

BEFORE THE  
POSTAL RATE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20268-0001

EVOLUTIONARY NETWORK DEVELOPMENT  
SERVICE CHANGES, 2006

Docket No. N2006-1

RESPONSE OF UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE WITNESS WILLIAMS  
TO QUESTION POSED BY OFFICE OF THE CONSUMER ADVOCATE  
DURING HEARINGS ON JULY 19, 2006

The United States Postal Service hereby gives notice that it is filing the response of witness David Williams to a question posed during hearings on July 19, 2006, at the following transcript citation: Tr. 3/608. The question is paraphrased and followed by the response.

Respectfully submitted,

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

By its attorneys:

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**RESPONSE OF UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE WITNESS WILLIAMS  
TO QUESTION POSED THE OFFICE OF THE CONSUMER ADVOCATE  
AT HEARINGS**

**Tr. 3/608 ---- QUESTION:**

Please provide a copy of the Postal Service manual or handbook governing environmental assessments that may be conducted in connection with the closure or consolidation of a postal facility.

**RESPONSE**

Attached is a copy of Management Instruction AS-550-96-4, which I am told is undergoing revision. Also attached is a copy of Chapter 2 of the USPS Real Estate Handbook.

# Management Instruction

## National Environmental Policy Act Operational Guidance

This instruction provides standard operating procedures for implementing the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) within all functional organizations at Headquarters and in the field. The types of actions governed by NEPA are discussed in this instruction.

### Background

Historically, the U.S. Postal Service has implemented the provisions of NEPA through policies and procedures established by the Postal Service's Facilities functional organization. Certainly, most of the "major federal actions" undertaken by the Postal Service have been associated with construction or disposal of postal facilities. However, in recent years it has become increasingly evident that other postal functional organizations also have a role in implementing the provisions of NEPA. This instruction addresses their NEPA responsibilities.

### Purpose

NEPA requires responsible Postal Service officials to consider potential impacts of major federal actions to human health and the environment. To properly implement the provisions of the Act, responsible Postal Service officials must perform adequate environmental analyses to determine whether impacts are significant. If the impacts are determined to be significant, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required; otherwise, an Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared.

- This instruction provides guidance for determining the applicability of NEPA to Postal Service actions and how all organizations of the Postal Service are affected by the provisions of NEPA.
- This instruction supplements requirements for implementing NEPA contained in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations and the Postal Service implementing regulations (39 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Section 775) and the guidance contained in RE-6, *Facilities Environmental Handbook*.

Date	05/17/96
Effective	Immediately
Number	AS-550-96-4
Obsoletes	Not Applicable
Unit	Environmental Management Policy

  
 William J. Dowling  
 Vice President  
 Engineering

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- This instruction provides guidance on how the provisions of NEPA can be incorporated into the early planning and decision-making process of all actions that could affect the environment.
- This instruction also declares that the vice president of Area Operations has delegated to each facilities service office (FSO) the responsibility for implementing the provisions of NEPA within its geographical area.

## ACRONYMS

CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FSO	Facilities Service Office
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NESHAP	National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants
NOI	Notice of Intent
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Act
PCES	Postal Career Executive Service
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
REC	Record of Environmental Consideration
ROD	Record of Decision

## Policy

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### General

In performing its mission to provide prompt, reliable, and efficient postal services to all communities, the Postal Service will conduct its activities in a manner that protects human health and the environment.

### Postal Service Commitment

NEPA is our basic national charter for protection of the environment. It sets forth “action-forcing” provisions to make sure that federal agencies operate according to the letter and spirit of the Act. NEPA should be considered early in the planning process so that environmental impacts can be fully evaluated and the views of public officials and citizens considered before actions are taken.

Responsible officials must complete an environmental checklist to identify potential environmental concerns and to determine the need for preparing an Environmental Assessment. Although NEPA does not require the preparation of an environmental checklist, the Postal Service policy is to use the environmental checklist to better understand the environmental consequences of proposed actions that have potential impacts on the environment. The checklist should be used to identify environmental issues before an EA or an EIS is initiated.

If an EA or EIS is prepared, it must be made available to public officials in accordance with 39 CFR Section 775 before the proposed action is implemented. No public participation or public review process is required after the completion of an environmental checklist.

## Responsibilities

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The following table identifies responsible officials and approving officials in the Postal Service. This section narrates the responsibilities for NEPA compliance.

## NEPA Responsibilities of Postal Service Managers

Position	Policy Making	Responsible Official	Approving Official*
Board of Governors			●
Capital Investment Committee			●
Vice President, Engineering	●	●	●
Vice President, Facilities	●	●	●
Vice Presidents, Other Functional Organizations		●	●
Vice Presidents, Area Operations		●	●
District Managers		●	●
Plant Managers		●	●
Headquarters PCES Managers		●	●

\*The maximum funding authority of the approving official is established through the delegation of approval authority issued by the Finance functional organization.

## Headquarters

### ***Vice President, Engineering***

As chief environmental officer for the United States Postal Service, the vice president of Engineering is responsible for the development of overall policies for implementation of NEPA.

### ***Environmental Management Policy***

Environmental Management Policy has been assigned the responsibility to:

1. Develop policy and guidance documents designed to facilitate compliance with NEPA and its implementing regulations.
2. Provide guidance on the types of information to be collected and maintained in order to comply with NEPA.
3. Ensure that appropriate environmental documents are prepared and that the public is offered adequate opportunities to participate in Postal Service decision making.
4. Assist the responsible official with the completion of NEPA documents for Headquarters actions that require NEPA review.
5. Recommend to the responsible vice president in whose functional organization the action has been initiated the appropriate follow-up actions required to ensure NEPA compliance.

### ***Vice Presidents, Other Functional Organizations***

All vice presidents serve as the responsible officials for compliance with NEPA for actions taken within their area of authority. This responsibility may be delegated by the vice president to a Postal Career Executive Service (PCES) manager who may be expected to generate proposals

## REFERENCES

1. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, 42 U.S.C. Section 4321, et seq.
2. Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 40 CFR Sections 1500–1508, issued by the Council on Environmental Quality, July 1, 1986.
3. Postal Service NEPA Implementing Regulations, 39 CFR Section 775.
4. *Facilities Environmental Handbook* (RE-6), January 1991.
5. Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning CEQ's National Environmental Policy Act Regulations, *Federal Register*, Volume 46, No. 55, March 23, 1981.

that would require NEPA compliance. In the case of facilities projects, responsibility for NEPA compliance has been delegated to the facilities service offices.

### ***Vice President, Facilities***

The vice president of Facilities is responsible for the development of policy and guidance for implementation of the Postal Service's NEPA regulations as they affect real estate and design and construction of postal facilities.

### ***Senior Vice President and General Counsel***

This individual is responsible for providing legal advice for evaluation of the legal sufficiency of environmental documents that have a significant impact upon the environment. This individual is also responsible for ensuring that assigned counsel provides appropriate legal assistance to responsible officials at an early stage in the development of an EIS.

### ***Technical Training Center***

The Technical Training Center is responsible for the development and provision of training designed to facilitate compliance with NEPA and its implementing regulations. It provides training courses and materials to meet the needs of responsible officials, area environmental compliance coordinators, and district environmental compliance coordinators.

## **Area Offices**

### ***Vice President, Area Operations***

Within their jurisdiction, the vice presidents of Area Operations have overall responsibility and authority for ensuring compliance with the requirements of NEPA. This responsibility may be delegated by the vice president to a PCES manager.

### ***Area Environmental Compliance Coordinator***

An area environmental compliance coordinator is responsible for providing technical assistance to the vice president of Area Operations and district environmental compliance coordinators in the review of environmental documents, including the environmental checklist and the Environmental Assessment. When the vice president of Area Operations recommends that an EIS be prepared, the area environmental compliance coordinator serves as the project manager and plays the lead role in managing its development, review, and release. An area environmental compliance coordinator also:

1. Advises district environmental compliance coordinators concerning the appropriate course of action to be taken in order to comply with NEPA.

2. Assists district environmental compliance coordinators with the preparation of environmental documents required for compliance with NEPA.
3. Distributes NEPA documents to all appropriate postal and public officials for review.
4. Verifies the need for other environmental studies (e.g., wetland and floodplain evaluations) recommended by the district environmental compliance coordinators.
5. Assists the responsible official with preparation of the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) if such a conclusion is appropriate.

## **Districts**

### ***District Manager***

To provide consistency of approach, district managers are responsible for ensuring districtwide compliance with NEPA evaluation and notification procedures. District managers are responsible officials in those instances when they propose an action subject to NEPA.

### ***District Environmental Compliance Coordinator***

The district environmental compliance coordinator is responsible for the review of all environmental checklists completed within the district. In addition, the district environmental compliance coordinator reviews the environmental checklist to determine if any of the following are required:

1. Project mitigation measures.
2. Additional environmental studies (e.g., wetland or floodplain evaluations).
3. An Environmental Assessment.

The district environmental compliance coordinator distributes the completed checklist to the area environmental compliance coordinator if he or she determines that an EA is required.

### ***Responsible Official***

The responsible official is responsible for completing the environmental checklist, EA, and EIS. This individual must refer any proposals that could potentially affect the environment to either the district environmental compliance coordinator, in the case of non-real estate actions, or to the facilities service office environmental specialist, in the case of real estate actions (e.g., construction, acquisition, or lease of property). Responsible officials include district and plant managers and any person with spending authority of over \$50,000.

## **Facilities Service Offices**

### ***Manager***

The managers of facilities service offices are responsible for ensuring the Postal Service's adherence to NEPA requirements and procedures before the acquisition or lease of real property, during the construction of new facilities, and during the process of disposing of Postal Service property.

### ***Environmental Specialist***

Facilities service office environmental specialists are responsible for preparing, or coordinating the preparation of, an EA for all real estate and construction actions that fall within the contracting authority of the facilities service offices. They also:

1. Advise real estate and design and construction staff concerning the appropriate course of action to be taken in order to comply with NEPA.
2. Assist real estate and design and construction staff with the preparation of environmental documents required for compliance with NEPA.
3. Distribute NEPA documents to all appropriate postal and public officials for review.
4. Verify the need for other environmental studies (e.g., wetland and floodplain evaluations) recommended by real estate and design and construction staff.
5. Assist the responsible official with preparation of the FONSI if such a conclusion is appropriate.

### ***Responsible Official***

Information concerning the role of responsible officials for NEPA actions managed by the Facilities functional organization is contained in the *Facilities Environmental Handbook*. As defined for this instruction, this person is the manager of the facilities service office or a contracting officer who has been delegated responsibility for NEPA compliance.

## **Lead Postal Organization**

If it is determined that a project involves more than one postal organization, a lead organization will be selected to complete the NEPA process before any NEPA documents are prepared. If it is determined that a project has both real estate and non-real estate actions, the Facilities functional organization should take the lead, provided that the project is also reviewed by the other postal organizations proposing the action — whether they are at the area, district, or Headquarters office level.

# Preparation of Environmental Documents

The table below identifies responsibilities for NEPA document preparation and review at the Headquarters and field levels. This section describes those responsibilities in detail.

