How to Stake and File a Mining Claim in Washington

To stake and file a mining claim in Washington, you make a discovery, post a notice where you found it, mark the boundaries, record the notice with the county auditor, and file with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Washington gives you 30 days from the day of your discovery to mark the boundaries and record with the county, while BLM's deadline is 90 days from the day you post. A new lode claim costs $274 in BLM fees, plus $303.50 at the county, since Washington adds state charges to every paper it records.

A placer claim also needs $10 of work for each 20 acres within 60 days of your discovery. Washington requires a sworn statement with the county auditor every year by September 30, even if you pay BLM's yearly fee, and any digging in or near a stream follows the state's Gold and Fish rules.

Last checked November 10, 2026. This is a plain-words summary of Washington and federal law, not legal advice. Fees and rules change, so confirm dates and costs with your county auditor or BLM before you rely on them. The newest version of our Washington staking guide is at goldmapsonline.com/how-to-stake-a-mining-claim-in-washington.html. Check it before you file, since fees and rules can change after you download your maps.

The steps at a glance

Step	Where	Deadline	Cost
1. Post your notice	At your discovery	The day you find it; this starts the clock	No fee
2. Mark the boundaries	On the claim	30 days after discovery, before you record	Your posts or stones
Placer work	On a placer claim	60 days after discovery	$10 of work per 20 acres, plus $303.50 to record a statement
3. Record the notice	County auditor	30 days after discovery	$303.50 first page, $1 each added page
4. File with BLM	Online in MLRS, or BLM in Portland	90 days after posting	$274 for a lode claim
Keep it each year	BLM	September 1	$200 per lode claim or per 20 acres of placer
Record each year	County auditor	September 30	$303.50 first page, $1 each added page

Start with your map

A filled closed box on your Washington map means that section has no active claims today, which makes it a good place to start looking. Its pop-up gives you what the paperwork asks for: the county, the township, range and section, and the BLM code.

One example from the November 2026 map is a closed placer box in Chelan County at T22N R17E Sec 26, Willamette Meridian, with the BLM code 33 0220N 0170E 026. A box covers a section of about 640 acres and doesn't show a claim's exact edges, so the map tells you where to look and your own checks tell you whether you can stake there.

Check the ground first

1. **Look it up in BLM's records.** Go to reports.blm.gov/reports/MLRS, choose Mining Claims – Geographic Report, enter the BLM code, and tick Active and Filed. Our step-by-step MLRS guide walks through each screen.
2. **Check that the land is open to mining.** BLM's Master Title Plats, on the GLO Records website, show what's open. You can't stake in national parks, national monuments, wilderness areas, Indian reservations or military land, and private land is off limits.
3. **Watch for Washington state land.** Federal mining claims don't apply there. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) handles mineral leases on state land, and it wants applicants with schooling or years of experience in mining and the money to explore, so it isn't set up for hobby miners.
4. **Walk the ground.** A new claim can take up to 90 days to reach BLM's records, so look for fresh posts and notices before you put up your own.
5. **Make a discovery.** Every claim needs a discovery of a valuable mineral. BLM's test is whether a sensible person would spend more time and money trying to develop a mine there, and recording a claim and paying the fees won't make it valid without one.

Lode or placer

A lode claim covers gold in solid rock, like a quartz vein, and can be up to 1,500 feet long and 600 feet wide. A placer claim covers loose gold in sand and gravel, and can be 20 acres per person, up to 160 acres for a group of eight or more. Washington's notice, markers and work rules differ for the two, so pick the type that fits what you found.

Step 1: Post your notice

Washington's law says you can't locate a lode claim until you've found the vein inside it, and it writes both kinds of claim for the person who made the discovery. The county deadline counts from your discovery and BLM's counts from the day you post, so post the notice at your discovery the same day you find it. It has to give all of these:

- The name of the claim and the name of each locator
- **Lode:** the date of discovery
- **Placer:** the date of discovery and posting, which counts as your location date, and a description by legal subdivision, like a quarter section, or else one tied to a natural object or permanent monument nearby

The county copy of a lode notice needs more, so put it on the posted notice too: the date of location, how many feet you claim along the vein on each side of the discovery, the general direction of the vein, and a description tied to a natural object or permanent monument.

BLM's Oregon/Washington office also needs the township, range, section and quarter section with the Willamette Meridian, and each claimant's full name and mailing address. It won't accept GPS coordinates alone, and a lode claim also needs its edges described by distance and direction, tied to a permanent object. Use a separate notice for each claim. BLM says there's no official form, so you can write your own.

