

ERT Survey Results

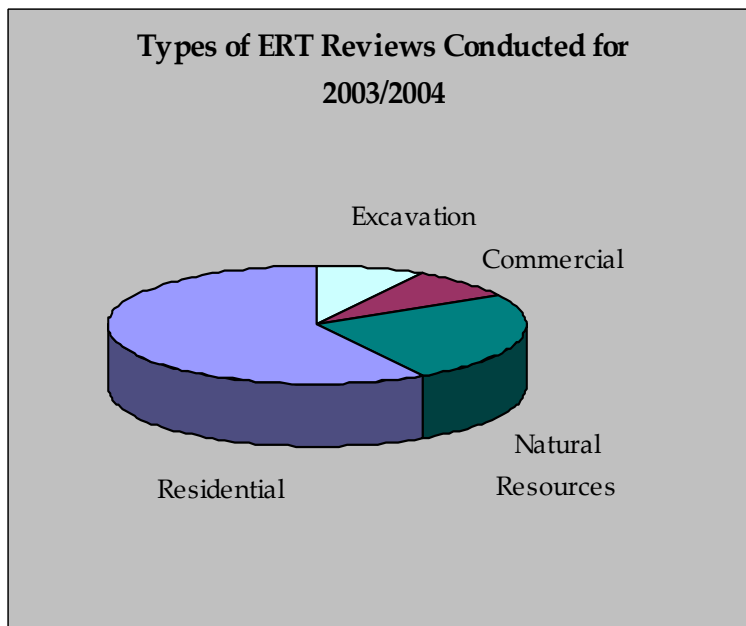
Fiscal year 2003/2004

September 2005

Since 1996 the Environmental Review Team has conducted a yearly survey concerning completed ERT reports. The survey is sent to the requesting agency after they have had time to read and review the report. The purpose of the survey is to determine the effectiveness of the ERT program in providing towns with natural resource information and project reviews that can be used in their decision making processes. The information that the surveys provide indicates to us how the towns use the reports, what aspects of the ERT are most valuable to them, their perception of the quality of the report, what kinds of changes or improvements the ERT can make to the program and overall awareness of the ERT program.

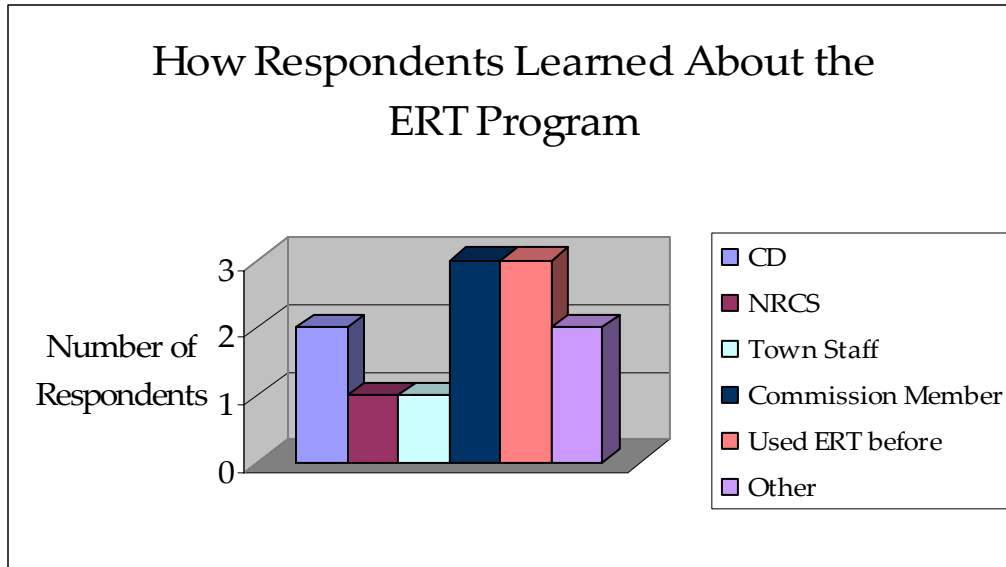
In the past year (2003/2004) 12 reviews were conducted. Of the 12 reviews 11 reports were completed. The twelfth report will be finished this fall. A total of 13 surveys were sent out. 10 surveys were returned representing 10 of the 11 reviews reports were completed for (91%). The only survey not returned was for the Trade Wind Farms Subdivision in the Town of Winchester. In an average year the ERT is able to conduct 12-18 reviews. Of the surveys returned, 7 projects were assisting towns in the review of private development projects, and 3 of the reviews were for municipal projects. One review was used in requesting state funding which they did not receive, and one was used to develop a management plan. Seven of the 10 surveys returned were filled out by the individual who made the request for their agency.