## Responsibilities for NEPA Document Preparation

Position	Complete Checklist	Review Checklist**	Complete EA/FONSI	Review EA/FONSI	Complete EIS/ROD	Review EIS/ROD
<b>Headquarters</b>						
Responsible official*	●		●		●	
Environmental Management Policy		●		●		●
General Counsel				●		●
<b>Field</b>						
Responsible official*	●		●		●	
District environmental compliance coordinator		●				
Area environmental compliance coordinator				●		●
Managing counsel						●

\* The responsible official may delegate responsibility for completing NEPA documents to a designated representative within the functional organization.

\*\* If "Yes" is answered to any question on the environmental checklist, Environmental Management Policy or the district environmental compliance coordinator reviews it and recommends appropriate action.

## Environmental Checklist

When an environmental checklist is prepared, it must be completed before the subject action is taken. However, it should not be completed so early that project information needed to complete it is lacking, thus making the analysis inaccurate. When more than one proposed action is being considered, an environmental checklist should be completed for each viable option so that environmental considerations can be incorporated into the decision-making process. PS Form 8195, *Operational Environmental Checklist*, is presented in Attachment A.

# Public Notification Requirements for an EA and EIS

## *Notice of Intent*

### *Preparation*

The responsible official prepares and causes to be published a Notice of Intent (NOI) for all proposals requiring the preparation of an EIS. The area environmental compliance coordinator provides technical assistance with the preparation of the NOI. A copy of every NOI to prepare an EIS must be furnished to the senior counsel, Environmental Law, who arranges to have it published in the *Federal Register* through the office of the chief counsel, Legislative Affairs. A Notice of Intent is also required for an EA and is to be issued by the responsible official pursuant to 39 CFR Section 775.

### *Content*

The NOI must describe the proposed action and all reasonable alternative actions being considered by the Postal Service. It must also give the name, address, and telephone number of a postal official who may be contacted for information.

### *Public Point of Contact*

Generally speaking, the point of contact for public notices — including the NOI to prepare an EIS, the FONSI, or the Record of Decision (ROD) — is the responsible official. However, the responsible official may request that the area environmental compliance coordinator or Environmental Management Policy serve this function on projects requiring technical expertise beyond his or her area of responsibility.

### *Public Hearings*

NEPA requires federal agencies, thus the Postal Service, to hold public hearings for the preparation of an EIS as follows:

1. To initiate an EIS to allow public comment concerning the actions, alternatives, and impacts to be considered within the scope of work.
2. To review the draft EIS after it has been released for public comment.
3. To review a draft supplemental EIS when a proposed project has been substantially modified after the initial scoping hearing.

NEPA does not require a public hearing for an EA. However, the responsible official may hold a public hearing if the Postal Service determines that it would be in its best interests to fully evaluate public opinion on issues that may be considered controversial within the community.

## **Environmental Assessment**

### ***Preparation***

An EA is prepared only if such an action is recommended by the area environmental compliance coordinator (or Environmental Management Policy for Headquarters programs) in the case of actions that are primarily operational in nature, or by the facilities service office environmental specialist in the case of actions that are primarily related to real estate or design and construction and fall within the contracting authority of the facilities service office. Such a recommendation is based on the findings and proposed action contained in either PS Form 8195, *Operational Environmental Checklist*, or PS Form 7498-D, *Facilities Environmental Checklist*, and is reached after a review of the typical classes of actions requiring an EA (see 39 CFR Section 775 for a list of some facilities actions requiring an EA).

It is expected that some Environmental Assessments will be prepared by contractors, especially when environmental issues require technical disciplines not normally found within the Postal Service. Funding for the preparation of NEPA documents that require the services of environmental contractors is available through Environmental Management Policy and the area environmental compliance coordinators.

### ***Content***

The Postal Service requirements for preparing an EA are set forth in 39 CFR Section 775. The EA is prepared utilizing the guidance contained in RE-6, *Facilities Environmental Handbook*, and available from Environmental Management Policy.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

### ***Preparation***

The responsible official prepares, signs, and causes to be published a FONSI when an EA has been completed and no findings of significant impact have been identified. The area environmental compliance coordinator provides technical assistance with the preparation of the FONSI.

### ***Content***

The FONSI includes the EA or a summary of it and notes any other environmental documents relevant to it. The FONSI clearly indicates why the proposed action will not significantly affect the environment. It must also give the name, address, and telephone number of a postal official who may be contacted for information. The FONSI must be issued before the Postal Service initiates any irretrievable commitment of resources, such as a contract for construction.

## **Environmental Impact Statement**

### ***Preparation***

An EIS is prepared only if such an action is recommended by the area environmental compliance coordinator and approved by the vice president of Area Operations. Responsibility for managing the development, review, and release of an EIS may be delegated to the district environmental compliance coordinator by the vice president of Area Operations.

In the case of actions initiated at Headquarters, an EIS is prepared only if such an action is recommended by Environmental Management Policy and approved by the Headquarters vice president responsible for taking the action. The responsibility for managing the development of an EIS may be delegated to a PCES manager within the responsible official's functional organization.

It is expected that all EIS documents will be prepared by contractors, since these actions involve major environmental issues that require technical disciplines not normally found within the Postal Service. Funding for the preparation of EIS documents that requires the services of environmental contractors is to be provided by the functional organization proposing the program or project.

### ***Content***

The Postal Service requirements for preparing an EIS are set forth in 39 CFR Section 775.

## **Record of Decision**

### ***Preparation***

The responsible official prepares, signs, and causes to be published a Record of Decision when an EIS has been completed. The area environmental compliance coordinator or Environmental Management Policy, as appropriate, provides technical assistance with the preparation of the ROD.

### ***Content***

The ROD must:

1. Indicate what action has been decided.
2. Identify alternatives considered in reaching the decision, specifying alternatives considered to be environmentally preferable.
3. Identify and discuss all significant factors, including any essential considerations of national policy, that were addressed in making the decision.

4. State how those considerations entered into the decision.
5. State whether all mitigation measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been or will be adopted, and if not, why not.
6. Identify a monitoring and enforcement program that will be adopted for any mitigation.

The ROD must give the name, address, and telephone number of the responsible official, or designee, who may be contacted for information. The ROD must be issued at least 30 days before the Postal Service initiates any irretrievable commitment of resources, such as a contract for construction.

## **Review of Environmental Documents**

The responsible official submits, or causes to be submitted, all environmental documents, including the EA, FONSI, EIS, and ROD, to the area environmental compliance coordinator for review, approval, and signature by the responsible vice president before they are released to the public. In the case of the EIS and ROD, the responsible vice president also submits these documents to the managing counsel — or to the senior counsel, Environmental Law, for Headquarters actions — for review and approval before they are released to the public.

## **Record of Environmental Consideration**

The project manager is responsible for completing PS Form 8194, *Record of Environmental Consideration* (REC), for any operational project or programmatic action that could affect the environment and obtaining the approval of the responsible official. A REC must accompany completed NEPA documents in order to document that the initiating project manager and the responsible official have complied with Postal Service NEPA procedures. A copy of the REC is presented in Attachment B.

## **Requirements for Funding Approval**

No operational project or programmatic action requiring the preparation of an EA or an EIS may be approved for funding by the approving official without the submission of a FONSI or ROD attached to the REC. NEPA documents (i.e., the REC with FONSI or ROD) must be presented to the approving official at the same time the Justification of Expenditures documentation or the Decision Analysis Report is submitted. When no NEPA review is required or an environmental checklist completes the environmental review process, the REC must accompany the Justification of Expenditures documentation or the Decision Analysis Report presented to the approving official.

## Document Retention

In the case of NEPA documents prepared for facility projects, these documents must be retained on site at the affected facility for the life of the facility or until Postal Service occupancy expires. The FSO responsible official must provide all NEPA documents to the affected facility's manager upon completion of the project. In the case of NEPA documents prepared for operational projects or programs, these documents must be retained with the project or program file for a 3-year period after project completion.

## Actions Not Requiring an Environmental Checklist

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The responsible official proposing to initiate an action determines, in consultation with the Headquarters or area environmental staff, as appropriate, whether or not the proposed action requires an environmental checklist. An action normally requires an environmental checklist if the proposed action could potentially:

1. Affect a threatened or endangered species, wetland or floodplain, cultural or historical resource, important farmland, coastal zones, wild and scenic rivers, sole-source aquifer, or other environmentally significant resource.
2. Generate substantial controversy over the significance of the environmental effects associated with the proposed action.
3. Affect, directly or indirectly, the environment.

The typical classes of action discussed in the following three sections normally do not require either an EA or EIS. These actions also do not require an environmental checklist. Note that some of these actions are also categorically excluded from review under the Postal Service's regulations for implementing NEPA as set forth in 39 CFR Section 775.

## General Agency Actions

The following typical general agency actions normally do not require an environmental checklist:

1. Policy development, planning, and implementation that relate to routine activities such as personnel actions, organizational changes, or similar administrative functions.
2. Routine actions, including management of programs or activities necessary to support the normal conduct of agency business, such as administrative, financial, and personnel actions that involve no commitment of resources other than manpower and funding allocations.

3. Award of contracts for technical support services, management and operation of a government-owned facility, and personal services.
4. Research activities and studies and routine data collection when such actions are clearly limited in context and intensity.
5. Educational and informational programs and activities.
6. Reduction in force resulting from workload adjustments, reduced personnel or funding levels, skill imbalances, or other similar causes that do not affect more than 1,000 positions.
7. Postal rate or mail classification actions or address information system changes, including ZIP Code changes.
8. Property protection, law enforcement, and other legal activities undertaken by the Postal Inspection Service and General Counsel.
9. Activities related to trade representation and market development activities abroad.
10. Emergency Preparedness planning activities, including designation of on-site evacuation routes.
11. Minor reassignment of motor vehicles and purchase or deployment of motor vehicles to new locations that do not adversely affect traffic safety or congestion and are in conformance with applicable state Air Quality Implementation Plans.
12. Procurement or disposal of mail transport equipment.
13. Acquisition, installation, operation, removal, or disposal of communication systems and data processing equipment.
14. Postal facility function changes not involving construction, where no employees are relocated or the number of motor vehicles at a facility is not increased.
15. Procurement of equipment or construction activities involving the expenditure of less than \$50,000.
16. Actions that have an insignificant effect upon the environment as established in a previously written EA and FONSI or EIS. Such repetitive actions are considered "reference actions," and a record of all decisions concerning these reference actions will be maintained by Environmental Management Policy. The proposed action must be essentially the same in context and the same or less in intensity or must create fewer impacts than the reference action previously studied under an EA or EIS in order to qualify for this exclusion.

## **Emergencies and Environmental Restoration Actions**

The following typical emergencies and environmental restoration actions normally do not require an environmental checklist:

1. Minor operational changes at an existing facility to minimize waste generation and to reuse materials. These changes include, but are not limited to, adding filtration and recycling systems to allow reuse of vehicle or machine oil, setting up sorting areas to improve process efficiency, and segregating waste streams previously mingled and assigning new identification codes to the two resulting streams.
2. Any cleanup, remediation, or removal action conducted under the provisions of the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) or the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA); any asbestos abatement actions regulated under the provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), the National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP), or the Clean Air Act; or any lead-based paint abatement actions regulated under the provisions of OSHA or RCRA.
3. Testing associated with environmental cleanups or site investigations on Postal Service-owned or Postal Service-leased property.

