**WATERCOURSE CLASSIFICATIONS**

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**Introduction**

Watercourses in lowland Whatcom County may often look similar but have very different histories and sources. This classification system will help to define watercourses so you will know what permit requirements and Best Management Practices (BMPs) are necessary in order to perform drainage maintenance work. Watercourses are defined primarily by their history and source of water. The following definitions will apply to watercourses occurring within Whatcom County Drainage Improvement Districts (DIDs) or other agricultural lands:

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**Natural Watercourse (Red)**

Natural watercourses have not been significantly altered from their historical flow path or floodplain in any manner and have headwaters (usually from wetlands or springs). Natural watercourses do not typically exist within DID boundaries of Whatcom County and maintenance work on natural watercourses is not addressed by a Drainage Management Plan (DMP). Any kind of work in or around a natural watercourse will require individual permitting.

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**Modified Watercourse (Yellow)**

Modified watercourses are historically natural systems that have been previously diverted, dredged, straightened, and/or diked.

- Appropriate permits including a HPA from WDFW are required for any drainage maintenance work. A completed and approved DMP packaged with permit applications will enable WDFW to issue five year HPAs allowing drainage maintenance work on these watercourses.
- A DMP must be approved by Whatcom County Planning and Development Services before any maintenance activities can occur within 150 feet of any “shoreline” watercourse and within 100 feet for all other watercourses.
- Permit applications for work on modified watercourses must also be sent to the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). Maintenance exemptions may be granted for some watercourses or ACOE permits may be required.
- BMPs listed in the DMP must be implemented to minimize impacts to fish and water quality and to
Avoid violation of State Water Quality Standards or Tribal Water Quality Standards for lands under the jurisdiction of the Lummi Nation Natural Resources Department.

**Constructed Watercourse (Green)**

Constructed watercourses, also known as ditches, convey drainage water from an individual farm, or supply water to an individual farm property. Constructed watercourses do not have headwaters or other natural water sources. They may hold water permanently or intermittently. The presence of water necessitates use of Best Management Practices. Drainage Maintenance work on constructed watercourses can be done without permits as long as the work does not impact natural or modified watercourses downstream. If water is present, BMPs listed in your DMP must be implemented to avoid violation of State Water Quality Standards or Tribal Water Quality Standards for lands under the jurisdiction of the Lummi Nation Natural Resources Department.