



NEPA/NFMA Forest Plan Implementation Training Course (1900-01)

Making successful project decisions to implement land and resource management plans using the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the National Forest Management Act of 1976

TARGET AUDIENCE:

The course is designed for USDA Forest Service line officers responsible for decisions and people who participate on and are consultants to interdisciplinary (ID) teams that conduct environmental analyses (including ID team leaders, resource professionals, and public affairs specialists). A general understanding of the NEPA process and natural resource management experience is helpful, but not necessary. Interdisciplinary teams are well suited for this course. Employees from other Federal and State agencies can also benefit.

COURSE GOAL:

Conduct and document environmental analysis which will result in decisions that contribute to implementing a land and resource management plan (forest plan).

OBJECTIVE:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Use the forest plan to identify measurable needs and possible activities
2. develop a proposed action, purpose and need, and alternatives
3. perform environmental analysis
4. document analysis
5. write a decision and findings

INSTRUCTION METHODS

The subject material is taught with participants working through example problems as individuals, small groups, and ID teams. These exercises comprise about 40% of the class time. Information is presented to the students through use of anecdotes, analogies, and real examples where possible. Each student will have a class notebook and reference book containing all information needed for work back on the job.

COURSE CONTENT:

The course was designed by Washington Office, Regional, and field professionals with the assistance of professional trainers. All course content is consistent with Washington Office direction on forest plan implementation and the NEPA process. The course is presented in a series of units, each with a different emphasis. Each unit builds upon previous units, providing strategic process considerations to help participants use the NEPA process effectively and efficiently to conduct environmental analysis and implement the forest plan. The function of the responsible official, ID team leader, and ID team members/consultants are discussed in each unit. An overview of each unit follows:

1--OVERVIEW: The overview introduces the course content, sets performance objectives, and provides a very general introduction to the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and their respective implementing regulations. The themes for the course are introduced along with the triangle that is used as a reference diagram during the course.

- 2--STAGED DECISION MAKING AND TWO TYPES OF DECISIONS:** This unit discusses the decisions made in the forest plan and how project-level decisions relate to the forest plan. A discussion of programmatic and site-specific NEPA analysis, what it is and what it requires is included. Participants learn how to locate plan direction such as goals, objectives, and standards.
- 3—PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OVERVIEW:** This unit introduces basic public involvement concepts within the Forest Service. A five-question public involvement framework is introduced for participants to apply and discuss in subsequent units and back on the job. Public participation methods are not discussed in detail.
- 4--PLAN TO PROJECT:** This unit introduces the concept of using the forest plan as a basis for identifying measurable needs and designing possible activities to be used in implementing the forest plan. The first in a series of case study exercises building a project record for an environmental analysis is introduced.
- 5--PROPOSED ACTION, PURPOSE AND NEED:** This unit examines the process of formulating and writing: A statement of the proposed action; a purpose and need statement for the proposal, and a clear statement of the scope of the decision framework. The emphasis is on preparation of clear, concise statements tied to site-specific situations. Key concepts related to connected, similar, and cumulative actions are presented.
- 6—INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT RECORDS:** The unit presents the content of a project record explains the role of the project record in appeals and litigation.
- 7—INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:** Key definitions and concepts are presented on environmental effects, including direct and indirect effects and how to establish cause-effect relationships between a proposal and effects. The information is used in subsequent units on issues, alternatives, monitoring, and effects.
- 8--SCOPING:** This unit focuses on scoping as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations. The terms "project scope" and "scoping" are defined. The roles of the responsible official and the ID team are highlighted.
- 9--ISSUE MANAGEMENT:** A step-by-step process of issue analysis is introduced. Participants work with their interdisciplinary teams to refine broad issues into the most significant issues that will later guide alternative formulation.
- 10--ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS:** The framework of NEPA documentation requirements is presented, including environmental document content requirements for an Environmental Assessment (EA), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and associated decision documents. NEPA significance criteria are discussed.
- 11--ALTERNATIVES:** This unit discusses the Council on Environmental Quality regulations to provide a legal framework for alternatives. The unit focuses on: Addressing significant issues, developing a range of alternatives, developing mitigation measures, comparing alternatives, and describing alternatives eliminated from detailed study.
- 12--ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS ANALYSIS:** This unit builds on the earlier introduction to effects analysis and focuses on: identifying direct, indirect, and cumulative effects from past, present, and future activities; quantifying and describing effects; and interpreting effects. The Council on Environmental Quality regulations are discussed, as well as applicable case law. Important terms are defined.
- 13--MONITORING AND EVALUATION:** Monitoring requirements under NFMA and NEPA are examined. The link between project-level monitoring and forest plan monitoring is developed. This unit is placed after the unit on environmental effects to emphasize that monitoring is designed as part of the project.
- 14--RESPONSE TO COMMENTS:** This unit examines how comments to draft environmental impact statements and environmental assessments can be addressed by the agency. Legal requirements for responding to comments are discussed.
- 15--DECISIONS AND NOTIFICATION:** The role of the responsible official is explored along with the type of

information influencing a decision. Consistency with the Forest Plan and with NFMA management requirements is discussed. This unit also explores the legal and administrative requirements for public notification of decisions.

16--PROJECT RECORD REVIEW: This unit covers the importance of the project record and participants respond to an appeal of the project record and documents they have created throughout the class.

17—IMPLEMENTING DECISIONS: Participants learn of the importance of ensuring that decisions are implemented as planned. Procedures are presented on addressing changed circumstances and new information after decisions are made.

18--SUMMARY: The course is quickly summarized and evaluated.

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