## **Maintenance or Repair Actions at Existing Facilities**

The following typical maintenance or repair actions at existing facilities normally do not require an environmental checklist:

1. Siting, construction, or operation of temporary support buildings or support structures.
2. Routine actions normally conducted to protect and maintain properties that do not alter the configuration of the building.
3. Repair to, or replacement in kind of, building equipment or components (e.g., electrical distribution; heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning systems; doors, windows, roofs).
4. Internal modifications or improvements to structures or buildings to accommodate mail processing, computer, communication, or other similar types of equipment or other actions that do not modify the external walls of the facility.
5. Joint development and joint use projects that only modify an existing facility internally.
6. Actions that require concurrence or approval of another federal agency, where the action is a categorical exclusion under the NEPA regulations of that federal agency.

# Actions Requiring Documentation

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## Environmental Checklist

The classes of operational actions detailed in Projects and Program Actions of this section normally require an environmental checklist. If an operational action is not listed below but appears to have environmental impacts, the responsible official proposing to initiate an action must determine, in consultation with the district environmental compliance coordinator or Headquarters environmental staff, as appropriate, whether or not the proposed action requires an environmental checklist.

### ***Projects***

Environmental checklists must be completed for the following types of operational actions:

1. Outdoor repair or construction that increases the building or parking footprint at Postal Service-owned or Postal Service-leased facilities undertaken by staff at the district or plant level.
2. Creation, relocation, or increase of 100 or more employees at any one Postal Service facility or any location providing contract services to the Postal Service.
3. Creation, relocation, or increase of 250 or more vehicles at any one Postal Service facility or any location providing contract services to the Postal Service.
4. Alteration of vehicle travel patterns for 250 or more Postal Service vehicles at any one Postal Service facility or any location providing contract services to the Postal Service.
5. Changes in the fuels used by 250 or more vehicles operated by the Postal Service at any one site.
6. Installation of an underground or aboveground storage tank containing petroleum products and/or hazardous substances where one did not previously exist.
7. Outside storage of hazardous materials, hazardous wastes, or petroleum products exposed to stormwater that have the potential to reach waters of the United States.
8. Purchase and use of hazardous substances in quantities that, if they were to leak, would exceed reportable quantities established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
9. Any outside activity, such as vehicle washing or vehicle maintenance, that could affect waters of the United States.
10. Any outside activity that could adversely affect the environment, such as large-scale painting projects of multiple pieces of equipment or mail receptacles.

11. A 10 percent or greater change of parking spaces at any post office.
12. Any activity involving the disturbance of one acre or more of land not caused by facilities construction or disposal action.

### ***Program Actions***

Numerous Headquarters actions may require an environmental checklist review. Any action, policy, or program that has potential nationwide impacts to the environment or involves significant purchases at the national level requires the preparation of an environmental checklist. Although no list of programs or plans subject to a checklist review can be specified, the following actions should be evaluated:

1. Reductions in force that affect more than 1,000 positions.
2. Any plan to purchase or deploy new mail sorting equipment that requires increased building space, new facilities, or substantial changes in employment levels.
3. Any Postal Service-initiated alteration of delivery or carrier routing schemes or scheduled road times at a national level.
4. Any new program with areawide or nationwide application.

### **Environmental Assessment**

The classes of operational actions discussed in Projects and Program Actions of this section normally require an EA. If an operational action is not listed below but appears to have environmental impacts, the responsible official proposing to initiate an action must determine, in consultation with the Headquarters or area environmental staff, as appropriate, whether or not the proposed action requires an EA. An environmental checklist should be used to determine the need for an EA.

### ***Projects***

Environmental Assessments must be completed for the following types of operational actions:

1. Any project that includes the conversion, purchase, or any other alteration of the fuel source for 25 percent or more of USPS vehicles operating with fuel other than diesel or gasoline in a carbon monoxide or ozone nonattainment area.
2. Closure of a post office of 30,000 square feet or greater that does not involve a facilities action.
3. Any action that would directly affect a wetland.
4. Any action that would adversely affect a threatened or endangered species or its habitat.
5. Any action that would directly affect a floodplain.
6. Any action that would directly affect public health.

7. Any action that would require development within park lands, or be located in close proximity to a wild or scenic river or other ecologically critical area.
8. Any action affecting the quality of the human environment that would be highly controversial.
9. Any action that may have highly uncertain or unknown risks on the human environment.
10. Any action that threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

### ***Program Actions***

No list of actions requiring an assessment review at the Headquarters level can be defined. However, guidelines are discussed here. Certain Headquarters actions — particularly any action, policy, or program at the national level that has potential nationwide impacts to the environment or involves significant purchases that could potentially affect the environment — may require an EA or an EIS. Examples of Headquarters programs that could trigger the need for an Environmental Assessment are the following:

1. Major changes in transportation modes.
2. Implementation of a new network of mail processing or sorting centers.
3. Consolidation of existing processing and distribution centers.

Before an EA is initiated, an environmental checklist should be completed to determine the nature of the effects associated with any Headquarters action, policy, or program. Technical assistance in determining the applicability of NEPA to Headquarters program actions is available through Environmental Management Policy.

## **Definitions**

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The following definitions are central to this instruction and provide more detailed information:

1. **Approving official** — that person, or group of persons, who authorizes funding as established through the delegations of approval authority issued by the Finance functional organization. For larger projects, that person, or group of persons, may not have proposed the action for which financial approval is sought.
2. **Categorical exclusion** — a category of actions that do not individually or cumulatively significantly affect the human environment and for which, therefore, neither an EA nor an EIS is required. The Postal Service's categorical exclusions are set forth in 39 CFR Section 775.

3. **Consistency determination** — a document prepared by the responsible official that identifies the consistency of federal development projects undertaken in coastal zones with the adopted state Coastal Zone Management Program. A coastal zone is an area covering the coastal waters and adjacent shorelands and includes islands, transitional and intertidal areas, salt marshes, wetlands, and beaches.
4. **Critical habitat** — specific areas within geographical areas, occupied by species listed as threatened or endangered by the Department of the Interior, on which are found those physical or biological features that are essential to the conservation of the species and that require special management considerations or protection. It also includes specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species at the time it is listed as threatened or endangered by the Department of the Interior, as determined by the Secretary that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species.
5. **Effects** — include (a) direct effects that are caused by the action and that occur at the same time and place or (b) indirect effects that are caused by the action, but are later in time or farther removed in distance and are reasonably foreseeable. Effects may also include those resulting from actions that may have both beneficial and detrimental effects, even if on balance the agency believes that the overall effect will be beneficial. Effects and impacts as used in this instruction are synonymous.
6. **Endangered species** — any species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.
7. **Environmental Assessment** — a concise public document, for which a federal agency is responsible, that serves to (a) briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an EIS or a FONSI, (b) aid an agency's compliance with NEPA when no EIS is necessary, and (c) facilitate preparation of an EIS when one is necessary. An EA briefly discusses the need for the proposal, reasonable alternatives, and the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives; and lists agencies and persons contacted.
8. **Environmental Checklist** — a Postal Service document that identifies potential environmental impacts for proposed actions initiated by program managers at Headquarters functional organizations and by plant and district managers and units reporting directly to them. A copy of the *Operational Environmental Checklist* is contained in Attachment A.
9. **Environmental Impact Statement** — a detailed, written statement as required by 39 CFR Section 775.

10. **Finding of No Significant Impact** — a document prepared by a responsible official that briefly presents the reasons why an action, not otherwise categorically excluded, will not significantly affect the human environment and for which an EIS, therefore, will not be prepared.
11. **Floodplain** — a 100-year floodplain is land that has at least a one percent chance of flooding during any year.
12. **Major federal actions** — include actions with effects that may be major and that are potentially subject to federal control and responsibility. Actions include new and continuing activities (i.e., continuing activities that have had major changes), including projects and programs entirely or partly financed, assisted, conducted, regulated, or approved by federal agencies; new or revised agency rules or regulations, plans, policies, or procedures; and legislative proposals. Federal actions include adoption of formal plans or adoption of programs to implement specific policies or plans as well as approval of specific projects such as construction or management activities located in a defined geographical area.
13. **National Environmental Policy Act** — a federal statute that establishes the policy that federal agencies, including the Postal Service, create procedures to ensure that environmental information is available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made and actions are taken. NEPA is intended to help federal agencies make decisions based on understanding of environmental consequences and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment. It requires federal agencies to develop implementing regulations to carry out the purpose of the Act.
14. **National Register** — includes historic districts, sites, structures, buildings, or objects formally determined as such by the Secretary of the Interior and all other properties that meet National Register listing criteria.
15. **NEPA documents** — include the Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Statement, Finding of No Significant Impact, Notice of Intent, and Record of Decision.
16. **Notice of Intent** — a notice that an EA or an EIS will be prepared and considered. The notice briefly describes the proposed action and possible alternatives and states the name and address of a person within the agency who can answer questions about the proposed action. In the case of an EIS, the notice must also describe the agency's scoping process including whether, when, and where any scoping meeting will be held.

17. **Project manager** — the person designated by the responsible official to complete the environmental checklist and NEPA documentation. Typically, this person has daily management of the program or project that is being evaluated for compliance with NEPA.
18. **Proposal** — exists at that stage in the development of an action when the Postal Service has a goal, is actively preparing to decide on one or more alternative means of accomplishing that goal, and can meaningfully evaluate the effects.
19. **Public hearing** — required to solicit comments on the scope of work for an EIS and to receive comments on a draft EIS. When deemed appropriate, the responsible official may also use public hearings or meetings to solicit comments on other NEPA documents, including an EA.
20. **Responsible official** — that person, or designated representative, who proposes an action and is responsible for compliance with NEPA. For larger projects, that person may not have the financial authority to approve such action. The responsible official signs the NEPA documents (i.e., the FONSI and the ROD) and the REC. The responsible official includes vice presidents, district managers, plant managers, and any official with spending authority of \$50,000 or more.
21. **Record of Decision** — a document prepared by a responsible official that summarizes the decision made after the release of an EIS and identifies all alternatives considered in reaching a decision, specifying alternatives considered to be environmentally preferable. The ROD should identify and discuss all significant factors that were weighed in reaching the decision and state how those considerations entered into the decision. The ROD must state whether all mitigation measures to avoid or minimize harm from the selected alternative have been adopted, and if not, why not.
22. **Record of Environmental Consideration** — a method of documenting the Postal Service's review of proposed activities under NEPA. The purpose of the REC is to (a) assist project managers initiating an action in making a threshold evaluation of the appropriate level of environmental review early in the planning process, (b) assist responsible officials in better documenting the initiating office's and the Postal Service's consideration of environmental consequences of proposed actions, and (c) promote uniformity in the environmental review of proposed actions.

