



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

January 26, 2015

MEMORANDUM TO INTERESTED PARTIES AND HEADS OF FEDERAL AGENCIES

FROM: MICHAEL BOOTS

Council on Environmental Quality

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Boots".

SUBJECT: National Environmental Policy Act Pilot Projects Report and Recommendations

On March 27, 2011, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), as part of its continuing efforts to improve the efficiency and integrity of [National Environmental Policy Act](#) (NEPA) implementation across the Federal Government, [launched a NEPA Pilot Program](#) to identify, evaluate, and disseminate innovative ways to prepare NEPA reviews. CEQ selected five pilots to further the NEPA goals of transparency and informed decisionmaking in a more timely and effective manner. This memorandum presents an evaluation of the outcomes, highlights lessons learned, and makes recommendations for Federal agencies to consider as they review their environmental programs and NEPA implementation.

Enacted by Congress in 1969, NEPA is a cornerstone of our Nation's efforts to protect the environment and engage the public in government decisionmaking. CEQ was established under NEPA to, among other things, oversee federal agencies' implementation of the NEPA environmental review process and to ensure that federal agencies' environmental review procedures achieve NEPA policy objectives. NEPA was enacted to improve federal decisionmaking, by making high quality information about the environmental effects of a proposed action and reasonable alternatives available to decisionmakers and the public before the action is taken. NEPA reviews range in scope and complexity, from Environmental Impact Statements (EISs), the more extensive form of NEPA review; to Environmental Assessments (EAs), the intermediate level of review; and to categorical exclusions (CEs), the least extensive review.

CEQ also fosters best practices by highlighting model approaches - such as these pilot programs - and works with the Federal agencies to assess their suitability for broad adoption. In consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Justice, CEQ selected the following five pilot projects:

- Assessing [NEPA information technology tools](#) to improve the efficiency and management of Federal environmental reviews;
- Supporting the National Association of Environmental Professional's project to improve efficiency of Federal environmental reviews through the creation of [best practice principles for EAs](#);
- Improving efficiency of Federal environmental reviews through use of [EPA's NEPAassist](#);



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- Identifying efficiencies to speed the Department of Transportation (DOT) [environmental review process for rail service](#) in the Northeast Corridor (Washington, DC, to Boston, MA); and
- Facilitating and assessing the Forest Service's collaborative approaches to forest restoration and the development of NEPA [best practices for forest restoration projects](#).

CEQ collaborated with the relevant agencies, tracked the implementation of the NEPA Pilots, and monitored the outcomes. These NEPA pilots have been both instructive and productive through the efforts of all the parties involved; consequently, CEQ has been able to identify ways to modernize and reinvigorate NEPA implementation, such as:

- Simplifying NEPA implementation practices, such as data gathering, scoping, and public review and comment;
- Leveraging and coordinating federal, state, tribal, and local environmental review, consultation, and permitting requirements;
- Reducing the time and cost involved in preparing NEPA reviews;
- Using information technology to improve the efficiency of NEPA;
- Improving the quality and transparency of federal agency decisionmaking and public involvement; and
- Promoting best practices or procedural innovations that will improve NEPA implementation.

Based upon the outcomes, CEQ is providing you the following recommendations:

1. Agencies should refine and develop their NEPA management and public engagement IT tools by leveraging existing tools and working collaboratively across the Federal Government to ensure the compatibility of IT tools.
2. Agencies should have a suite of NEPA IT tools at their disposal and be able to choose which ones they need to meet their needs, depending on the project and step in the NEPA review process.
3. Agencies should review the Best Practice Principles for developing Environmental Assessments and incorporate them into their NEPA practices.
4. Agencies should provide comments to CEQ on which Best Practice Principles for Environmental Assessments should be incorporated into CEQ guidance.
5. Agencies should encourage use of EPA's [NEPAssist](#) geospatial IT tool by program and project managers as well as NEPA practitioners.
6. Agencies should ensure their IT tools are compatible to ensure ease of use with [NEPAssist](#).
7. Agencies should consider developing and using a [Statement of Principles](#) in lieu of the more complex and time-intensive process required to adopt a formal Memorandum of Understanding when developing cooperating or participating agency agreements with other Federal, tribal, state, or local governmental entities.



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8. Agencies should review the [final best practices report](#) for the FRA's Northeast Corridor Future project when developing a large-scale (temporal and spatial) NEPA review.
9. Agencies should review the final reports for the USFS 4FRI and Fivemile-Bell restoration projects and use the best practices when developing a large-scale (temporal and spatial) NEPA review.
10. Agencies should optimize the use of collaborative stakeholder groups for developing and implementing monitoring for the effects of proposed projects and the effectiveness of proposed mitigations.

Questions about CEQ's NEPA Pilots Program may be emailed to Horst Greczmiel, Associate Director for NEPA Oversight, at Horst_Greczmiel@ceq.eop.gov.

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