



# Balancing Nature and Safety

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A Homeowner's Guide to  
Wash Ownership and  
Maintenance



## MAINTAINING SCOTTSDALE'S NATURAL WASHES



Historically, Scottsdale has preserved as much of the Sonoran desert landscape as possible. Especially in the north, the city usually allows natural washes to handle runoff from storms, rather than building concrete-lined stormwater channels and other structures. Additionally, the preservation of native plants within washes and the environmental protection of wash corridors are important goals of the city.

This natural system of washes brings its own set of challenges. Over time, natural and man-made obstructions often block the free flow of stormwater. Overgrown desert plants or dead vegetation may accumulate. People sometimes dump waste material into washes, fill them when grading lots, or build walls or fences across them.

Blocking washes can create serious damage and put people in danger. Though we live in a desert, our infrequent rains can be heavy and sudden. Obstructions can divert the flow of a wash, cause erosion, and flood buildings.

Consequently, the city must work with residents to strike a balance. The city's wash systems must be maintained to reduce the risk of flooding for Scottsdale residents. At the same time, maintenance work needs to comply with the city's ordinances protecting natural open spaces, environmentally sensitive areas and native plants.



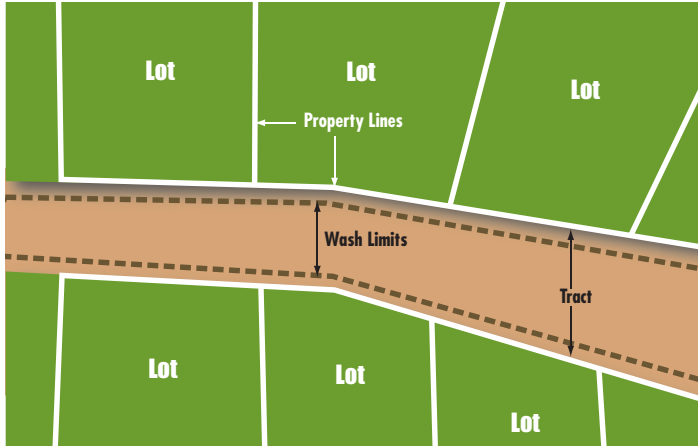
## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAINTAINING WASHES?

- Property owners are responsible for maintaining the portion of a wash that is on their property.
- The city is not responsible for maintaining washes on private property.
- The city is responsible for maintaining washes on city-owned property, such as those in city parks or crossing city streets.

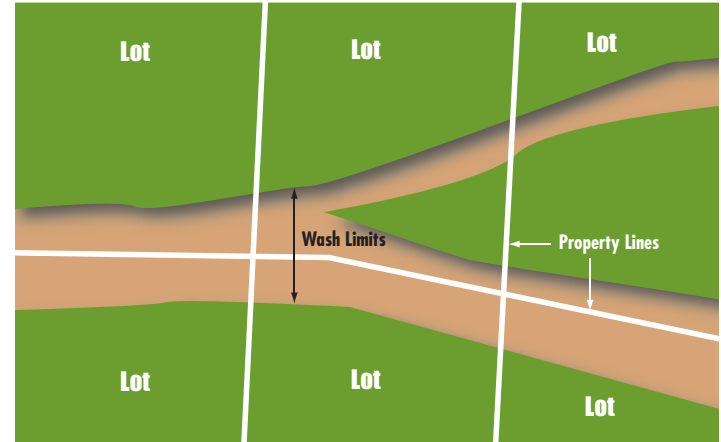


## WHICH PARTS OF THE WASH DO I OWN?

You can contact the city for detailed information on your property boundaries. For residential properties, there are two typical ownership patterns related to wash property.



In the first, the wash is located within a separate tract of land, typically owned by a homeowner's association. An example of this ownership pattern is shown above. It is common in larger subdivisions or master planned communities. In this situation, the homeowner's association (or the owner of the tract) is responsible for maintenance of the washes within the tract.



In the second pattern, washes are located within the boundaries of individual parcels. This pattern is more common among parcels created by lot splits and in many smaller or older residential subdivisions. Typically, such patterns locate washes near property lines to maximize the developable area of the lot. An example of this pattern is shown above. In this situation, each lot owner is responsible for the portion of the wash located within his or her property.



If you are uncertain of the boundaries of your property or whether a wash is within those boundaries, the configuration and an aerial image of your parcel can be viewed using the city's land information web map application at <http://eservices.scottsdaleaz.gov/maps/flood-insurance-rates>. This digital map also allows you to view the approximate boundaries of medium- to large-sized washes. For assistance from city staff, please call Stormwater Management at (480) 312-2500 or Records at (480) 312-2356.

### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD I INSPECT WASHES ON MY PROPERTY?**

Please inspect washes crossing your property at least annually and after any storm that produces flow within the washes.

## WHAT DO I NEED TO DO (AND NOT DO) TO MAINTAIN A WASH ON MY LAND?

The goal of wash maintenance is to remove obstructions that significantly reduce the ability of washes to convey storm flows, particularly in areas where houses and other structures could be flooded. Before starting any maintenance program, please contact either Stormwater Management or Current Planning at (480) 312-2500. This goal is accomplished by removing debris, weeds, and overgrowth while observing the city's environmental protection ordinances and requirements.