Step 2: Mark the boundaries

Mark the claim on the ground within 30 days of your discovery, and before you record the notice. Washington's law asks for these markers on a lode claim:

- A post or stone monument at each corner, at least 3 feet high
- Posts at least 4 inches across, set firmly in the ground
- The name of the claim and the date of location on each one
- Where there's brush or timber, cut the brush and blaze the trees along the lines

For a placer claim, the law says only to mark it so its boundaries are easy to trace, even if you describe it by legal subdivisions. To be safe, use the lode markers at every corner. BLM doesn't allow perforated or uncapped pipe as markers, because of wildlife deaths.

A placer claim also needs work. Within 60 days of your discovery, do at least $10 worth of labor developing the claim for each 20 acres or part of 20 acres. Then record a sworn statement with the county auditor that says you did it and what kind of work it was. The law gives no deadline for that statement, so record it by day 60 to be safe. Washington's law lists no digging for a new lode claim. If the work is in or near a stream, follow the Gold and Fish rules below.

Step 3: Record with the county auditor

Within 30 days of your discovery, record the notice with the auditor in the county where the claim sits. Washington's law gives two different deadlines for a lode claim, 30 days and 90 days, and BLM's packet says 90, so record within 30 days, which meets all of them. State law doesn't ask for a map with the county copy.

Washington's recording law sets these rules for every paper:

- Pages no bigger than 8.5 by 14 inches, in ink that copies clearly, with type of at least 8 point
- A blank margin of 3 inches at the top of the first page and 1 inch on its other sides, and 1 inch all around on later pages
- The name and address the auditor should send it back to, in the upper left corner of the first page
- A title, like Notice of Location, just below the top margin
- The locators' names and the section, township, range and quarter-quarter section, also on the first page
- Nothing taped or stapled on, and no Social Security numbers or birth dates

If your first page can't fit all of that, put the state's cover sheet in front as a new first page. The auditor has the form, and it adds one more page fee. A paper that misses the margin or type rules can still be recorded with a cover sheet and a signed request, but it costs $50 more.

Washington's law doesn't ask for the notice to be signed in front of a notary. The sworn statements for placer work and for the yearly filing do need a notary. Bring a photo ID, like a driver's license or passport, since the notary has to check who you are. The law also lets the auditor swear you in for $2, so ask whether your office will.

State law adds several charges to every recorded paper, so a one-page notice costs $303.50 and each added page costs $1. That's what Kittitas, Okanogan, Snohomish and Kitsap counties charge since July 27, 2025, so older

fee sheets show less. Each claim needs its own notice, so five claims cost $1,517.50 or more to record. Send the exact fee with anything you mail.

The auditor marks each paper with the day, hour and minute it arrives, not the day you mail it, so mail it well before day 30.

If you find a mistake in a lode notice later, or want to change the boundaries, Washington's law lets you record an amended certificate of location, made the same way as a new one.

Step 4: File with BLM

BLM needs its own filing by the 90th day, and it advises recording with the county first. Send BLM a copy of the recorded notice, a map of the claim and the fees. You can file online in MLRS at mlrs.blm.gov with a login.gov account, by mail, or in person at BLM's Oregon/Washington State Office in Portland, which handles claims in both states. Set up an appointment with its public room before you go.

A sketch works as well as a map, as long as it shows the claim well enough that someone could find it on the ground. Claims you file together can share one map, but each claim needs its own notice.

Claim	Fees	Total
Lode	$25 + $49 + $200	$274
Placer, up to 20 acres	$25 + $49 + $200	$274
Placer, 21 to 40 acres	$25 + $49 + $400	$474

The three fees are the processing fee, the location fee and the first maintenance fee, for claims located on or after September 1, 2026. Each added 20 acres of placer, or part of 20 acres, adds $200.

A claim that isn't recorded with BLM and the county by the 90th day is abandoned and void under federal law, even if the ground is good. BLM says it refunds the location and maintenance fees in that case, after the appeal period. Washington's own county deadline is 30 days from discovery, so don't count on the full 90.

Re-staking a closed claim

Re-staking a closed claim means making a brand-new claim, and none of the old owner's rights carry over, so all four steps apply. Check the old claim's status in BLM's records before you start.

