



NEWS RELEASE

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**Forest Service seeks comment on work to increase efficiency of
National Environmental Policy Act compliance**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Jan. 3, 2018) – USDA Forest Service seeks public comment on its work to improve an often costly, lengthy process to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when making land management decisions.

“Our efforts to improve our processes are rooted in our desire to be more responsible for the land we manage and more responsive to the people we serve,” said USDA Forest Service Chief Tony Tooke. “We will continue to deliver science-based, high-quality analysis as we work to make better decisions in a timelier manner. We are focused on our core mission to achieve quality land management for multiple uses of national forests and grasslands.”

The public has until Thursday, Feb. 1, 2018 to comment on the advance notice of proposed rulemaking published in the Federal Register. Instructions about how to comment are included in the online notice.

The Forest Service seeks public comment on how it, under the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, can:

- Increase efficiency in moving through the NEPA process.
- Improve application of the NEPA process on landscape-scale restoration projects.
- Determine which types of activities could undergo an abbreviated NEPA review because they pose minimal effects on natural resources, such as certain restoration projects, special use authorizations, and activities to maintain and manage sites, facilities, and associated infrastructure.
- Improve coordination with other agencies on multi-agency projects.

Our review of how we comply with NEPA is part of a larger effort by the Forest Service to evaluate our environmental analysis and decision-making process. The Forest Service’s capacity to complete environmental analysis needed to make decisions is at its lowest level in decades, largely due to the increased costs of dealing with longer, more intensive wildfire seasons. In addition, more than 80 million acres of land the Forest Service manages is in urgent need of treatment to mitigate risk for fire, insect and disease infestation.

Thus, a substantial backlog of forest, watershed, and range restoration projects exists. Additionally, the majority of environmental decisions the Forest Service makes authorize special use permits, of which more than 6,000 are awaiting completion. This affects more than 7,000 businesses and 120,000 jobs.

The Forest Service must improve its efficiency in these areas in order to fully meet the expectations of the American public to increase the health and productivity of our national forests and grasslands. National forests and grasslands are working lands that provide a multitude of benefits to the American public, from forest products like wood and food, to opportunities for world-class recreational experiences that also provide health benefits. Forest Service programs and work contribute to 360,000 jobs and more than \$30 billion in gross domestic product.

For more information about the USDA Forest Service visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/>.

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