

# Improvements on Your Land

**T**o maintain the quality of life that attracted us all to this area, we need to follow certain rules, regulations and best management practices. This is especially true when you consider making changes to your land. Thankfully, there are many resources available to help ensure that your planned improvements are safe and legal. In this chapter we discuss some of the types of improvements you may consider making to your land, some of the guidelines to follow, and resources available to help you make the right decisions for your land and our county.

## Buildings/Structures

Before you build new structures (and in some cases even alter old ones), it's a good idea to check with the Hood River County Planning and Building Services Department at (541) 387-6840. Their staff can help you figure out what uses and activities are allowed in your area, the zoning for your property and what permits, if any, are required. In most situations, proposed development, including changes of use on your property, must be reviewed and approved via a permit application to the County Planning Department and the County Building Official. This includes culvert installation, streambank stabilization and any other instream or near stream work.

Fortunately, there are many services available to help you determine the procedures you should follow when planning to build or make changes to your existing infrastructure.



**TIP:**  
If you don't have access

to the internet in your home, each branch of the Hood River County Library System provides free internet workstations for public use.

- Hood River County website: ([www.co.hood-river.or.us](http://www.co.hood-river.or.us)) Select the "Planning Department" on the drop down menu to link to the Hood River County Zoning Ordinances (HRCZO) and much more.
- Tax maps and tax assessment records may be obtained from the County Records and Assessments Department, at (541) 386-4522.
- Property surveys, aerial photos and tax maps can be explored on a computer at the County Public Works Department located at 918 18<sup>th</sup> Street in Hood River or call ahead at (541) 386-2616.

## Creating Parcels

New parcels (created by dividing established parcels) must be approved by the County Planning Department.



*Before you start work, make sure your planned activities are permitted. Remember to call before you dig!*

ment. They can approve development applications only for properties that comply with the definition of a parcel (defined in Article 3 of the HRCZO). A property that complies with this definition is considered a legally established parcel.

## Setbacks

As you plan to build, alter structures or even develop your landscape, it is important to make sure your planned improvements comply with the site development standards (including setbacks) of the zone in which they are located. There may be additional buffer setbacks required if the property is located in or adjacent to a farm, forest or stream zone. Again, the best option is to check with your local resources before you begin work.

## Streams, Wetlands and Floodplains

One commonly overlooked setback is the buffer required around all streams, wetlands and other waterways. You are required to maintain a 50-75 foot buffer from the bank of all streams and/or wetlands designated within the Stream Protection Overlay (SPO) zone on the county zoning maps. A 100 foot setback is also required from the ordinary high water

## Resources

Hood River County Planning Information:  
[www.HoodRiverProspector.com](http://www.HoodRiverProspector.com)

State of Oregon Building Codes Division:  
[www.cbs.state.or.us/bcd/](http://www.cbs.state.or.us/bcd/)

line of a stream designated within the Floodplain (FP) zone on the county zoning maps.

Activities that are not allowed within the SPO zone in Hood River County include:

- Cutting, clearing or removing native vegetation.
- Ground alteration, grading, excavation or the placement of fill material in streamside areas.
- Construction, installation or placement of new structures or solid surfaces in streamside areas.
- Dumping, disposal or storage of materials, including but not limited to, garbage, yard debris, construction debris, vehicles or hazardous materials.
- Construction activity or creation of temporary roads in streamside areas.
- Creation of a parcel that would be wholly within the SPO zone, unless the parcel is included in a conservation easement that prohibits development on the site.

## Fire Safety and Fuelbreak

New homes in the Forest and Primary Forest zones have specific siting, road and fire standards. Fire standards include clearing and maintaining a fuel break surrounding all dwellings and structures. A



*Planning work near a waterway? It's a good idea to check with local authorities before you start work.*

minimum of a 30 foot primary fuel break and a 100 foot secondary fuel break will be required. Questions regarding how to create a fuel break should be directed to your local fire district. More information can be found in the "Fire Prevention" chapter.

## Wetland or Streambank Enhancements

Are you thinking about restoring or enhancing your wetland or streambank? Although your intentions may be to improve the habitat in the area, it is important to make sure you are working within the limitations of county ordinances and state and regional standards. Your Hood River SWCD technician or Department of State Lands resource coordinator can help you move forward in the right direction.

## Conservation Easements

One way you might consider conserving natural resources on your land is through a conservation easement. This is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows you to continue to own and use your land and to sell it or pass it on to heirs. When you donate a conservation easement to a land trust, you give up some of the rights associated with the land. For example, you might give up the right to build additional structures, while retaining the right to grow crops. Future owners also will be bound by the easement's terms. The land trust is responsible for making sure the easement's terms are followed. A landowner sometimes sells a conservation easement, but usually easements are donated. If the donation benefits the public by permanently protecting important conservation resources and meets other federal tax code requirements, the property may be able to qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation.



**TIP: Call before you dig!**

**Remember to call the Oregon Utility Notification Center at least two business days before you start ground breaking work to have your utilities identified and marked for free. The number is 811.**

*This article was written in cooperation with: Anne Debbaut, Hood River County Planning Department and Jess Jordan, Department of State Lands*