

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLANNING

Guidance on Development of Planning Records

The following is general guidance on the development of a Planning Record. Information provided from USFS Handbook, Environmental Policy, dated 12/96; modified by USFWS Planning Team 4/97).

1. **Planning Record.**

- a. **Guiding Principles.** The following principles guide Planning Records for Categorical Excluded Actions (CX's), Environmental Assessments (EA's), and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS's) and their organization for planning projects.
 - (1) Organize and index Planning Records in a manner that allows easy access and retrieval. Place documents under headings where it makes sense for them to be located. When possible, index all Planning Records using electronic query systems to facilitate search and retrieval.
 - (2) Clearly indicate the date and author or person responsible for the content of each document in the record and, when appropriate, to whom the document was made available. Anonymous documents serve little purpose and create confusion.
 - (3) Include in the Planning Records all data and information used in the analysis to arrive at the final decision.
 - (4) Mark each page of all draft documents as "draft."
 - (5) Documents should be legible and standard size (8.5 x 11 when possible).
- b. **Contents of a Planning Record.** The Planning Record typically includes the following: (See also attachment A, "Step by Step Guidance for Planning Record Documentation - Reference to Common Examples.")
 - (1) A copy of all notices appearing in the Federal Register.
 - (2) All formal recommendations and directions from Line Officers, Staff Directors, the Planning Team Leader, or other entities, and all formal requests for such recommendations or directions.
 - (3) All records of consultation with the public, interest groups, and other agencies.

- (4) A record of all announcements for public participation activities including a copy of the announcement, the date of the announcement, the medium or source used to make the announcement (newspaper, magazine, television, or radio), the area of circulation, and a copy of the announcement as published in each source.
- (5) A record of each major public participation activity including the date and location of the activity, names of participants or contributors, purpose of the activity, and a summary of accomplishments of the activity (public comments, questions, suggestions, and decisions or agreements). Include any NEPA-related hearing transcripts and tapes. Note: You may also include notices made to the public regarding the fact that if they participate in the public planning process, their comments will be a part of the public record).
- (6) Any draft of a work product or other document if it is clear that the draft was used in the planning/decision making process (Example: an unsigned draft plan which was used for its technical content), or the draft was circulated externally for comment (Example: drafts provided to State agencies or interest groups for comment).
- (7) All transmittal memorandums or letters enclosing or documenting circulation of any of the above products.
- (8) All decision documents and any accompanying news releases, circulation or mailing lists, or other attachments, summaries, and so forth.
- (9) Published final and draft EIS, EA, Record of Decision (ROD), Decision Notice (DN), Environmental Action Statements (EAS), and any maps, charts, summaries, and so forth, made publicly available with these documents.
- (10) All documents referenced (including other NEPA documents or decisions) in a draft, supplemental or final EIS, ROD, EA, DN, or EAS. If the references are lengthy, include a copy of the cover and the specific chapter, section, or page referenced along with identifying information including the author, title, and date. Complete documents which are not readily available upon request should be included in their entirety.
- (11) All completed work products, which may or may not be marked as final, including Planning Team, specialist or resource reports, studies, inventories, or study plans prepared by the Agency or other entities. Include authors' names and dates.
- (12) Electronic data frozen at a date specified, such as the date of use in the decision or the date of the decision. Include electronically generated data in the Planning Record, either as hard copy or on electronic storage media, such as disks or tapes, suitable for producing a hard copy on demand.

