



# ERT

Eastern Connecticut  
and  
King's Mark

## The Connecticut Environmental Review Team Program

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February 2010

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### Who Can Our Town Turn to for Free Technical Assistance with Land Use Planning and Review?

The answer is simple, the Connecticut Environmental Review Team. The Environmental Review Team, also known as the ERT, has been in existence since 1969, making this our 41st year of service.

The ERT is a group of environmental professionals drawn together from a variety of federal, state, regional and local agencies to form a multi-disciplinary environmental study team to assist municipalities in the review of sites proposed for development or to provide natural resource inventories for planning purposes.

The ERT operates under the guidance of the Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Areas (RC&D's). The RC&D's are a federal and state sponsored program that encourages the blending of natural resource use with local economic and social values.

The Eastern CT RC&D and ERT serves an 86 town area, and the King's Mark RC&D and ERT serves an 83 town region in western Connecticut. Federal, state and local agencies provide their professionals' time and expertise to the ERT as a public service activity so that the ERT can serve all towns *free of charge*.

Meeting the challenge of development requires thorough knowledge of the land, its resources, and the probable effects of development. The growing body of knowledge regarding land and its finite resources has made it difficult for local commissioners and landowners alike to assess the factors that should be considered in land use decisions.

The ERT assists towns in meeting the challenge by performing environmental reviews of sites proposed for major land use activities or to provide natural resource inventories to be used for land acquisition, master planning, or anticipation of future development pressures. The ERT has expertise and professional competence in addressing a wide array of environmental, planning and development-related issues. The program is very adaptable and flexible, and strives for excellence, objectivity and accuracy.

The information and analyses provided assist both towns and developers in making environmentally sound decisions. The ERT reports are not meant to compete with private consultants by supplying site designs or detailed solutions to development problems, but they do provide information about the existing resource base and evaluate its significance with regard to the proposed uses. Recommendations are given, but the report is non regulatory. All final decisions are left to the town and landowner/developer.

# What Kind of Project Will the ERT Review?

The ERT is designed to be a flexible program that will assist in the review of many types of projects. The ERT has reviewed the following kinds of projects but it is not limited to these and is always open to new requests. Projects have ranged in size from .5 acres to several thousand acres.

Subdivisions, Condominiums  
Active Adult Communities, Affordable Housing  
Shopping Centers, Malls  
Industrial Parks, Professional Parks  
Schools, Town Offices, Public Facilities  
Golf Courses, Race Tracks, Marinas  
Roads, Parking Lots, Sewer Extensions  
Playing fields, Nature Trails  
Outdoor Classrooms  
Sand, Gravel, Stone, Peat Excavations  
Watershed, Lake and Stream Studies  
Septage Lagoons, Landfills  
Zone Changes, Cemeteries, Bike Trails  
Coastal Management, Boat Launches  
Parks, Open Space, Camps, Campgrounds  
Indian Reservations, Critical Areas



## Can I Request a Review?

You may request a review if you are a chief elected official of a municipality, the chairman of an administrative agency such as planning and zoning, inland wetlands, conservation, economic development, parks and recreation, or a town appointed special committee dealing with natural resource/land use issues. There are exceptions when the superintendent/principal of schools, the president of a land trust, a tribal leader, a Girl Scout or Boy Scout Council, or a state agency may request a review for a natural resource inventory/open space/recreation review with a municipal endorsement. Private citizens, citizens groups, engineers, and developers may not request an ERT.

In the case of a development proposal, it is recommended that the agency with the permitting power be the agency making the request for a review. It is best to request an ERT prior to the official submission of a project or as soon as possible thereafter to allow ample time for a study. The process from request to final report may take up to 3 months or longer. The earlier in the process the ERT gets involved the easier it is to meet all deadlines. The ERT should not be used as a delaying tactic.

## How is the ERT Program Funded?

The ERT Program began in 1969 and was funded in the early years by various federal grants until 1977. From 1977 until 1990 money was provided from the State through a line item in the budget of the Department of Environmental Protection. In 1991 the \$103,000 provided for the ERT Program was cut to \$1000 and in 2005 it was cut to \$0 in the DEP Budget. For two years money was collected from towns and savings were used to run the ERT. The program was consolidated in 1992 and one coordinator and an assistant now serve the entire state. The RC&D Councils may one day return to the two coordinator system as the work load and funding allow. In July 1992 P.A. 92-235, the "Fee Bill", was approved in the state legislature. This was the end result of a two year effort to secure stable funding. A Survey conducted by the Eastern CT RC&D Area concluded that many towns felt that this was the fairest way to pay for the program.

In 2009 the "Fee Bill" was changed, with the fee increased and money now going into the General Fund. The ERT program lost stable funding. The ERT program is currently funded by a line item in the DEP budget and has been subject to rescissions and cuts.

New efforts to work with state legislators to again have a stable form of funding will be a priority. Funds are needed to provide for a full time coordinator, a part time assistant, office space, equipment, and the costs of field review and report preparation.

## How Do I Request an ERT and What Does a Review Involve?

An ERT Request Form needs to be completed. These forms are available from the ERT office or the ERT website ([CTERT.org](http://CTERT.org)). The information requested consists of narratives describing the project to be reviewed, the reason for the request, and a page where specific information requested is detailed. Also needed is a location map and any other plans or reports that are available for the site. Another important requirement is a letter of permission from the landowner or authorized agent for the ERT to enter the property for the purposes of the review.

