

Introduction to the Handbook

This edition of the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Handbook has been developed in response to the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) implementing regulations on NEPA. These regulations state that each agency shall interpret the provisions of the act as a supplement to its existing authority and as a mandate to view traditional policies and missions in the light of the act's national environmental objectives.

1.1 Who It's For

This handbook has been designed as a tool for use by all Reclamation staff. It should also be useful to applicants, contractors, tribal representatives, and others who may be involved in Reclamation's NEPA process, or who develop environmental reports for Reclamation's use in preparation of NEPA documents.

1.2 What It Does

This handbook describes Reclamation directives and guidelines for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] 4321, et seq.), CEQ's Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500-1508), and the Departmental Manual (DM) 516 DM 1-7 (see attached references). This handbook draws these legal requirements together and describes how to apply them to Reclamation program areas. The *Reclamation Manual* refers to this handbook as the source for additional information on directives and guidance for Reclamation. The handbook also presents and summarizes other related environmental laws and Executive orders (EO) which should be addressed during NEPA compliance.

The handbook contains a general description of the requirements and procedures of NEPA in chapter 3. Specific information on categorical exclusion checklists (CEC), environmental assessments (EA), and

environmental impact statements (EIS) can be found in chapters 5, 6, and 7, respectively. This organizational structure has been selected to allow the user to quickly locate specific, step-by-step information on the different levels of NEPA compliance. Chapter 8 addresses EIS content, and chapter 9 discusses the requirements of a record of decision (ROD). Chapters 10 and 11 present other information that can be useful in the various situations that arise in the field. The handbook concludes with chapter 12, which includes material on NEPA references and sources of information.

Where the handbook is reflecting requirements from law, CEQ regulations, the Departmental Manual, or Reclamation policy, the language should be definitive, using such words as “will” or “shall.” Where the handbook is discussing areas where more flexibility exists, or areas where individual circumstances may require different responses, the language should reflect that flexibility, using such words as “should” or “may.”

In addition, various issues and special problems are discussed throughout the handbook. Where possible, solutions that have worked historically, or approaches that seem most reasonable, are recommended.

1.3 What It Does Not Do

The handbook is a guide and contains considerable information that will assist anyone preparing NEPA documents or applying NEPA to various situations. However, it does not replace either the law, CEQ regulations, or the Departmental Manual for appropriate policy and procedures. Although this handbook has been written with these authorities in mind, if a conflict should be found between the handbook and these authorities, the authorities take precedence.

Also, this handbook will not answer every question. The real world is full of situations that do not fit “classic” NEPA definitions. Regulatory, social, and political realities can seriously complicate the application of NEPA to unusual situations. The handbook cannot, and does not try to, address every possible situation. It should be useful as a starting point in any situation, but there is no substitute for discussions of complex situations with experienced environmental staff within Reclamation, whether at the area office, regional office, in Denver, or in Washington. The appropriate Solicitor’s Office can also be a valuable resource when analyzing NEPA compliance issues.

1.4 How to Modify the Handbook

This handbook will be reviewed periodically and modified to reflect changes in environmental, Department of the Interior (Department), and Reclamation regulations and policy. Recommendations for modifications should be directed to the Commissioner's Office of Policy, D-5100.

Please let the Commissioner's Office of Policy know if there are areas in the handbook that are not clear or not helpful. Revisions can occur any time there is an identified problem with the existing text. The handbook is being distributed in its final form in a three-ring binder, specifically to make such revisions easy to accommodate.

1.5 Figures and Attachments

Most of the figures located at the end of each chapter are examples of the various documents discussed in the chapter. These figures are intended to be guides. Reasonable deviation from these examples is an option, but such changes should be discussed with appropriate staff. Be aware that things like the format of *Federal Register* notices are determined outside Reclamation and are not generally subject to any change.

Finally, a number of standard references have been attached to the end of the handbook, along with a list of other useful references. These are noted throughout the text as "attached." But, again, all this information (and more) may not address a specific situation adequately.