



# National Environmental Policy Act

## *Internal/External Compliance*

### What Is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is one of the first and most significant pieces of environmental legislation enacted in the United States. NEPA provides the basic national charter for protection of the environment. NEPA is intended to ensure that information about environmental effects of an Agency's proposal and alternative actions are available to agency decision makers and the public. The Service's NEPA coordination activities involve ensuring internal compliance with NEPA related to Service proposals and environmental documents and Service involvement in the coordination and review of NEPA and other environmental documents of other Federal agencies.

### What Is The Service's Role In Internal Compliance?

Responsibility for coordinating Fish and Wildlife Service responsibilities for proposed actions subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reside in the Branch of Conservation Planning Assistance within the Division of Habitat and Resource Conservation (DHRC). The Division is responsible for preparing NEPA policies, directives, guidance, and training materials for Service personnel related to environmental review and other related matters. The Fish and Wildlife Service is involved in the preparation of about 65 environmental impact statements and 1,000 environmental assessments annually. Service actions that may require NEPA documentation include: issuance of permits or licenses, land acquisition, establishment of national wildlife refuges and national fish hatcheries, operation and management of lands and waters administered under the NWR and NFH systems, issuance of regulations, policies, procedures, and guidance, and issuance of financial assistance, including grants, cooperative agreements, and private land restorations.

### What Is The Service's Role In External Compliance?

Most Federal projects or activities require compliance with NEPA and other environmental laws. The Service has the opportunity and duty to review these documents and others prepared under various environmental protection laws. Service review of another agency's NEPA activities focus on clear, meaningful analysis of significant environmental issues. Most interagency coordination on environmental reviews is conducted by Ecological Services field offices. However, other Services offices (e.g., Endangered Species, Environmental contaminants, Refuges, and Fisheries) may also be required to participate in such reviews, when appropriate. Service personnel provide timely input and effective participation in other agencies' environmental documents to further our mission of providing Federal leadership for conservation of

fish and wildlife and their habitat. Service review and comment on other agency environmental documents are aimed at accomplishing the following objectives:

- encourage agencies to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of fish and wildlife values during their actions;
- ensure that all potential beneficial and adverse effects of a proposed action are recognized and addressed during the decision-making process;
- ensure that practicable alternatives that minimize or avoid damage to fish and wildlife resources are adequately identified, evaluated, and adopted (where feasible); and
- assure that appropriate mitigation measures are adequately developed and included as part of the preferred alternative.



Savage River. Photo Credit: PXLPusher

The Service review of other Federal agency NEPA documents is often in conjunction with the Service's comments on other separate reviews, such as: section 404 permits for private development in waters of the United States, permits or easements for transmission line crossings, point source discharge permits, Federal Highway Administration activities requiring use of publicly-owned land under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, and project licenses or exemptions issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The Service reviews over 2,000 environmental documents annually from other Federal agencies, providing comments from Service field, Regional and other offices and facilities.

### **Where Can I Obtain More Information?**

Please contact the Service's Washington Office Environmental Coordinator, at 703/358-2183 if you have questions regarding the NEPA process. Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of the Interior NEPA guidance and procedures are contained in the Service's NEPA Reference Handbook at [www.fws.gov/r9esnepa/](http://www.fws.gov/r9esnepa/). For additional information on NEPA, visit the Council on Environmental Quality NEPANET Home Page at [ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/nepanet.htm](http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/nepanet.htm)



*Glacier National Park*