
9.0 Definitions and Acronyms

9.1 Definitions

The controlling definitions for terms under CEQ’s NEPA regulations are contained at 40 CFR. The numbers in parentheses refer to the appropriate section of 40 CFR. These definitions are provided as a supplement to those regulatory definitions.

Categorical exclusion (CE) (1508.4)—An action with no measurable environmental impact which is described in one of the categorical exclusion lists in section 3.3 or 3.4 and for which no exceptional circumstances (section 3.5) exist. NPS also uses the acronym “CX” to denote a categorical exclusion.

Connected actions (1508.25)—Actions that are closely related. They automatically trigger other actions that have environmental impacts, they cannot or will not proceed unless other actions have been taken previously or simultaneously, or they are interdependent parts of a larger action and/or depend on the larger action for their justification.

Conservation planning and impact assessment—Within NPS, this process is synonymous with the NEPA process. This process evaluates alternative courses of action and impacts so that decisions are made in accord with the conservation and preservation mandate of the NPS Organic Act.

Cooperating agency (1508.5)—A federal agency other than the one preparing the NEPA document (lead agency) that has jurisdiction over the proposal by virtue of law or special expertise and that has been deemed a cooperating agency by lead agency. State or local governments, and/or Indian tribes, may be designated cooperating agencies as appropriate (see 1508.5 and 1502.6).

Cultural resources (NPS-28, appendix A)—Aspects of a cultural system that are valued by or significantly representative of a culture or that contain significant information about a culture. A cultural resource may be a tangible entity or a cultural practice. Tangible cultural resources are categorized as districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects for the National Register of Historic Places, and as archeological resources, cultural landscapes, structures, museum objects, and ethnographic resources for NPS management purposes.

Cumulative actions (1508.25)—Actions that, when viewed with other actions in the past, the present, or the reasonably foreseeable future regardless of who has undertaken or will undertake them, have an additive impact on the resource the proposal would affect.

Cumulative impact (1508.7)—The impacts of cumulative actions.

Direct effect (1508.8)—An impact that occurs as a result of the proposed action or alternative in the same place and at the same time as the action.

Environmental assessment (EA) (1508.9)—A brief NEPA document that is prepared to (a) help determine whether the impact of a proposed action or alternatives could be significant; (b) aid NPS in compliance with NEPA by evaluating a proposal that will have no significant impacts, but that may have measurable adverse impacts; or (c) evaluate a proposal that either is not described on the list of categorically excluded actions, or is on the list but exceptional circumstances (section 3.5) apply.

Environmental impact statement (EIS) (1508.11)—A detailed NEPA document that is prepared when a proposed action or alternatives have the potential for significant impact on the human environment.

Environmental screening process—The analysis that precedes a determination of the appropriate level of NEPA documentation. The minimum requirements of the environmental screening process are a site visit, consultation with any agency that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise, and the completion of a screening checklist. The process must be complete for all NPS actions that have the potential for environmental impact and are not described in section 3.3.

Environmentally preferred alternative (1505.2, Q6a)—Of the action alternatives analyzed, the one that would best promote the policies in NEPA section 101. This is usually selected by the IDT members. CEQ encourages agencies to identify an environmentally preferable alternative in the draft EIS or EA, but only requires that it be named in the ROD.

Exceptional circumstances—Circumstances that, if they apply to a project described in the NPS categorical exclusion lists (sections 3.3 and 3.4), mean a CE is inappropriate and an EA or an EIS must be prepared because the action may have measurable or significant impacts. Exceptional circumstances are described in section 3.5.

Finding of no significant impact (FONSI) (1508.13)—A determination based on an EA and other factors in the public planning record for a proposal that, if implemented, would have no significant impact on the human environment.

Human environment (1508.14)—Defined by CEQ as the natural and physical environment, and the relationship of people with that environment (1508.14). Although the socioeconomic environment receives less emphasis than the physical or natural environment in the CEQ regulations, NPS considers it to be an integral part of the human environment.

Impact topics—Specific natural, cultural, or socioeconomic resources that would be affected by the proposed action or alternatives (including no action). The magnitude, duration, and timing of the effect to each of these resources is evaluated in the impact section of an EA or an EIS.

