

Department of the Interior
Departmental Manual

Effective Date: 11/20/15

Series: Environmental Quality Programs

Part 516: National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Chapter 9: Managing the NEPA Process - U.S. Geological Survey

Originating Office: U.S. Geological Survey

516 DM 9

9.1 **Purpose.** This Chapter provides supplementary requirements for implementing provisions of 43 CFR Part 46 and 516 DM 1 through 4 within the U.S. Geological Survey in the Department of the Interior.

9.2 **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Responsibilities.**

A. The Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is responsible for NEPA compliance for USGS activities.

B. The Regional Directors and Associate Directors for USGS programs are the designated USGS NEPA Responsible Officials (ROs) for actions under their purview. The ROs review and approve environmental impact statements (EISs), environmental assessments (EAs), and related NEPA and decision documents, including findings of no significant impacts, decision records, and records of decision, prepared for agency actions under their jurisdiction. The ROs ensure that potentially affected Federal agencies; state, tribal, and local governments; and the public are notified early in the NEPA review process, as appropriate. The ROs are responsible for coordinating with the Associate Director (AD) for Administration to ensure compliance with NEPA.

C. The AD for Administration provides NEPA compliance leadership and coordination, program direction, and guidance within the USGS, in support of the ROs. The AD for Administration is the focal point for NEPA matters and develops NEPA-related policy and guidance for the USGS. The AD for Administration ensures that reviews are conducted of environmental documents and regulations or rules proposed by other agencies that involve USGS equities.

D. The Science Center Directors (SCDs) serve as the designated NEPA RO for actions within their respective organizations that are categorically excluded from the preparation of an EA or EIS. The SCDs review and approve all categorical exclusions and related decision documents for actions under the control of the respective science center. They ensure that applicable consultation requirements under other statutes are completed prior to categorically excluding a proposed action from further NEPA review. Actions that are not categorically

excluded are referred to the appropriate Regional Director or AD. The SCD's are responsible for coordinating with the AD for Administration to ensure compliance with NEPA.

9.3 Guidance to Applicants. Because the USGS does not have any regulatory responsibilities in this area, the USGS has no applicable programs requiring guidance to applicants.

9.4 Actions Normally Requiring an EIS or EA.

A. Approval of construction of major new USGS research centers or test facilities normally will require the preparation of an EIS.

B. An EA will be prepared to aid in deciding whether a finding of no significant impact is appropriate, or whether an EIS is required prior to implementing any action. The EA will be prepared in accordance with guidance provided in 516 DM 3. Specifically, an EA is required for all actions that are: (1) not categorically excluded; (2) listed as exceptions to the Departmental categorical exclusions in 43 CFR § 46.215; and (3) not being addressed by an EIS.

9.5 Categorical Exclusions. In addition to the actions listed in the Departmental categorical exclusions specified in 43 CFR § 46.210, many of which the USGS also performs, the following USGS actions are designated categorical exclusions unless one or more of the Department's extraordinary circumstances, listed at 43 CFR § 46.215 applies. The categorical exclusions shall apply to internal program initiatives performed in the United States and its Trust Territories and Possessions, including Federal lands and the Outer Continental Shelf.

A. Topographic, land use and land cover, geological, mineralogic, resources evaluation, and hydrologic mapping activities, including aerial topographic surveying, photography, and geophysical surveying.

B. Collection of data and samples for geologic, paleontologic, hydrologic, mineralogic, geochemical and surface or subsurface geophysical investigations, and resource evaluation, including contracts therefor.

C. Acquisition of existing geological, hydrological or geophysical data from private exploration ventures.

D. Well logging, aquifer response testing, digital modeling, inventory of existing wells and water supplies, water-sample collection.

E. Operation, construction, installation, and removal – including restoration of sites to the pre-structure condition or equivalent of the surrounding environment – of hydrologic and water quality monitoring structures and equipment including but not limited to weirs, cableways, stream-gaging stations, groundwater wells, and meteorologic structures.

F. Routine exploratory or observation groundwater well drilling operations that do not require a special access road, and that use portable tanks to recycle and remove drilling mud, and create no significant surface disturbance.

- G. Test or exploration drilling and downhole testing, including contracts therefor.
- H. Establishment of survey marks, placement and operation of field instruments, and installation of any research/monitoring devices.
- I. Digging and subsequent site restoration of exploratory trenches not to exceed one acre of surface disturbance.
- J. Establishment of seasonal and temporary field camps.
- K. Off-road travel to drilling, data collection, or observation sites that do not impact ecologically sensitive areas such as wilderness areas, wetlands, or areas of critical habitat for listed endangered or threatened species.
- L. Hydraulic fracturing of rock formations for the singular purpose of in situ stress measurements.
- M. Reports to surface management agencies, or any state, territorial, tribal, commonwealth, or Federal agencies concerning mineral and water resources appraisals.
- N. Other actions where USGS has concurrence or co-approval with another Department bureau and the action is a categorical exclusion for that bureau.
- O. Minor, routine, or preventive maintenance activities at USGS facilities and lands, and geological, hydrological, or geophysical data collection stations; and
- P. Minor activities required to gain or prepare access to sites selected for completion of exploration drilling operations or construction of stations for hydrologic, geologic, or geophysical data collection.