

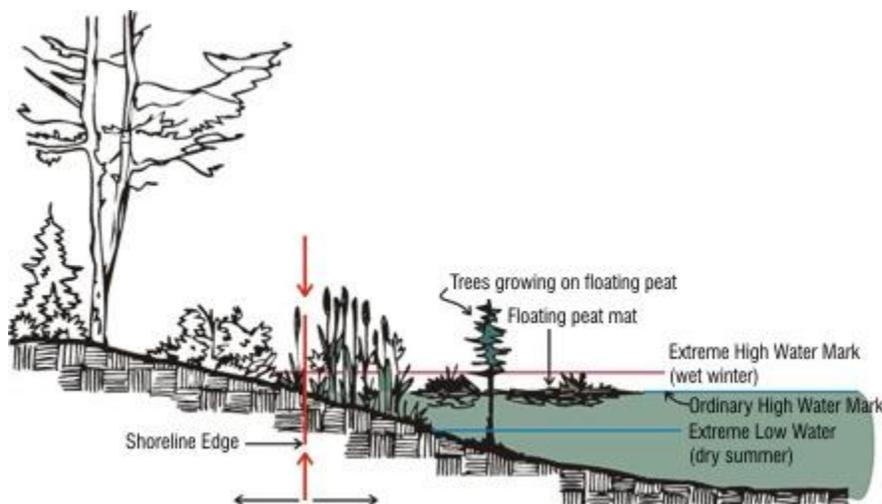
Ordinary high water mark

The ordinary high water mark (OHWM) as defined in the Shoreline Management Act is a biological vegetation mark. Ecology's rules include a default tidal or fresh water elevation line for locations where the OHWM cannot be found. [See definitions in RCW 90.58.030(2)(b) and WAC 173-22-030].

Definition

The OHWM is defined as:

- That mark that will be found by examining the bed and banks and ascertaining where the presence and action of waters are so common and usual, and so long continued in all ordinary years, as to mark upon the soil a character distinct from that of the abutting upland, in respect to vegetation as that condition exists on June 1, 1971, as it may naturally change thereafter, or as it may change thereafter in accordance with permits issued by a local government or the Department of Ecology.
- For tidal waters in high energy environments where there is no vegetative cover for less than 100 feet parallel to the shoreline, the OHWM is the average tidal elevation of the adjacent lines of vegetation. Where the ordinary high water mark cannot be found, the ordinary high water mark adjoining salt water shall be the line of mean higher high tide.
- For tidal waters in low energy environments where the action of the waves and currents is not sufficient to prevent vegetation establishment below mean higher high tide, the OHWM is coincident with the landward limit of salt tolerant vegetation which means vegetation tolerant of interstitial soil salinities greater than or equal to 0.5 parts per thousand.



For more information

For assistance with ordinary high water mark determinations contact Ecology's regional planner.