

CHAPTER 3: CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A CE describes a category or type of actions that do not cumulatively or individually have the potential for significant environmental impacts (1508.4). If an action fits within a CE it is not exempt from NEPA; however, it is exempted from the requirement to prepare an EA or EIS. You are encouraged to use CEs when applicable, in order to reduce paperwork and delays associated with approvals of certain federal actions (1500.4; 1500.5).

If an action fits within a CE it is not exempt from NEPA; however it is exempted from the requirement to prepare an EA or EIS (1508.4)

The NPS categorizes CEs into two types based on documentation requirements associated with the CE: (1) CEs for which no documentation is required; and (2) CEs for which documentation is required.

CEs applicable to NPS actions come from two sources:

1. The DOI NEPA regulations (46.210), which include CEs available for use by all DOI bureaus and offices.
2. The NPS chapter of the DM (516 DM 12), which includes additional CEs available specifically to the NPS.

These CEs are listed below. You may rely on the CE lists included in this handbook and cite the CEs listed below by referring to chapter 3.2 or 3.3 and the CE letter/number, for example, “CE 3.2Y” or “CE 3.3 A.4.,” rather than citing to the DOI NEPA regulations or the DM.

Information regarding when a CE may be used, approval authority for CEs, and public involvement considerations is included in this section. Other sections in this chapter describe the various NPS actions that may be categorically excluded and discuss associated documentation requirements and procedures, consideration of extraordinary circumstances, and use of CEs for ongoing and recurring actions. The sections discussing these topics are:

- 3.2 Categorical Exclusions for which No Documentation is Required
- 3.3 Categorical Exclusions for which Documentation is Required
- 3.4 Process for Categorical Exclusions Requiring Documentation
- 3.5 Extraordinary Circumstances
- 3.6 Use of Categorical Exclusions for Ongoing and Recurring Actions

Determining Whether a Categorical Exclusion May be Used

In order to use a CE, you must ensure a proposed action fits within the category of actions described in a specific CE. A proposed action is “the bureau activity under consideration” (46.30). The proposed action does not have to be specifically mentioned in the text of a CE, but should easily fit into the category of actions described by the CE. Many of the CEs listed below include guidance that is intended to help you understand how they should best be applied. Where the guidance provides examples of actions that would be appropriate under a specific CE, the examples are meant to be illustrative and not exclusive. If the proposed action does

not fit within the category of actions described in a CE you must either modify the proposal so that it does, or prepare an EA or EIS (46.205). If multiple CEs are required to cover different elements of the proposed action that is a sign that a CE is likely not appropriate.

Once you determine that a proposed action fits within a CE, you must consider whether any of the extraordinary circumstances listed in the DOI NEPA regulations apply. [See Section 3.5: *Extraordinary Circumstances*.] If extraordinary circumstances do apply, you may not use a CE. In such circumstances you must either modify the proposal so that extraordinary circumstances no longer apply, or prepare an EA or EIS (46.205).

As long as the proposed action fits within a CE and no extraordinary circumstances apply, you should use the CE as your pathway for complying with NEPA.

Approval of Categorical Exclusions

Authority for categorically excluding an action rests with the park unit's superintendent (DO-12, 5.4).

Prior to the approval of a CE, all other necessary consultation and coordination (such as ESA Section 7, NHPA Section 106, and tribal consultations) should be completed and related documentation should be included in the decision file. If the action under consideration triggers the need to comply with Section 106 of the NHPA, you must complete the Section 106 consultation before the CE is approved. You may implement an action that is categorically excluded immediately upon approval of the CE by the superintendent as long as all other necessary consultation and coordination requirements have been completed. [See Section 4.14: *Integrating NEPA and other Environmental Requirements*.]

Public Involvement

Public comment is not required when using a CE. However, you may wish to seek public comment in situations where there is a high degree of public interest or uncertainty regarding potential effects of a proposed action. Public input can help identify environmental issues [See Section 4.2 D: *Identifying Environmental Issues and Impact Topics*] and provide information that will help determine whether any extraordinary circumstances exist. If you decide to seek public comment regarding the use of a CE, you generally should provide only a short period for the public to submit written comments.

Regardless of whether or not you seek public comment, when using a CE that requires documentation, you should consider notifying the public once the CE is approved by the superintendent. This can be accomplished by posting a brief notice on PEPC or your park unit or program's website, or by other means.