23. **Significantly** — refers to the significance of the action as measured by its context and intensity. The intensity of an impact must consider (a) the degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety; (b) unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas; (c) the degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial, involve unique or unknown risks, and affect endangered or threatened species or their habitats; (d) whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant actions but with cumulatively significant impacts; and (e) whether the action threatens to violate federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.
24. **Threatened species** — a species that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.
25. **Wetland** — an area inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

Attachment A  
**Operational Environmental Checklist Form**



**Operational Environmental Checklist**

Project	
Proposed Action	
Address (No., Street, City, State, ZIP + 4)	
Affected Site(s) or Building(s)	
Site Size	Name of Responsible Official

(Check one)

- |  |                              |                             |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Does the action affect, or potentially affect, wetlands?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2. Does the action affect, or potentially affect, a 100-year floodplain?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. Does the action require a consistency determination within the coastal zone management area?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. Does the action affect a critical habitat or rare/endangered species?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5. Does the action affect a sole-source aquifer protection zone?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6. Does the action affect, or potentially affect, a drinking water supply?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7. Does the action adversely affect zoning or surrounding land uses?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 8. Does the action affect property within a Historic District or on or eligible for a local, state, or National Register?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 9. Does the action involve the placement of underground or aboveground storage tanks in wetlands, floodplains, or sole-source aquifer protection zones?                | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 10. Does the action result in the creation of 100 or more new jobs, or the creation of a total of 100 jobs at a site in a severe or extreme ozone nonattainment area?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 11. Does the action result in the creation of 300 or more new jobs, or the creation of a total of 300 jobs at a site in a carbon monoxide or ozone nonattainment area? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 12. Does the action increase, or have the potential to make this facility a large generator of, hazardous waste?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 13. Does the action affect outdoor air quality by increasing public exposure to hazardous air pollutants?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 14. Does the action increase the amount of solid waste generated by the facility by more than 25 percent?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 15. Does the action affect travel patterns or travel times, or increase trips by postal customers, postal vehicles, or employees within the community?                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 16. Does the action increase energy consumption levels within the community?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 17. Does the action affect, or potentially affect, land use patterns?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 18. Does the action involve closing or relocating a post office?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 19. Does the action affect traffic safety or traffic congestion?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 20. Does the action affect air quality?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 21. Does the action involve the construction of spray paint booths?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 22. Does the action result in the disposal of materials that cannot be reused or recycled?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

---

Action Required (Check one)

- The checklist contains no "Yes" answers and, therefore, no further environmental review is required.  
(Place this checklist in the project file.)
- The checklist contains one or more "Yes" answers and, therefore, the checklist will be reviewed by the district environmental compliance coordinator or Environmental Management Policy for Headquarters programs.

Name of Project Manager	Telephone Number (Include Area Code)
Signature of Project Manager	Date (Month, Day, Year)

---

Action Required by District Environmental Compliance Coordinator \* (Check one)

- The district environmental compliance coordinator has reviewed the checklist and determined that no further environmental review is required.
- The district environmental compliance coordinator has reviewed the checklist and recommends preparation of an Environmental Assessment. (Forward to area environmental compliance coordinator for concurrence.)
- The district environmental compliance coordinator has reviewed the checklist and recommends preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. (Forward to area environmental compliance coordinator for concurrence.)

Name of District Environmental Compliance Coordinator *	Telephone Number (Include Area Code)
Signature of District Environmental Compliance Coordinator *	Date (Month, Day, Year)
Concurrence by Area Environmental Compliance Coordinator **	Date (Month, Day, Year)

\* For Headquarters programs, Environmental Management Policy will review the checklist when it contains one or more "Yes" answers and will recommend appropriate further action to be taken by the responsible official.

\*\* Concurrence by area environmental compliance coordinator is required for those projects where an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement is recommended.

Attachment B  
**Record of Environmental Consideration Form**



**Record of Environmental Consideration**

Name of Project

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Location of Project

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I have reviewed Management Instruction AS-550-96-4, *National Environmental Policy Act Operational Guidance*, and have considered the environmental impacts of the proposed action. The following activity has been taken based on information available to me, the guidance contained in MI AS-550-96-4, and the recommendations of the district environmental compliance coordinator:

*(Check one)*

- No National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review is required.
- PS Form 8195, *Operational Environmental Checklist*, was completed and no further review is required.
- An Environmental Assessment was prepared and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued.
- An Environmental Impact Statement was prepared and a Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued.

Name of Project Manager	Telephone Number <i>(Include Area Code)</i>
Signature of Project Manager	Date <i>(Month, Day, Year)</i>
Name of Responsible Official	Telephone Number <i>(Include Area Code)</i>
Signature of Responsible Official	Date <i>(Month, Day, Year)</i>

**NOTE:** When an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement is required, PS Form 8194, *Record of Environmental Consideration*, must accompany the NEPA documents presented to the approving official. When no NEPA review is required or an environmental checklist completes the environmental review process, Form 8194 must accompany the Justification of Expenditures documentation or the Decision Analysis Report presented to the approving official. A copy of Form 8194 is retained with the project file.

## 2 The National Environmental Policy Act Process

### 2-1 Introduction

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NEPA requires federal agencies to consider the environmental impacts of their actions and decisions. The intent of NEPA is for federal agencies to fully integrate environmental considerations into their decision-making and planning processes. Each agency must develop its own system to integrate and manage NEPA compliance for its own particular operations and missions.

The Postal Service has promulgated regulations identifying specific environmental procedures implementing NEPA. These regulations are found at 39 CFR 775. MI AS-550-96-4, *National Environmental Policy Act Operational Guidance*, sets forth guidance on how to successfully comply with NEPA for non-facilities-related actions. Postal Service NEPA regulations, MIs, and other documents referenced in this chapter are available on the Facilities Web site at <http://blue.usps.gov/facilities>.

### 2-2 Responsibilities

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#### 2-2.1 General

NEPA applies to all Postal Service functional organizations. The vice president of Engineering, as chief environmental officer for the Postal Service, is responsible for the development of overall policies regarding NEPA. Since most “major federal actions” undertaken by the Postal Service are associated with facility projects, Facilities plays a major role in the implementation of NEPA.

#### 2-2.2 Responsible Official

The responsible official is that person, or designated representative, who proposes an action and is responsible for compliance with NEPA. For large projects, that person may not have the financial authority to approve such action. The responsible official signs the NEPA documents (i.e., the FONSI, the ROD, and the REC).

All vice presidents serve as the responsible officials for compliance with NEPA for actions taken within their areas of authority. Vice presidents of Area Operations are responsible for NEPA compliance for operational actions (see MI AS-550-96-4). In the case of Facilities projects, responsibility for NEPA compliance has been delegated to the FSOs. The FSO manager may delegate to the manager of Real Estate or manager of Design and Construction (for projects without real estate components) at the FSO the authority to sign the *Record of Environmental Consideration* as the responsible official for Facilities projects.

The managers of FSOs and the national manager of Real Estate, Facilities, Headquarters, are the responsible officials for real estate projects and programs. They must ensure that the Postal Service adheres to NEPA requirements before decisions are made to acquire or lease real property, construct new facilities, and dispose of Postal Service property. They are ultimately responsible for assuming proper execution of requirements and processes for all the regulations described in Chapter 3.

### 2-2.3 **Approving Official**

The approving official is that person, or group of persons, who authorizes funding as established through the delegations of approval authority issued by the Finance functional organization. For large projects, that person, or group of persons, may not have proposed the action for which financial approval is sought. For example, the construction of a new processing and distribution center (P&DC) costing over \$10 million requires approval of the Board of Governors, in which case the Board is the approving official and the FSO manager or national manager of Real Estate is the responsible official for purposes of NEPA. In these instances, NEPA requirements must be completed before submitting the project to the Board for funding approval.

### 2-2.4 **Real Estate Project Manager**

The real estate specialist (RES) is the real estate project manager for all aspects of the site acquisition (lease or purchase) process required for Facilities projects. The RES is responsible for informing the facilities environmental specialist (FES) when the FSO or Facilities, Headquarters, is considering purchasing or leasing new or additional property. Although the FES provides technical guidance and assistance in completing the environmental documents required, the RES is responsible for ensuring that all necessary environmental documents are prepared.

### 2-2.5 **Design and Construction Project Manager**

The Facilities A-E is the design and construction (D&C) project manager for new leased space (NLS) and new construction owned (NCO) projects, repair and alteration (R&A) projects, and expansions of existing facilities that do not require the lease or purchase of additional property. The FES provides technical guidance and assistance for environmental issues during design and construction, but the D&C project manager is responsible for ensuring

that all necessary environmental documents are prepared for projects involving D&C.

**Illinois Farm, 1936 Mural by Gustaf Dalstrom Located in Gillespie Post Office, Illinois**



Photograph by PARMA Conservation.

This image illustrates the diversity of the national collection housed in our facilities. Murals in the Postal Service's Fine Arts Collection were commissioned by the former Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later renamed the Section of Fine Arts). See 3-4.7 for more information.

## 2-2.6 Facilities Environmental Specialist

The FES is the environmental project manager for preparing or coordinating the preparation of EAs and other NEPA documentation for all real estate and construction actions that are under the contracting authority of Facilities. To ensure that the Postal Service is complying with NEPA requirements, FESs are responsible for the following:

- Advising real estate and D&C staff on actions requiring NEPA compliance.
- Coordinating with area environmental personnel for technical and program support, as needed.
- Assisting real estate and design staff with required NEPA documents.

- Distributing NEPA documents to all appropriate Postal Service and public officials for review.
- Verifying the need for, and obtaining, other environmental studies.
- Providing assistance with preparation of the FONSI or, in the case of an EIS, a ROD.
- Completing the REC as soon as the necessary environmental analyses have been completed.
- Signing the REC as the project manager.
- Sending a copy of the final EA and the signed FONSI to the national manager of Real Estate for inclusion in the Facilities NEPA Repository.

