

# Reclamation Manual

## Policy

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**Subject:** Public Involvement in Reclamation Activities

**Purpose:** To ensure that whenever Reclamation actions may significantly affect individuals or groups, Reclamation will systematically provide opportunities for affected individuals, groups, and communities to be informed about the issues; as appropriate, participate in the definition of the problem, objectives, and possible solutions; and have their views documented and considered in Reclamation's decision-making processes.

**Authority:** Departmental Manual (DM) 301 Chapter 2 and supporting regulations, laws, and directives listed in tables 1 - 3 in the appendix of CMP 04-01.

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1. **Goals and Objectives.** Reclamation will implement appropriate procedures for public involvement in a timely and effective manner for all Reclamation decisions that may significantly affect or interest the public. Appropriate public involvement must occur with the understanding that Reclamation cannot relinquish its legislated decision-making responsibility. Although the public will provide input to be considered in the decision-making process, the public does not make the decision. If the significance of a considered action is unknown, consult with a public involvement staff professional to determine whether public involvement is needed or useful. The goals of this public involvement policy are to:
  - A. Ensure that programs respond to public needs and concerns within Reclamation's overall mission.
  - B. Provide meaningful opportunities for the public to participate and provide input in the decision-making processes.
2. **Rationale for Public Involvement.** Public involvement in the Reclamation decision-making process is important for the following reasons:
  - A. **Successful Missions.** Reclamation successfully serves the public, if the public's concerns are considered in implementing programs. Public involvement:
    - (1) Improves opportunities for developing successful agreements and solutions, minimizes litigation and disputes, ultimately reduces program costs and time, and enhances effectiveness.
    - (2) Invites input from all stakeholders to ensure representation and consideration of differing perspectives and solutions and discloses legal, physical, and institutional constraints which could preclude possible options.

# Reclamation Manual

## Policy

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- B. **Credibility.** By consistently being open, fair, and honest, a public involvement process fosters both legitimacy and credibility. The public may not completely agree with the final decision, but they may more likely support the action as a result of being involved in such a process.
  - C. **Accountability.** Public involvement ensures that Reclamation is accountable to its customers and stakeholders.
3. **Approach.** Public involvement is a conscious process requiring order and intent. The process must be:
- A. **Open.** An open, fair, and participatory public involvement process helps Reclamation accomplish its agency and project-specific missions. Reclamation must incorporate partnerships, where applicable, to manage water and land resources effectively. Reclamation should ensure the adequacy of public involvement for activities in which the agency is involved.
  - B. **Flexible.** Public involvement must be appropriate to the specific situation and circumstances and must be incorporated into the decision-making process as soon as the need for action is recognized. The public involvement approach must be selected based on the nature of the issues and the public affected, which vary by location, program, and action. Understanding the particular situation and applying relevant, cost-effective, and useful techniques is necessary to attain the program's objective. Public involvement requires a thoughtful, flexible approach that can respond to changes throughout the decision process.
4. **Responsibility and Accountability.**
- A. **Managers.** Managers are responsible for soliciting and considering appropriate public input at all levels of the decision-making process. Decisions regarding specific strategies for public involvement need to be determined at the lowest applicable level of the organization. Delegation of program responsibility carries with it accountability for public involvement. Responsibility for public involvement and subsequent decision-making must be at the same level.
  - B. **Resources.** Adequate resources—including staff, training, and funding—to facilitate public involvement processes is to be maintained and available at appropriate levels throughout Reclamation.

# Reclamation Manual

## Policy

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- C. **Further Requirements.** Table 1 in the appendix of CMP 04-01 lists actions which trigger laws requiring public involvement. Table 2 describes the requirements under laws and regulations governing public involvement. In addition, most program- and project-specific enabling legislation carries with it authority for appropriate public involvement activities.