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- (13) Forms indicating the location and physical description (dimensions, number of pages, color, edition, and so forth) of any document not physically included in the Planning Record due to size, bulk, or volume (such as large EIS's). These documents must be readily available upon request.
- (14) Both formal and informal selection criteria for determining membership on the Planning Team.
- (15) Each Planning Team member's specific qualifications, including expertise, years of experience and education, and the specific contribution the team member makes to the development of the guide or plan. Document when Planning Team members join and leave the team.
- (16) Minutes of Planning Team meetings, management team meetings, or other staff meetings, including the date, all participants or contributors, their titles and/or positions, and a summary of major happenings such as accomplishments, agreements, and decisions.
- (17) Records of each meeting or activity involving external coordination, including other Federal, State, county, and local governments; Native groups; and special interest groups. Include the type, date, location of the activity, all participants or contributors, purpose of the activity, summary of accomplishments, including information exchanged, comments, questions, suggestions received, and decisions or agreements.
- (18) A dated copy of all agreements with Tribes and State or other Federal agencies.
- (19) Final computer runs used in the analysis.

- c. **Documents Not Included in the Planning Record.** The documents listed below are part of the work process and may have some value as background or historical information.

These work documents should either be destroyed or be clearly disassociated from the formal Planning Record.

The Planning Record should not include:

- (1) Drafts of any document, except as specified above. Do not include working drafts or edited versions of documents or chapters.
- (2) Informal, preliminary internal deliberations, such as comments on internal drafts, informal notes of internal Planning Team meetings, and so forth.
- (3) Other notes for which there is no documentation of circulation or adoption as final recommendations, direction, inventory, or analysis.

- (4) Preliminary computer runs which were not used in the final decision making process.
 - (5) Personnel documents, other than Planning team selection records and fiscal documents.
- d. **Schema.** Establish a schematic outline (schema) of the organizational structure for filing the Planning Record, put it in writing, and then follow it, modifying as necessary through the planning process. Organize documents in chronological order (that is, like a book, from beginning to end) within each subdivision of the schema. Creating file folders for each part of the schema at the beginning of the planning process facilitates prompt filing and maintenance of the Planning Record.

Designate one person responsible for compiling, maintaining, and indexing the Planning Record.

The size of the Planning Record will determine the most efficient organization.

- (1) **Small Planning Records.** Environmental Action Statement project files, most EA's, and some EIS's result in Planning Records which contain fewer than 100 documents. Organize and file documents in small Planning Records chronologically and/or subdivide by document source according to a simple schema whose organization and content is obvious at a glance.

See Attachment B for an "Example of subdivisions for a typical small Planning Record".

- (2) **Large Planning Records.** Some EA's and most EIS's result in Planning Records which contain more than 100 documents. Large Planning Record schemas should be self-explanatory and clearly show the hierarchy of subdivisions.

For large Planning Records, a standardized schema facilitates processing of appeals and litigation, and promotes use of the Planning Record during project implementation.

The schema can be based on subject matter or activity, the NEPA process, or a combination of both, and time. Each type has advantages and disadvantages depending on the expertise and information needs of the user.

The most efficient and usable schema for implementation, appeal, and litigation is a schema based on subject matter or planning activity, subdivided further by resource or activity, and organized chronologically. (See attachment C, for an example of a "Planning Record Schema--Subject Format.")

A schema subdivided primarily according to the NEPA process distributes specific resource information throughout the record and is somewhat more difficult to use for persons not familiar with NEPA.

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The process schema uses the table of contents of the NEPA document to form the main headings and subtitles. This format does not lend itself to easy retrieval of specific documents by agency/author or tracking a specific issue during project implementation. Many documents will logically fit in several subtitles. The location of documents is not obvious to persons not involved with the original planning process.

e. **Assembling the Final Planning Record.**

- (1) **Index of Individual Documents.** Develop a Planning Record index which lists each document in the Planning Record. The index should be in order of the schema, listing each document under each subdivision.

For each document in the index, include the following information:

- (a) Schema part
- (b) Date
- (c) Number of pages
- (d) Document type
- (e) Author (last name first and title)
- (f) Recipient (last name first and title)
- (g) Document title (if applicable)
- (h) Brief description of the document
- (i) FOIA exempt status, if applicable

List attachments and enclosures to documents separately under the respective document, including page numbers in parentheses. Planning Record documents are **not** given a specific document number.

