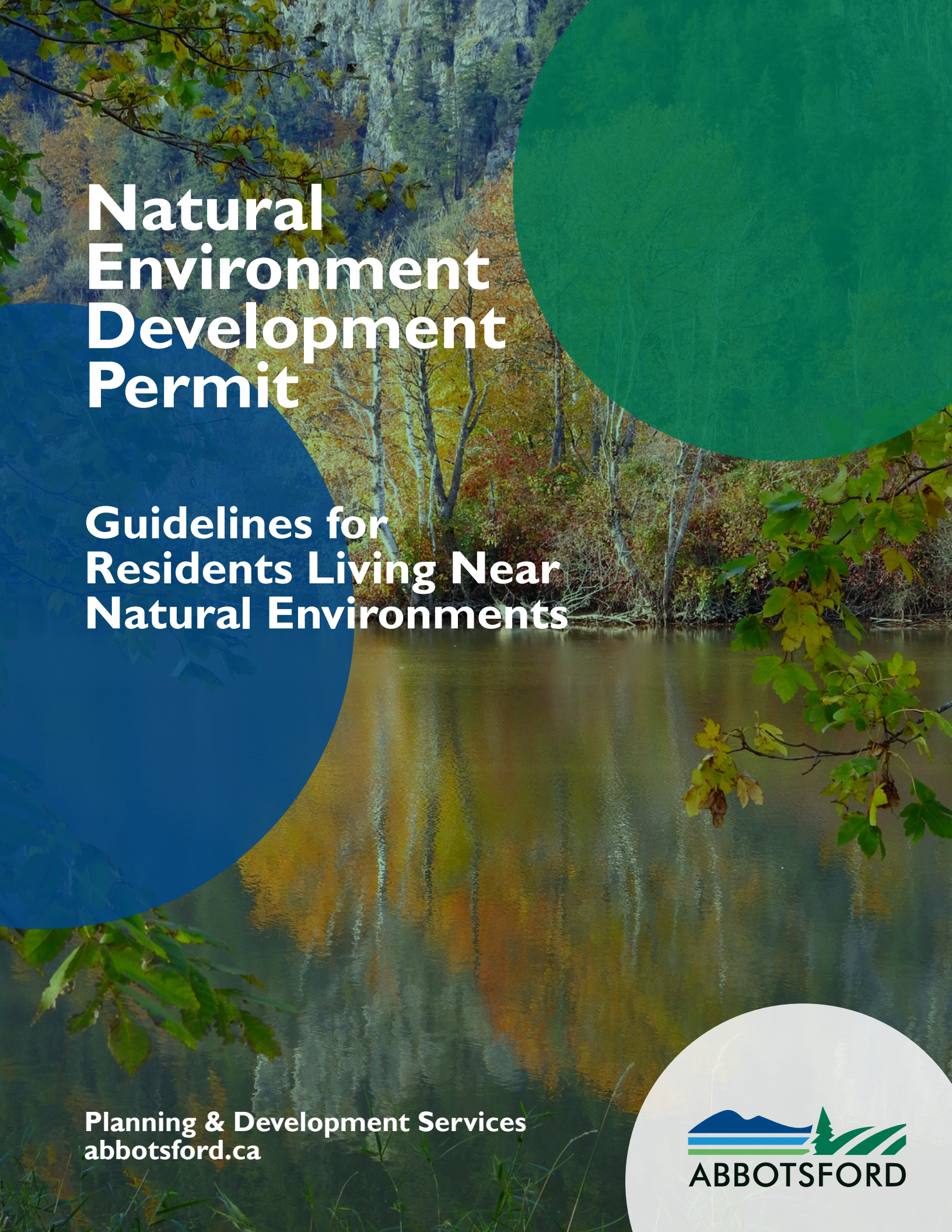


Natural Environment Development Permit

Guidelines for Residents Living Near Natural Environments

Planning & Development Services
abbotsford.ca

ABBOTSFORD

This pamphlet provides information to residents about living and building near natural environments in the City of Abbotsford. It describes what the Natural Environment Development Permit (NEDP) area is and what activities require an NEDP. Additionally, it also explains how residents can protect fish and wildlife habitat while reducing the risk of impacts.

In December 2025 the City completed revisions to regulations for development activities within the NEDP area for all non-agricultural uses. As part of these revisions, the updates were made to the Official Community Plan (OCP), Zoning Bylaw, and NEDP Guidelines, which outlines how to protect fish and wildlife habitats, as well as other unique ecological and biodiversity assets.

WHAT IS A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AREA?

