



## **Minimum Qualifications for Biological Consultants**

### **County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency • Planning Division**

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[vcrma.org/divisions/planning](http://vcrma.org/divisions/planning)

Biological consultants must have a certain level of specialized skills within different disciplines to produce documents of acceptable quality required for Coastal and Non-Coastal Zone Initial Study Biological Assessments (CISBAs/ISBAs), Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plans, and other biological planning documents that may be required for planning, permitting, and other projects requiring biological study. This document outlines the minimum qualifications a County approved qualified biologist would need to possess depending on the activity conducted to complete the required environmental documentation. For each biologist that meets the minimum qualifications below, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be executed between the biologist and the Planning Division before any work can take place for an applicant. All biologists must have a current MOU with the Planning Division and cannot work under another biologist's MOU. Applications will be deemed incomplete that contain any work completed by a biologist without a valid MOU.

Other County agencies/departments responsible for administering projects for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) may establish their own lists of approved biological consultants with additional qualifications.

The Planning Division requires that all County approved biologists have the following minimum qualifications:

1. An undergraduate or graduate degree in biology, zoology, wildlife biology, natural resources, ecology, conservation biology, environmental biology, or related field.
2. An up-to-date subscription to the California Natural Diversity Database/BIOS and experience using the CNDDDB field survey form for reporting occurrences of rare plants, animals and natural community stands.
3. A current GIS mapping subscription or contract with a firm to provide GIS maps for project documents.
4. Familiarity with the Ventura County General Plan (including Area Plans and Local Coastal Program), zoning ordinances, the Coastal and Non-Coastal Zone Initial Study Assessment Guidelines, and other guidance documents provided by the County for the protection and mitigation of biological resources.
5. Signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Planning Division.

The following tasks require additional specialized skills and experience outside of the minimum qualifications described above. Please see the section headings below to review the minimum qualifications associated with each of the specialized biological services.

## A. Writing and Preparation of State and Federal Environmental Review Documents

The following minimum qualifications are required for a biologist to prepare or directly supervise<sup>5</sup> the preparation of ISBAs and other environmental compliance documents:

OPTION ONE: A current [California Native Plant Society Consulting Botanist Certification](#)<sup>6</sup> or similar certification from a professional society.

### **OR**

OPTION TWO: At least four years of professional experience writing, directing, and evaluating the preparation and 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 (CDFW)
- 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.

## B. Wildlife Field Surveys

Biologists qualified to conduct wildlife field surveys shall have the expertise to identify Ventura County's local species or taxa. They also shall be knowledgeable and experienced with state and federal survey protocols and/or professional survey standards for the taxonomic group or species. The following minimum qualifications are required for a qualified biologist to conduct wildlife surveys:

1. The ability to identify Ventura County's [Locally Important Animal Species](#).
2. At least four years of experience conducting regional [Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo and/or Los Angeles Counties] wildlife surveys, studies, and/or research for a taxonomic group (i.e., Invertebrate [gastropods, crustaceans, insects], Fish, Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds, Mammals [small, medium, large, bats, marine]).
3. For species listed as threatened, endangered, or rare under the state or federal laws or regulations, an individual must be permitted by California Department of Fish & Wildlife or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, if required.

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<sup>5</sup>The biologist who is being supervised in the preparation of the environmental document section must meet the minimum qualifications listed on page one of this document.

<sup>6</sup>The skills and knowledge needed to satisfy all the requirements of this certification program are adequate to meet the minimum qualifications listed for the comparable option, if not more. As a consulting botanist to pass the consulting botanist certification, it is recommended that the botanist have a minimum of 5 years of experience as a full-time senior level permitting biologist. See <https://www.cnps.org/education/botanist-certification/faq>

### C. Botanical Field Surveys

Botanists approved to conduct botanical field surveys must have a solid foundation in plant terminology, competent at plant keying using the Jepson Manual and online resources, familiar with vegetation sampling basics, and knowledgeable about Ventura County local species and taxa, state and federal survey protocols, and plant mapping. The following minimum qualifications are required to conduct ANY vegetation surveys and mapping:

#### ***General Botanical and Rare Plant Surveys/Mapping***

##### OPTION ONE:

- a. The ability to identify Ventura County's [Locally Important Plant Species](#) .
- b. Four years of combined experience conducting botanical surveys within the region [ Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo, and/or Los Angeles Counties].
- c. Competent at utilizing the Jepson Manual and online resources to key out plants.
- d. Ability to accurately categorize vegetation alliances and associations as defined in the Manual of California Vegetation (2nd edition).
- e. Experience utilizing State or Federal survey protocols, CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Vegetation Mapping Protocol and vegetation field sampling and survey forms. For species listed as threatened, endangered, or rare under the state or federal laws or regulations, an individual must be permitted by California Department of Fish & Wildlife or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, if required.

