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NEPA Compliance at APHIS

Last Modified:

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a law that requires Federal agencies to assess the possible environmental effects of our proposed actions before making decisions. We must also offer opportunities for public review and comment during that process. This helps make sure that Federal decisions are well-informed and environmentally responsible.

In delivering APHIS programs and services, certain actions we take, such as those to address animal and plant health risks, programs that reduce wildlife damage, decisions on biotechnology permits, and more, may invoke NEPA requirements.

Learn More About NEPA

Latest Updates

11/17/26
APHIS Issues Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for Cactus Moth Biological Control
10/20/26
APHIS Issues Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for Erythrina Gall Wasp Biological Control

6/11/26
Notice of Availability: Final Programmatic Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for African Swine Fever Response Activities in the Event of an Outbreak
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Our NEPA Procedures

The NEPA review process begins at APHIS when an issue and need for action first arise, either through ongoing work or an outside request. We analyze potential proposed agency actions and establish whether they may have significant environmental effects.

We follow the USDA NEPA regulations to determine whether to prepare one of three types of environmental compliance documentation:

1. Categorical exclusion,
2. Environmental assessment, or
3. Environmental impact statement.

Regardless of the chosen path, we may need to consult and coordinate with other Federal, State, and local agencies and Tribal governments throughout the process.

Categorical Exclusion

A categorical exclusion is a category of actions that do not have the potential to significantly affect the environment. If our review shows that a proposed action falls within a categorical exclusion, neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is generally required.

Categorical exclusions allow for immediate action to be taken once analysis is complete, but the situations under which they may be used are limited. USDA NEPA regulations identify the criteria for actions that qualify to be categorically excluded.

Environmental Assessment

An environmental assessment is a concise public document that uses best available science and information to determine if a proposed Federal action will have a significant impact on the environment. This assessment must describe (but is not limited to): the purpose and need for the proposed action; when applicable, alternatives to the proposed action; and the associated potential environmental effects.

During the assessment process, we may find no significant impacts are likely to occur from the proposed or preferred action. In that case, we prepare a decision document called a “finding of no significant impact.” This document explains the reasons for our conclusion. USDA NEPA regulations identify the criteria for actions that qualify for an environmental assessment.

Environmental Impact Statement

An environmental impact statement is a more detailed public document APHIS prepares if:

1. We expect our proposed action's effects on the environment may be significant,
2. Our environmental assessment indicates a need for further evaluation of the proposed action's impacts, or
3. The proposed action is one that requires an environmental impact statement due to agency regulations.

The statement describes the potential environmental effects of the proposed or preferred action, explains what steps may be taken to minimize any negative impacts, and offers a reasonable range of alternative actions.

APHIS will post the environmental impact statement and a decision document called a “record of decision” on the agency’s website. The decision document identifies our selected environmentally preferred alternative. It also details related commitments, such as specific enforcement and monitoring activities. After posting the record of decision, we will proceed with the selected action.

Public Involvement

We publish a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement in the Federal Register, which provides the public with an opportunity to comment on alternatives or potential effects and on relevant information, studies, or analyses with respect to the proposal via regulations.gov and mail. We inform the public of the availability of documents and notices via the APHIS website and our email subscription service .

Final NEPA Documents by Program Area

For easy reference, we make final NEPA documents available on our website by APHIS program area.

Biotechnology Regulatory Services NEPA Documents for Legacy Petitions and Permits

Plant Protection and Quarantine NEPA Documents

Veterinary Services NEPA Documents

Wildlife Services NEPA Documents

Other Environmental Laws

APHIS also complies with all other applicable environment regulations, including the Endangered Species Act and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). Under FIFRA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency oversees the registration, distribution, sale, and use of all pesticides in the United States. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service enforce compliance with the Endangered Species Act to protect threatened and endangered species and critical habitat.

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