When possible, index all Planning Records using electronic query systems to facilitate search and retrieval.

Manually created indexes should be organized so they are easy to read and documents are easy to locate. It is important to organize the index chronologically and by the schema for easy retrieval.

At any point until the Planning Record is certified as the Administrative Record for litigation purposes, documents used in the planning process and dated prior to the decision date may be added to the Planning Record and the index amended accordingly.

Any addition of documents to the record after it is certified requires notice to the court.

(2) **Document Specifications.**

- (a) All documents shall be legible. Copies of photocopies, handwritten documents, pencil, and so forth are often not readable. Retype any document that cannot be clearly reproduced and indicate that it is a duplicate document. Include both the duplicate document and the original document in the Planning Record.
- (b) Documents in the Planning Record must be 8-1/2" by 11" or be capable of being folded to that size for placement in the record. Where possible, and if reductions are legible, reduce oversized material to 8-1/2" by 11" to facilitate copying of the whole record.
- (c) Signatures on documents must be original, a carbon, or photocopy. Documents with electronic indication of signature (/s/) are not admissible in court and should not be placed in the Planning Record unless the signed copy has been lost or destroyed.
- (d) All documents should have a minimum 1" left margin to allow for left-side binding.
- (e) Attach photographs and negatives to 8-1/2" by 11" paper. Identify each photograph indicating the subject, location, date, time, and photographer.
- (f) Reproduce large graphics, such as maps and charts that cannot be folded to an 8-1/2" by 11" format, as slides or photographs. Ensure that all details of the original graphic are legible in the reduced form. Label slides and photographs to clearly identify the subject, location, date, time, and photographer. Large maps, such as GIS maps, may be the originals if there are enough copies for each copy of the record.
- (g) Write a letter to the file, identifying by subject and location, any data stored and filed on electronic media that cannot be physically included in the Planning Record.
- (h) Do not place duplex (double-sided) documents in the Planning Record. Replace original duplex documents with single-sided copies (make sure they are legible). Exceptions to this rule are voluminous documents, such as Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEIS's), Final Environmental Impact Statements (FEIS's), and other books and references, when originals are readily available for inclusion in multiple records.
- (i) Each page of each document should be consecutively numbered in the lower right-hand corner, including the cover and blank pages. Each document is numbered beginning with the cover as number 1.

- (j) Within each subdivision, place documents in chronological order with the oldest document in front or on top. Planning Records read in the same order as a book, from beginning to end.

- (3) **Binding and labeling (optional).** Bind the closed Planning Record in 8-1/2" by 11" three-ring binders, Acco binders, file folders, and so forth. Remove all staples, paper clips, and bands from documents before binding. Binders should not prevent removal of documents for examination or copying. To minimize damage to documents during use, binders should not be more than 2 inches thick unless absolutely necessary. Using a large hole punch will facilitate removal of documents and reduce damage. Documents must be side-bound only.

Label each binder to prevent the loss of documents and to make it easier for the public to review the record. Label the binder cover with the project name and description of the contents of the binder.

Number each binder consecutively, indicating the volume number and total number of binders (Example: 1 of 67).

Place a complete copy of the index in the front of the Planning Record. Also, in the front of each binder, place a copy of the portion of the index which covers the respective documents included in the binder.

f. **Filing and Retention.**

- (1) **Responsibility.** The Planning Team Leader is responsible for compilation and maintenance of the Planning Record from initiation of the NEPA process until the decision document is signed.

Following the decision, the Planning Record is the responsibility of the records management system of the unit preparing the document and the respective Line Officer. Typically the Planning Record will be retained at the Refuge HQ, under the responsibility of the Project Leader.

- (2) **Storage.** Maintain Planning Records until the project is implemented, including restoration, development and monitoring, and until any litigation is completed. Evaluate Planning Records for long-term disposition according to the Records Management requirements.

