

## **Preparing an Environmental Assessment**

The purpose of an environmental assessment (EA) is to determine whether the potential impacts of a federally proposed action could have significant environmental impacts. If the EA concludes that the impacts of the proposal could be significant, then the agency is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to prepare an environmental impact statement. If, however, the agency concludes on the basis of the EA that the impacts would not be significant, then the agency may issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and proceed with the action.

The EA must include a discussion of:

- The need for the proposal;
- The proposed action and alternatives, including the no action alternative;
- The affected environment;
- The environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives;
- Unavoidable adverse impacts, and
- A listing of agencies and persons consulted during the preparation of the EA.

The resources to be evaluated should include:

- Physical Environment
  - Landforms, Soils, and Geology
  - Water Resources
  - Air Resources
  - Visual Resources and Noise
- Human and Biological Environment
  - Human Health
  - Ecology
- Socioeconomic Environment
  - Population
  - Employment
  - Infrastructure (housing, schools)
- Built Environment
  - Land Use
  - Waste Management
- Environmental Justice

The environmental analysis must fully address all resource areas of potential concern. Environmental resources determined not to be of concern should be identified and dismissed from further analysis, with an explanation as to why they are considered to be unaffected by the proposed action.

Preparation of an EA and FONSI also includes related activities such as the development and maintenance of a mailing list, creation of a database to track all comments received on versions of the EA (internal agency comments and public comments), and creation and maintenance of the administrative record for the EA.