You should:

- Remove all man-made trash and debris, dead plant material, grasses, weeds, small shrubs, and plants identified by the city as invasive plants from the bottom of the wash. A list of invasive plants can be obtained at

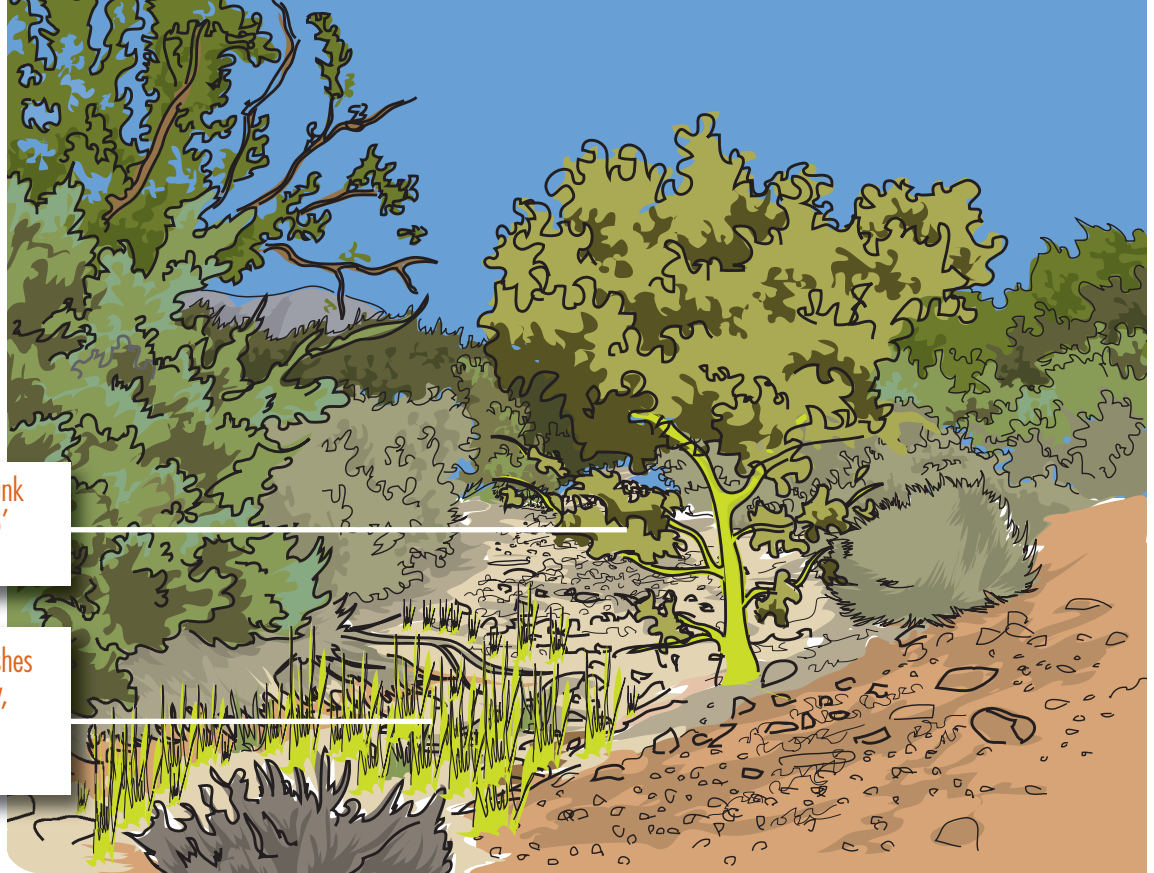
<https://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/Assets/ScottsdaleAZ/Building/invasiveweeds.pdf>

- Trim trees and large shrubs so that limbs are three feet above the bottom of the wash. (See the diagram on the next page as a guideline; the city suggests using a certified arborist when performing major tree trimming operations.)
- Remove all debris and plant material from the area and dispose of them properly.

You shouldn't:

- Remove grasses, root systems and small shrubs from the wash banks – these stabilize wash banks against erosion and should be left intact.
- Remove cacti, trees or plants protected by the city's Native Plant Ordinance without prior approval by the city. More information on native plants is available at [www.scottsdaleaz.gov/codes/native-plant](http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/codes/native-plant) or by calling Current Planning at (480) 312-2500.

