

Environmental Impact Statement for Divert Activities and Exercises



Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Background

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 was enacted to address concerns about Federal actions and their effects on the environment. NEPA establishes a national policy for attaining harmony between people and nature, for promoting efforts to eliminate damage to the environment, and for better understanding of ecological systems and natural resources. NEPA's main objectives are as follows:

- ◆ Ensure that Federal agencies evaluate the potential environmental impacts of proposed programs, projects, and actions before decisions are made to implement them
- ◆ Inform the public of proposed Federal activities that have the potential to significantly affect environmental quality
- ◆ Encourage and facilitate public involvement in the decisionmaking process.

What is an EIS?

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is the most detailed analysis prescribed by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA. An EIS is a detailed public document describing a proposed action, all alternative actions that were considered, and the environmental impacts of implementing the proposed action and reasonable alternatives.

Why prepare an EIS?

Federal agencies are required to prepare an EIS for actions that could significantly affect the human or natural environment. An EIS is required to “provide a basis of consideration and inform decisionmakers and the public of the reasonable alternatives.”

How is an EIS prepared?

The first step in preparing an EIS is to determine the scope of the proposed action, which includes the geographic region of influence and the characteristics of the natural environment that could be impacted. Technical professionals, including biologists, archaeologists, planners, and engineers, examine and gather data on existing conditions such as land use, socioeconomics, cultural resources, noise, air quality, water quality, vegetation and wildlife, safety, environmental justice, and hazardous materials.

The collected information is analyzed to identify how the proposed action and alternatives might change, or impact, existing conditions. The assessment of impacts determines several characteristics of potential impacts, including context and intensity. Where findings indicate that there might be significant impacts, the agency identifies practicable ways to reduce or minimize those impacts through best management practices or mitigation measures. The EIS also provides information on methodologies and assumptions used in the analyses.

There are several opportunities for public involvement during development of an EIS, including submitting scoping comments, submitting comments on the Draft EIS, and attending public meetings.



General Steps in the EIS Process

Scoping

The Scoping Period, which is generally 30 to 45 days long, formally begins with the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the *Federal Register*. The purpose of the Scoping Period is to define the scope of issues to be addressed in the EIS through the identification of significant issues, provision of recommendations to the agency, and determination of points of contact and interested parties. Public scoping meetings are conducted during the Scoping Period to provide information to interested parties and to receive comments on the proposed action and alternatives that will be considered in the Draft EIS.

Draft EIS

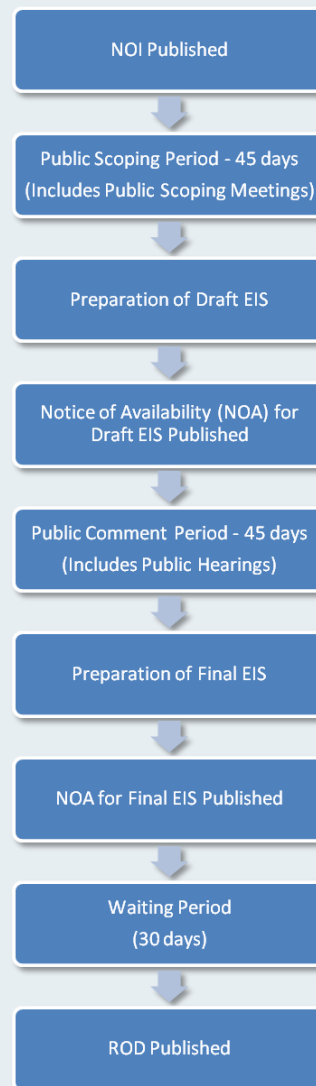
After completion of the Scoping Period, a Draft EIS is prepared that considers all scoping comments received. The Draft EIS identifies and analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the implementation of the proposed action and alternatives. A Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft EIS is published in the *Federal Register*, which initiates the start of the Public Comment Period that must be at least 45 days in duration. After issuance of the NOA, the Draft EIS is made available for public review and comment. During the Public Comment Period, public hearings are held on the Draft EIS to present information on the proposed action and alternatives, and to identify potential impacts. Comments received during the Public Comment Period are considered in preparation of the Final EIS.

Final EIS

A Final EIS is prepared after completion of the Draft EIS Public Comment Period. The Final EIS incorporates and responds to all public comments received on the Draft EIS. Incorporation of and response to comments can include corrections of data inaccuracies, clarifications of and modifications to analytical approaches, inclusion of additional data or analyses, and modification of the proposed action or alternatives. If not previously identified in the Draft EIS, the Final EIS identifies the preferred alternative for implementation. An NOA of the Final EIS is published in the *Federal Register*, which initiates the start of the 30-day Waiting Period.

Record of Decision

A minimum of 30 days must pass after the publication of the NOA of the Final EIS before an agency can make a decision on a proposed action. This 30-day Waiting Period provides time for the agency decisionmaker to consider the action's purpose and need, evaluate the alternatives, and make a decision. After 30 days, a Record of Decision (ROD) can be signed and issued. The ROD provides the public record of the agency's decision, describes the public involvement and agency decisionmaking process, and presents the commitments to minimize potential impacts. The ROD also identifies the environmentally preferred alternative. An NOA of the ROD is then published and the proposed action can be implemented.



Steps in EIS Process

Guam and CNMI Divert Activities and Exercises Environmental Impact Statement

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), its environment, culture, and people are important to the U.S. Air Force. To make sure the environment continues to be protected, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared for improving an existing airfield on U.S. territory in the Mariana Islands region. This study will help to understand the effects on the environment, including natural and cultural resources, and the economic well-being of the people of CNMI from proposed activities and exercises. The EIS will help the U.S. Air Force to better protect the unique environment of CNMI. For more information about the EIS, see the "Proposed Action and Alternatives" fact sheet.

The U.S. Air Force wants to hear what you think about the EIS.

Submit comments via

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Voice Mail: 1-855-200-6734

Project Web site:

www.PACAFDivertMarianasEIS.com

All comments should be submitted no later than July 23, 2012, for consideration in the Final EIS.