

# National Environmental Policy Act



Fort Belvoir, Virginia

In 1969, Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), our national charter for protection of the environment.

Under NEPA, all branches of the federal government must consider potential impacts to the human and natural environment before undertaking any major action. The President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) established the guidelines to implement NEPA.

Agencies consider the potential impacts of major actions through preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The EIS process informs the public and decision makers about the proposed action, its impacts, and reasonable alternatives that might avoid or minimize adverse impacts to, or enhance the quality of, the environment. The EIS process provides an opportunity for the public and other agencies to comment on federal actions that may affect their community.

## What types of actions require an EIS?

An EIS is prepared for actions with the potential to significantly affect the environment, such as expansion of physical facilities, implementation of master plans, or changes in operations.

## How is an EIS prepared?

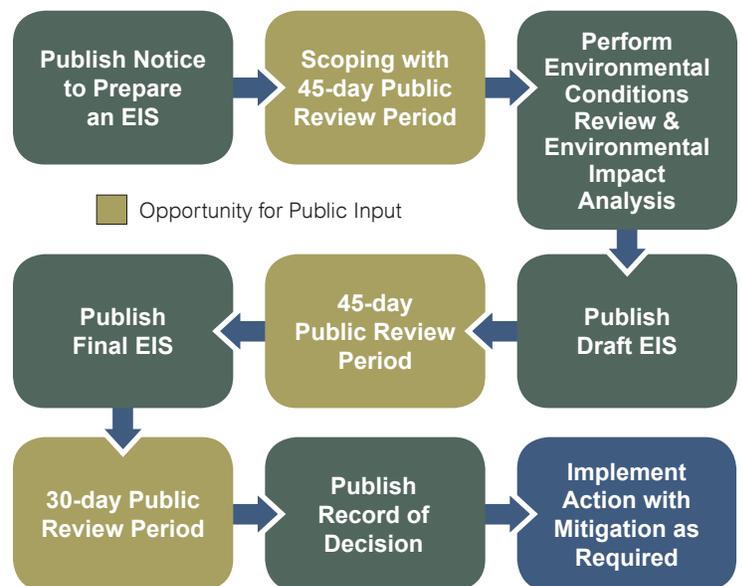
At the outset of an EIS, the agency proposing the action, in this case the Army, develops a range of reasonable alternative approaches to meet the purpose and need for the action. The No Action Alternative is always evaluated to serve as a baseline for comparison with the action alternatives.

Technical professionals then prepare baseline studies for resources that might be affected by the proposed action in order to describe existing conditions. Such resource

areas typically include noise, socioeconomics, air quality, land use, water quality, traffic, vegetation and wildlife, coastal zone management, and hazardous materials, among others. At Fort Belvoir, there are protected resources that would also be assessed, including wildlife and wetland refuges, a forest and wildlife migration corridor, and a designated environmental quality corridor.

The next step is to assess the impacts likely to occur if each of the alternatives were implemented.

Planners evaluate the potential extent and severity of these impacts on the existing environment as described in the baseline resource studies. Impacts can be positive or negative. Potentially significant negative impacts can lead to developing ways to minimize or mitigate impacts or to rejecting alternatives that would result in significant adverse effects.



## What is the NEPA process for an EIS?

First a **notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS** is published in the Federal Register by the agency proposing the project. The NOI provides an overview of the proposed project and describes the scope of the EIS.

# NEPA

Just after the NOI is published, a 45-day “**scoping period**” commences so that the public and other agencies may review the project and provide input to help determine what the EIS will address. During this time, a scoping meeting is held for the public where information on the project is made available.

Often, the agency proposing the project will also hold a meeting or meetings with other public agencies that may have an interest in the project. Interested members of the public are encouraged to comment, ask questions, and help prioritize issues to be analyzed in the EIS.

The next step is to prepare a **draft EIS (DEIS)**, taking into consideration comments received during scoping. When completed, a **notice of availability (NOA) of the DEIS** is published in the Federal Register and in local newspapers. DEIS copies are placed in public locations for the public to review and are distributed to interested members of the public, government agencies, and other organizations for review and comment.

During this **45-day review period**, one or more public hearings are held. Comments are sought on the range of alternatives considered, impacts associated with each alternative, accuracy and completeness of the data in the document, and conclusions that were reached.

The **final EIS (FEIS)** is prepared next. The FEIS incorporates and responds to all public comment on the DEIS. Responses can take the form of corrections of data inaccuracies, clarifications of and modifications to analytical approaches, inclusion of additional data or analyses, or modification of the alternatives.

The FEIS is available for public review for 30 days. After considering comments received, but no sooner than 30 days after the FEIS is published, a **record of decision (ROD)** is prepared. The ROD establishes the proposed action, describes the public involvement and agency decision-making process, and presents the commitments to mitigation measures. The proposed action can then be implemented.

### What does the public have to do with this process?

EISs are issue-oriented, and input from the public – including citizens, elected officials, special interest groups, and local, state, and federal agencies – is very important. Public involvement will:

- Actively seek opinions and perceptions from all concerned citizens, organizations, and agencies so

they can be considered during the EIS analyses.

- Keep the public informed about the project and the EIS.
- Promote understanding on the part of the public about the way environmental problems are studied and solved.

Formal public involvement takes place at three points during the EIS process:

- During the scoping process
- During the DEIS review period
- During the FEIS review period prior to issuance of the ROD



### How does this apply to Fort Belvoir?

Fort Belvoir proposes to implement new short-range projects and update its Real Property Master Plan (RPMP) to develop a blueprint for planning that will optimize management of the installation's real property – land, facilities, resources, infrastructure, and population changes – through 2030. This update is needed because Fort Belvoir's existing master plan was prepared in 1993 prior to implementing the recent Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) actions and prior to post-9/11 changes at the installation; it no longer accurately reflects current conditions at Fort Belvoir. Further, Army Regulation 210-20 requires periodic master plan updates.

The proposed changes to the master plan would allow development at Belvoir that could have significant impacts to traffic, air quality, and natural, cultural, and other resources. As part of the EIS process, mitigation measures will be identified for any adverse impacts.

The Army at Fort Belvoir has developed an extensive public involvement program. This public scoping meeting is part of the EIS process and is being held so that you, the public, can participate by offering your comments. Please visit the display stations here to learn about the master plan and the EIS.

To comment at this meeting, fill out a comment form at the comment table, dictate your comment at the computer station there, or provide your comment to the court reporter.

To comment after the meeting, write to Directorate of Public Works, Environmental and Natural Resource Division, Attn: RPMP EIS, 9430 Jackson Loop, Suite 200, Fort Belvoir, Virginia, 22060-5116. You may also send an email to: [imcom.fortbelvoir.dpw.environmental@us.army.mil](mailto:imcom.fortbelvoir.dpw.environmental@us.army.mil).