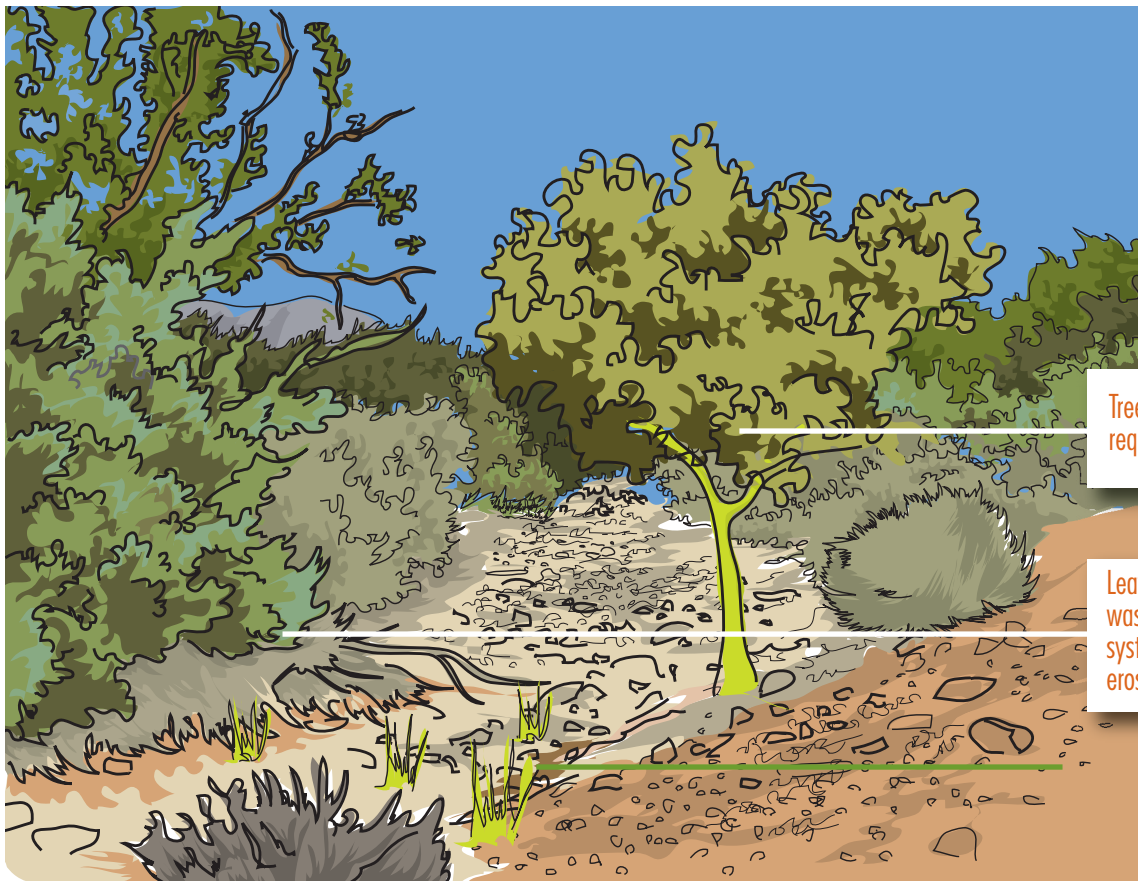
## WASH MAINTENANCE



Trim trees to create a clear trunk from the base of the tree to 3' above wash bottom

Remove most grasses and bushes from the wash bottom entirely, since these greatly restrict stormwater flows.





Trees should remain, but may require trimming.

Leave vegetation on banks of washes alone, since the root systems stabilize the bank against erosion.

## **WORKING IN DESIGNATED NATURAL AREA OPEN SPACE**

Many natural washes in Scottsdale are located within areas designated as Natural Area Open Space (NAOS). When working in these areas, specific requirements must be met to preserve the natural desert environment. Current Planning should be contacted at (480) 312-2500 to determine if a wash is located within NAOS and to obtain approval for wash maintenance work within these areas.

More information on requirements for work within NAOS may be found in:

- Chapter 2-2.501.D of the city's Design Standards and Procedures Manual at [www.scottsdaleaz.gov/design/dspm](http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/design/dspm)
- Section 6.110 of the city's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Ordinance at

<https://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/codes/eslo>

## **MAINTAIN HISTORIC GRADES**

You may also need to remove sediment

deposited by a storm, or fill and compact an area of a wash that has been substantially eroded. To preserve the natural desert and minimize environmental impact, work within the wash should be confined to hand labor or small motorized equipment. The use of motorized equipment is subject to City approval which can be obtained by contacting Stormwater Management at (480) 312-2500.

## **WHAT IF I WANT TO DO MORE THAN MAINTENANCE? WHAT IF I CHANGE THE WASH?**

If you plan to do more than maintenance such as realigning or filling the wash or armoring the banks to provide erosion protection, you will need city approval of an engineered grading and drainage plan as a minimum. The first step is to contact Current Planning or Stormwater Management at (480) 312-2500 to determine the process and requirements for the engineered grading and drainage plan.

## **WHAT IF I WANT TO CROSS A WASH WITH A WALL OR FENCE?**

Wall or fence crossings of washes are one of the major sources of flooding in the City of Scottsdale. Drainage openings in walls for washes are often undersized for the flow that needs to pass through them. Fences across washes are built with the perception that water will freely flow through the fence while in reality the fence will catch debris and plant material and block flow through the opening. Improvements for wall or fence crossings of washes will also require city approval of an engineered grading and drainage plan.

## **WE'RE HERE TO HELP**

The city's stormwater and planning specialists are here to assist you in understanding wash maintenance and related issues. Please contact us at (480) 312-2500.







Stormwater Mgmt.

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