



Minimum Qualifications for Biological Consultants

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency • Planning Division

800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009-1740 • (805) 654-2478 •

vcrma.org/divisions/planning

The Planning Division has established the following minimum qualifications for biological consultants for the purpose of conducting Initial Study Biological Assessments (ISBA), Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plans, and other biological planning documents that may be required for planning, permitting, and other projects requiring biological study. Biological consultants must first submit their qualifications (in the form of a résumé) and complete a questionnaire for Planning Division review and approval. Once the biologist is approved, a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be submitted to the Planning Division and the approved qualified biologist will be posted on the Planning Division's Qualified Biologist list for four years. Every biologist that works on the preparation of any biological document or conducts a biological survey for the County must have an executed MOU with the County as an approved qualified biologist with at least the minimum qualifications listed in Section A below.

Other County agencies/departments responsible for administering projects for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) may also establish lists of approved biological consultants and may require additional qualifications as appropriate.

Once approved, the submission of quality work products is required by all approved qualified biologists. The Planning Division will review biological planning documents for consistency with its standards and policies, and if a consultant provides low-quality reports that consistently do not meet the Biological Consultant Minimum Qualifications and the standards and policies represented in the MOU, the Planning Division will give a notice of unacceptable work in writing to that consultant. Two notices of unacceptable work will result in removal from the Planning Division's list of Qualified Biological Consultants.

A. Minimum Qualifications for Biological Consultants

The Planning Division requires that **all** County approved biological consultants who prepare any part of a biological document or conduct a biological survey has the following minimum qualifications listed within this section (A) and an executed MOU.

1. An undergraduate or graduate degree with coursework in biology, botany, wildlife biology, natural resources, ecology, conservation biology or environmental biology. It may be determined on a case-by-case basis that other degrees or combinations of experience and course work meet the intent of this minimum standard.
2. An up-to-date subscription to the California Natural Diversity Database/BIOS and experience using and contributing to its online products and using the CNDDDB field survey form for reporting occurrences of rare plants, animals and natural community stands.
3. Ability to map survey findings (e.g., plant communities, wetlands, special-status species) in GIS or access to an individual or firm with the ability to map survey findings in GIS.
4. Familiarity with the Ventura County General Plan (including Area Plans and Local Coastal Program), zoning ordinances, Initial Study Assessment Guidelines, and other guidance documents provided by the County for the protection and mitigation of biological resources. This can be demonstrated through the written acknowledgment that the consultant has read and understands these policies, regulations, and standards.
5. Signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Planning Division for the preparation of biological planning documents, including all biological field surveys.

B. Minimum Qualifications for Biological Consultants Writing and Preparing ISBAs and Other Biological Documents that Must Comply with State and Federal Laws

In addition to the minimum requirements described above, the Planning Division requires that the biologist(s) who work on an ISBA or other environmental compliance documents be at a senior level, or under the direct supervision of a senior level biologist, with a high-level of local biological experience and proficient in State and Federal requirements as defined below. The following minimum qualifications are required for a biologist to prepare or directly supervise the preparation of ISBAs and other environmental compliance documents:

1. A current [California Native Plant Society Consulting Botanist Certification](#); **OR**
2. At least four years of professional experience in each of the following areas (a or b below).
 - a. Writing and directing the preparation of biological assessment reports or environmental impacts reports in compliance with CEQA Guidelines.
 - b. Evaluating compliance with relevant federal and state regulations, policies and procedures, associated with the following:
 - California Environmental Quality Act
 - Federal Endangered Species Act
 - California Endangered Species Act
 - California Coastal Act
 - Army Corps Permitting for Waters and Wetlands of the US
 - California Department of Fish and Wildlife
 - Regional Water Quality Control Board

This includes but is not limited to, compiling field baseline conditions, conducting project impact assessments, developing appropriate mitigation measures, etc.

