



Hiring an Environmental Professional

Recognizing critical areas—like wetlands, streams, and steep slopes—can seem easy, but in most cases an environmental professional will be required to determine their presence (or absence) and accurately document extent, functions, and values. Sites with critical areas, critical area buffers and critical area structure setbacks are provided legal protections under the City of Bellevue’s Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO). Environmental professionals can help identify what protections may apply to your site, provide valuable guidance in the planning of development activities, and ensure complete documentation for your permit application.

Things to Consider

- ✔ Preliminary identification of critical areas may begin with online resources (→ See Handout CA-3, *Site Planning Resources*), consultation with city staff, and exploration of the site; however, determining exact critical area boundaries is a job for an environmental professional skilled at interpreting legal definitions, identifying critical area types and variations and assessing the site’s ability to provide specific functions.
- ✔ If the existing conditions of your site and adjacent properties aren’t documented appropriately, the city cannot process your application. A qualified environmental professional will ensure that your documentation meets city requirements.
- ✔ If your proposed project will have impacts on critical areas or their buffers, the city requires that your documentation is prepared by a qualified professional.
- ✔ Finally, if your project is appealed, you will need to provide proof that your property was investigated by a qualified environmental professional.

Choosing the right professional for your project

Depending on the scope of your project and your site characteristics, you will need professionals with different skills and experience. To increase the likelihood of your project’s success, ask questions and research the abilities and experience of the professionals you’re considering.

- ✔ Hire the right professional for your needs—you wouldn’t want a biologist designing your floor plan and you probably don’t want an architect determining whether or not you have wetlands, steep slopes, or nesting habitat for great blue herons.
- ✔ The right professional will be clear about which services they perform and which they do not. Some companies are specialized; others are capable of assessing a variety of critical areas.
- ✔ You may need more than one individual or firm if your site is complex or contains multiple critical areas.

Types of environmental professionals you might need

- **Wetland scientists** identify, delineate, and categorize wetlands and streams (including ordinary high water marks), and determine wetland functions and values. Currently, wetland scientists are not licensed or certified by the state, but have professional training as wetland scientists. Wetland scientists are typically found at larger environmental consulting firms or at small companies that specialize in wetlands.
- **Fish and wildlife biologists** determine stream conditions, ordinary high water marks, habitat types and the likelihood that a listed species of local importance could occur on your site. Fish and wildlife biologists can also prepare the reports required for Endangered Species Act compliance, if your project requires federal permits. Fish and wildlife biologists often work for the same companies as wetland scientists; they are not state licensed or certified.
- **Land surveyors** create topographic base maps and determine slopes. They are licensed by the state; however, land surveyors are not necessarily qualified to delineate wetlands or determine ordinary high water marks, unless they have undergone specific, accredited trainings in these areas.
- **Geotechnical engineers** determine erosion hazards, steep slopes, landslide hazards, coal and mine hazards, and provide advice regarding structure foundations, bridges, and soil loading during construction. Geotechnical engineers are licensed as engineers by the state and are typically found at companies that specialize in geotechnical analysis or at large engineering firms.
- **Hydraulic engineers** prepare flood analyses, assess fish passage issues, design stream and wetland restoration projects, and can contribute to the design of mitigation for unavoidable impacts to streams and wetlands. Hydraulic engineers are licensed by the state and often work for civil engineering companies or for larger environmental consulting firms.



Feel free to ask the city for advice on questions to ask professionals you are considering to help analyze document the conditions on your site.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact the Land Use Desk in the Development Services Center at 425-452-4188 or landusereview@bellevuewa.gov.