## 2-3 The NEPA Process

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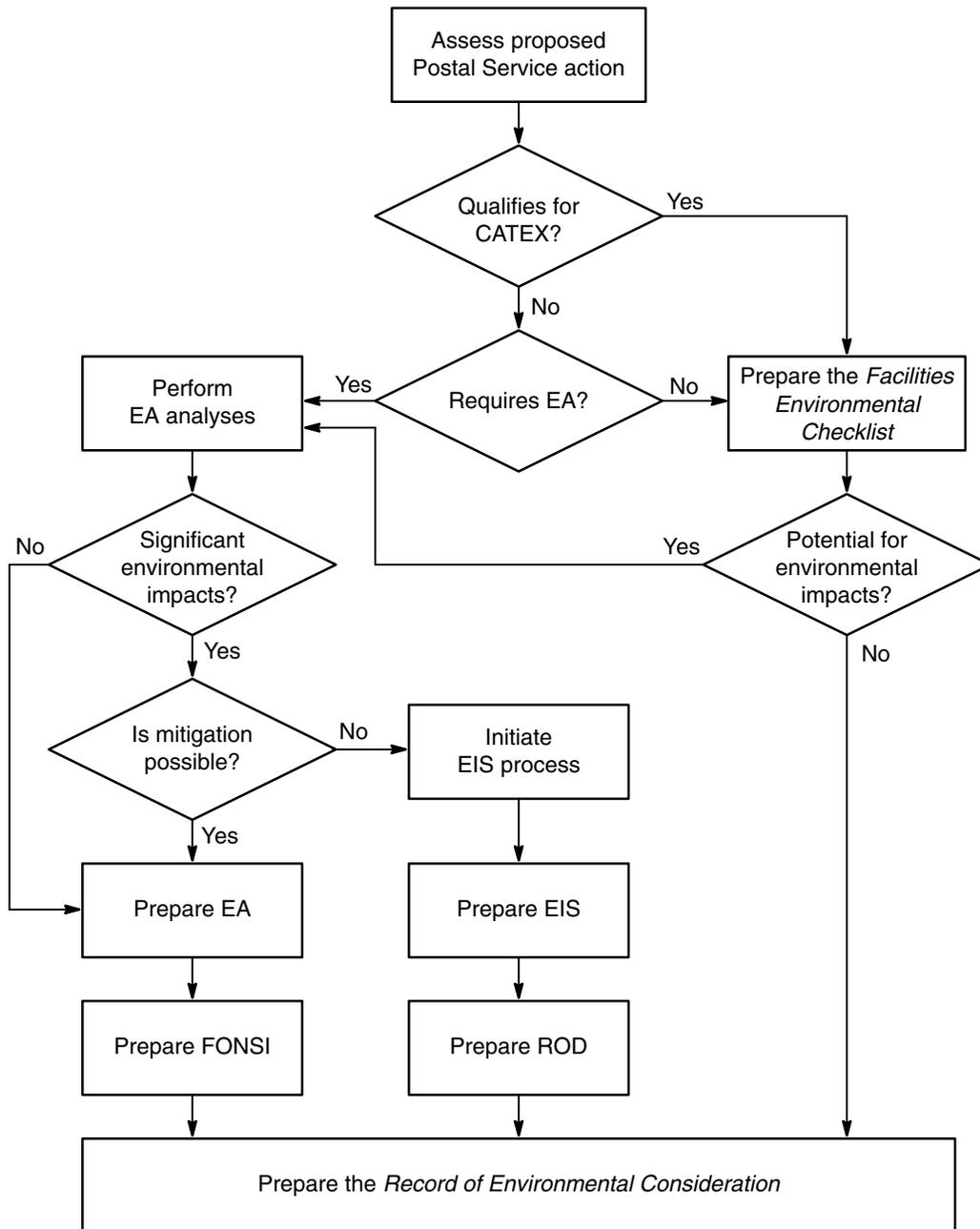
The NEPA process is a “thought” process by which project planners and decision makers assess, analyze, document, and publicly communicate the environmental impacts of their proposals and decisions. The goal is to consider environmental impacts along with other factors such as cost, feasibility, and design.

One of the most crucial aspects of the NEPA process is timing. If the decision to go forward with a proposed project is made before initiating the NEPA process, then neither the letter nor the spirit of NEPA has been followed. The goal of NEPA is to inject environmental analyses into the planning process as early as possible in order to enable the agency to make informed decisions before it is too late to change the project. NEPA is intended to be used as a planning device and not as a justification for an action already taken. Environmental planning is a futile act if the proposed action is already a “done deal” in the minds of the decision makers. On the other hand, conducting the NEPA process when the project is still in such an early stage of planning that the proposed action cannot be accurately defined and, thus, no concrete environmental issues can be analyzed, would not be useful to decision makers either.

**Example:** It is too early to start the NEPA process during the development of a Postal Service metro plan. Postal Service metro plans are based on projected population and future growth. During the development stage of a metro plan, there are no concrete proposals as to what actions, if any, may be proposed to implement the plan. However, the information in the Postal Service metro plan, once developed, may be used later in the environmental planning process to facilitate the preparation of either a Programmatic EA (see 2-5.2) or a site-specific EA.

As a general rule of thumb, for most Postal Service actions the NEPA process should be completed before the time that funding is committed for the acquisition of real property. Additionally, if a Decision Analysis Report (DAR) or a Justification of Expenditure (JOE) is required for a project, the NEPA process must be completed before project funding is committed. See [Exhibit 2-3](#) for an outline of the NEPA process.

Exhibit 2-3  
**The NEPA Process**



The following primary tools are used to complete the NEPA process:

- Postal Service listing of actions that are categorically excluded and therefore not usually requiring an EA (see Appendix A).
- *Facilities Environmental Checklist* (see Appendix B).
- Postal Service listing of actions requiring an EA (see section 2-5).
- Environmental Assessment.
- Environmental Impact Statement.
- *Record of Environmental Consideration*.

The remainder of this chapter is intended to help project planners and decision makers use the above tools to do the following:

- Determine whether or not NEPA applies to a project.
- If so, determine whether or not an EA or EIS is required.
- Effectively manage the preparation of an EA.

## 2-4 Determining NEPA Applicability

Once a project (action) has been proposed, it must undergo some level of NEPA analysis to determine the level of environmental impacts and whether or not it would be considered a “major federal action.” Potential major actions undertaken by the Postal Service could include construction of large plants, such as P&DCs, or projects smaller in scope but with potential environmental consequences. Based on this analysis, the proposed action may be categorically excluded from further NEPA consideration or may require an EA or EIS. If the analysis reveals that a project does not pose any known risk of significant environmental impacts and is not a “major federal action,” an EIS need not be prepared.

### 2-4.1 **Categorical Exclusions**

The office proposing to initiate an action must determine, in consultation with the appropriate Facilities environmental staff, whether or not the proposed action is categorically excluded. If the action is not listed as one that normally requires an EA, it may qualify as a categorical exclusion (CATEX).

Based on review of previous analyses and experience with common Postal Service activities, it has been determined that some Postal Service actions have a negligible impact on the environment. These actions are categorically excluded from the need to prepare an EA under 39 CFR 775, National Environmental Policy Act Procedures. Appendix A contains the list of Postal Service classes of actions that normally do not require either an EA or an EIS and, therefore, qualify as CATEX actions.

However, it must be ensured that the action meets the criteria set forth. This means that the *Facilities Environmental Checklist* must be completed to identify any extraordinary circumstances that may require further NEPA review (e.g., an EA), thus removing the project from the CATEX status.

CATEX provisions apply only if the completed checklist reveals no extraordinary circumstances and the following:

- The proposed action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.
- The proposed action exclusion is based on a determination that the action fits within a class listed.
- The proposed action is not connected, or related, to other actions with potentially significant impacts.

Upon determining that the action does, in fact, qualify for a CATEX, the responsible official must fill out a REC, summarizing the findings of the checklist and justifying the use of a CATEX.

#### 2-4.2 Facilities Environmental Checklist

The checklist is a Postal Service document, not a NEPA document. It is, however, a tool designed to serve several purposes, some of which are relevant to the NEPA process. One such purpose is to identify all environmental areas that the project could potentially affect. For actions that are “categorically excluded,” completion of the checklist may reveal an “extraordinary circumstance” with potential adverse environmental impacts. In such instances, an EA would be required. Appendix B contains the checklist and instructions for how to complete it.

**Example:** The proposed action is an NCO project to construct a small Post Office, an action that is categorically excluded and that does not normally require an EA. Completion of the checklist, however, reveals that the site, currently undeveloped, is adjacent to the critical habitat of a federally listed endangered plant species. This is an “extraordinary circumstance” that would occasion the need for an EA.

For projects that normally require an EA, completion of the checklist is an effective means for identifying the environmental issues that will be the focus of the EA’s analysis. If the project does not normally require an EA but at the same time is not listed as a CATEX, the checklist must be completed to determine whether or not an EA is required. The checklist determines if the proposed action could potentially affect (directly or indirectly) an environmentally significant resource, such as threatened or endangered species or wetlands. The checklist also helps to determine if substantial controversy may be generated over the significance of the environmental effects associated with the proposed action. For every such proposed action, the checklist should be completed for each reasonable alternative. In the above example, a feasible alternative is to lease an existing building in the same area but further away so that Postal Service operations will not impact wildlife.

## 2-5 Preparation of an EA

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If the proposed action does not qualify for a CATEX and it is a “major action” that has the potential to significantly affect the environment, an EA must be completed. An EA provides evidence and analyses of potential environmental impacts to determine if the proposed action’s implementation will result in “significant” environmental impacts. (**Note:** An EA is not necessary if it is already known that the project requires an EIS.) Essentially, the EA is used to confirm any issues raised by the checklist and to analyze them in greater detail. The Postal Service has identified the following 14 actions for which an EA *must* be prepared:

- Any project that includes the conversion, purchase, or any other alteration of the fuel source for 25 percent or more of Postal Service

vehicles operating with fuel other than diesel or gasoline in any carbon monoxide or ozone nonattainment area.

- Any action that would adversely affect a federal- or state-listed threatened or endangered species or its habitat.
- Any action that would directly affect public health.
- Any action that would require development within park lands, or would be located in close proximity to a wild or scenic river or other ecologically critical area.
- Any action affecting the quality of the physical environment that would be scientifically highly controversial.
- Any action that may have highly uncertain or unknown risks on the human environment.
- Any action that threatens to violate applicable federal, state, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.
- New construction of a facility with vehicle maintenance or fuel-dispensing capabilities, whether owned or leased.
- Purchase or lease of an existing building involving new uses or a change in use to a greater environmental intensity.
- Real property disposal involving a known change in use to a greater environmental intensity.
- Postal Service facility function changes involving new uses to a greater environmental intensity.
- Reduction in force involving more than 1,000 positions.
- Relocation of 300 or more employees more than 50 miles.
- Initiation of legislative proposals.

### 2-5.1 **Contents of an EA**

An interdisciplinary approach integrating the natural and social sciences must be used throughout the EA process. Information contained in the EA must be concise and easy to understand. Remember that the NEPA process is a public process, and the audience for the EA is both the Postal Service decision makers and members of the public. It is of utmost importance, therefore, that the EA present a clear picture of the existing environmental conditions and how the Postal Service's proposed project will affect them.

Every attempt must be made to ensure that appropriate contacts are made to obtain the most complete information for determining the environmental impacts of the proposed action. Those contacts include other federal agencies, universities, and other institutions that may have knowledge of particular environmental issues.

In general, an EA must do the following:

- Describe the proposed action(s), including existing conditions, reasons for the proposed action(s), and the range of the proposed action(s).
- Describe all reasonable alternatives to the proposed action(s), including the “no-action” alternative.
- Describe the affected environment, the environmental consequences, mitigation measures, and a comparison of all alternatives considered.
- Describe for each alternative the activities and operations that would take place at the site and the environmental impacts expected to result from them.
- Summarize major considerations and conclusions.
- Identify documents, federal laws, regulations, executive orders, and state and local laws and regulations that pertain to the proposed action and its potential effect on the environment.
- Provide a list of agencies and persons consulted.