Washington is stricter about re-staking a lode claim. Its law says it can only be done one of two ways:

- Sink a new discovery shaft, or do at least as much development work inside the claim, and set new boundaries the same way as for a new claim
- Or sink the old discovery shaft 10 feet deeper than it was when you started, and put up new markers or bring the old ones up to the rules in Step 2

Either way, put up a new location monument, like a solid post at your discovery that holds your notice. The law gives no size for a new shaft and no deadline, so finish the work before you record, within your 30 days. It counts a cut or tunnel with 200 cubic feet of rock taken out, or a test hole drilled 20 feet on the vein, the same as a discovery shaft, but it doesn't say whether that sets the amount for re-staking. Digging like this on federal land can need a notice to BLM or the Forest Service first.

The law has no re-staking rule for placer claims, so treat one as a new claim, including the $10 of work for each 20 acres. Each marker carries its claim's name, so put up your own.

Keeping your claim each year

On or before September 1 each year, pay BLM $200 per lode claim, or $200 for each 20 acres of a placer claim, or the claim is forfeited. If you stake before September 1 but file with BLM after it, you'll owe two maintenance fees at once, one for each year, unless you qualify for the small miner waiver and file it when you record the claim.

Washington also requires a sworn statement, called an affidavit, recorded with the county auditor within 30 days after BLM's work year ends on September 1, so record it by September 30 each year. It says either how much you paid BLM or what work you did, like how many feet of shaft, tunnel or cut, plus the section, township and range. If BLM excused both the fee and the work, it says that instead.

Sign it in front of a notary. It costs $303.50 for the first page and $1 for each added page, so ask the auditor whether one affidavit can list all your claims.

With 10 or fewer claims nationwide, you can do at least $100 of work on each claim instead of paying. File the free waiver form with BLM by September 1, on paper because it can't be filed online, then file an affidavit of the work with BLM by December 30 at $15 per claim. The Washington county affidavit is still due by September 30.

A claim doesn't give you a free hand on the surface. Work beyond casual use can need a notice or a plan of operations, so talk to the local BLM field office or Forest Service ranger district first.

In Washington, any prospecting in or near the water needs a Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) from the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Its free Gold and Fish pamphlet counts as that approval for hand methods, so you don't have to apply, as long as you follow its rules. It allows pans and non-motorized sluices, rocker boxes and highbankers in one of two ways:

- **Year-round:** in any stream or river but not lakes, with no more than 3 square feet of riffles, and no digging in the part of the stream that's under water
- **During set work times:** the dates the pamphlet lists for each stream, with up to 10 square feet of riffles, and you must have a copy of the pamphlet with you

The pamphlet doesn't cover suction dredges, motorized highbankers, power sluices or gravity siphons. Those need their own HPA and a water quality permit from the Department of Ecology, which says to apply at least 180 days ahead. State law bans them in any water that's critical habitat for salmon, steelhead or bull trout, or would harm that habitat. Ecology's map shows them possible only in parts of Adams, Benton, Clallam, Grant, Grays Harbor, Lincoln, Pacific, Spokane, Whitman and Yakima counties, which leaves out Chelan, Okanogan, Kittitas and the other counties with the most claims on our map.

Who to ask

- **BLM Oregon/Washington State Office:** Call 503-808-6030 for mining claims, or 503-808-6008 for the public room. The office is at 1220 S.W. 3rd Avenue, 11th Floor, Portland, OR 97204, open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday. It handles claims in both Oregon and Washington, and you'll need an appointment to record in person.
- **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife:** Call 360-902-2200 and ask for a habitat biologist about an HPA, or read the Gold and Fish pamphlet. The main office is at 1111 Washington St. SE, Olympia, WA 98501, open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- **Washington Department of Ecology:** Water quality permits for suction dredges and other motorized mining, and the map of where they may be allowed, on Ecology's placer mining page.
- **Washington Department of Natural Resources:** Call the Mining and Minerals Program at 360-790-8179 about mineral leases on state land, where federal claims don't apply.

Where these rules come from

- Revised Code of Washington Chapter 78.08: discovery, notices, markers, placer work, re-staking and the yearly affidavit
- Chapter 65.04, 36.18.010, Chapter 36.22 and 42.45.050: document rules, county fees and notaries
- Revised Code of Washington 90.48.615 and WDFW's rules for mineral prospecting: dredges, HPAs and the Gold and Fish pamphlet
- BLM's Oregon/Washington mining claim packet and mining claim fees
- 43 U.S.C. 1744 and 30 U.S.C. 28f: the yearly filing and the maintenance fee

Washington county auditors

A claim is recorded in the county where the ground is, and in Washington the county auditor records it, though King County calls that office the Recorder's Office. Call before you mail anything, since offices move and hours change.