Natural environment areas include terrestrial areas, such as steep escarpments, forested slopes, sandstone rock faces, second and old growth forest, dry bluffs, riparian (or streamside) areas, and watercourses, such as streams, ditches, and wetlands.

You can view the NEDP areas on the City's WebMap. On the WebMap, find your property, click the 'Development Layer' and 'DP – Natural Environment' and a buffer will appear surrounding any known watercourses and sensitive ecosystems.

WHAT IS THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DEVELOPMENT PERMIT?

The NEDP is a permitting process enacted by the City to protect sensitive ecosystems that is triggered when new development is proposed within the NEDP area as shown on the City's WebMap and in the Official Community Plan (Map 13). This process is intended to allow land to be used for its intended purposes, while:

- Implementing the requirements of the Provincial Riparian Areas Protection Regulation and establishing the requirements to accommodate development in a manner that minimizes impacts to fish and fish habitat;
- Establishing requirements to protect species at risk and their habitat; and
- Protecting other unique ecological and biodiversity assets.

DO I NEED A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DEVELOPMENT PERMIT?

If your project is located outside of the NEDP area, then you may not need an NEDP. Other City permits may be required, such as a Building Permit.

If your project is located inside the NEDP area (within the green or blue mapped areas), it may proceed as either an NEDP exemption or as an NEDP. Planning Development staff will be able to assist you to understand if your project meets the criteria for an exemption or if you need to make an application for a permit.

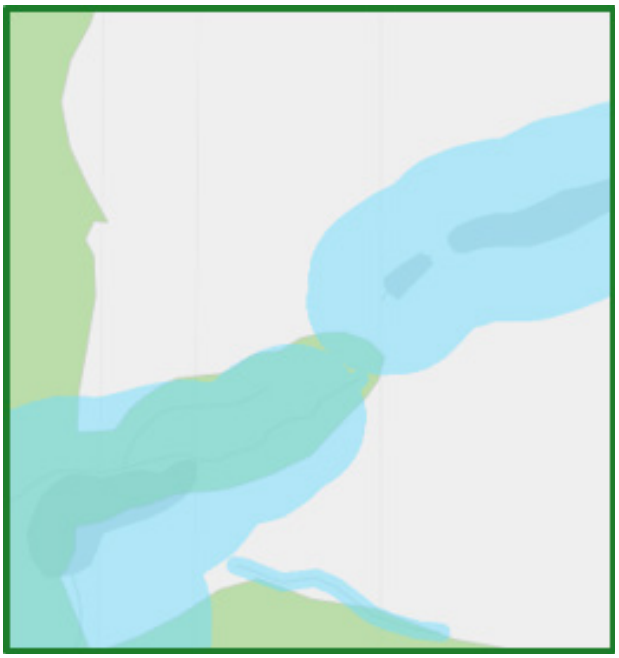
If you are or become aware of any watercourses or wildlife habitats that are not shown in our WebMap, they will require an assessment by a Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) to determine its appropriate watercourse classification (see table on the next page) and protection measures as per the NEDP Guidelines.

WHAT IS 'DEVELOPMENT'?

Development includes not only the construction of, addition to, or alteration of a building or structure, but for the purposes of the NEDP, also includes any alteration of land such as grading and vegetation clearing, installation of services and subdivision.

WATERCOURSE CLASSIFICATION AND NEDP AREAS

CLASSIFICATION	DESCRIPTION	SPEA	ADDITIONAL PROTECTION BUFFER	NEDP AREA
Class A (red)	Permanent streams that have fish present or potentially present	30 m	10 m	**40 m**
Class B1 (orange)	Non-permanent streams that have fish present or potentially present and provide water, food, and nutrients to a fish-bearing stream or water body	30 m	10 m	**40 m**
Class B2 (yellow)	Non-permanent streams that are not inhabited by fish but provide water, food, and nutrients to a fish-bearing stream or water body	15 m	10 m	**25 m**
Class C1 (green)	Constructed ditches that have fish present or potentially present	10 m	10 m	**20 m**
Class C2 (dashed-green)	Constructed ditches with no documented fish presence	2 m	3 m	**5 m**
Ravine	Where stream banks maintain a grade of 3:1 or greater and are 60m or more in width (excluding stream floodplain)	10 m	10 m	**20 m**
Wetland	As defined in the Riparian Areas Protection Regulation, where connected by surface flow to a watercourse or body of water.	30 m	10 m	**40 m**
Unclassified (blue)	Streams for which the permanency, presence of fish, or value in providing nutrients has not yet been determined	30 m	10 m	**40 m**



WHERE ARE THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DEVELOPMENT PERMIT AREAS?