The range of projects reviewed included:



- ◆ Residential (58%)
Subdivision (4), Age Restricted Housing (3)
- ◆ Natural Resource (25%)
Natural Resource Inventory (3)
- ◆ Commercial (8.5%)
Zone change (1)
- ◆ Excavation (8.5%)
Sand and Gravel (1)

The request for reviews came from a variety of municipal officials and other agencies. Some requests were made jointly by two or more town agencies. The inland wetland commissions (8) made the most number of requests, followed by conservation commission (1), environmental commission (1), forest commission (1), park and recreation department (1), and town council (1).



Almost all of the towns that made requests had full time professional staff, as well as part time staff. Staff positions included town planner (7), environmental planner (1), town engineer (6), town sanitarian (3), combined zoning and wetland officer (3), zoning enforcement officer full or part time (4), wetland enforcement officer full or part time (6), or hired a private consultant (1) to review the same application that the ERT was asked to review.

At the time of survey completion, one had no action taken, three projects were in the planning stage, two were under review, five of the proposals were accepted, three were modified by request of the agency, one was modified voluntarily, one was taken to court, and five proposals were denied.

In general when asked if the ERT report was used in the decision-making process 25% replied the ERT report was the basis of the final decision. 50% said that the ERT was partially used in the decision. 16.5% said it was used for general resource management and planning. Another 8.5% said the ERT hadn't been used because the application was not filed yet. Five reported asking for additional assistance from Team members. Four reported that the Team members were helpful. One town requested another report pertaining to the new site plan shortly after the first ERT report had been issued. The ERT was unable to provide them with another review on the same site because it is not ERT policy to do so, unless there is a significant land use change or an extended time has elapsed.

Of the ten respondents 100% noted that the information provided by the ERT report was easily read and understood. All said that the information was pertinent to the proposed project. Seven said the report was able to cite specific concerns and make recommendations. Six noted that the ERT report was able to answer specific questions adequately. One noted the information was not technical enough, and another noted that some parts of the information were too general. Lastly one noted that the report provided excellent information for trail access and public use management.

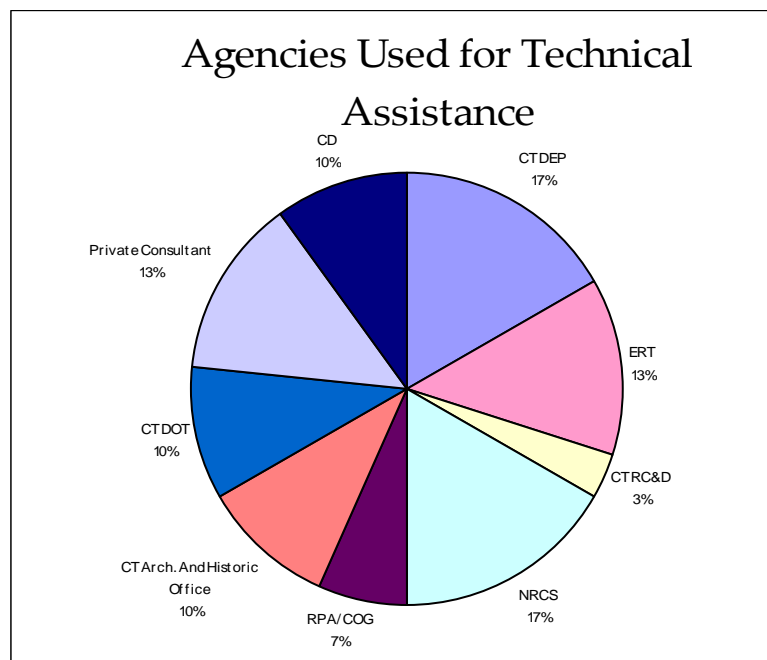
The ERT reports were rated “excellent” by 40% of the survey respondents, 30% rated them “very good”, and the remaining 30% rated the report “good”. When asked how helpful the report was in decision making 40% of respondents replied that the reports were “very helpful,” 50% responded that the report was “helpful” to them, and one respondent said the report hadn’t been used because the application was not filed yet. When asked if the ERT report provided them with the information they expected it to have eight said yes, one said it had most of the information they expected, and one said no. Those who said most and no, responded that it was due to the time of year that some parts of the report were vague, and no fisheries report was received. The ERT is unable to study certain natural resource inventory issues during winter months, and is noted to prospective requesters. If a report is needed for specific concerns it is best to wait until the appropriate season if possible.

