

Environmental Assessments

Project Analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act

Proposed Action

- The Forest Plan divides the forest into Management Areas. Like city zoning areas, each of these management areas has different goals, objectives and guidelines for management.
- Activities are proposed to achieve, or move toward achieving, the desired conditions for the Management Area described in the forest plan. This is described in the purpose and need for the project.

Scoping

- Once a proposed action is identified, the public is invited to share comments and concerns about the proposed action.

Issues

- All responses will be reviewed, and issues will be grouped and evaluated for their relevance to the proposed action.
- Issues are unresolved conflicts that arise from the proposed action.
- The Council of Environmental Policy regulations state that agencies must identify the “significant issues”. These regulations also direct agencies to only briefly discuss issues that are not “significant”.
- Issues that are already decided by law, not relevant to the proposed action, are outside the scope of the proposed action, or are conjectural or speculative and not supported by scientific data are not considered “significant issues”. All responses received and their disposition are disclosed in the project file for the environmental assessment.

Alternative Development

- “Significant issues” are used to develop alternative ways of achieving the purpose and need for the project.
- Each significant issue will have an alternative that responds to it.

Analysis of Effects

- Each Alternative will be evaluated for its effects on each of the concerns raised (“significant issues”), and on its success in achieving the goals, standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan (purpose and need of the project).

Selection of Alternative

- The Responsible Official will decide on a preferred alternative after reviewing the effects analysis.

Public Comment Period

- The public will be given 30 days to review the proposal. Under the new regulations this could occur after the environmental assessment has been prepared or at any time before that.

Decision

- After the Responsible Official reviews all the comments, he/she will make a decision and will issue a Decision Notice, detailing the decision and the rationale for making that decision. With the Decision Notice will be a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).
- If the Responsible Official can make a finding of no significant impact, the selected alternative is subject to a 45-day appeal period.
- If the Responsible Official can not make this “finding” and believes there may be significant effects, a Decision Notice will not be issued and we will begin preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the public will have additional opportunities to comment as we go through the EIS process.

Appeals

- The Forest Service has an appeal process where a commenter may ask a higher level Forest Service official to review the Responsible Official’s decision. Those who submit substantive comments during the 30-day comment period may file an appeal.
- Substantive is defined as follows: “comments that are within the scope of the proposed action, that are specific to the proposed action, that have a direct relationship to the proposed action and that include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider”.
- The appeal period is 45 days from the date of publication of the notice of the decision in the paper of record.