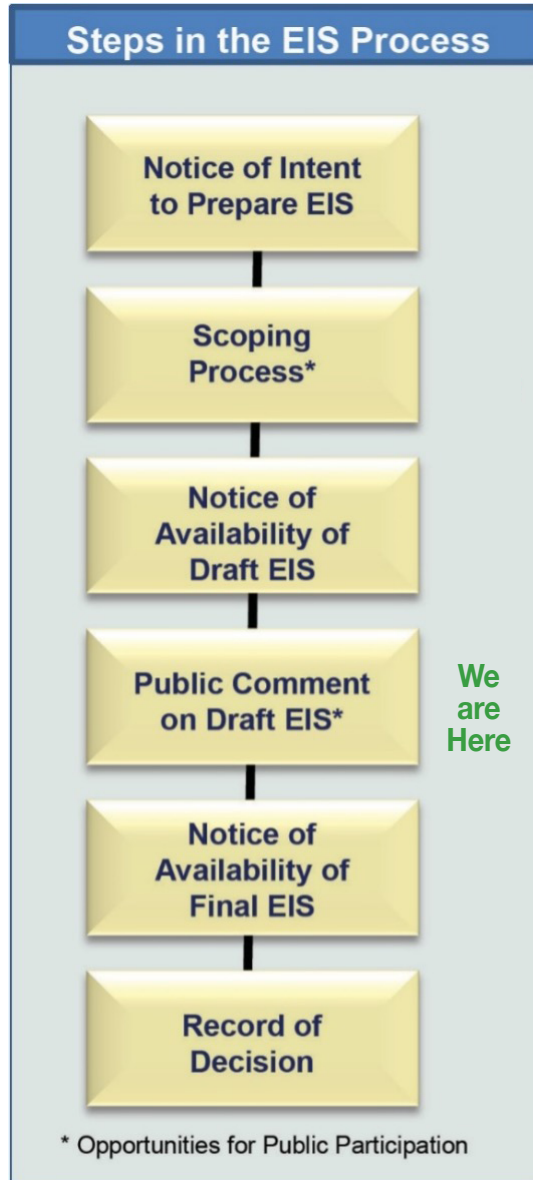


PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND THE NEPA PROCESS

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), enacted by Congress in 1969, ensures that Federal agencies consider the potential environmental impacts of their proposed actions and alternatives before deciding on a course of action. NEPA requires the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) for major Federal actions that could significantly affect the quality of the environment. Under NEPA, the term “environment” encompasses the natural and physical environment (e.g., air, water, geography, and geology) as well as the relationship of people with that environment (e.g., health and safety, jobs, housing, schools, transportation, cultural resources, noise, and aesthetics).

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) established NEPA requirements for all Federal agencies, including procedures for preparing an EIS. Individual agencies have established their own implementing regulations to meet or exceed these requirements. The major steps in the NEPA process for preparing an EIS are as follows:

- Issue a Notice of Intent to begin the EIS process.
- Conduct the scoping process (gather input) on the scope of issues to be addressed and identify significant issues related to a proposed action.
- Issue a Notice of Availability that announces the comment period on the draft EIS.
- Respond to public comments on the draft EIS.
- Prepare the final EIS.
- Issue a Record of Decision.



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Public Involvement

A Federal agency first issues a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to inform the public that an EIS will be prepared and to formally announce the beginning of the scoping process. For the Mars Sample Return Campaign Programmatic EIS, the Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on April 15, 2022. During the 30-day scoping period, input was sought from the public, Federal agencies, state and local governments, and Native American tribes about the scope of the EIS issues, alternatives, and analyses. Comments received during the scoping process were considered in the development of the EIS.

Once a draft EIS is issued, a minimum of 45 days is provided for the public, Federal agencies, state and local governments, and Native American tribes to provide comments. The public comment period begins with the publication of a Notice of Availability (November 4, 2022) for the draft EIS in the Federal Register.

Following the public comment period, a final EIS is published and distributed. Consideration of public comments on a draft EIS during preparation of a final EIS is required under NEPA.

Therefore, the final EIS that supports agency decision making reflects consideration of all comments received during the public comment period. The final EIS includes responses to comments received during the public comment process and provides revised EIS text based on those comments. The final EIS also identifies the agency's preferred alternative.

Once the final EIS is published, a minimum 30-day waiting period is required before a Record of Decision can be issued. The Record of Decision notifies the public of the decision made on the proposed action and the reasons for that decision. The Record of Decision 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 NEPA process does not dictate that an agency select the most environmentally beneficial or least expensive alternative. The purpose of the NEPA process is to ensure that accurate environmental analyses are performed, the public is involved, and public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences.

Ways You Can Participate in the Proposed Mars Sample Return Campaign Programmatic EIS

You are invited to provide comments on the draft EIS. Comments can be submitted in the following ways:

- At the virtual public meetings on November 30, 2022, verbally (510-210-8882; meeting number/access code: 901-525-785) or by Webex chat box <https://jpl.webex.com/meet/msr>
- During the in-person public meetings on December 6, 2022, at the Wendover Community Center, Wendover, Utah, and on December 7, 2022, at the Clark Planetarium, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- Internet: Federal E-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments. Please note that NASA will post all comments on the Internet without changes, including any personal information provided.
- By U.S. Mail to Steve Slaten, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 4800 Oak Grove Drive, M/S: 180-801, Pasadena, California 91109-8099.

For Internet and U.S. Mail submissions, please add the following docket number at the beginning of your comment: NASA-2022-0002.

The comment period is open from November 4, 2022, to December 19, 2022. To ensure your comments are considered for use in the final Programmatic EIS, please submit them by December 19, 2022.

For additional information on the MSR Campaign Programmatic EIS, visit www.nasa.gov/feature/nepa-mars-sample-return-campaign.

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