

Environmental Risks of Bill M216 (Professional Reliance Act) Background

Why environmental groups, municipalities, and legal experts are sounding the alarm.

1. Reduced Environmental Oversight

Bill M216 would require local governments to *automatically accept* technical reports, development assessments, and environmental evaluations **if a single “PGA professional” certifies them as compliant.**

Why this is a risk

- Municipal and regional governments currently review these reports for *accuracy, completeness, and environmental risk.*
- Under Bill M216, this internal environmental review would be restricted or eliminated.
- One hired consultant—who is being paid by the proponent—would essentially be the *final environmental authority.*

This dramatically reduces the layer of independent, public-interest environmental oversight.

2. Conflicts of Interest Become Systemic

A developer’s chosen biologist, engineer, or agrologist certifies that their own project meets requirements.

Environmental concerns

- Environmental professionals sometimes face commercial pressure.
- Under Bill M216, the municipal safeguard is removed.
- There is no mandatory independent environmental review in sensitive areas (wetlands, riparian zones, wildlife habitat).

WCEL warns this can lead to:

- Lower-quality environmental assessments
- Undetected impacts to species and ecosystems
- “Rubber-stamping” of development applications

3. Greater Risk to Sensitive and High-Value Ecosystems

Local governments currently use environmental staff to flag or reject inadequate reports involving:

- Shoreline developments
- Watershed alterations
- Riparian setbacks
- Tree removals
- Stormwater pollution

- Habitat fragmentation
- Wildlife corridor disruption
- Erosion and geotechnical hazards

Bill M216 weakens this capacity. Without municipal review, incorrect or incomplete environmental data may go unchecked. WCEL warns this could lead to “*catastrophic harm to environmental and public safety.*”

4. Undermining Environmental Bylaws and Community Planning

Bill M216 allows a single certified document to override:

- Environmental Development Permit Areas
- Tree protection bylaws
- Riparian and wetland buffers
- Hazard-area restrictions
- Watershed protection plans

Local governments lose the ability to require additional environmental information even when red flags exist. This could weaken or nullify local environmental bylaws across B.C.

5. Reduced Accountability if Harm Occurs

If environmental damage later appears—such as failing retaining walls, contaminated runoff, or habitat loss—the certifying professional may:

- No longer be practising
- Have insufficient insurance
- Be difficult to hold legally liable

UBCM notes that taxpayers may be left to absorb environmental cleanup or mitigation costs.

6. Delays and Barriers for Environmental Enforcement

If a municipality disputes a professional’s certification—even if environmental harm is evident—it must go through a provincial superintendent.

Environmental risks

- Delayed response times during active ecological harm (e.g., erosion, stormwater pollution).
- Municipal enforcement staff lose ability to act quickly.
- Vulnerable ecosystems may be damaged before dispute resolution occurs.

7. One-Size-Fits-All Approach Ignores Local Ecological Realities

B.C.’s ecosystems are enormously diverse:

- West Coast wetlands
- Garry oak ecosystems
- Salmon-bearing rivers
- Arbutus bluffs
- Foreshore eelgrass beds
- Subalpine zones

Municipal environmental staff have local knowledge essential for understanding unique ecological conditions.

Bill M216 sidelines that expertise.

8. Environmental Protection Becomes Privatized

Instead of environmental review being a public responsibility, accountable to community well-being, Bill M216 shifts that authority to:

- private consultants
- hired professionals
- development proponents

This privatization of environmental oversight is widely opposed by:

- West Coast Environmental Law
- UBCM
- municipal planners
- environmental NGOs
- local stewardship groups
- many professional biologists and engineers

Bottom Line for the Environment

Bill M216 weakens local environmental protections by:

- removing municipal environmental review
- shifting authority to hired consultants
- undermining environmental bylaws
- weakening habitat safeguards
- creating liability gaps
- slowing enforcement
- ignoring local ecological knowledge

It risks long-term, irreversible damage to B.C.'s ecosystems, watersheds, and wildlife.

Where to Read the Bill & Opposition Documents

- Full text of the letter from WCEL to MLA George Anderson: “*Letter regarding BC Bill M 216, the Professional Reliance Act*”. wcel.org
- Summary analysis and critique by WCEL (on their website). wcel.org+1
- Press release / public statement (Nov 19, 2025) combining WCEL + UBCM concerns: as summarized on advocacy site CRD Watch. [CRD Watch Homepage+1](#)
- Official news from UBCM (Nov 19, 2025): “UBCM encourages local government response to Bill M216” — with details, and a submissions portal. [Union of BC Municipalities+1](#)
- UBCM submission to the Legislative Committee (Nov 28, 2025): a detailed 2025 “Submission on Bill M216” document. [Union of BC Municipalities+1](#)