



Improve forest management by reforming the National Environmental Policy Act

The American Loggers Council (ALC) supports meaningful reforms to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

This well-intended federal environmental law was originally intended to give the American public a voice in public land management decision making. But after more than four decades of implementation, NEPA has provided professional "No Management" groups with a powerful tool to bring responsible, science-based, active management to a halt. The results have been devastating: less healthy forests, more taxpayer dollars spent on endless paperwork, expensive lawsuits, and rural communities that cannot provide good paying jobs or essential services like law enforcement.

The time required for the Forest Service to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) has risen from 817 days to a whopping 1,300 days. The number of days required to complete an environmental assessment (EA) increased from 594 days to 730 days. According to U.S. Government Accountability Office, the Forest Service between 2008 and 2012 produced more than twice as many EISs as the Army Corps of Engineers or the Federal Highway Administration, and nearly two and a half times as many as the Bureau of Land Management.

There's strong agreement on the need to reduce paperwork. Longstanding guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality, for instance, recommends that EIS's only be used for significant environmental impacts, and that they should be completed in one year or less, and should be generally less than 300 pages. Forest Service NEPA processes frequently take up to four years and documents run into the thousands of pages.

It's time to make the NEPA process more responsive to the needs of our forests and communities. Action is needed because it's taking the Forest Service longer to complete NEPA paperwork. With 100 million acres of Forest Service land at some risk of catastrophic wildfire, we need the agency to manage our public lands. Reforming NEPA would enable the Forest Service to implement better forest projects more quickly. This will not only improve the health of our federal forests, it will support America's small, family-owned logging companies who will do a majority of the work.

ALC urges the federal government to reform NEPA through Congressional action and administrative rulemaking. We support the NEPA reforms contained in the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017 (HR 2936) that expands "categorical exclusions" under NEPA to expedite projects at immediate risk of catastrophic wildfire, insects and disease, as well as to protect watershed, enhance wildlife habitat and ensure speedy salvage and reforestation after a wildfire. The U.S. House has already approved HR 2936, and the U.S. Senate should approve it without delay.

Other reform options include streamlining projects on lands that have already been identified as being suitable for timber production; expanding categorical exclusions for projects on forests that are in immediate need of treatment; recognizing the risks of inaction; declaring an emergency on all Federal lands designated as condition fire class 2 or 3; among others.