## 2-5.2 The EA Process

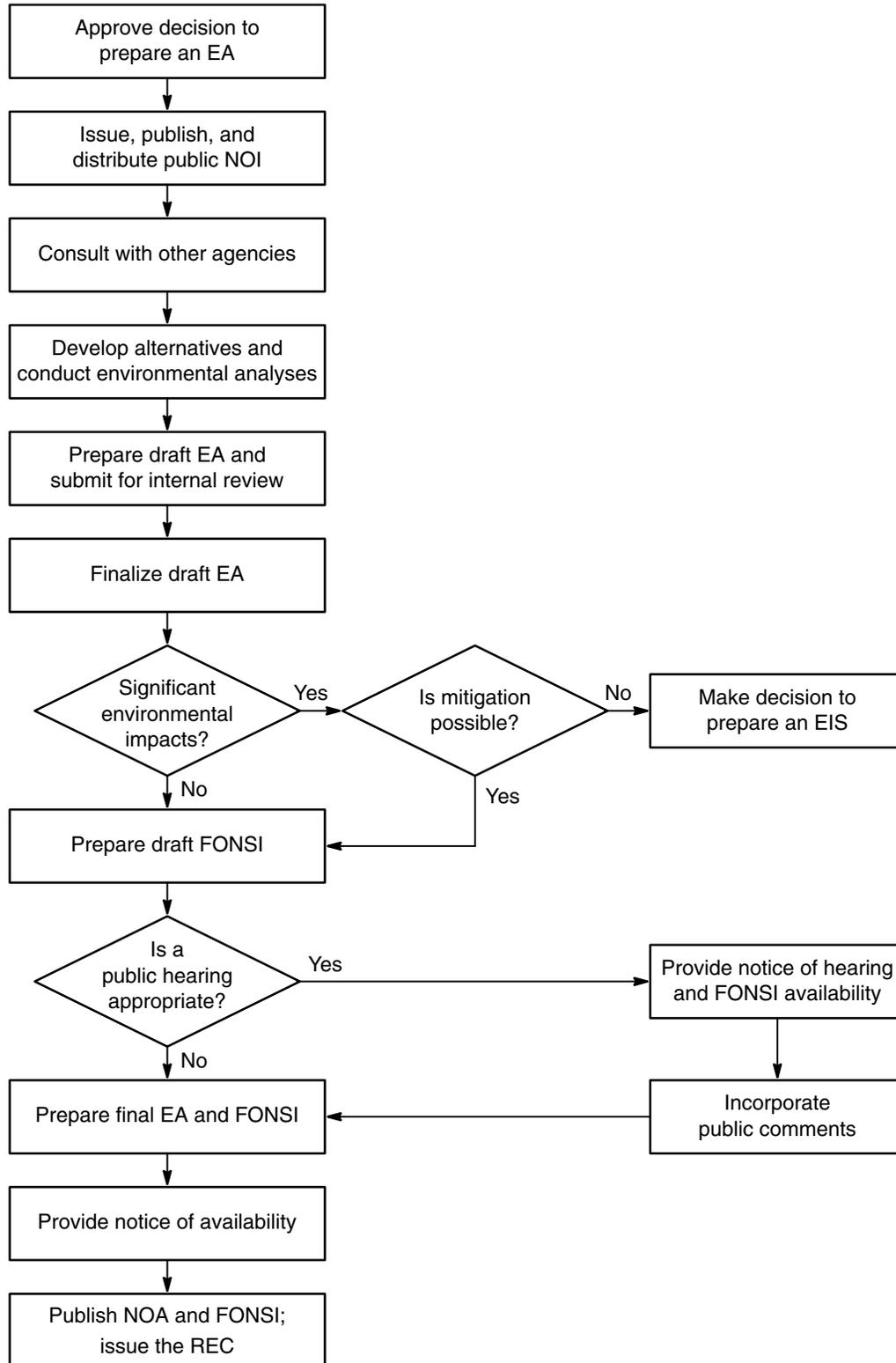
The following sections describe the EA process in more detail, with guidance on how to meet NEPA and Postal Service requirements as the process unfolds. Exhibit [2-5.2](#) illustrates the required steps.

### 2-5.2.1 Public Notice of Intent to Prepare an EA

After a decision is made to prepare an EA, Postal Service regulations require that a public Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EA be issued. The project FES is responsible for deciding how many days the NOI should be published. A review and comment period is not required when issuing a public notice. In areas where many non-English-speaking citizens are present near the affected project area, public notices should be translated and provided to foreign language newspapers. The NOI to prepare an EA is issued as follows:

- NOIs must be mailed to anyone who has requested them.
- If the action affects local concerns, NOIs may also be sent to potentially interested parties such as community organizations, small business associations, and owners and occupants of nearby or affected property.
- NOIs must be sent to the appropriate intergovernmental review offices, such as the state historic preservation officer (SHPO) and appropriate local public officials. For projects in the Washington, DC, National Capital Planning Region, NOIs must be sent to the National Capital Planning Commission.
- NOIs must be published in one or more local newspapers as a legal display advertisement. Prior to publishing the NOI, a copy of the NOI must be provided to the local Postal Service public affairs personnel.
- NOIs must be sent to the local postmaster for posting on or near the proposed and/or contending sites that the EA will cover (e.g., at the nearest Postal Service facility).

Exhibit 2-5.2  
**Preparing an EA and a FONSI**



- If the action involves a proposal of national concern, then the NOIs must be mailed to national organizations reasonably expected to be interested. Any such NOI must be published in the *Federal Register* (the publication process is discussed in Appendix C).

The contents of the public NOI must include the following:

- A brief description of the proposed action and reasonable alternatives.
- The name, address, and telephone number of a Postal Service official who may be contacted to obtain information or additional copies of environmental documents.

Public hearings are not normally required by NEPA or Postal Service regulations during preparation of an EA, but they are an option available to officials responsible for the project. A decision to hold such hearings should be made by Postal Service managers on a case-by-case basis. However, public hearings *must* be held whenever one of the following occurs:

- A substantial environmental controversy concerning a proposed action exists and any responsible individual or organization has requested a hearing.
- An agency with jurisdiction over, or with special expertise concerning, the proposed action has requested a hearing.
- A reasonable expectation exists that a hearing will produce significant information not likely to be obtained without a hearing.

**Example:** The Postal Service plans to build a combined P&DC and vehicle maintenance facility (VMF) with fueling capabilities in a medium-sized formerly industrial city located at the confluence of two rivers. Research has established that the existing facility is inadequate and cannot be renovated to meet the needs of the Postal Service. In addition, no existing buildings are available that are large enough to accommodate the Postal Service's requirements in the preferred area. A new facility is one viable option to solve the Postal Service's operational problem.

In addition to the no-action alternative, an alternative being considered is to build two facilities, a P&DC and a separate VMF. Three reasonable alternative sites have been located, but due to transportation requirements and the existing highway system, constructing the building or buildings on any of the contending sites could possibly affect one or both of the rivers.

City officials and local citizens have been working to revitalize the city by attracting new businesses and developing riverfront recreational facilities. As part of this development, they have instituted extensive plans to reduce the existing pollution problems in the rivers and are concerned about the effects of runoff from the VMF, notwithstanding the mitigation methods the Postal Service plans. The city asks for a public hearing; under the above circumstances, the responsible official should hold the hearing.

### 2-5.2.2 Describing the Proposed Action and Alternatives

All Postal Service projects are initiated to achieve a particular goal or solve a particular problem. This goal or problem must be described in the EA in order to provide a rationale for the “proposed action.” The proposed action is the means through which the Postal Service intends or prefers to meet its goals. The EA should describe the proposed action thoroughly and in layman’s terms. The EA is a public document and the drafter needs to keep in mind that, although the decision maker may be quite familiar with Postal Service operations, many other readers may not be.

Discussion of alternatives is a vital element of NEPA analyses, thus making it the most critical and scrutinized aspect of the process. Alternatives are simply other means by which to achieve a goal. Although alternatives should include consideration of different sites for the proposed action, alternatives should also include different actions that could be undertaken to achieve the goal or solve the problem.

**Example:** Due to the rapidly increasing population in City X, an existing P&DC is having difficulty operating effectively and, as a result, mail service to the public is suffering. To solve this problem, the Postal Service proposes to construct a new and larger P&DC. In this case, expanding the existing plant, occupying another existing facility (e.g., a warehouse), and increasing automation are viable alternatives. Note that each of these alternatives is a mix of entirely different actions to the proposed action to build a new facility. In addition, the EA should discuss alternative contending sites. The EA text will address the potential environmental impact of every alternative, including the no-action alternative.

Although the no-action alternative in most cases will not meet Postal Service goals, it must be analyzed for potential environmental impacts. Even if no feasible alternatives exist other than the proposed action, the no-action alternative must be analyzed.

The alternatives developed must be “reasonable.” This means that they must be realistic, feasible, and able to meet Postal Service goals or solve the identified problem. Different forms of real estate transactions for the same property are not valid alternatives. For example, leasing a new building for the P&DC or buying the same new building are not different with respect to environmental impacts, thus they are not discrete alternatives. Also, obtaining a building smaller than the existing P&DC is not an alternative because it would not satisfy the goals of the Postal Service.

Alternative actions that were considered during the planning process but rejected for operational or other legitimate reasons should be discussed in the EA. The EA should briefly both describe the alternative action and explain the reason the Postal Service rejected the alternative.

**Example:** The proposed action is for an NCO P&DC; an alternative action considered was to lease an existing building in the preferred area. This alternative was rejected because the only available existing building with adequate square footage could not accommodate, or be

made to accommodate, the large trucks necessary to transport the mail. The EA should contain this discussion.

NEPA does not require agencies to choose the *most* environmentally friendly alternative; however, the Postal Service should provide its rationale for not doing so.

### 2-5.2.3 Describing the Affected Environment

The EA must discuss the affected environment before Postal Service activity (i.e., the existing condition of the project site and its environs). The checklist can be used to determine which of the areas listed below requires extensive discussion and analyses. It is unlikely that all of the items listed will be relevant, just as it is possible that the evaluation may reveal additional environmental areas that are not listed.

Provide a narrative description in the EA of each relevant resource element and explain the findings. When no impacts are expected for a particular element, it is only necessary to explain briefly for each why there will be no impact. Support the statements identifying the significance of the effects on the environment with data attached to the EA or by reference to sources accessible to the public. Ensure that any maps and illustrations are easy to read and relate relevant information.

The typical environmental areas to be analyzed are:

- Physical environment:
  - Topography.
  - Geology and soils.
  - Hydrology and water quality.
  - Prime farmland.
  - Fish and wildlife.
  - Botanical.
  - Floodplains.
- Cultural environment:
  - Historical and archaeological.
  - Local employment and economics.
  - Environmental justice.
  - Land use and zoning patterns.
  - Transportation.
  - Recreation.
  - Noise.
  - Air quality.
  - Population trends and housing.
  - Relocation of employees, residences, and businesses.
  - Community services.
  - Utilities.

- Energy requirements and conservation.
- Solid and hazardous waste generation.
- Postal Service environment:
  - Postal services.
  - Delivery service.
  - Working conditions.
  - Operational productivity.

#### 2-5.2.4 Analyzing Impacts

Environmental impacts caused by an action can be direct, indirect, or cumulative, as follows:

- *Direct impacts* — impacts caused by the action that occur at the same time and place as the precipitating action (e.g., wetlands destruction).
- *Indirect impacts* — impacts caused by the action that are later in time or farther removed in distance but that are still reasonably foreseeable. For example, indirect impacts may include adding to surface runoff due to paving a parking lot.
- *Cumulative impacts* — impacts that result from incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions by any federal or nonfederal agency or person. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

**Example:** The Postal Service is considering building a P&DC with a VMF near an area where a new mall is to be constructed within 3 years. The Postal Service would have to consider the cumulative impacts of its action on altering traffic, increasing impervious surfaces, possibly losing wetlands, causing stormwater runoff, etc., against the backdrop of the mall development.