The request is sent concurrently to your local Conservation District (CD) office and the ERT office for review and consideration. The CD may make a recommendation to the appropriate RC&D Council. The RC&D Council's ERT sub-committee approves, denies, or offers other assistance on the request. Once the request is approved, a date is set for the Team to conduct an on-site investigation. This "review day" begins with a brief meeting with the town, developer and ERT members to discuss the proposed project and identify concerns to be addressed by the Team. This meeting is followed by the field review, usually lasting several hours. At times, individual Team members will visit the site on their own to complete their inventory and assessment.

After the field review, individual reports are prepared by each Team member reflecting his or her own area of expertise. These reports are then submitted to the ERT coordinator who is responsible for compiling and editing the final report. The report is then sent to the requesting agency and others. Team members are available for follow-up questions.

Town officials and/or commissioners need to be present for the review meeting and field walk. Your active participation, as well as the developers cooperation make this program a success.

## Top Ten Reasons Why You Should Call the ERT.....

1. The ERT provides comprehensive technical assistance as a public service free of charge to town officials and commissions.
2. Professionals from federal, state, and regional agencies participate as Team members creating a comprehensive and expert study group unique to Connecticut
3. The ERT can be used for:
  - development proposals
  - master planning
  - critical area analysis
  - redevelopment proposals
  - natural resource inventories
  - fulfilling requirements for grant proposals
4. The ERT report can satisfy the need for an objective review and strengthen support for community decisions.
5. The ERT supplies information on a wide range of subjects that are not readily available to local decision makers.
6. Reports are non-regulatory and leave all final decisions to the town and landowner.
7. Saves time and money, and prevents costly misuse of natural resources that can be identified prior to project implementation.
8. ERT reports can increase awareness and knowledge concerning natural resources.
9. The ERT can act as a clearing house/referral service, if we cannot assist you we will try to get you the help you require.
10. The ERT is entering its 40th year of service, it is a well respected, efficient, economical and easy method of receiving natural resource and land use planning assistance.

# Who are the Team Members?

## **CT Dept of Environmental Protection**

Wildlife Biologist  
Fisheries Biologist  
Ecologist  
Botanist  
Wetland Specialist  
Lake Specialist  
Forester  
Watershed Coordinator  
Coastal Area Specialist  
Park/Recreation Planner  
Stormwater Engineer  
Environmental Educator



## **CT Office of State Archaeology and State Historic Preservation Office**

Archaeologist

## **CT Conservation Districts**

District Manager                      Technician  
Executive Director                  Natural Resource Planner

## **CT Department of Transportation**

Transportation Planner  
Engineer

## **CT Department of Health**

Water Supply Specialist  
Sanitarian

## **Regional Planning Agencies/Councils of Government**

Regional Planner  
Land Use Planner

*Other specialists have been obtained from these sources on an as-needed basis:*

## **UCONN Cooperative Extension System**

**University of Connecticut**

**CT Department of Agriculture**

**Water Companies**

## **Connecticut College**

**CT Office of Policy and Management**

**USDA– Natural Resource Conservation Service**

# A Few Words from Satisfied Users ...

“Incredibly useful report both to the Darien Land Trust and the Town of Darien. Timing could not have been better with the redevelopment of the I-95 rest area directly behind the report area. We have used the ERT report in our comments to the developer regarding the lake and watershed directly behind the rest area. This is an environmental issue that the DLT has been dealing with for 20 years and finally we believe that we may have a solution to the polluted run-off. Your report gave our concerns credence and authority. *Darien, 2010* .....

“This is an incredibly thorough and fascinating study that will provide the direction for much of our decision-making regarding the property....We are indebted to all the experts who participated in the study, as each area was investigated thoroughly and presented in language that is at once topically relevant and easy for a lay audience to understand.”  
*Sprague, 2008* .....

“Just a quick note of thanks, the New Fairfield Zoning Commission held its public hearing on the zoning revision with the stormwater measures being at the center .... A number of folks spoke in favor. I suspect that this could have been a much different outcome without your help and I am grateful for it.”  
*Candlewood Lake Authority, 2009*

“The Town of Franklin just had occasion to utilize the services of the Connecticut ERT to review the site of a proposed ash landfill in town. I would like you, as our local state legislator and as the chairs of the legislative environmental committee; to know how vitally important the Team’s review is to the Town of Franklin. Their services are, and will continue to be, crucial as this proposal progresses and the townspeople draw on the information provided by the Team.”  
*Franklin, 2009.* .....

“The Team recently assisted the town of North Stonington with an ERT on the Mystic Seaport/Hewitt Property and the Shunock River Non-Infringement Area ERTs. Both reviews were conducted with skill and professionalism. This group of individuals has consistently conducted environmental reviews for the town and is a truly valuable resource and asset for the conservation safeguards of the cities, towns, and state.” *North Stonington, 2009* .....

“The ERT’s report greatly exceeded the Commission’s expectation, and is proving an extremely useful resource as the Commission updates Cornwall’s Plan of C&D. Other groups in town, such as the Cornwall Land Trust, have also expressed appreciation for the ERT report, and we are using the report to further conservation efforts.” *Cornwall, 2008*