

Participate in the Planning Process and Environmental Review

What is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)?

In 1969, Congress passed NEPA, the national charter for responsible management of the environment. Under NEPA, all branches of the Federal government must consider the potential impacts of their proposed actions on the human environment prior to making a decision to implement the action.

One process for considering the potential impacts of proposed Federal actions is through the preparation of a document called an Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA determines whether or not a Federal action has the potential to cause environmental effects. Preparation of an EA also provides an opportunity for the public to learn about and comment on Federal actions that may affect their communities prior to any action being taken.

Generally, the EA includes a brief discussion of:

- The purpose and need for the Proposed Action
- Alternatives to the Proposed Action, including the No Action (status quo) alternative
- The potential environmental and social impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives
- A listing of agencies and persons consulted and responses resulting from consultations

Based on the EA, the following actions can occur:

- If the Army determines that the action will not have significant environmental impacts, the Army will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). A FONSI is a document that presents the reasons why the agency has concluded that there are no significant environmental impacts projected to occur upon implementation of the Proposed Action.
- If the EA determines that the environmental impacts of a proposed Federal action will be significant, an Environmental Impact Statement is prepared, or project elements are reconsidered.

How is an EA prepared?

1. Sensing Efforts: An optional effort during which government agencies solicit the public's input on the Federal action's potential impacts and related issues. These comments help determine the range of issues considered in the EA. Sensing often includes a public meeting.
2. Preparation of the Draft EA: After sensing is complete, a Draft EA is prepared by an interdisciplinary team of environmental professionals. The Draft EA describes, in plain language, the Proposed Action, the alternatives being considered, and the potential impacts of these alternatives on the environment, both natural (air, water, vegetation, wildlife, etc.) and human-made (land use, cultural resources, traffic and transportation, noise, community resources, etc.).
3. Review of the Draft EA: Once complete, the Draft EA is made available for review and comment by government agencies and the public. The review period lasts for 30 days.
4. Preparation and Publication of the Final EA: After the end of the 30-day Draft EA review period, all the comments received are analyzed and considered, and a Final EA is prepared. The Final EA incorporates and responds to the relevant Draft EA comments received.
5. Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS): An EA can result in either a FONSI or a Notice of Intent to conduct a more thorough EIS. If the agency determines that the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts, the agency will issue a FONSI. A FONSI is a document that presents the reasons why the agency has concluded that there are no significant environmental impacts projected to occur upon implementation of the Proposed Action. After the signing of the FONSI, the proposed action may move forward.

