

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Overview Training

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ABSTRACT

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has been in effect for over 40 years. The current federal regulations that implement the law have been in place for almost 30 years. Federal agencies with river management responsibilities have similar rules and procedures for implementing NEPA. This session will provide a general overview of NEPA with emphasis and examples relevant to rivers and river management.

Topics to be covered include the purpose and procedural requirements of NEPA; how NEPA is used in making decisions; applicability of NEPA; different levels of NEPA analysis including Environmental Impact Statements, Environmental Assessments, and Categorical Exclusions. The basic components of NEPA analysis including public involvement will be covered. There will be a brief discussion of other related laws and how NEPA is integrated into natural resource agency planning and decision making. Relevant examples from river management will be discussed.

Time is allotted for discussion and questions from participants. This session is a companion to the other NEPA sessions and should be considered a prerequisite for those with little or no knowledge of NEPA who plan to attend any of the three sessions on writing a NEPA document.

Target audience includes federal agency employees who may work with NEPA and others who wish to learn more about the NEPA process and where to obtain additional information.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Writing Environmental Assessments (EAs), Part 1 of 3

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ABSTRACT

Writing clear Environmental Assessments (EAs) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is critical to successful implementation of the law and more importantly good decisions. The NEPA process must be well documented in clear language so that the proposals, alternatives and the environmental effects of proposals and alternatives are clearly explained. Often the NEPA analysis is not well documented resulting in costly delays in projects as appeals and litigation occur regarding the NEPA analysis. This training will focus on how to properly document the NEPA analysis for EAs with emphasis and examples relevant to rivers and river management.

This first part of the 3-part training will review NEPA and the types of NEPA documentation. The session will focus on scoping, public involvement, and defining the purpose and need for action. The session will include exercises and review of relevant documents. Ample time is allotted for discussion and questions from participants. The session will be followed up by Parts 2 and 3 covering the rest of the EA process.

Target audience includes federal agency employees who may work with NEPA and others who wish to learn more about the NEPA process and where to obtain additional information.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Writing Environmental Assessments (EAs), Part 2 of 3

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ABSTRACT

This session follows Part 1 and will continue training on the EA process. Part 2 will address development of alternatives and description of the affected environment. Part 2 will end with a discussion of environmental consequences. Discussion of environmental consequences will carry over into Part 3.

While environmental impact statements (EISs) and environmental assessments (EAs) have been prepared for federal and federally funded actions for over 40 years, developing a reasonable range of alternatives, identifying the affected environment and the actual analysis of the likely environmental effects of a proposed action is often poorly understood.

The presenters will draw upon their over 50 years of experience with NEPA to describe alternatives, the affected environment and impact analysis focused on topics relevant to river management. Examples relevant to both river planning and river management will be explored and critiqued. Resource-specific analysis (for examples, effects on wildlife, effects on recreation, effects on water quality) and cumulative impact analysis (effects of past, present, and “reasonably foreseeable” future actions) will be explored. Sources of additional information and training on the subject will also be shared. Hands-on exercises will help participants expand knowledge and skill in impact assessment.

Ample time is allotted for discussion. Target audience includes federal agency employees and others who are interested in impact assessment. Individuals with substantial impact assessment experience are encouraged to participate to expand the discussions and supplement the expertise of the presenters.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Writing Environmental Assessments (EAs), Part 3 of 3

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ABSTRACT

Writing clear Environmental Assessments (EAs) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is critical to successful implementation of the law and more importantly good decisions. The NEPA process must be well documented in clear language so that the proposals, alternatives and the environmental effects of proposals and alternatives are clearly explained. Often the NEPA analysis is not well documented resulting in costly delays in projects as appeals and litigation occur regarding the NEPA analysis.

This training session is a continuation of the materials presented in Writing Environmental Assessments, Parts 1 and 2. Resource-specific analysis (for examples, effects on wildlife, effects on recreation, effects on water quality) and cumulative impact analysis (effects of past, present, and “reasonably foreseeable” future actions) will be explored. Mitigation and monitoring will be addressed. As with the other NEPA sessions examples relevant to river management will be explored and critiqued. Ample time is allotted for discussion and questions from participants.