C. Minimum Qualifications for Conducting Biological Field Surveys and Construction Monitoring Requirements

The County approved qualified biologist shall have expertise in local taxonomic groups or species on which biological surveys are focused; as well as the County's data review procedures; survey methods recommended by natural resource agencies; and commonly accepted survey standards in the taxonomic group, community, or species (e.g., California Native Plant Society survey protocols). Experience for botanical or wildlife surveys can be met by one individual or by combined biologists within a firm, but each individual who will be approved as a qualified biologist to conduct the survey for a specific species group must have at least four years of experience surveying for that group of species:

1. The following minimum qualifications are required for a qualified biologist to conduct wildlife surveys:
 - a. At least four years of experience performing wildlife surveys for a specific biological group located within the region (e.g., Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo and/or Los Angeles Counties).
 - b. The ability to identify Ventura County's designated Locally Important Species.

2. The following minimum qualifications are required for a qualified biologist to conducting botanical surveys:
 - a. The ability to identify Ventura County's designated Locally Important Species; and
 - b. One of the following options below:

Option 1: A current [California Native Plant Society Certified Field Botanist Certification](#); **or**
 - c. Option 2: At least four years of experience performing botanical surveys within the region (e.g., Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo and/or Los Angeles Counties); and experience or training using the Manual of California Vegetation (Sawyer/Keeler-Wolf).
3. The following minimum qualifications are required for a qualified biologist to conduct construction monitoring duties:
 - a. The ability to identify Ventura County's designated Locally Important Species; and
 - b. At least four years of combined experience performing botanical **and** wildlife surveys within the region (e.g., Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo and/or Los Angeles Counties).
4. For projects where biological surveys or construction monitoring involves the potential presence of federal or state listed species, the lead qualified biologist conducting the survey or handling the listed species shall have the required US Fish and Wildlife Service recovery permit or California Department of Fish and Wildlife MOU for the target species.¹

D. Minimum Qualifications for Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plans

This section is used to assess the qualifications of qualified biologists who wish to be approved by the Planning Division to submit Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plans for permit compliance. The Division requires that the botanists and/or ecologists, who work on a Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plans, be at a senior level with local restoration experience for the specific plant community being restored, or under the direct supervision a senior level restoration botanist or ecologist who meets the minimum qualifications as defined below. The following minimum qualifications are required for restoration specialist(s) who work or directly supervise qualified biologists on the preparation and implementation of these technical documents:

1. Experience as the primary author and director for the preparation of a minimum of **three Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plans** for a specific plant community type of which resulted in successful restoration of a native vegetation community or a rare plant population that occurs in either Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo or Los Angeles Counties. This requirement includes experience selecting reference sites, development of restoration and irrigation design plans, project implementation/guidance or plan adjustments, invasive species management recommendations, etc.; and
2. The qualified restoration specialist must have the minimum qualifications described in either Option 1 or 2 below:
 - a. Option 1: [Current Ecological Restoration Practitioner Certification \(Society for Ecological Restoration\)](#) **or**
 - b. Option 2: All qualifications in "i" through "iii" below:

¹ The qualified biologist should submit within the application a resume that lists any protocol level surveys, permits or MOU's along with any specialized workshops attended for monitoring the protected species.

- i. An undergraduate or graduate degree with coursework in agriculture, restoration ecology, biology, botany, landscape architecture, soil sciences, conservation biology, environmental biology, or a related field. It may be determined on a case-by-case basis that other degrees or combinations of experience and course work meet the intent of this minimum standard.
- ii. A current [California Native Plant Society Certified Field Botanist Certification](#).
- iii. At least **four years of professional restoration experience** in writing and directing the preparation of a Restoration and Monitoring Plans for plant communities or rare plants present in Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo or Los Angeles Counties. This requirement includes experience conducting pre-project baseline and reference site inventories, restoration and irrigation design plans, project implementation, invasive species management recommendations, etc.

Note: The restoration specialist requirements do not apply to restoration activities associated with implementation of the removal of invasive species, irrigation, etc. However, baseline surveys of reference sites must be conducted by a qualified biologist meeting the requirements of section C(2) above.