



Hiring an Ecological Consultant

Ecological professionals who consult on development projects are trained and experienced in providing informed, constructive feedback. While qualifications may vary, most professionals share common combinations of education and professional experience. This document outlines the most recommended qualifications and offers guidance on what to look for when selecting a professional for your development project.

Why is an ecological consultant important for land development and building construction?

Wetlands, streams, lakes, and some wildlife habitats are protected from development by critical areas regulations. Ecological consultants can help by identifying critical areas on or adjacent to your property that may affect your development plans. They will research background information on soils, vegetation, hydrology, stream types, and priority wildlife habitat. They will prepare critical areas reports. If necessary, they can prepare mitigation plans to compensate for adverse impacts when a critical area or buffer is proposed to be altered by a development plan.

What qualifications should I look for when interviewing an ecological consultant?

King County Code (KCC) Title 21A defines an ecological professional as:

A person having a degree in ecology, wildlife biology, wetland biology, fisheries, botany, soil science, environmental science, natural resource management, or a closely related field, with a minimum of five years of professional experience related to the subject ecological field. Professional certification in a relevant ecological field can be substituted for two years of professional experience.

There are no government-mandated certifications for ecological professionals with expertise in wetlands, streams, aquatic areas, or wildlife, but we recommend looking for candidates with particular academic and work experience to help you in the decision-making process. Some professional organizations offer their own certifications to help signify a certain level of expertise. Some ecological professionals have proficiency in several of the fields below, while others may be more specialized.

Wetland Professional

- Wetland professionals will walk your property to observe plants, soils, and evidence of the presence of surface water or saturated soils. They will research background information on soils, vegetation, and hydrology. They can flag the edge of wetlands, rate them to determine the width of protective buffers, and conduct functional assessments and impact analyses.
- Academic background: Minimum Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree in ecology, biology, botany, hydrology, soil science, environmental science, resource management, or related field.
- Professional work experience in field: Minimum five years full-time work experience including delineating wetlands, rating wetlands, preparing wetland reports, assessing impacts, and developing and implementing mitigation plans. Training and experience using the 1987 Corps of

Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual and the 2010 Regional Supplement and the Department of Ecology's Wetland Rating System for Western Washington (2014 version). Additional continuing education / training programs such as the University of Washington Wetland Science and Management Certificate Program are desirable.

- Certification: Professional Wetland Scientist certification by the Society of Wetland Scientists.

Fisheries and Streams Professional:

- Fisheries and stream professionals will walk your property to look for evidence of defined surface water channels or water bodies. They will research background information on stream types and hydrology. They can flag the edge of the ordinary high-water mark of a stream and determine the type of stream and the width of protective riparian areas.
- Academic background: Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree in fisheries, aquatic ecology, environmental science, resource management, or related field.
- Professional work experience in field: Minimum five years full-time work experience including delineating stream ordinary high-water marks, conducting stream and/or fisheries surveys, classifying streams, preparing stream survey reports, conducting stream impact assessments and developing and implementing mitigation plans. Additional continuing education / training programs in fisheries, aquatic ecology, or similar are desirable.
- Certification: Certified Fisheries Professional by American Fisheries Society

Wildlife professional:

- Wildlife professionals will walk your property to look for signs of wildlife habitat and use. They will research background information on wildlife habitat and presence in the area. They can identify protected wildlife habitat networks or wildlife conservation areas and the required protective buffer.
- Academic background: Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree in wildlife ecology, wildlife studies or management, ecology, environmental science, resource management, or related field.
- Professional work experience in field: Minimum five years full-time work experience including wildlife studies, wildlife habitat, bird and animal surveys, Endangered Species Act consultation preparation, preparing management plans, habitat restoration projects, and/or mitigation plans for wildlife impacts. Additional continuing education / training programs in wildlife ecology, wildlife management, Endangered Species Act, or similar.
- Certification: Certified Wildlife Biologist by The Wildlife Society

How do I locate an ecological consultant?

The internet is a great place to start. Use search terms such as ecological consultant, wetland consultant, stream or aquatic ecologist, wildlife consultant, etc. There are several online databases that contain lists and forums where these professionals can be found. Some examples are:

- [Society of Wetland Scientists Professional Wetland Scientist](#)
- [Certified Ecological Restoration Practitioner](#)
- [American Fisheries Society Certified Fisheries Professional](#)
- [The Wildlife Society Certified Wildlife Biologist](#)

What should I know before interviewing ecological consultants for my project?

Ecological consultants will have greater expertise in some areas than others. Be sure to explain what specific tasks you need completed. Here are some questions to ask:

- What types of additional training or expertise in related fields does the consultant have?
- Is the professional familiar with King County, state, and federal critical areas regulations?
- How long has the consultant been in practice?
- Does the consultant have experience working with regulatory agencies, specifically King County?
- For complex projects, does the professional have experience working with a team of other consultants, such as civil engineers and hydrogeologists?
- Does the consultant have experience working on the specific type of task you need completed? For example, if you know you need a Critical Areas Alteration Exception, does the consultant have experience applying for and obtaining this type of approval through King County? If so, how many and when?
- For a large consulting firm, ask about the expertise of the specific staff who would be assigned to your project.
- Request references from past clients.
- Obtain a cost estimate for the work you need to have performed. Ensure that this estimate includes any additional aspects of work that may be necessary based on your needs (i.e., a written report, survey, coordination with agencies, etc.)

Additional Resources

King County [Department of Local Services, Permitting Division](#)

Seattle – King County Public Health, [Environmental Health Services](#)