

On March 16, 2010, FHWA - Sharon Love, Elizabeth Healy, Ingrid Allen; and, WSDOT - Cheryl McNamara and Chris Regan discussed common issues with NEPA Documentation. The following is a categorized list of common problems from that discussion.

Once finalized, this list will be incorporated into guidance documents and shared with WSDOT project teams in an effort to raise awareness and avoid these mistakes with future documentation efforts.

### **Structure**

- Missing Index
- Keep description of disciplines together – don't separate Construction and Operational Impacts into different chapters – want to keep discussion relevant to a particular discipline together.
- Don't just focus on impacts that have specific regulatory requirements. For instance fish and wildlife discussion should not be focused entirely on listed species.
- Keep graphics and sidebars close to the text that refers to them, or give a specific reference (page number, section).

### **Content**

- General
  - Public involvement sections that fail to describe the comments received from the public.
  - Ensure that there is enough information pulled out of the discipline report to show what your decision is based on.
  - Don't just focus on impacts that have specific regulatory requirements. For instance fish and wildlife discussion should not be focused entirely on listed species.
  - Boiler plate language would be good (Section 4(f), Section 106, ESA, etc).
- Comments
  - Ensure that all the comments are addressed – particularly when canned responses are used.
  - Ensure that the tone is appropriate.
  - Ensure responses are specific to comments received.
- ROW
  - Failure to identify if replacement housing is available. If it is not available need to discuss potential need for housing of last resort.
  - Need to understand where Right of Way acquisition is – show on graphics – with property lines. It is nice to have graphics (aerials or plan views that show building locations).
- Wetlands
  - Identify potential mitigation sites – need specific sites identified. Don't have to have selected a specific site.
  - Ensure that potential mitigation that is identified is eligible for funding and appropriate to the level of impacts. Don't over-promise.
- Section 4(f)
  - Identify each 4(f) resource and clearly state whether there is a use of that resource.
  - Don't talk about constructive use when there is an actual use of the resource

- Include graphics which show the boundaries of the 4(f) resource and the amount of use (show the proposed ROW line). Often a graphic is more helpful than a table.
- “Feasible and Prudent” discussion is only needed for Avoidance Alternatives.
- Social Section – Environmental Justice
  - In addressing EJ populations don’t forget the rest of the community.
  - Address Employment – not just residences.
  - Always supplement Census data with other EJ data sources.
  - Don’t forget to include tribes, as appropriate, in your discussion. A project’s impact to Usual and Accustomed areas and Treaty Rights is an EJ issue.
  - When determining impact on EJ populations consider the project area population not the regional, county, or city population. Narrow discussion/analysis to proportions of that project area population that is impacted (EJ and non-EJ) to describe the threshold of impact on EJ populations.

### Details

- Inconsistencies in the document - quantities, schedules, text, tables, different parts of documents. Often the same data appears in multiple parts of the document, so ensuring that all references are updated when something changes is critical.
- Cite sources for numbers, qualitative statements.
- Sometimes numbers don’t tell the whole story – number of acres of impact, number of houses displaced, etc. Don’t forget to convey the subjective qualities – is the wetland a ditch with reed canary grass or a 500 year old bog?
- Try to use graphics, tables, etc to illustrate what is driving your decision. Use the tool that best communicates the basis for the decision.
- Make sure your Project Description and Location Description are informative to someone that doesn’t know your project.

### Labeling

- Keep project title consistent for life of project.
  - Need to know it is the same project in the STIP, Financial Management Information System, ROW Cert, NEPA, PS&E
- Make sure project title is reflective of the project – for instance SR 520 – I-5 to Medina became I-5 to Medina.

### Graphics

- Common Problems
  - Poor labeling
  - Not labeling streets mentioned in text
  - Graphic is too small
  - Colors not contrasting enough
  - Graphics don’t translate well to black and white printing.
- Visual quality – need good photos – ground-level not aerials – and a map showing where the photo was taken and which way they were looking.
- Show the Section 106 APE on a graphic.