County	Auditor's address	Phone
Asotin	135 Second Street, Asotin, WA 99402 Mail: P.O. Box 129, Asotin, WA 99402	509-243-2084
Benton	7122 W. Okanogan Pl., Bldg. E, Kennewick, WA 99336 Mail: PO Box 1000, Richland, WA 99352	509-736-2727
Chelan	350 Orondo Ave, Suite 202, Wenatchee, WA 98801	509-667-6815
Clallam	223 E 4th Street, Port Angeles, WA 98362	360-417-2220
Clark	1300 Franklin St, 2nd Floor, Vancouver, WA 98660 Mail: PO Box 5000, Vancouver, WA 98666	564-397-2208
Columbia	115 E Main Street, Dayton, WA 99328	509-382-4541
Douglas	213 S. Rainier Street, Waterville, WA 98858 Mail: PO Box 456, Waterville, WA 98858	509-888-6409
Ferry	350 E Delaware Ave #2, Republic, WA 99166	509-775-5225, ext. 2500
Franklin	1016 N 4th Avenue, Pasco, WA 99301 Mail: P.O. Box 1451, Pasco, WA 99301	509-545-3502, ext. 4
Garfield	789 Main St, Pomeroy, WA 99347 Mail: PO Box 278, Pomeroy, WA 99347	509-843-1411
Grant	35 C Street NW, Ephrata, WA 98823 Mail: P.O. Box 37, Ephrata, WA 98823	509-754-2011, ext. 2705
Grays Harbor	100 W Broadway, Suite 2, Montesano, WA 98563	360-249-4232, Option 1
Jefferson	1820 Jefferson Street, Port Townsend, WA 98368 Mail: P.O. Box 1220, Port Townsend, WA 98368	360-385-9116
King	201 S. Jackson St., Suite 204, Seattle, WA 98104	206-477-6620
Kitsap	619 Division St, Port Orchard, WA 98366 Mail: 614 Division St. MS-31, Port Orchard, WA 98366	360-337-4935
Kittitas	205 W 5th Suite 105, Ellensburg, WA 98926	509-962-7504
Klickitat	205 S Columbus Ave Room 203, Goldendale, WA 98620	509-773-4001
Lewis	351 NW North Street, Chehalis, WA 98532 Mail: P.O. Box 29, Chehalis, WA 98532	360-740-1165
Lincoln	450 Logan Street, Davenport, WA 99122 Mail: PO Box 28, Davenport, WA 99122	509-725-4971

County	Auditor's address	Phone
Mason	411 N 5th St, Shelton, WA 98584 Mail: PO BOX 400, Shelton, WA 98584	360-427-9670, ext. 467
Okanogan	149 3rd Ave N Room 104, Okanogan, WA 98840 Mail: P.O. Box 1010, Okanogan, WA 98840	509-422-7240
Pacific	300 Memorial Drive, South Bend, WA 98586 Mail: PO Box 97, South Bend, WA 98586	360-875-9318
Pend Oreille	625 W 4th Street, Newport, WA 99156 Mail: PO Box 5015, Newport, WA 99156	509-447-6473
Pierce	2401 S. 35th St., Room 200, Tacoma, WA 98409	253-798-7440
San Juan	350 Court Street, 1st Floor, Friday Harbor, WA 98250 Mail: P.O. Box 638, Friday Harbor, WA 98250	360-378-2161
Skagit	700 S. 2nd St, Room 201, Mount Vernon, WA 98273 Mail: PO Box 1306, Mount Vernon, WA 98273	360-416-1704
Skamania	240 NW Vancouver Ave, Room 27, Stevenson, WA 98648 Mail: PO Box 790, Stevenson, WA 98648	509-427-3730
Snohomish	3000 Rockefeller Avenue, Everett, WA 98201 Mail: 3000 Rockefeller Ave., M/S 204, Everett, WA 98201	425-388-3483
Spokane	1116 W Broadway, Spokane, WA 99260 Mail: P.O. Box 2353, Spokane, WA 99210	509-477-2270
Stevens	215 South Oak Street, Rm 106, Colville, WA 99114	509-684-7512
Thurston	3000 Pacific Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98501	360-786-5405
Walla Walla	500 West Main St., Walla Walla, WA 99362 Mail: PO Box 1856, Walla Walla, WA 99362	509-524-2549
Whatcom	311 Grand Avenue, Suite 103, Bellingham, WA 98225	360-778-5100
Whitman	400 N Main Street, Suite 245, Colfax, WA 99111	509-397-6270
Yakima	128 N 2nd Street, Yakima, WA 98901 Mail: PO Box 12570, Yakima, WA 98909-2570	509-574-1400