

Dolores Public Lands Office
General National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis process
Environmental Assessments

The process outlined below is the general template for developing the Dolores River Management Plan. Tentative timelines/months when each step may be completed are outlined. These timelines are tentative based on the needs of the group and the amount of public comment received. The Dolores Public Lands Office and the Dolores River Dialogue control our own destiny on the pace of the process and how much time we spend on each step.

Plan-to-Project Period (December 2008 - October 2009)

- An action is proposed and discussed in generalities, with possible alternatives.
- Overall effects are discussed and an Interdisciplinary Team (ID) Team is identified based on those effects.
- The initial level of NEPA analysis is identified (we will prepare an Environmental Assessment).
- Scoping needs are evaluated.
- A timeline for completion is established (similar to what is below).

NEPA Analysis is formally initiated (1 month)

- A project initiation letter identifying team members and responsibilities and timelines is issued (this goes to internal BLM/FS staff but would identify DRD related members as needed or identified by the group).
- Clearance requests for resource work are distributed
- Scoping is initiated - this generally involves a standard news and media releases.
 - Some letters directly mailed to interested parties/groups may be sent out as well. A public meeting may be held.
 - Scoping comments can be collected through the life of the project, but are most helpful if they are received within 30 days after the scoping period begins to help the team focus the analysis. A scoping period is used to identify general concerns and to provide general comments about the proposal and the analysis area.
- The project is entered into the Schedule of Proposed Actions which is an electronic spreadsheet on the internet which lists all on-going projects.

NEPA Analysis period (3-12 months)

- Depending on the complexity of the analysis, this can run anywhere from 3 months to a year. This involves meetings, field trips if necessary and specialists (wildlife biologists, archaeologists, botanists, etc.) conducting their analyses.
- During this time, the EA document is also being drafted generally by the ID team leader with input from specialists and others involved in the project.

30-Day Comment Period (when preliminary EA is completed)

- Preliminary NEPA document can be released for a comment period with a corresponding news release of the project to a standard list of media outlets.
- The NEPA document can be posted on the San Juan Public Lands website for the public to access. CD and paper copies are made available upon request.

- This is a comment period specific to the prepared NEPA document.

Comments are Evaluated (1-3 months)

- The comments received during the comment period are evaluated. The EA is sometimes modified based on comments. Other times the comments are minor enough to be addressed in the Decision Document.

Decision (1-2 weeks)

- The decision is written and signed
- The decision is announced through a news release beginning the appeal period.

Appeal Period (30 days)

- The decision is appealable for 30 calendar days. If no appeals are received within the 30-day period, the project may be initiated 5 days after the close of the appeal period.
- If appeals are received, the appeal and the entire administrative record for the project are reviewed by a government solicitor and the ID team to prepare the appeal for litigation.

If you have questions about this process please call Shauna Jensen, Hydrologist (970)882-6815 or Steve Beverlin, Manager (970)882-6834 both at the Dolores Public Lands Office.