The Importance of a Team Approach When Preparing a NEPA Document

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is designed to ensure federal government agencies and all organizations under the jurisdiction of these government agencies are compliant with guidelines that safeguard the environment in a programmatic way. Document must be prepared to demonstrate the federal undertaking is going to be compliant with this policy. NEPA is an interdisciplinary approach to environmental compliance and documents should be prepared by individuals with various scientific and technical backgrounds. NEPA documents must be prepared with a team effort. This ensures the scope isn’t too narrow or it is subject to inconsistencies and contradictions in the data presented and interpretations (P. 1, Reviewing NEPA Documents). Reviewers, technical specialists, writers/editors must play role in developing an Environmental Assessment/Environmental Impact Statement that encompasses all technical disciplines involved in the project. Section 1502.6 states that environmental impact statements shall be prepared using an interdisciplinary approach. This ensures the integrated use of the natural and social sciences and the environmental design arts (Section 102(2)(A) of NEPA). In order to ensure this interdiscliplinary approach is occurring according the the regulations, it is necessary to look at the purpose and need of the document to see what disciplines are needed for the project. The impacted disciplines must play an active role in the alternative section, concisely describing the environment of the areas affected or created by alternatives under consideration (P. 14, Reviewing NEPA Documents). The Environmental Consequences section should be another area of review to ensure all impacted disciplines are included and there aren’t any contradictions between the possible impacts within the various disciplines. The key to this integrated approach is communication. Subject matter experts can not write their sections of the report in isolation of other disciplines. Reviewers need to ensure all technical disciplines that apply to the project are represented, the information presented by the experts in the Alternatives and Environmental Consequences sections are consistent and do not contradict in data and interpretations, and the list of preparers actually have the credentials to evaluate an impacted area,.(P15. Reviewing NEPA Documents)