**OR**

##### OPTION TWO:

- a. A current [California Native Plant Society \(CNPS\) Certified Field Botanist Certification](#) or [California Native Plant Society Consulting Botanist Certification](#) or similar certification from a professional society. For species listed as threatened, endangered, or rare under the state or federal laws or regulations, an individual must be permitted by California Department of Fish & Wildlife or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, if required.

## D. Construction Monitoring Requirements

Biologists qualified to conduct construction monitoring duties are required to interpret, communicate, and enforce permit conditions to construction crews accurately. These duties may include but are not limited to the following: educational briefings on special status species life ecology to workers, conduct surveys for wildlife prior to construction work, measure noise or light emissions, and when detected, potentially relocate special status species or halt work activities. Therefore, the following minimum qualifications are required for a biologist to conduct construction monitoring duties:

1. Qualified for both wildlife and botanical field surveys (see sections B and C.1 above).
2. For projects where biological surveys or construction monitoring involves the potential presence of federal or state listed species, the lead qualified biologist conducting the required special status species 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 special status species<sup>1</sup>

## E. Habitat Restoration Specialists

Due to the cost, time, expertise, and knowledge required to successfully restore different types of native plant communities within the County, the minimum qualifications for a *restoration specialist* have been broken into two tiers. The *primary restoration specialist* is a senior level botanist that has the education, training, experience, and knowledge base to successfully implement from beginning to end, the restoration of either a local native plant vegetation alliance or rare plant type requiring restoration. The *supporting restoration specialist* is a botanist with restoration experience, who may not have the proven experience or knowledge base as the *primary restoration specialist*; however, they have the education and training to implement the activities of the adopted restoration plan or other prescribed habitat compensatory mitigation requirements as described in detail below. Both the *primary* and *support restoration specialist* shall have the minimum education requirements:

- Knowledge Base: 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, with at least 6 credits in Ecological Restoration and at least 6 credits in soils, hydrology, or climate science.

### 1. Supporting Restoration Specialist

The *supporting restoration specialist* may implement the activities of an **approved** restoration plan or other prescribed habitat compensatory mitigation requirements as described within the plan. This includes preparing and submitting all monitoring and final reports, restoration activities (plantings, irrigations, monitoring, invasive species removal, etc.)<sup>2</sup>. The conducting all required following minimum requirements must be met to qualify for the *supporting restoration specialist* designation:

- a. At least *four*<sup>3</sup> years of professional restoration experience in writing and directing the preparation of restoration and monitoring plans of native vegetation or rare plant populations in the region [Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo, or Los Angeles Counties]<sup>4</sup>.
- b. A current [California Native Plant Society Certified Field Botanist Certification or California Native Plant Society Consulting Botanist Certification](#).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> The revision of any Restoration Plan's performance criteria, adaptive management measures, or other activities that require the discretionary judgement or knowledge/experience of the supporting restoration specialist to implement the task is pursuant to the approval of a County-approved primary restoration specialist or the County staff biologist.

<sup>3</sup> After Dec 31, 2025, subcategory b. will be required in conjunction with "five years" of professional restoration experience rather than "four years" of professional restoration experience.

<sup>4</sup> This requirement includes experience conducting pre-project baseline and reference site inventories, restoration and/or irrigation design plans, project implementation, invasive species management recommendations, etc.

## 2. *Primary Restoration Specialist*

The *primary restoration specialist* has the authority to develop, revise, and implement all habitat or species restoration plans or other prescribed habitat compensatory mitigation requirements for the County. The following minimum qualifications must be met to qualify for the *primary restoration specialist* designation:

### OPTION ONE:

- a. Hold a [Current Ecological Restoration Practitioner Certification \(Society for Ecological Restoration\)](#) or similar certification from a professional society for ecological restoration.

**OR**

### OPTION TWO:

- a. Authored [Primary] and directed at least **three successful** Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plans for a specific native vegetation association or rare plant population in the region [Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, San Luis Obispo, or Los Angeles Counties]. This includes pre-project baseline assessments, restoration and irrigation design, project implementation, invasive species management, and other relevant tasks; **AND**
- b. Requirements of the supporting restoration specialist (#1 above). For example, the authoring of three restoration plans in addition to the minimum experience requirements above.

**Note:** *Restoration specialist* requirements do not apply to restoration activities associated with unskilled labor activities such as removal of invasive species, installation of irrigation, etc. However, baseline surveys of reference sites must be conducted by a qualified biologist meeting the minimum requirements for general botanical and rare plant surveys/mapping.