



Plan Revision Process and the National Environmental Policy Act

In alignment with the National Forest Management Act, a land management plan (or Forest Plan) is intended to be amended or revised in response to changing conditions and demands on the public lands, or when new components are added to the National Forest System Lands that it manages. Keeping a plan current helps ensure that the Forest Service manages the public lands in ways that meet the multiple-use and sustained yield goals that Congress has set for these lands.

The Forest Service can take several steps to keep its plans current, through plan maintenance actions, plan amendments, or plan revisions. Minor changes to an existing land-use plan, such as correcting typographical errors or refining the boundaries of a fire management area are examples of plan maintenance actions. Plan maintenance actions do not require public notice or the creation of associated NEPA documents.

Changing the decisions in a plan, however, can't be done through plan maintenance. The Forest Service must either amend or revise its land-use plans to change the plan's decisions.

- **Plan revisions:** Plan revisions involve a complete or near-complete rewrite of an existing land-use plan. A plan revision requires a full Environmental Impact Statement.
- **Plan amendments:** Plan amendments modify one or more parts of an existing land-use plan. Depending on how wide-ranging the effects of an amendment would be, the Forest Service will prepare either an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement to accompany a plan amendment.

In this case, the Forest Service is completing a plan amendment instead of a plan revision because this amendment will only affect direction for a subset of 1994 Northwest Forest Plan components. Amending the Northwest Forest Plan will provide an updated management framework that incorporates best available scientific information and current conditions.

Process and Engagement Steps in Developing and Implementing an Amendment

Identify Need to Change

- Tribal and Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) input
- Publish Notice of Intent

Develop Proposed Amendment

- Consider prior public comment, tribal consultation, and FAC

Publish Draft Amendment & Consider Environmental Effects

- Publish Draft Amendment and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for public review
- Receive public comments

Publish Amendment

- Publish Draft Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement
- Objection process

Approve & Implement

- Sign Record of Decision
- Implement monitoring program

Coordination and Consultation with Tribes

What is the National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was signed into law on January 1, 1970. NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. NEPA also aims to improve decision-making by involving the public in the process. The Forest Service must follow all processes related to the National Forest Management Act and 2012 Planning Rule, along with the National Environmental Policy Act to update the ways units are managed under amendments or revisions.

Using the NEPA process, agencies evaluate the environmental and related social and economic effects of their proposed actions. Agencies also provide opportunities for public review and comment on those evaluations.

Throughout the NEPA process, the public has opportunities to engage and provide input, as defined by the Act's implementing regulations. Formal comment periods are required after the Notice of Intent is released and following the publication of a draft analysis. When the agency releases final products, including a draft decision, people who have engaged in the previous steps of the process will have an opportunity to object before a final decision is signed. See below for a more detailed description of opportunities to engage within the NEPA process.



Summary of the National Environmental Policy Act EIS Public Engagement Process

1. An agency publishes a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register. The Notice of Intent informs the public of the upcoming environmental analysis and describes how the public can become involved in the EIS preparation.

This Notice of Intent starts the scoping process, which is the period in which the federal agency seeks public input to define the range of issues and potential alternatives that could be considered during project development to meet the purpose and need.

2. A draft EIS is published for public review and comment for a minimum of 45 days.

Upon close of the comment period, agencies consider all substantive comments and, if necessary, conduct further analyses.

3. A final EIS is then published, which provides responses to substantive comments.

Publication of the final EIS begins the minimum 30-day “wait period,” in which agencies are generally required to wait 30 days before making a final decision on a proposed action.

The Forest Service publishes a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register, announcing the availability of both draft and final EISs to the public.

4. The EIS process ends with the issuance of the Record of Decision (ROD), which explains:

- a. explains the agency's decision,
- b. describes the alternatives the agency considered, and
- c. discusses the agency's plans for mitigation and monitoring, if necessary.

