



## Public Involvement and the NEPA Process

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was enacted by Congress in 1969 to ensure that Federal agencies consider the potential environmental impacts of their proposed actions and alternatives before deciding on a course of action. NASA completed a Final EIS (FEIS) under NEPA in support of the Mars 2020 mission in 2014 and issued a Record of Decision (ROD) in January 2015.

NEPA requires the preparation of a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) when:

- An agency makes substantial changes in the proposed action that are relevant to environmental concerns; or
- There are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.

Since publication of the 2014 FEIS and issuance of the ROD in 2015, NASA and the Department of Energy (DOE) have completed a more detailed risk analysis. Based on the new and updated information associated with postulated launch vehicle accident scenarios resulting in potential release of nuclear materials, NASA determined that it is appropriate to prepare this SEIS.

If an Agency identifies the need for a SEIS, NEPA requires the Agency to prepare, circulate, and file a supplement to a statement in the same fashion (exclusive of scoping) as a draft and final statement. The major steps in the NEPA process for preparing a SEIS are as follows:

- Issue a Notice of Intent (NOI) to begin the SEIS process.
- Issue a Notice of Availability (NOA) that announces the comment period on the draft SEIS.
- Respond to public comments on the draft EIS.
- Prepare the final SEIS.
- Issue a Record of Decision (ROD)



**NASA facts**

# Public Involvement

For a SEIS, a Federal agency first issues a NOI in the Federal Register to inform the public that a SEIS will be prepared. Under 40 Code of Federal Regulations §1502.9 (Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Implementing Regulations) the traditional scoping process is not required.

Once a draft SEIS is issued, a minimum of 45 days is provided for the public, Federal agencies, state and local governments, and American Indian tribes to provide comments. The public comment period begins with the publication of an NOA for the draft SEIS in the Federal Register.

Following the public comment period, a final SEIS is prepared, published and distributed. Consideration of public comments on a draft SEIS during preparation of a final SEIS is required under NEPA. Therefore, the final SEIS that supports agency decision-making reflects consideration of all comments received during the public comment period. The final SEIS includes responses to comments received during the public comment process and, where appropriate, provides revised SEIS text based on those comments.

Once the final SEIS is published, a minimum 30-day waiting period is required before a ROD can be issued. The ROD notifies the public of the decision made on the proposed action and the reasons for that decision. The ROD also includes a discussion of any other factors considered in making the decision, such as cost, technical feasibility, agency statutory mission, or national objectives.

The purpose of the NEPA process is to ensure that accurate environmental analyses are performed; that the public is involved; and that public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences.

## How Can You Participate in the Mars 2020 SEIS NEPA Process?

The draft SEIS public comment process gives you the opportunity to attend public meetings and provide comments on the contents and conclusions of the draft SEIS.

Keys to making effective comments:

- Be specific. State particular reasons for your comment instead of making broad statements.
- Focus your comments on particular issues or resources and provide details.
- Describe how your issue of concern relates to the draft SEIS.
- Make a separate comment for each issue.
- Let us know what environmental and community factors you consider important for analysis in the final SEIS.

Comments on the draft SEIS must be received by December 10, 2019 in order to be considered in preparation of the final SEIS. Comments can be submitted in the following ways:

- Verbally or in writing at the public meetings
- Via e-mail to [mars2020-nepa@lists.nasa.gov](mailto:mars2020-nepa@lists.nasa.gov)
- By U.S. mail to Mr. George Tahu, Planetary Science Division, Science Mission Directorate, Mail Suite 3E46, NASA Headquarters, Washington, DC 20546-0001

For additional information on the proposed Mars 2020 mission SEIS, visit <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/nepa-mars-2020-mission>.