Approximately 90% of the respondents said that the ERT was a good method to receive objective information and recommendations to help in the decision-making process. All of the respondents said that the ERT was a valuable service that they would use again and recommend. 20% said it provides a good service, but it takes too long, another 2% noted the ERT was a method to delay or deny a project. 10% had other impressions of the ERT, and suggested that it would have been more beneficial if P&Z had requested and used the report.

Respondents stated the following impacts were minimized or avoided because of information included in the ERT report are as follows:

- erosion and sedimentation (40%)
- water pollution (30%)
- wetland degradation (40%)
- wildlife habitat degradation (30%)
- fisheries habitat degradation (10%)
- sewage disposal or water supply problems (20%)
- incompatible land uses (20%)
- impacts minimized in management plan (10%)

Data in graph is based on survey response when asked what agencies respondents normally contact for technical assistance with the review of projects.



The following chart indicates survey responses for which information was applicable from the ERT report.

Type of Information	Used	Partially used	Not used
Topography	6	1	
Bedrock/ Surficial Geology	3	3	
Geological Limitations	4	2	
Soil Resources/ Limitations/ Descriptions	7	2	
Storm Water Management	6	2	
Wetland Resources	7	2	
E&S Information	6		
Hydrology	5	3	
Water Supply	1	2	2
Sewage Disposal	2	1	2
Recreation	2	1	2
Natural Diversity Data Base	3	2	1
Vegetation/ Forestry	5	3	
Wildlife Resources	2	5	
Fisheries Resources	3	3	1
Planning Review/ Land Use	4	1	1
Traffic / Transportation Review	1		4
Archaeological Review	2	2	2
Education	3	2	2
Other			1

When asked what discipline/ professional or information that is not now available would you want to have as an ERT Team member in the future, the replies were: native landscaping, management planning for open space, economic/fiscal analysis, archeologist specialist, environmental scientist who is experienced in reading site plans and has field experience.

Eight respondents reported that someone encouraged them to request an ERT, which included: applicant/developer, town staff, commission member, citizen/citizen's group, conservation district, regional planning agency / council of government, and a park and recreation director. Only three of the ten surveys indicated that someone tried to discourage them from requesting an ERT. Those that did so included: the applicant/developer, chief elected official, and commission member.

When asked if they knew the ERT program had been in existence since 1969 six responded yes and four said no. Another seven responded they were aware of how the program is funded. When asked if they agreed with this method five said yes and one said yes and no. Additional comments included, " If the fee climbs any higher I don't think it will be accepted. We heard a lot of complaints when it rose to \$30.00." Another respondent said, " I understand the connection for development to pay for this service but the general fee for all land use permits is extreme for small things like sheds."

Respondents replied that they were informed about the ERT program from the Conservation District (2), NRCS (1), Town Staff (1), Commission Member (3), used the program in the past (3). The rest noted other (3), which included seeing the ERT used in other towns, knew about King's Mark, and was on the RC&D Council.

Future Action:

The ERT program is currently in its 36th consecutive year of service. It continues to fulfill its objective by providing professional objective reviews of development proposals, natural resource inventories for planning and management and recommending guidelines for sound land use.

The statewide ERT subcommittee intends to continue to maintain the ERT Program's reputation as a highly regarded resource for Connecticut communities. They will continue to meet and develop strategies to enhance current procedures so that towns can receive the information they need in a timely and useful manner in order to make their decision. The ERT relies on the voluntary participation of federal, state, and local agency personnel so interagency cooperation and communication is key in maintaining expert professional Team Members.

Additional Survey Comments:

- ◆ *" The ERT assistance has always been professional, efficient, helpful and greatly appreciated. Thank you!"*
- ◆ *" Setting and meeting deadlines for completion at the beginning would be helpful in planning."*
- ◆ *" Thank you for your support."*
- ◆ *"Great program. Application time limits make it difficult to utilize ERT as much as we would like."*
- ◆ *" Although there has been no application filed yet, the ERT raised a number of issues that the developer has been able to consider and hopefully incorporate into their design. The ERT will give the local agencies additional supporting information for review of the application when it is submitted that will be very useful."*
- ◆ *" The Stormwater Management was the most valuable, SWCD info very helpful. Geology too general. Wetland Review not sufficient and one comment was not supported by the plan. I have seen older ERT's that were much more complete and helpful with respect to environmental reviews and impacts."*

Contact Information:

Connecticut Environmental Review Team

P.O. Box 70, 1066 Saybrook Road

Haddam, CT 06438

Phone: (860) 345-3977

Fax: (860) 345-3357

Website: www.ctert.org

Elaine Sych: ERT Coordinator

E-mail: CTERTElaine@aol.com

Amanda Fargo-Johnson: ERT Program Assistant (Author of this report 8/05)

E-mail: CTERTAmanda@aol.com