Indirect impact (1508.8)—Reasonably foreseeable impacts that occur removed in time or space from the proposed action. These are “downstream” impacts, future impacts, or the impacts of reasonably expected connected actions (e.g., growth of an area after a highway to it is complete).

Issues—In NEPA, issues are environmental, social, and economic problems or effects that may occur if the proposed action or alternatives (including no action) are implemented or continue to be implemented.

Lead agency (1508.16)—The agency either preparing or taking primary responsibility for preparing the NEPA document.

Major federal action (1508.18)—Actions that have a large federal presence and that have the potential for significant impacts to the human environment. They include adopting policy, implementing rules or regulations; adopting plans, programs, or projects; ongoing activities; issuing permits; or financing projects completed by another entity.

Memo to file—A memo to the planning record or statutory compliance file that NPS offices may complete when (a) NEPA has already been completed in site-specific detail for a proposal, usually as part of a document of larger scope, or (b) a time interval has passed since the NEPA document was approved, but information in that document is still accurate.

Mitigated EA (Q40)—An EA that has been rewritten to incorporate mitigation into a proposal or to change a proposal to reduce impacts to below significance.

Mitigation (1508.20)—A modification of the proposal or alternative that lessens the intensity of its impact on a particular resource.

NEPA process—The objective analysis of a proposed action to determine the degree of its environmental and interrelated social and economic impacts on the human environment, alternatives and mitigation that reduce that impact, and the full and candid presentation of the analysis to, and involvement of, the interested and affected public.

Notice of intent (1508.22)—The notice submitted to the *Federal Register* that an EIS will be prepared. It describes the proposed action and alternatives, identifies a contact person in NPS, and gives time, place, and descriptive details of the agency’s proposed scoping process.

Notices of availability—Separate notices submitted to the *Federal Register* that the draft EIS and the final EIS are ready for distribution.

Preferred alternative (1502.14 (e))—The alternative an NPS decision-maker has identified as preferred at the draft EIS stage. It may be the same as the initial proposal or proposed action, or it may be different. It is identified to show the public which alternative is likely to be selected to help focus its comments.

Programmatic documents—Broader scope EAs or EISs that describe the impacts of proposed policy changes, programs, or plans.

Proposal (1508.23)—The stage at which NPS has a goal and is actively preparing to make a decision on one or more alternative means of accomplishing that goal. The goal can be a project, plan, policy, program, and so forth. NEPA begins when the effects can be meaningfully evaluated.

Record of decision (ROD) (1505.2)—The document that is prepared to substantiate a decision based on an EIS. It includes a statement of the decision made, a detailed discussion of decision rationale, and the reasons for not adopting all mitigation measures analyzed, if applicable.

Scoping (1508.25)—Internal NPS decision-making on issues, alternatives, mitigation measures, the analysis boundary, appropriate level of documentation, lead and cooperating agency roles, available references and guidance, defining purpose and need, and so forth. External scoping is the early involvement of the interested and affected public.

Significantly (1508.27)—A subjective interpretation of the intensity of impact, in several contexts, of the proposed action or alternatives.

Tiering (1508.28)—The use of broader, programmatic NEPA documents to discuss and analyze cumulative regional impacts and define policy direction, and the incorporation by reference of this material in subsequent narrower NEPA documents to avoid duplication and focus on issues “ripe for decision” in each case.

9.2 Acronyms

CE	categorical exclusion
CEF	categorical exclusion form
CEQ	President's Council on Environmental Quality
CX	categorical exclusion
DEC	Division Environmental Comment request issued by NPS Environmental Quality Division-WASO
DM	departmental manual
DOI	Department of the Interior
EA	environmental assessment
ECM	environmental compliance memorandum
EIS	environmental impact statement
EO	executive order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EQD	Environmental Quality Division
ER	Environmental Review issued by the Department of the Interior
ERM	environmental review memorandum
ESA	Endangered Species Act
ESM	environmental statement memorandum
ESF	environmental screening form
FONSI	finding of no significant impact
GMP	general management plan
IDT	interdisciplinary team
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOA	notice of availability
NOI	notice of intent
NPS	National Park Service
OEPC	Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance
REO	regional environmental officer
ROD	record of decision
SSO	system support office
WASO	Washington DC Office of the National Park Service