

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Overview

When a project is proposed on national forest lands, USFS personnel write a “scoping document” that includes a Purpose and Need Statement, explains the proposed work, and allows a period for public comment. This step is denoted as “Proposed Agency Action” in the first red box of the graphic in this document. Based on the comments received, a determination is made on which level of analysis should be done. There are three levels of analysis:

- *Categorical Exclusion*. A CE, or “Cat Ex” is the most streamlined regulatory method for getting work done. Cat Ex criteria can be automatically applied to situations that are pre-defined, such as salvage logging on 250 acres or less, hazard tree removal near private property or public roads or trails, hazard fuel reduction within 1.5 miles of urban areas up to 1,000 acres in size, and for wildlife enhancement.
- *Environmental Assessment (EA)* An EA discloses one or more action alternatives as well as a “no action” alternative. The proposed action(s), benefits, and possible negative impacts are described. The process is more time consuming than for a CE, but less time consuming than for an EIS.
- *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* An EIS is often used when there are substantial controversial issues that need to be addressed. A multidisciplinary team is assembled to write a draft that describes the potential benefits and negative impacts of several alternatives for action, including no action. The draft is released to the public for a 45 day comment period. The draft is finalized with one alternative chosen. The process of writing an EIS and getting it approved can take several months to years.

The Trestle Forest Health Project began as an Environmental Assessment but, because of agency concerns, became an Environmental Impact Statement level project. The EIS was finalized in July 2017 and the Record of Decision was released in September 2017. Work is now underway with treatment in a few units already complete.