Target audience includes federal agency employees who may work with NEPA and others who wish to learn more about the NEPA process and where to obtain additional information.

“Aligning Watershed and Habitat Protection for Conservation Success in the Raccoon Creek Watershed, Georgia”

Presenter - Lindsay Gardner, Program & Communications Manager, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP)

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Nothing is more important than water for human health and the health of our fish and wildlife resources. Clean water and abundant habitat are critical to functional aquatic ecosystems with healthy populations of fish and wildlife. Successful aquatic resource conservation at the watershed level requires a multipronged approach working with local communities to restore ecologically impacted or impaired streams and put land use/habitat protections in place. *The collaborative efforts of the Southeast Watershed Forum (SEWF), Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Georgia Wildlife Resources Division (GWRD), and other key partners in the Raccoon Creek area of the Etowah River Watershed, Georgia, an EPA priority watershed, provide a positive example of this holistic approach to watershed management.* Building on the conservation planning, land protection and restoration efforts by TNC on Raccoon Creek, this partnership is successfully working with Paulding County stakeholders to identify conservation priorities and align watershed and conservation planning with county land use planning to ensure long-term benefits for prime habitat and water quality. This work encourages conservation-oriented growth practices and habitat protections to benefit fish and wildlife, like the Cherokee darter, and supports the regional habitat objectives of the SARP-directed Southeast Aquatic Habitat Plan, addressing threats to aquatic resources and key habitat protections. An outstanding example of how on-the-ground restoration of aquatic resources at the local level, the project also addresses national conservation priorities and demonstrates how through community-supported land use quality growth planning it is possible to develop a strategy and stewardship ethic to maintain these resources for generations to come. **Contributors: Christine Olsenius, Jane Fowler (SEWF); Scott Robinson, Lindsay Gardner (SARP); Kathleen Owens (TNC).**

An Update on Efforts to Improve Water Quality in Urban Streams in Denver, CO

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ABSTRACT

In recognition that the waterways in the City and County of Denver are important recreational amenities for residents and can act as a driver for economic development, Denver has begun improving its riverfront parks. Improvements to Denver's waterways come with many management challenges. One of the more difficult challenges has been balancing the desire to increase recreational access with the need to alert users about public health concerns related to poor water quality.

As in most urban areas, *E. coli* levels in Denver's waterways are frequently above health-based standards considered safe for instream recreation. As a result, Denver has implemented a number of efforts to improve water quality in order to support safe recreational use and to improve aesthetics. One of those efforts is attempting to eliminate sources of *E. coli* through the implementation of infrastructure maintenance BMPs. Quantitative data shows this to be a promising approach, but it is difficult to link to BMP implementation to changes in instream water quality. Another effort to improve water quality is examining ways to reduce trash in waterways. This effort is leading to the development of education and outreach campaigns intended to change social norms related to littering and to the examination of policies and BMPs that might decrease the amount of trash found in the water. Denver is also working to improve water quality by examining opportunities to incorporate water quality BMPs into improvements to parks along the river, by identifying areas within the City that need more water quality BMPs, and by refining its existing water quality-related education and outreach efforts to ensure they effectively communicate information about water quality, public health, and actions anyone can take to improve water quality.

Funding for these efforts comes from a variety of sources including storm water fees, grants, and in-kind services from partners.

Water Used to Develop Energy

Stacy Tellinghuisen

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More water is used to produce electricity than for any other use in the United States. In the arid West, water is consumed to cool down electrical generating plants that burn coal or natural gas, while in the East water withdrawn from rivers circulates through power plants and is then returned to the river at higher temperatures. This presentation will address the pressures that energy production brings to our rivers, especially in light of warming temperatures.

As natural gas production increases in both the West and East, water pumped into the ground for fracking is lost to the system since it is fully consumed. Twenty to fifty acre feet is needed to drill each well, and as thousands of wells are drilled, the impact to local water supplies is growing.

Fortunately, new technologies and conservation practices pose a solution. Water used to produce energy can be saved if cities encourage water conservation (since energy is needed to move water). Renewable energy sources like wind and solar consume very little water. This presentation will address the problems that fossil fuels pose for rivers, and focus on technologies that can solve these problems.