The NEDP area is comprised of two features: known watercourses and fish habitat (blue areas) and sensitive ecosystem areas (green areas). An example of the blue and green NEDP areas are shown on the map left.

Blue NEDP areas are applied to known watercourses identified by a QEP, based on the watercourse's classification, Streamside Protection and Enhancement Area (SPEA) established by Provincial riparian legislation, and an Additional Protection Buffer to ensure development does not negatively affect the SPEA (table above).

Green NEDP areas include unique ecosystems, wildlife corridors, and intact wildlife habitats mapped during a regional Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory exercise.

WHAT IS A STREAM?

A stream includes a watercourse or source of water supply, whether usually containing water or not, a pond, lake, river, creek, brook, ditch, and a spring or a wetland that is integral to a stream and provides fish habitat. Streams may still be fish habitat despite being channelized and/or being dry during portions of the year.

WHAT IS A STREAMSIDE PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT AREA (SPEA)?

A SPEA is an area adjacent to a stream that links aquatic (stream channel) to terrestrial (land) ecosystems and includes both existing and potential streamside vegetation. It is also commonly referred to as a riparian area or stream setback. SPEAs are non disturbance areas (i.e. development activity of any kind is not permitted within them), except for a few minor exemptions noted on page 6.

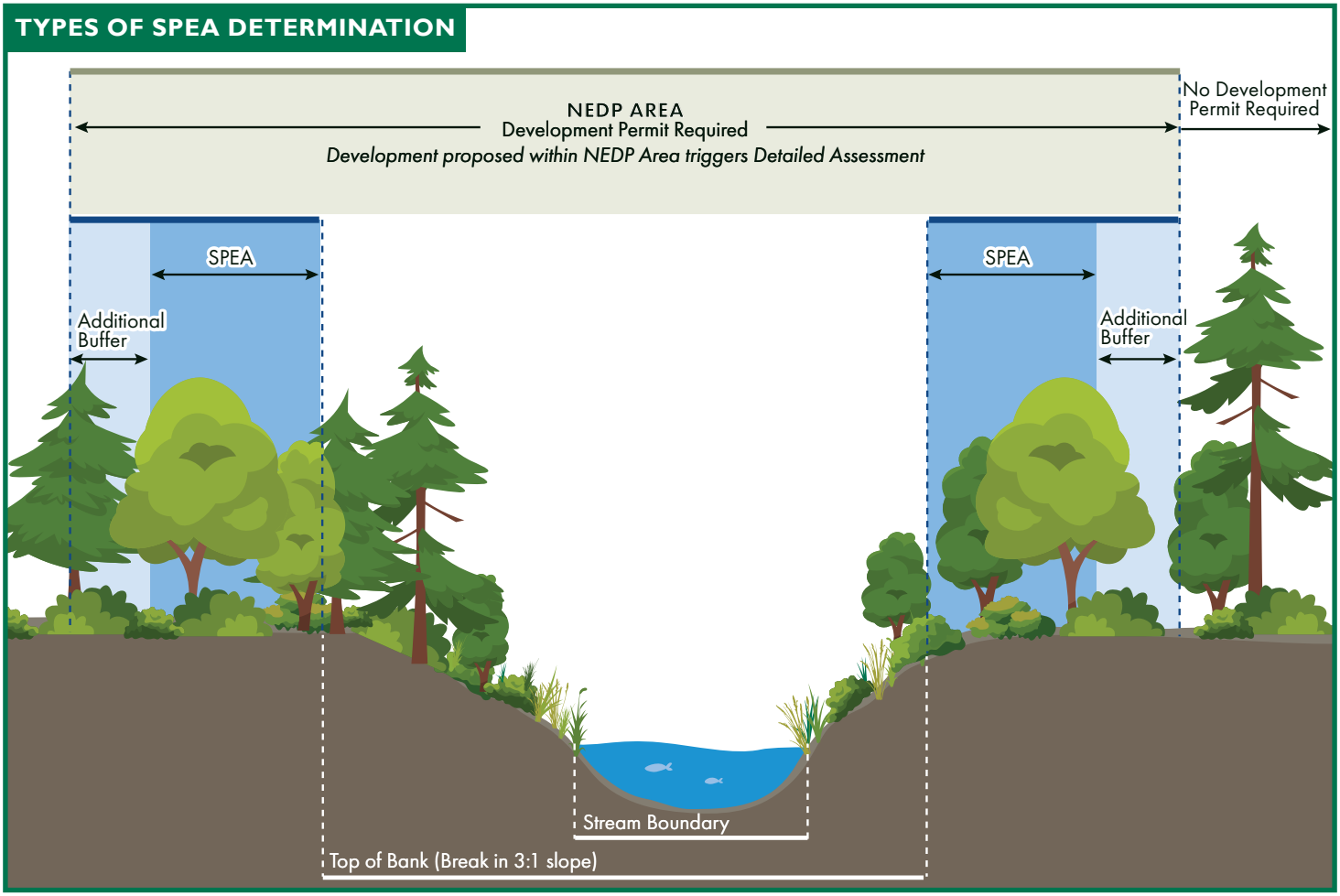
WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Within the SPEA, land alteration, subdivision, and construction are prohibited unless a development permit or exemption is obtained.

