



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT

What is the California Environmental Quality Act?

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a state law that requires state and local agencies to disclose and require mitigation of the potentially significant environmental impacts of "discretionary" projects that they may approve. A discretionary project requires an agency to exercise judgement when deciding whether to approve it. This is different from a "non-discretionary" project that an agency must approve if the project meets predetermined standards.

Does CEQA Apply to My Project?

If the project is a discretionary project, as defined above, then yes.

When is a CEQA Document Drafted?

The agency with the principal authority for carrying out or approving the project is the CEQA lead agency and is responsible for preparing an environmental document to analyze the project's environmental impacts. This process typically begins with the Environmental Checklist Form included as Appendix G to the CEQA Guidelines. The project proponent must pay for the costs of CEQA compliance, including preparation of the environmental document. In limited circumstances, an agency may determine a project is exempt for CEQA if certain criteria are met. If an agency other than CDFW finds a project is exempt, CDFW must either independently determine the project is exempt or assume lead agency status and prepare an environmental document.

What is the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Role?

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) must comply with CEQA for discretionary projects that it may approve. Often, these are projects requiring a lake or streambed alteration agreement or a California Endangered Species Act incidental take permit.

When an environmental document is required, a county or a city is typically the lead agency, and CDFW is usually a responsible agency and may assist the lead agency in its duties. Responsible agencies include all public agencies, other than the lead agency, which have discretionary approval authority over the project. When no local agency or other state agency is approving the project, CDFW can become the lead agency.

CDFW also serves as the trustee agency for the State's fish, wildlife, and plant resources and may provide comments to lead agencies regarding fish and wildlife impacts even if CDFW is not a responsible agency for the project. The CDFW Environmental Document Filing Fee is intended to cover the costs of this service. The fee is due when the lead agency files the Notice of Determination for most environmental documents.

For more information, please visit:

www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/CEQA

Why Should I Care?

CEQA helps to protect the environment that we live, play, and work in. This includes protecting our air and water quality, cultural, mineral, agricultural and forestry resources, wildlife habitats, public services, transportation, recreation and much more!

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