

Environmental Corridors Policies & Criteria – 2026 Update

Overview of Proposed Changes (last updated: April 1, 2026)

The table below provides a summary of proposed revisions to the Policies and Criteria for Environmental Corridors. Only changes of significance which affect the implementation of Environmental Corridors have been included. Please refer to the draft Environmental Corridor Policies and Criteria (Policies and Criteria, or EC P&C) for precise language ([link here](#)) and consult with CARPC Staff for additional information, as required.

Current Policies and Criteria for Environmental Corridors ([link here](#)) (adopted 2008)

Current Environmental Corridors Report ([link here](#)) (adopted 2025)

Environmental Corridor Delineation

	Description of Change	Intent of Revision	Existing Policy	Proposed Policy
1	<i>Define minimum extent of riparian vegetated buffer based on streamflow duration (e.g., perennial) instead of navigability</i>	Functional value of streams is not directly tied to navigability. Insufficient data describing navigability to apply policy consistently and accurately. Streamflow data is more readily accessible & provides a more consistent determination.	Navigable water bodies receive minimum 75’ buffers; non-navigable water bodies receive minimum 25’ buffers. (A.5. – A.7.)	Perennial water bodies receive minimum 75’ buffers; intermittent water bodies receive minimum 25’ buffers. (Sect 4.a.2. – 4.a.3.)
2	<i>Apply wider vegetated corridors for waters designated as Areas of Special Natural Resource Interest (ASNRI)</i>	Lack of specificity in existing language regarding protection of high-quality water bodies. Align P&C with more recent Fact Sheet which provides for 200’ total width buffer.	(N/A; EC Fact Sheet provides for 200’ total width buffer on all water bodies receiving a 75’ buffer)	Waters designated as ASNRI receive minimum 75’ buffers, with minimum 200’ total width. (Sect 4.a.4.)

Description of Change	Intent of Revision	Existing Policy	Proposed Policy
<p>3 <i>Require inclusion of riparian steep slopes, regardless of vegetation</i></p>	<p>Preservation of riparian steep slopes benefits regional water quality regardless of whether the slopes are wooded. This change aligns with long-standing implementation of policy based on understanding of policy intent.</p>	<p>Wooded steep slopes commencing within 75' of the water body; in practice, all riparian steep slopes are included. (A.4.)</p>	<p>Steep slopes within riparian areas (if commencing within minimum required vegetated buffers and up to 300' from the wetland edge or OHWM & contributing to water body) must be included in EC. (Sect 4.a.7.)</p>
<p>4 <i>Exempt constructed riparian steep slopes</i></p>	<p>Existing policy language does not distinguish between constructed and natural steep slopes.</p>	<p>Wooded steep slopes commencing within 75' of the water body; in practice, all riparian steep slopes are included. (A.4.)</p>	<p>Any constructed steep slopes within riparian areas are not required to be included in EC outside of the minimum required vegetated buffers. (Sect 6.b.)</p>
<p>5 <i>Exempt wetlands in stormwater drainage swales or roadside ditches (and associated buffers)</i></p>	<p>Wetlands can develop within linear drainage swales along roadways and are often eligible to receive DNR permitting; however, if there is no disturbance within the wetland then permitting is not required. In consideration of the function of such wetlands and the operating context of wetland permitting, it is appropriate to relax the wetland setback requirements.</p>	<p><i>All wetlands require a 75' vegetated buffer, unless a DNR permit is provided.</i> (N/A)</p>	<p>Wetlands which have formed within constructed drainage swales as part of a stormwater management plan or in roadside ditches are exempt from inclusion in EC and from provisions of the Policies & Criteria. (Sect 6.d.)</p>

Description of Change	Intent of Revision	Existing Policy	Proposed Policy
<p>6 <i>Prohibit storage of materials or activities with potential to contaminate surface or groundwater within EC</i></p>	<p>Existing policy language does not include explicit provisions to prevent storage of materials or activities within vegetated buffers, despite the potential to contaminate surface water or groundwater.</p>	<p>(N/A)</p>	<p>Storage of materials (e.g., contaminated waste products, agricultural chemicals, industrial chemicals, petroleum products, etc.) or equipment (e.g., diesel generators, fueling stations, etc.) with the potential to contaminate surface water or groundwater is not permitted within EC.</p> <p>(Sect 5.a.3.)</p>
<p>7 <i>Consider of recreational use in determining minimum width of riparian corridor</i></p>	<p>Existing policy language does not reference designated use; specific widths of minimum required vegetated buffers are only described in an associated fact sheet.</p>	<p>(N/A; EC Fact Sheet provides for minimum widths for riparian corridor depending on extent of recreational use & facilities)</p>	<p>Minimum extent of riparian corridor for intermittent streams and drainageways: if intended for public recreational access is 100 ft; if not, 75 ft.</p> <p>(Sect 4.a.3.a – b)</p>
<p>8 <i>Allow temporary impacts to vegetation within the no-grading buffer for defined compatible uses</i></p>	<p>Address gap in current policy where utilities can go through EC within the no-grading buffer, despite no exception being stated for this use. Additionally, temporary impacts when restored to existing or better conditions using native flora pose minimal risk to water quality.</p>	<p>(G.4.)</p>	<p>Temporary impacts to the EC is allowed for compatible uses, provided temporary disturbance is fully restored to existing (or better) conditions utilizing vegetation appropriate for the conditions</p> <p>(Sect 5.b.)</p>

Reorganization & Clarification

	Description of Change	Existing Policy	Proposed Policy
9	<i>Provide background information</i>	Brief explanation with reference to NR 121. (A., D.)	Detailed explanation of the basis, purpose, and implementation of environmental corridors specifically within Dane County. (Sect 1 – 3)
10	<i>Categorize areas eligible for inclusion in Environmental Corridor</i>	No clear distinction between areas that are required to be included and those that are optionally included in practice. (A.)	Areas required for inclusion in corridor and areas recommended for inclusion in corridor are clearly distinguished and enumerated. (Sect 4)
11	<i>Clarify compatible and incompatible uses</i>	Description of which site development activities or land uses are compatible and incompatible with the functions of environmental corridors is vague; policy execution has therefore relied on precedent and interpretation. (F.1., F.5., G.4., H.)	Compatible and incompatible uses are defined and enumerated. (Sect 5)
12	<i>Clarify exemptions</i>	Existing impervious areas are identified as exempt from inclusion in corridor. No clear distinction between compatible uses, incompatible uses, and exemptions. (B., G.1.)	Exempted areas are defined and enumerated. (Sect 6)
13	<i>Clarify role of local government in protection of Environmental Corridor</i>	<i>Outdated information regarding role of local government and CARPC staff.</i> (C., D., E.)	Roles and responsibilities of municipal staff and CARPC staff in the implementation and application of the policies and criteria are explicitly described. (Sect 1, Sect 3, Sect 7)
14	<i>Update nomenclature for changes to Environmental Corridor</i>	Described as Major Changes & Minor Changes. (F., G.)	Described as Major Changes and Administrative Changes. (Sect 7)