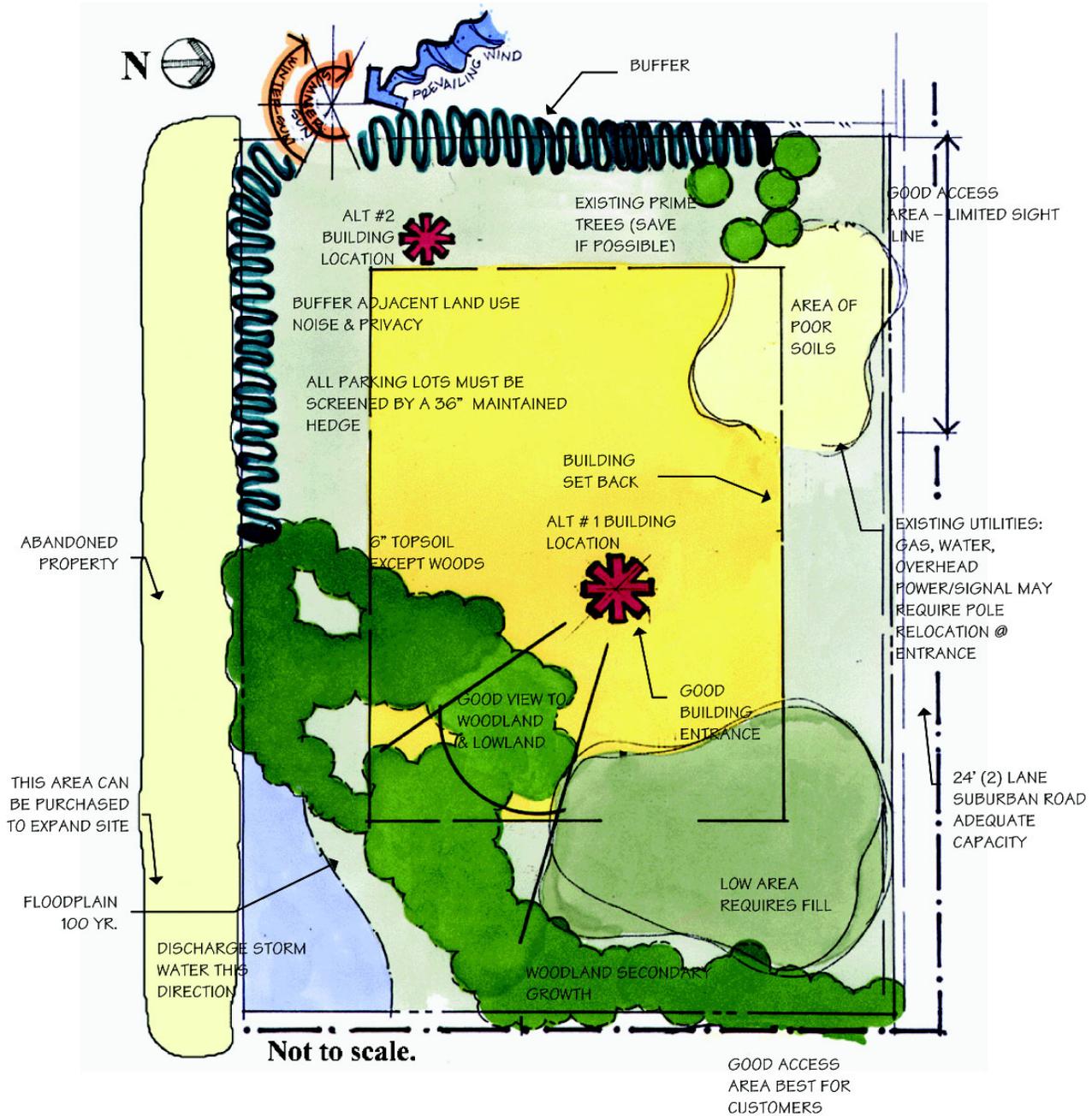
Each of the types of impact must be identified in the EA and be factored into all determinations of overall impact significance. When discussing these impacts, it is essential to clearly establish the cause and effect links between the operations that will occur and the impacts to the environment. This requires that the operations be analyzed and their known environmental effects discussed. Never assume that the reader of an EA will know what operations occur at a particular Postal Service facility. For instance, a VMF has some inherent potential to affect stormwater, and a facility with heavy truck traffic has inherent impacts on air quality. Operations or activities having inherent environmental impacts must be described.

#### 2-5.2.5 Determining Significant Impacts

The “significance” of an environmental impact is directly related to both context and intensity. The significance of a proposed action must be analyzed in several *contexts*, such as the affected environmental area, the interested parties, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed

action. Both short- and long-term impacts are relevant to the analysis and must be discussed.

**Example of Site Inventory and Analysis**



*Intensity* refers to the severity of an impact. The following should be considered when evaluating intensity:

- The impact may be both beneficial and adverse.
- The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

- The unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to cultural resources, wetlands, etc.
- The degree to which the impacts are likely to be highly controversial.
- The level of uncertainty regarding impacts and/or the uniqueness of certain risks.
- The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.
- The potential cumulative impact.
- The degree to which historic and cultural resources and endangered species and habitats will be affected.

If the initial analysis identifies *only* socioeconomic impacts, the EA is not required to be completed. If, however, both impacts to the physical environment *and* socioeconomic impacts are identified, an EA is required and must discuss both physical environment and socioeconomic impacts.

One of the biggest questions faced when preparing an EA is the amount of data that is sufficient to determine the significance of identified environmental impacts. It is important to remember that an EA is *not* a short EIS. The purpose of each document is very different. The purpose of an EA is simply to identify the environmental impacts and determine if they are significant enough to require the preparation of an EIS. EAs should be short, concise documents containing only enough analysis necessary to determine this. EISs, on the other hand, involve detailed analyses of the significant environmental impacts expected to result from the project.

#### 2-5.2.6 Mitigation Measures

The impacts identified in an EA can sometimes be mitigated, thus eliminating the need to conduct an EIS. The intention of mitigation is to minimize (or eliminate) the effects of the proposed action on the environment (see [Exhibit 2-5.2.6](#) for an example of how the effects may be mitigated). If mitigation is necessary to support a FONSI, then mitigation must be implemented as part of the final action. Mitigation measures cannot be identified in the EA simply as a means to avoid preparing an EIS. Unless necessary mitigation measures are actually implemented by the responsible official, the use of an EA in lieu of an EIS is not acceptable. Generally, there are five types of mitigation:

- *Avoidance* — mitigation that avoids the impact entirely by not taking certain actions or parts of actions.
- *Limitation of action* — mitigation that limits the degree or magnitude of an action.
- *Restoration of the environment* — mitigation that restores the environment to its previous condition or better (e.g., reseeded or replanting to restore damaged vegetation).
- *Preservation and maintenance* — mitigation that changes the design of the action to include engineered systems that reduce emission of pollutants (e.g., air emission scrubbers and oil/water separators).

Exhibit 2-5.2.6  
Example of Site Mitigation Measures



- *Replacement* — mitigation that replaces resources destroyed by the action, usually in an alternate location on the property (e.g., wetlands).

Only mitigation measures that can be reasonably accomplished as part of the proposed action should be identified in the EA. Mitigation actions that appear practicable but are in fact unobtainable (e.g., due to budgetary constraints) should be identified as such in the EA. Postal Service regulations require that mitigation measures identified in the EA must be implemented. Upon request, the Postal Service must inform federal, state, and local agencies and the public of the progress in implementing adopted mitigation measures.

#### 2-5.2.7 **Assessment Tool: Environmental Impacts Summary Matrix**

An example of an environmental impacts summary matrix is shown in [Exhibit 2-5.2.7](#); it may be used to summarize the results of the completed EA. The matrix enables EA reviewers to easily identify the impacts of projects, their scope, and all identified mitigation measures.

#### 2-5.2.8 **Internal Review and Comments**

Before the draft EA is finalized, it must be submitted to the responsible official for internal review and comments. A written determination of legal sufficiency is required from General Counsel for all EAs prepared by Facilities. Following internal review and comment, the final EA is prepared. This final document incorporates all required changes. A notice of its availability is published along with the FONSI. The EA may be included in the FONSI if it is short; otherwise, provide a summary. The notice is published in the same manner as the initial NOI.

#### 2-5.3 **Finding of No Significant Impact**

If the EA indicates that there is no significant adverse impact on the environment resulting from a proposed project or action, then an EIS is *not* required. The responsible official, in this case the FSO manager or national manager of Real Estate, reviews the EA and, if he or she concurs with the conclusions reached, issues a FONSI. The FONSI should briefly explain the reasons why the proposed action will not have any significant environmentally adverse impacts and state that an EIS will not be prepared.

The FONSI should contain either the completed EA or a summary. All mitigation measures that have been identified in the EA must be described in the FONSI. FONSI that include mitigation measures are known as “mitigated FONSI.” Again, all mitigation measures identified in the EA that form the basis of the FONSI must be implemented. The FONSI should indicate when the mitigation measures should be implemented.

The FONSI should also include the name, office, address, and phone number of a person who can provide information on the action to be taken. The use of the FONSI exempts the Postal Service from having to prepare an EIS. A copy of the FONSI should be sent to local public officials, agencies, and all persons requesting information about the project.

Exhibit 2-5.2.7 (p. 1)  
**Environmental Impacts Summary Matrix**

Environmental Area	No Action			Proposed Action			Alternative 1			Alternative 2		
	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation
<b>Physical Environment</b>												
A. Topography												
B. Geology and soils												
1. Characteristics												
a. Load bearing capacity												
b. Wetness												
2. Presence of faults												
3. Subsurface conditions												
4. Toxic and hazardous potential												
C. Hydrology and water quality												
1. Local ground water												
2. Adjacent streams and lakes												
3. Floodplain												
4. Wetlands												
5. Wild and scenic rivers												
6. Site surface drainage												
D. Prime farmland												
E. Fish and wildlife												
1. Alteration of habitat												
2. Rare or endangered species												
F. Botanical												
1. Alteration to vegetation												
2. Rare or endangered species												
<b>Cultural Environment</b>												
G. Historic and archaeology												
1. Archaeological												
2. Historic places and sites												

Exhibit 2-5.2.7 (p. 2)  
**Environmental Impacts Summary Matrix**

Environmental Area	No Action			Proposed Action			Alternative 1			Alternative 2		
	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation
<b>Cultural Environment (continued)</b>												
H. Local employment and economics												
1. Economic activity employment												
2. Taxes												
3. Real property disposal												
4. Condition												
5. Market demand												
6. Alternative uses												
I. Land use and zoning patterns												
1. Compatibility												
2. Aesthetic considerations												
3. Residential development												
4. Industrial potential												
5. Past uses of the site												
6. Environmental conditions of existing buildings at site												
J. Transportation												
1. Traffic and circulation												
2. Safety												
3. Accessibility and parking												
4. Public transportation												
K. Noise												
1. Traffic												
2. Exterior postal operations												
3. Sensitive receptors												
L. Air quality												
1. Odors												
2. Dust												
3. Chemicals												

Exhibit 2-5.2.7 (p. 3)  
**Environmental Impacts Summary Matrix**

Environmental Area	No Action			Proposed Action			Alternative 1			Alternative 2		
	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation	Impacts	Duration	Mitigation
<b>Cultural Environment (continued)</b>												
M. Population trends and housing												
N. Relocation												
1. Employees												
2. Residents												
3. Businesses												
O. Community												
1. Food												
2. Medical												
3. Fire protection												
P. Utilities												
1. Availability												
2. Location												
3. Capacities												
Q. Energy requirements and conservation												
R. Solid and hazardous waste generation												
<b>Postal Environment</b>												
S. Postal Service												
1. Retail												
2. Post office boxes												
T. Delivery service												
U. Working conditions												
V. Operational productivity												

Key:  
*Impact symbols:* B = beneficial effect; N = no effect or negligible effect; M = moderately adverse effect; and S = significant effect.  
*Duration symbols:* P = permanent effect; T = temporary effect; and N/A = not applicable.  
*Mitigation symbols:* Y = can be mitigated; N = cannot be mitigated; NR = not required; and N/A = not applicable.

