

(d) *Public participation*—(1) *General*. Public participation activities begin early in the EE and are to be appropriate to the proposed action. For example, extensive public participation activities are required in the implementation of new programs and project actions, but limited public participation is appropriate for nonproject technical and financial assistance programs on nonfederal land.

(2) *Early public involvement*. The public is to be invited and encouraged to participate in the early stages of planning, including the consideration of the potential effects of NRCS-assisted actions on significant environmental resources such as wetlands, flood plains, cultural values, endangered species, important farmland.

(3) *Project activities*. The following are general considerations for providing opportunities for public participation:

(i) *Identification of interested public*. The interested public consisting of but not limited to individuals, groups, organizations, and government agencies are to be identified, sought out, and encouraged to participate in and contribute to interdisciplinary planning and environmental evaluation.

(ii) *Public notices*. (40 CFR 1506.6) If the effects of an action are primarily of local concern, notice of each public meeting or hearing should be: Submitted to State and areawide clearing-houses pursuant to OMB Circular A-95 (revised); submitted to Indian tribes if they are interested; published in local newspapers; distributed through other local media; provided to potentially interested community organizations including small business associations; published in newsletters that may be expected to reach potentially interested persons; mailed directly to owners and occupants of nearby or affected property; and posted onsite and offsite in the area where the action is to be located.

(iii) *State statutes*. If official action by the local units of government cooperating in the proposal is governed by State statute, the public notice and mailing requirement of the statute is to be followed. If the effects of an action are of national concern, notice is to be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER and mailed to national organiza-

tions reasonably expected to be interested.

(iv) *Public meetings*. The RFO, after consultation with the sponsors, is to determine when public meetings or hearings are to be held. Public meetings may be in the form of a workshop, tour, open house, etc. Public involvement will include early discussion of flood-plain management and protection of wetlands, where appropriate. Environmental information is to be presented and discussed along with other appropriate information. To the extent practical, pertinent information should be made available before the meetings.

(v) *Documentation*. The RFO is to maintain a reviewable record of public participation in the environmental evaluation process.

(4) *Nonproject activities*. Public participation in the planning and application of conservation practices with individual land users is accomplished primarily through conservation districts. These districts are governed by boards of supervisors directors, commissioners, etc., who are elected and/or appointed to insure that soil, water, related resources, and environmental qualities in the district are maintained and improved. The public is to be encouraged to participate in the development of long-range district programs and district annual plans. The district keeps the public informed through public meetings, district newsletters, news stories, radio and television programs, and annual reports.

§ 650.10 Adoption of an EIS prepared by a cooperating agency.

(a) If NRCS adopts an EIS prepared by another Federal or State agency, the RFO is to review the document to insure that it meets the requirements of the CEQ regulations and NRCS-NEPA procedures.

(b) If the actions included in the EIS are substantially the same as those proposed by NRCS, the RFO is to recirculate the EIS as "final." The final EIS is to include an appropriate explanation of the action. If these actions are not substantially the same, the EIS is to be supplemented and recirculated as a draft EIS. The RFO is to inform the preparing agency of the proposed action.

(c) If the adopted EIS is not final, if it is the subject of a referral under 40 CFR part 1504, or if the statement's adequacy is in litigation, the RFO is to include an appropriate explanation in the EIS.

(d) The RFO is to take appropriate action to inform the public and appropriate agencies of the proposed action.

§ 650.11 Environmental documents.

(a) NRCS is to use the following documents in compliance with NEPA (see § 650.4):

- (1) Environmental assessments (EA)
- (2) Environmental impact statements (EIS)
- (3) Notice of intent (NOI)
- (4) Finding of no significant impact (FNSI)
- (5) Record of decision (ROD)

(b) The format and content of each document is to be appropriate to the action being considered and consistent with the CEQ regulations.

(1) To reduce duplication, NRCS may combine environmental documents with other planning documents of the same proposal, as appropriate. For example, NRCS, in consultation with CEQ and the office of the Secretary of Agriculture, has determined that each EIS is to satisfy the requirements for a regulatory impact analysis as required by Executive Order 12044. This may necessitate modifying the recommended CEQ format. If documents are combined, the RFO is to include the information and sections required by the CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1502.10). The environmental impact statement should indicate those considerations, including factors not related to environmental quality, that are likely to be relevant to a decision.

(2) The RFO is to establish the format and content of each document giving full consideration to the guidance and requirements of the CEQ regulations. The NRCS technical service center director is to provide guidance and concurrence on the format and content if the NRCS state conservationist is the RFO. The results of scoping are to determine the content of the EA or the EIS and the amount of detail needed to analyze the impacts.

(3) In addition to the minimum requirements of the CEQ regulations (40

CFR 1502.10), environmental assessments and environmental impact statements are to include—

(i) A brief description of public participation activities of agencies, groups, and individuals during the environmental evaluation;

(ii) A description of the hazard potential of each alternative, including an explanation of the rationale for dam classification and the risk of dam failure from overtopping for other causes;

(iii) Information identifying any approved regional plans for water resource management in the study area (40 CFR 1506.2(d)) and a statement on whether the proposed project is consistent with such plans;

(iv) All Federal permits, licenses, and other entitlements that must be obtained (40 CFR 1502.25(b)); and

(v) A brief description of major environmental problems, conflicts, and disagreements among groups and agencies and how they were resolved. Unresolved conflicts and the NRCS's proposal for resolving the disagreements before the project is implemented are to be summarized.

(4) *Letters of comment and responses.* (40 CFR 1503.4, 1502.9(b)) Letters of comment that were received and the responses to these comments are to be appended to the final EIS. Opposing views and other substantive comments that were not adequately discussed in the draft EIS are to be incorporated in the final EIS.

(5) *Appendix.* The RFO may use an appendix to an EA or EIS. If an appendix is too voluminous to be circulated with the EIS, the RFO is to make it available on request. If an appendix is included it is to—

(i) Meet the requirements of 40 CFR 1502.18;

(ii) Identify any methodologies used (40 CFR 1502.24) and make explicit reference to other sources relied on for conclusions; and

(iii) Briefly describe the relationship between the benefit-cost analysis and any analyses of unquantified environmental impacts, values, and amenities. “For purposes of complying with the Act, the weighing of the merits or drawbacks of the various alternatives need not be displayed in a monetary cost benefit