- (3) **Labeling.** Label and store the Planning Record in a secure location to prevent damage and loss. Store and maintain the Planning Record on the administrative unit where the activity is taking place. Where a decision relates to several administrative units, store and maintain the Planning Record at one location.

- (4) **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).** Planning Records are subject to public availability according to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974, as amended, and implementing regulations.

ATTACHMENT A:

**Step by Step Guidance for Planning Record Documentation - Reference to
Common Examples**

A. **Preplanning**

Examples: Workplan, Public Involvement Plan, Notice of Intent

B. **Identify Issues**

Examples: Planning Updates, Scoping Report, Issues

C. **Gather Information and Analyze Resource Relationships**

Examples: Resource Information Checklist, Sources and Documentation

D. **Develop Range of Alternatives, Assess Environmental Effects and Identify Proposed Action**

Examples: Criteria to Develop and Screen Alternatives, Draft/Final Environmental Assessments

E. **Publish and Release Draft Plan and NEPA Document for Public Review and Comment**

Examples: Draft/Final CCP and NEPA documents, Planning Records, Public notices

F. **Make Decision**

Examples: Decision Document Package, Final CCP, NEPA, Optional Compliance Statements

G. **Adopt Plan/Record Decision**

Examples: Notice of Availability, Notice of Decision

H. **Implementation/Monitoring/Evaluation**

Examples: Monitoring Program

ATTACHMENT B:

Example of Subdivisions for a Typical Small Planning Record

1. Planning Team Organization and Activity (Work Plan, etc.)
2. Public Participation/Response to Scoping
3. Correspondence
4. References
5. Public Comments on Draft NEPA (if provided)
6. Final NEPA and Notices
7. Decision Documents

ATTACHMENT C:

Example of Planning Record Schema - Subject Format

1. General Information
 - a. Initial Direction
 - b. Notice of Intent
 - c. Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities
 - d. Planning Criteria
 - e. Planning Team Membership
 - f. Project Schedules
 - g. Study Plan

2. Public Information and Involvement
 - a. Public Involvement Plans
 - b. Public Info. Documents, Letters, Notices
 - c. News Reports and Clippings
 - d. Mailing Lists
 - e. General Correspondence
 - f. Meetings/Workshops
 - g. Telephone/Personal Contacts
 - h. Public Comments - Scoping
 - i. Public Comments - DEA or DEIS

3. External Communications
 - a. Other Federal Agencies and Tribes
 - b. State and Local Agencies
 - c. Elected Officials
 - e. Organizations
 - f. Individuals
 - g. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

4. Internal Communications
 - a. Project Management Correspondence
 - b. Planning Team - Correspondence
 - c. Planning Team - Meeting Agendas and Notes
 - d. FOIA Exempt Documents

5. Affected Environment
 - a. General
 - b. Soils and Geology
 - c. Vegetation
 - d. Hydrology
 - e. Air Quality
 - f. Water Quality
 - g. Wildlife
 - h. Marine
 - i. Fisheries
 - j. Land Use
 - k. Visual
 - l. Recreation
 - m. Cultural Resources
 - n. Economic and Social

6. Analysis of the Management Situation
 - a. Potential to Resolve Issues
 - b. Project Standards and Guidelines
 - c. Project Specific Goals, Objectives and Strategies (Also may include Actions)
 - d. Key areas of management focus (i.e. Habitat, Migratory Birds, Endangered Species, Public Use, etc.)

7. Alternatives
 - a. Formulation Process
 - b. Considered but Eliminated
 - c. Considered in Detail
 - d. Comparisons (e.g. Matrix)

8. Environmental Consequences
Analysis and assessment of alternatives by major issues and/or key environmental factors (see affected environmental, above)

9. Integrated Computer Systems
e.g., Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

10. Drafts and Final NEPA (CX, EA, EIS)

11. Decision Document and Notices (FONSI, ROD)

12. References