Both the EA and FONSI must be made publicly available. Exactly how this is done generally depends on the nature of the project. For a project with national scope, publication in the *Federal Register* and other national publications of the availability of an EA and FONSI is appropriate. The availability of an EA and FONSI for more regional or site-specific projects can be advertised in local newspapers or posted in public meeting areas. When publishing the notice of availability (NOA) and FONSI, follow the guidelines in 2-5.2.1 for publication of the NOI to prepare an EA.

The FONSI should be brief and may be written in letter or notice format. It is addressed to the local, state, and federal officials responsible for reviewing the proposed action. The content of the letter or notice must include the following:

- A summary of the proposed action.
- A statement of the major issues emanating from the proposed action.
- A summary of the findings of the EA and reasons why the findings constitute a FONSI.
- The notice of availability of the EA. The notice must state that the FONSI and EA have been completed; provide points of contact and telephone numbers; and, if there is a comment period, identify when the proposed action is to start and where the FONSI and EA may be obtained.
- A statement that, based on the results of the EA, the proposed action will not significantly impact the human and natural environment and will not require the preparation of an EIS.

The FONSI may be issued at any time after the EA is completed, but it must be issued before site acquisition and before project funding has been committed. Ordinarily, no review and comment period is required when issuing a FONSI. In some limited circumstances, however, such as when the proposed action is, or is closely similar to, one that normally requires preparation of an EIS or the nature of the proposed action is one without precedent, the responsible official must include a 30-day comment period. If so, public comments must be incorporated into the final FONSI.

**Note:** Many proponents start the EA process having predetermined that a FONSI is the goal, thus using the EA process as a means to justify an action already decided and to *prove* that there are no significant impacts. This does not agree with the spirit of NEPA and is an improper application of the NEPA process, which will be readily obvious to reviewers. The “F” in FONSI stands for “Finding,” which means that the absence of environmental impacts cannot be assumed and that some level of analysis and investigation must be conducted to *find out* if a project will result in significant impacts.

## 2-5.4 Environmental Impact Statement

If the EA identifies significant environmental impacts that will result from the proposed action, an EIS must be prepared if the planned project is to proceed. An NOI to prepare an EIS must be written by the responsible official

and sent to the chief counsel, Legislative, Legal Policy, General Counsel, Headquarters, who will have it published in the *Federal Register*. As with the FONSI, either a summary or full copy of the EA should accompany the NOI. The Postal Service normally does not undertake actions that require an EIS; however, detailed guidance regarding the preparation of an EIS can be found in Appendix C of this guide.

**Harvest, 1938 Mural by Miriam McKinnie Located in Marshall Post Office, Illinois**



Photograph by PARMA Conservation.

This image illustrates the diversity of the national collection housed in our facilities. Murals in the Postal Service's Fine Arts Collection were commissioned by the former Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later renamed the Section of Fine Arts). See 3-4.7 for more information.

## 2-5.5 Programmatic Environmental Assessment

NEPA regulations require that certain types of connected or similar federal actions be analyzed in a single NEPA document. Actions that are closely related to each other, resulting in the appearance that they are a single course of action, must be analyzed in a single document, known as a Programmatic EA (PEA) or Programmatic EIS (PEIS). For example, broad plans encompassing a particular geographic area or multiphased projects are often candidates for a PEA.

Actions are *connected* if they:

- Automatically trigger other actions that may require an EIS.
- Cannot or will not proceed unless other actions are taken previously or simultaneously.
- Are interdependent parts of a larger action and depend on the larger action for their justification.

Actions are *similar* if, when viewed with other reasonably foreseeable or proposed Postal Service action, they are similar enough to provide a basis for evaluating their environmental consequences together (e.g., proposed

actions with common timing or geographical location). The Postal Service should analyze similar actions in the same EA. The best way to adequately evaluate the combined impacts of similar actions, or reasonable alternatives to such actions, is to analyze them in a single EA.

Proposed actions that have *synergistic* effects also require a PEA or PEIS. A proposed action has synergistic effects if it creates an environmental effect that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The PEA should analyze the broad issues associated with the proposed program or action as a whole. For programs or actions involving several sites, issues peculiar to a specific site(s) that may not be known at the time the PEA is prepared will often lead to site-specific EAs. Site-specific issues should be addressed in the PEA, if they are known, but it is not uncommon for a PEA ultimately to include several attached site-specific EAs. If a PEA appears to be appropriate for a program or multiphased project but the Postal Service decides not to prepare one, the Postal Service must demonstrate that it considered preparing a PEA and explain why it did not.

**Example:** The Postal Service is proposing to build several new facilities in various sites across the nation to support a new mail processing operation for a particular product. In determining whether to prepare a PEA, the Postal Service cannot identify either any environmental effects arising from the program as a whole, any cumulative effects, or any other potentially significant effects. The Postal Service does expect, however, that as yet unknown site-specific issues may arise. Under these circumstances, it is appropriate to explain in a memorandum to the file that the Postal Service considered preparing a PEA and determined that it would serve no useful purpose, and noting that site-specific EAs would be prepared as necessary.

The Postal Service should consider the following two factors when deciding whether to prepare a PEA:

- If the PEA could be sufficiently forward-looking to aid the decision makers in their basic planning.
- If a PEA is not prepared, whether the decision maker will appear to have segmented the overall program, thereby unreasonably constricting the scope of the environmental review.

Multiphased projects, each part of which is assessed separately, for example, in a combination of *Facilities Environmental Checklists*, CATEXs, or EAs, could lead to a successful challenge that the Postal Service improperly segmented the large project in order to avoid a more extensive NEPA review, such as an EA or EIS.

**Example:** The Postal Service is preparing to initiate a project consisting of several actions (a new P&DC, a retail office, and a carrier annex). The entire project is discussed in internal planning documents and will be included in the same funding request. The retail office and carrier annex portions of the plan, if they were not part of the broader plan, would be categorically excluded. An EA is prepared for the P&DC, but does not analyze the potential environmental effects of the two smaller

facilities or all three facilities as a whole. The rationale given is that the two smaller projects are CATEXes.

This is an example of improper segmentation of a proposed major federal action. Recall that a CATEX does not apply if the action is connected, or related, to other actions with potentially significant impacts. Separate parts of a broad or multiphased project may not be analyzed separately in order to avoid a broader NEPA analysis. In this case, the EA should discuss and analyze all three actions that make up the proposed plan.

## 2-6 Record of Environmental Consideration

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The REC is intended as a simple record for documenting the level of NEPA review that has taken place for any given project (see [Exhibit 2-6](#)). A REC must be completed for all new Facilities projects, including NCOs, NLSs, expansions, renovations, and repair and alterations, even if no NEPA review is required. The REC states that the appropriate guidelines have been reviewed and indicates all the activities that were completed for this action from the following:

- No NEPA review was required.
- The *Operations Environmental Checklist* was completed and indicated that no further review was required.
- The *Facilities Environmental Checklist* was completed and indicated that no further review was required.
- Which CATEX number was applied.
- An EA was prepared and a FONSI issued.
- An EIS was prepared and a ROD will be issued.

See 2-2.2 for persons with authority to sign as the responsible official. The FES must sign as the project manager. Whenever an EA or an EIS is prepared, the REC accompanies NEPA documents. If no NEPA documents were prepared, the REC accompanies the JOE or the DAR. A copy of the REC is retained in the project file. In any event, the responsible official must review the EA or EIS before signing either the FONSI, ROD, or REC (see [Exhibit 2-6](#)).

## 2-7 Facilities NEPA Repository

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In 2002, Facilities Headquarters created a national NEPA repository, which is a collection of completed NEPA documents that have been prepared to assess Postal Service facility actions nationally. A supporting database summarizes each facility action by project type and location as well as the findings in the EAs. The FESs can query the database to determine if similar facility actions can be referenced when assessing the potential environmental impact of a proposed facility action. A proposed facility action may qualify for a CATEX under the Postal Service's NEPA implementing procedures (39

CFR 775.6) if it is essentially the same in context and has similar or fewer potential impacts than the “referenced action” previously studied under an EA. If any of these previously completed actions apply to the proposed action, the REC should state “reference action (b)(17)” as the CATEX used. For large projects, the FES should prepare a memorandum to the file summarizing the reference actions that were reviewed.

The FES must forward all completed EAs, along with the signed FONSI, to the national manager of Real Estate for inclusion in the Facilities NEPA Repository. NEPA documents may be sent in hard copy, although a compact disk containing the electronic files of the EA and scan of the signed FONSI is preferred. Facilities Headquarters is responsible for maintaining the Facilities NEPA Repository, updating the database, and providing copies of documents when requested.

Exhibit 2-6

**Example of Record of Environmental Consideration**



**Record of Environmental Consideration**

Name of Project

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Location of Project

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I have reviewed Postal Service NEPA guidance and have considered the environmental impacts of the proposed action. In the case of facilities projects, the requisite guidance is contained in Handbook RE-6, *Facilities Environmental Guide*. In the case of operational projects including construction and repair activities managed by districts, the requisite guidance is contained in Management Instruction AS-550-96-4, *National Environmental Policy Act Operational Guidance*.

The following activity has been taken based on information available to me, and, for operations projects, the recommendations of the appropriate area environmental professional. For facilities projects, policy allows the Facilities Environmental Specialist (FES) to prepare and sign as the project manager.

*(Check all that apply)*

- No National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review is required.
- PS Form 8195, *Operational Environmental Checklist*. *(Use only for operational projects.)*
- PS Form 7498-D, *Facilities Environmental Checklist*. *(Use only for facilities projects.)*
- Categorical Exclusion No. \_\_\_\_\_ was applied.
- An Environmental Assessment was prepared and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued.
- An Environmental Impact Statement was prepared and a Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued.

Name of Project Manager or Preparer	Telephone Number <i>(Include Area Code)</i>
Signature of Project Manager or Preparer	Date <i>(Month, Day, Year)</i>
Name of Responsible Official	Telephone Number <i>(Include Area Code)</i>
Signature of Responsible Official	Date <i>(Month, Day, Year)</i>

**NOTE:** When an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement is required, this form must accompany the NEPA documents presented to the approving official. When no NEPA review is required or an environmental checklist completes the environmental review process, this form must accompany the Justification of Expenditures documentation or the Decision Analysis Report presented to the approving official. A copy of Form 8194 is retained with the project file.

PS Form **8194**, December 2002

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