

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Scoping Period

R5 Forest Plan Revisions

Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests

What is NEPA?

NEPA is short for the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. This legislation requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes. This is achieved by considering the environmental impacts of proposed actions on federally-managed lands and the reasonable alternatives to those actions.

What is scoping?

Scoping is one of the earliest steps outlined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to gather internal and external input that will help us focus the environmental impact statement (EIS) that we will use to revise the forest plans for the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests. A scoping period gives the public a chance to tell the Forest Service what issues and concerns members of the public think should be addressed in the EIS before the Forest Service begins drafting the document. Public involvement is a critical piece of this analysis, and we will consider a wide range of alternatives.

What is an environmental impact statement?

An environmental impact statement or EIS is a document required by the National Environmental Policy Act. An EIS represents a federal agency's evaluation of the effect of a proposed action on the environment. During the NEPA process, an environmental impact statement is first issued as a draft EIS (DEIS) for public review and comment, and then issued as a final EIS (FEIS). During forest plan revisions, the EIS is used to determine how a forest plan will be revised and the alternatives for revising it.

What is a proposed action?

A proposed action is a proposal by the Forest Service to authorize, recommend or implement an action on federally-managed lands. The proposed action explains how the proposal will be implemented including how to reduce or avoid environmental impacts. It also includes a time frame for when the proposal should be implemented and where the action will take place. The current Proposed Action is to revise the existing forest management plans for the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests.

What is the current proposed action?

The current proposed action is to revise the existing forest plans for the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests, as amended. Such an action is programmatic in nature, and does not authorize or implement any specific actions. Those specific actions will require separate or 'project level' NEPA analysis and decisions.

The desired conditions, strategies, standards and guidelines have been developed to address the need to change areas. In the proposed action, they have identified the following areas where prominent changes are needed:

- Benefits to People and Communities
- Timber
- Tribal relations and uses
- Cultural resources
- Fire
- Air quality
- Terrestrial Ecosystems
- Aquatic and riparian ecosystems
- Water resources
- Invasive species
- Lands
- Designated areas

The detailed proposed action can be found on the Forest Plan Revision webpage at: <http://tinyurl.com/r5earlyadopters>.

How does revising a plan change the management of the national forest?

Revising the management plan for a national forest creates an entirely new land management plan for the entire forest. This is the case no matter if the revised plan differs to a large or small extent from the previous land management plan.

Is the proposed action all that will change in the current forest plans?

No. While what is outlined in the proposed action will be the primary driver for changes to the current forest plans, it is not all that will be reflected in the revised forest plans. There is some management direction in the in the current plans that is current and remains effective. In these cases, this management will be carried forward into the revised plans, and may be modified to meet requirements out lined in the 2012 Planning Rule.

What is sustainable recreation?

It is the notion that recreation settings and opportunities should be managed on National Forests in an ecologically, economically and socially sustainable way for present and future generations.

How is the NEPA process different from what occurred during the January and June public workshops?

The forest plan revision scoping process began on August 29, 2014, when the Notice of Intent (NOI) for the proposed action was published in the Federal Register. Scoping is also the timeframe when officially begins. The scoping process is the best time to identify issues, determine points of contact, establish project schedules, and provide recommendations to the agency. The overall goal is to define the scope of issues to be addressed in depth in the analyses that will be included in the EIS. Specifically, the scoping process will:

- Identify people or organizations who are interested in the proposed action;
- Identify the significant issues to be analyzed in the EIS;

- Identify and eliminate from detailed review those issues that will not be significant or those that have been adequately covered in prior environmental review;
- Determine the roles and responsibilities of lead and cooperating agencies;
- Identify any related EAs or EISs;
- Identify gaps in data and informational needs;
- Set time limits for the process and page limits for the EIS;
- Identify other environmental review and consultation requirements so they can be integrated with the EIS; and
- Indicate the relationship between the development of the environmental analysis and the agency's tentative decision-making schedule. It is in the public's best interest to become involved as soon as the EIS process begins and to use the scoping opportunity to make thoughtful, rational comments on impacts and alternatives before the end of the scoping period, which is 30 days after the Federal Register publishing date of the NOI.

What happens to my comments?

All comments will be evaluated and incorporated, where appropriate, into the environmental impact statement that will be used to revise the forest plans. You will not receive a direct response to your comments; however, they will be made a part of the project record.

What types of comments are useful in revising forest plans?

Public comments can be "substantive" or "non-substantive," and provide different information. Substantive comments provide:

- Alternative ways to reach the goals outlined in the purpose and need statement;
- Missing environmental and / or socioeconomic issues;
- New information about laws, regulations or guidance that apply to this the project;
- Missing scientific research or errors in the Forest Service's analysis.

"Non-substantive" comments are not related to the purpose and need, have no connection to the analysis presented, offer minor edits and formatting suggestions or express personal opinions. For instance comments that only say; "The Southern Sierra Nevada is my favorite place to recreate," are non-substantive. While form letters and mass e-mail campaigns offer insight to public sentiments, the NEPA process is not a voting action based on majority rule. Rather, it is making decisions based on information and science.

How has my input been used to date?

A variety of outreach efforts to inform and gather input from the public have been used prior to publishing the Notice of Intent (NOI). Public input was considered in developing the preliminary need to change, which was further refined considering additional feedback received in public workshops into the purpose and need and in developing the proposed action.

What comments are within the scope of forest plan revision?

Land resource management plans are programmatic, which means they do not address site-specific management. Instead, forest plans address important broad issues and uses of the forest. Comments that address a specific area may not help the Forest Service revise a forest plan. Such comments would be helpful during project-level planning. Further, comments that suggest an activity that is inconsistent with the laws and regulations that direct forest management will not be helpful.

What should my comments look like?

The following are two examples of comments that would fall within the scope of forest plan revision:

- Protecting water quality and wildlife habitat should be priorities when planning for sustainable recreation. Where conflicts arise, environmental protection should take priority over increasing recreational opportunities.
- The Forest Service needs more attention on providing recreational opportunities for under-served communities near the Inyo, Sierra, and Sequoia national forests. Desired recreation for these communities might be_____.

How can I provide comments?

The Forest Service invites public comment on the Notice of Intent (NOI) and its proposed action through September 29, 2014. Please identify which forest or forests each of your comments applies to. Comments must be written and may be submitted several ways:

- Online: <http://tinyurl.com/r5earlyadopters>
- Electronic email: R5planrevision@fs.fed.us

- U.S. mail: Land Management Plan Revision, U.S. Forest Service, 1839 South Newcomb Street, Porterville, CA 93257

Where can I find additional forest plan revision information?

The Notice of Intent (NOI), detailed proposed action and maps are available for review at <http://tinyurl.com/r5earlyadopters>.

For earlier information regarding forest plan revision documents and the planning process prior to the release of the NOI and scoping period, please visit the Pacific Southwest Region's planning website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r5/FPR>.