

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



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The controlling definitions for terms under the President's Council on Environmental Quality National Environmental Policy Act regulations are contained at 40 Code of Federal Regulations; the numbers in parentheses refer to the appropriate section. These definitions are provided as a supplement to those regulatory definitions.

Categorical exclusion (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.

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 the National Park Service, this process is synonymous with the National Environmental Policy Act 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 National Environmental Policy Act 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 the 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 proposal or alternative in the same place and at the same time as the action.

Environmental assessment (1508.9)—A brief National Environmental Policy Act document that is prepared to (a) help determine whether the impact of a proposal or alternatives could be significant; (b) aid the National Park Service in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act 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 (1508.11)—A detailed National Environmental Policy Act document that is prepared when a proposal 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 National Environmental Policy Act 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 alternatives analyzed, the one that would best promote the policies in the National Environmental Policy Act section 101. This is usually selected by the interdisciplinary team members. It is presented in the NPS National Environmental Policy Act document (draft and final environmental assessment or environmental impact statement) for public review and comment.

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 categorical exclusion is inappropriate and an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement 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 environmental assessment 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 the Council on Environmental Quality 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 Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the National Park Service considers it 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 are evaluated in the impact section of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

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 the National Environmental Policy Act, 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 National Environmental Policy Act document.

Life Cycle Costing (Analysis)—An accounting method that analyzes the total costs of a product or service, including construction, maintenance, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, useful life, salvage, and disposal.

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) National Environmental Policy Act 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 National Environmental Policy Act document was approved, but information in that document is still accurate.

Mitigated Environmental Assessment (Q40)—An environmental assessment 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.

National Environmental Policy Act process—The objective analysis of a proposal 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.

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

Notice of intent (1508.22)—The notice submitted to the Federal Register that an environmental impact statement will be prepared. It describes the proposed action and alternatives, identifies a contact person in the National Park Service, and gives time, place, and descriptive details of the agency's proposed scoping process.

Preferred alternative (1502.14 (e))—The alternative an NPS decision-maker has identified as preferred at the draft environmental impact statement stage or environmental assessment. Identification of the preferred alternative helps the public focus its comments during review of the National Environmental Policy Act document.

Programmatic documents—Broader scope environmental assessments or environmental impact statements that describe the impacts of proposed policy changes, programs, or plans.

Proposal (1508.23)—The stage at which the National Park Service 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. The National Environmental Policy Act process begins when the effects can be meaningfully evaluated.

Record of decision (1505.2)—The document that is prepared to substantiate a decision based on an environmental impact statement. 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.

Step-down facility—An access point to the Chattahoochee River constructed by the National Park Service and primarily used for canoes and kayaks.

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

Unauthorized trail—Visitor established trail not approved or maintained by the National Park Service and subject to closure due to safety and resource concerns.

Vessel—Under 36 Code of Federal Regulations 1.4, vessels are defined as every type or description of craft, other than a seaplane on the water, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water, including a buoyant device permitting or capable of free flotation.