

Environmental Resource Inventories: What are they, and why are they important? Adapted from Sustainable Jersey

What is an ERI (Environmental Resource Inventory)?

- An index of natural resources and a compilation of text and visual information about the natural resource characteristics and environmental features of an area
- Baseline documentation for measuring and evaluating resource protection issues
- An important tool for environmental commissions and planning boards – the ERI can be adopted as part of a Master Plan and serves as the first step in protecting and preserving natural resources

Why is it Important?

An ERI is an important land use tool as the natural resources identified in the ERI should be taken into account throughout land use decision-making processes. By integrating the ERI into the Master Plan and land use decision making process, the inventory will serve as the basis for where the community should seek to protect, integrate and/or conserve resources. Communities should begin their planning with the resources available and their ability to sustain a population while ensuring clean water and safe living conditions.

An ERI should also serve as an educational tool for the public as it shows a community's citizens and visitors where their resources are and provides insights about why certain land use decisions are made. It also empowers citizens, environmental commissions, and planning boards to think about how they can further protect and plan for the sustainability of the municipality's resources.

An ERI should be used as:

- a factual basis for municipal land use planning;
- a resource in the preparation of the land use element of the municipal Master Plan;
- a comprehensive guide in the Site Plan review process;
- a basic tool in determining zoning regulations, municipal ordinances, or other land use management techniques;
- a basis for a land capability analysis and for determining the intensity and location of development;
- an indicator of sensitive areas and areas suitable for certain kinds of development;
- a tool to increase understanding of natural systems, and their limitations and opportunities for use;
- a long-term planning tool to identify potential land use and natural resource problems;
- an educational tool for residents to learn more about their community and its environment;
- a way to save dollars by avoiding future problems and mitigation costs;
- a tool for making decisions about the placement of infrastructure, roads, sewers, schools, etc.