Streams and SPEAs are protected under municpal, provincial, and federal regulation. Development without a permit or exemption is not permitted, and impacted areas may require restoration to maintain the form and function of the natural areas.

Potential impacts to riparian ecosystem functions are illustrated in the figure on page 5, which compares a healthy, well-vegetated riparian area to a disturbed and degraded streambank. Demonstrating how the presence or absence of protected SPEA's directly influences stream health.

TYPES OF SPEA DETERMINATION

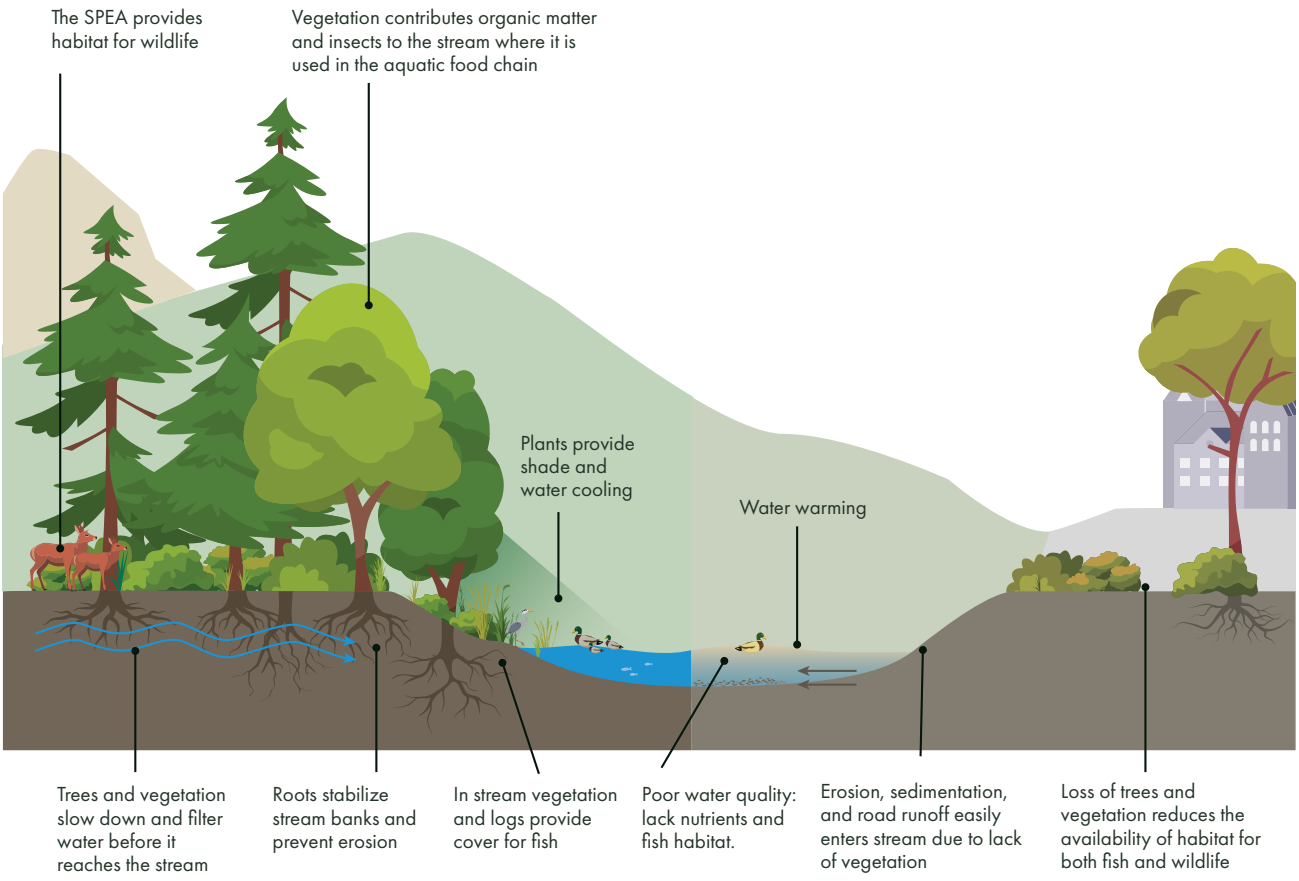


WHY PROTECT NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AREAS?

