

What to expect with an environmental impact statement

Since 1969, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has required federal agencies to consider the environmental impacts of things like storing radioactive materials, clear-cutting old-growth forests, laying oil and gas pipelines, or building highways through low-income communities. NEPA requires a thorough analysis of the consequences. It also guarantees that you and I have a voice in federal decisions that could affect our communities and our environment.

Before the formal NEPA process begins, the relevant federal agency identifies the need for action and develops an initial proposal. The proposal will determine whether the agency prepares a(n):

- **environmental impact statement (EIS)**
- **environmental assessment (EA)**
- **categorical exclusion (CE)**

If a proposed action is likely to cause significant impacts to the environment, then the environmental impact statement is required.

An interdisciplinary team of specialists from a variety of disciplines within the agency completes the NEPA process with direction from the responsible official (a district ranger or forest supervisor, in the case of U.S. Forest Service lands).

The purposes of this Act are to "...promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation."

—National Environmental Policy Act of 1969



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TIMELINE OF AN EIS

- 1 PROPOSED ACTION.** A notice of intent is published in the Federal Register—this notifies the public that a federal agency is considering a project. The proposed plan of action is not final, but merely a starting point.
- 2 SCOPING.** The draft plan goes through a public input period. Interested individuals have the opportunity to respond to the proposed action. Comment periods can vary from 45 to 90 days.

Your input is important.

Provide constructive feedback by highlighting an important issue the agency may not have identified in the proposed plan of action, propose an alternative approach, or suggest ways to mitigate negative project effects.

- 3 ALTERNATIVES AND EFFECTS.** The agency develops other options, or courses of action, based on identified issues or conflicts that were brought up in the public input period.
- 4 FINDINGS.** A draft environmental impact statement is published—this is a range of alternative plans, with the environmental consequences analyzed for each of the plan options.
- 5 COMMENT.** The draft environmental impact statement goes through a comment period that varies from 45 to 90 days. This is a second public input period for interested individuals to respond to the project plan options.

Contribute to the final decision.

Think about what you would like to make sure is included in the final plan, if the agency was accurate about the impacts of all the alternatives, and which alternative the agency should select and why.

- 6 NOTIFICATION.** A final environmental impact statement is published, which takes into account the public comments and newest information.
- 7 DECISION.** A final plan is agreed upon and a record of decision (ROD) is filed. The final EIS and ROD are often released at the same time.

At this point, it's time to implement the plan!