

# **Environmental Review Starter Guide for Local Governments**



Local governments often need to review environmental information when applying for state or federal grants or planning new projects. This guide brings together key data sources, maps, and explanations to help you understand what information is required and why it matters. It is designed to give municipal leaders, staff, and volunteers a clear starting point so they can complete a strong preliminary screening of their project.

## **Why Environmental Information Matters**

Environmental reviews help communities make safer, informed choices. By looking at local conditions, such as flood risks, sensitive habitats, or historic sites, municipalities can protect public health, avoid costly problems, and meet state and federal requirements. Understanding this information early in the process also helps projects move forward more smoothly and reduces the chance of delays.

## **Using This Resource**

This guide helps you understand the main areas reviewed in environmental assessments and find the data needed for early project screening. Each section explains what the resource is, why it matters, and where to locate reliable information. Using this guide early in your planning can help you spot issues, avoid delays, and prepare stronger applications. Municipalities completing a federal environmental review may also benefit from hiring an experienced contractor.

Some types of environmental information may not apply to Vermont. They are included because agencies may require proof that a specific review category does not apply. Having this information ready helps you complete a thorough preliminary



screening and keeps the review process on track.

## Getting Started

A helpful first step in any environmental review is exploring the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources' [Permit Navigator Tool](#). This easy-to-use tool walks you through a short set of questions about your project and then creates a simple guide you can download or print. The guide explains which permits you may need, how long they usually take, what they cost, and where to find applications and contacts. It works for projects on a single parcel of land. If your project covers several parcels or follows a road, trail, or other linear path, you can request a [Project Review Sheet](#) to understand which permits or approvals might apply.

## Environmental Topics and Information Sources

Once you know what permits might be required, you can review specific topics below and use the linked maps and data sources to gather information or print maps that show specific resource locations. Identifying potential issues early allows you to adjust your project or prepare needed documentation.

### Air Quality

Air quality information describes how clean or polluted the air is. Pollution can harm people's health, especially for children, older adults, and those with breathing problems. It helps communities protect public health and avoid



increasing pollution.

- [Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Air Quality Data](#)
- [NEPA Assist](#)
- [EPA Greenbook](#)

## Coastal Resources

Coastal areas are sensitive and easily damaged. Understanding these resources helps protect wildlife, reduce erosion, and support safe development.

- [Coastal Barrier Resources System](#)
- [Coastal Zone Management Programs](#)

## Drinking Water

Water systems deliver clean drinking water. Knowing their location, condition, and capacity helps ensure they can meet current and future needs.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)
- [Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Wastewater Regional Office Permit Search](#)



## Floodplains

Floodplain information identifies areas at risk of flooding. This helps prevent property damage and keeps people safe.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)
- [FEMA Flood Maps](#)
- [USDA Web Soil Survey](#)

## Hazardous Materials

Hazardous materials include chemicals, fuels, or waste that can harm people or the environment. Identifying where they are located helps prevent and/or address health risks, ensuring projects follow safety rules.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)
- [EPA Assessing Brownfield Sites](#)

## Historic Places



Historic places include buildings, landmarks, and archaeological sites that reflect a community's past. Knowing their location helps protect cultural heritage.

- [Vermont Online Resource Center](#)
- [National Register of Historic Places](#)

### **Human Health and Environmental Effects**

This information looks at how people's well-being and the natural environment have been or might be affected. It helps communities avoid harmful impacts like pollution, noise, or unsafe conditions and supports long-term community health and sustainability.

- [Vermont Department of Health Tools for Community Planners](#)
- [Vermont Department of Health Environmental Public Health Tracking](#)
- [Vermont Climate Action Office Municipal Climate Change Vulnerability Indicators Tool](#)
- [EJ Screen \(Unofficial Copy\)](#)

### **Important Farmland**



Farmland supports local food systems and rural economies. Protecting high quality soils helps maintain long term agricultural productivity.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)
- [Vermont Act 250 Criterion 9\(B\)](#)
- [USDA Web Soil Survey](#)
- [Farmland Protection Policy Act](#)

### **Threatened or Endangered Species and Critical Habitats**

These species and habitats are already at risk. Understanding where they live helps communities follow federal laws and supports biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)
- [US Fish & Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Consultation \(IPAC\) Official Species List](#)

### **Tribal Lands**



Tribal lands hold cultural, historical, and legal importance. Recognizing these areas supports respectful consultation and protects cultural resources.

- [National Map Viewer Native American Area Small-Scale](#)

## Wastewater Systems

Wastewater systems must be safe and reliable. Understanding their location and capacity helps prevent pollution and ensures systems can support new development.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)
- [Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Wastewater Regional Office Permit Search](#)

## Water Resources

Rivers, lakes, streams, and groundwater provide drinking water and support ecosystems. Protecting these resources is essential for community health.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)



- [Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Groundwater Studies](#)
- [NEPA Assist](#)
- [EPA Sole Source Aquifers Locations](#)

## Wetlands

Wetlands reduce flooding, filter pollution, and support wildlife. Protecting them helps maintain healthy ecosystems.

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Maps and Mapping [Natural Resources Atlas](#)
- [National Wetlands Inventory](#)
- [USDA Web Soil Survey](#)
- [NEPA Assist](#)
- [FEMA Resilience Analysis & Planning Tool](#)

## Zoning

Zoning rules are community agreements about how land can be used. Understanding zoning ensures that projects fit community plans and legal requirements.

- Your municipality's zoning map should be the information source used. Contact your municipality's Zoning Administrator or Administrative



Officer.

## **Moving Forward**

Environmental reviews don't have to feel overwhelming. With clear information and the right tools, local governments can make decisions that protect their communities and support responsible development. This guide is here to help you navigate the process with confidence and build a strong foundation for future planning.

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