Natural environment areas are critical for healthy ecosystems and our goal is to protect the features, functions, and conditions of these systems. These areas provide many benefits, including the following:

- **Improve Fish Habitat:** Tree roots and shrubs along the banks provide fish with hiding places away from predators. When trees fall into a stream they create riffles and pools, which are used by fish for spawning and rearing.
- **Shading and Temperature Control:** Vegetation reduces the ground and water temperatures during the hot summer months, cooling the water and helps fish as it holds more oxygen which fish need to breathe. In the winter, vegetation traps warm air and buffers cold winds.
- **Increases Property Values**: Attractive natural areas and nearby trails or green space can increase property value and neighbourhood desirability.
- **Bank Stability and Water Quality:** Dense vegetation stabilizes stream banks and reduces erosion. Vegetation also slows water flowing across the land so it has an opportunity to soak into the soil which filters the water and reduces flood risk.
- **Support Aquatic Food Web:** Aquatic insects feed on the leaves and woody matter that drops from streamside vegetation. Fish feed on these aquatic insects along with terrestrial insects that fall into the water from the vegetation.
- **Wildlife Habitat:** Over 80% of the wildlife in Abbotsford use streamside areas during some portion of their lives. Intact natural environment areas provides food, shelter and nesting sites for wildlife, including species at risk.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEA'S - HEALTHY VS. DEGRADED HABITATS



WHAT CAN I DO IN AN NEDP AREA?

- Remove invasive plants for the purposes of habitat restoration; however, any significant removal must first be approved by the City. For information on which species are considered invasive, please visit: http://bcinvasives.ca
- Plant more native trees, shrubs, and groundcover to restore the area.
- Install habitat features, such as nest boxes, bat boxes, or placing woody debris for wildlife.
- Enjoy the natural area, including walking, birdwatching, or exploring—without disturbing vegetation or wildlife. To minimize impact, the use of exisiting trails is encouraged.
- Remove litter and garbage to help keep the area clean and healthy

ARE THERE ANY EXEMPTIONS?

The following activities may not require an NEDP:

- Agricultural uses;
- Lot consolidation;
- Interior renovations and non-structural exterior renovations (i.e. those renovations that do not expand the footprint of an existing building);
- Ecological restoration of a SPEA by a plan approved by a senior government;
- Emergency actions required to prevent, control or reduce an immediate unacceptable threat to human life, the natural environment, or public or private property, when under the supervision of a QEP;
- Use of private roads, parking areas, landscaping, or outdoor commercial or industrial storage that existed prior to 2005;
- Renovation of permanent structures that existed prior to the adoption of the Bylaw; and
- Regular maintenance of a property, but not including vegetation removal, or construction of any sort (e.g. patios, fences, gazebos, etc).

EXAMPLES OF WHAT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE IN A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AREA:

- Allow your pets to utilize the area with such frequency that they impact vegetation through trampling
- Use pesticides, unless they are for removing invasive plants and prior permission is given by the City
- Hunt
- Dispose of garbage or yard waste (use a green waste pickup service instead)
- Removing fencing protecting a SPEA or the signage on the fence
- Building trails
- Use motorized vehicles (e.g. dirt bikes, ATVs, etc.)
- Constructing buildings (forts) or structures (ramps)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Staff in Planning & Development Services are happy to assist and help you comply with the Zoning Bylaw and NEDP. If you have a question about any information presented in this guide, please contact an Environmental Coordinator at 604-864-5510 or through email at **env-info@abbotsford.ca**

For more detailed information on developing near Natural Areas please see the NEDP Application Guide available online at **abbotsford.ca.**

DISCLAIMER: This guide does not outline all applicable municipal, provincial, or federal regulations. Any contradiction, dispute, or difference between the contents of this document and applicable provincial law or City bylaws, plans, policies, or guidelines will be resolved by reference to the law, bylaws, or other official documents.

CITY OF ABBOTSFORD

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March 2026

ABBOTSFORD