3.2 CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS FOR WHICH NO DOCUMENTATION IS REQUIRED

A variety of CEs exist to cover actions that typically have little or no potential for environmental impacts of any kind, let alone potential for significant adverse

impacts. For such actions, documentation regarding use of a CE is generally not required. These types of actions typically have such little potential to cause environmental impacts that in many instances, NPS personnel may not even realize they are taking an action to which NEPA applies.

While the CEs in this section may be applied without any associated documentation, there may be some instances where documentation is desired for administrative purposes. In such cases, you may prepare documentation following the procedures described in Section 3.4 or document use of the CE in some other way such as a memorandum to the project file. Voluntary documentation of CEs that do not require documentation should be considered on a case-by-case basis. If documentation is prepared for a CE that does not require documentation, it should not be considered to set a precedent for the need to document the use of that same CE in the future.

Although no documentation is required for the purposes of NEPA, if the proposed action triggers the need to comply with other laws, such as the ESA or NHPA, you should develop a decision file for the CE and include the results of any studies or consultations related to other laws.

Available CEs:

- A. Personnel actions and investigations and personnel services contracts.
- B. Internal organizational changes and facility and bureau reductions and closings.
- C. Routine financial transactions including such things as salaries and expenses, procurement contracts (e.g., in accordance with applicable procedures and executive orders for sustainable or green procurement), guarantees, financial assistance, income transfers, audits, fees, bonds, and royalties.
- D. Departmental legal activities including, but not limited to such things as arrests, investigations, patents, claims, and legal opinions. This does not include bringing judicial or administrative civil or criminal enforcement actions which are outside the scope of NEPA in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.18(a).
- E. Routine and continuing government business, including such things as supervision, administration, operations, maintenance, renovations, and replacement activities having limited context and intensity (e.g., limited size and magnitude or short-term effects).

Guidance: Examples of routine and continuing maintenance and operations include trash removal, sweeping parking lots, cleaning restrooms, fixing machinery, snow removal, and small-scale building repairs and renovations.

- F. Management, formulation, allocation, transfer, and reprogramming of the department's budget at all levels. (This does not exclude the preparation of environmental documents for proposals included in the budget when otherwise required).

- G. Legislative proposals of an administrative or technical nature (including such things as changes in authorizations for appropriations and minor boundary changes and land title transactions) or having primarily economic, social, individual, or institutional effects, and comments and reports on referrals of legislative proposals.
- H. Policies, directives, regulations, and guidelines that are of an administrative, financial, legal, technical, or procedural nature, or whose environmental effects are too broad, speculative, or conjectural to lend themselves to meaningful analysis and will later be subject to the NEPA process, either collectively or case-by-case.

Guidance: Consider documenting this CE if you are promulgating a regulation.

- I. Activities that are educational, informational, advisory, or consultative to other agencies, public and private entities, visitors, individuals, or the general public.
- J. Land and boundary surveys.
- K. Preparation and issuance of publications.
- L. Technical assistance to other federal, state, and local agencies or the general public.
- M. Routine reports required by law or regulation.
- N. Issuance of individual hunting and/or fishing licenses in accordance with state and federal regulations.
- O. Changes in interpretive and environmental education programs.
- P. Plans, including priorities, justifications and strategies, for non-manipulative research, monitoring, inventorying, and information gathering.

Guidance: This CE also applies to agreements between NPS offices and other federal and state agencies for plans and studies.

- Q. Authorization, funding, or approval for the preparation of statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plans.

Guidance: This CE applies to equivalent plans such as comprehensive statewide historic preservation plans.

- R. Adoption or approval of surveys, studies, reports, plans, and similar documents which will result in recommendations or proposed actions which would cause no or only minimal environmental impact.
- S. Sanitary facilities operation.

Guidance: This may also include upgrades to equipment to incorporate new technologies.

- T. Development of standards for, and identification, nomination, certification, and determination of eligibility of properties for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmark and National Natural Landmark Programs.

Guidance: This CE also applies to biosphere reserves.

- U. Statements for management, outlines of planning requirements, and task directives for plans and studies.

Guidance: Statements for management and outlines of planning requirements are now known as foundation statements and assessments of planning needs, respectively.

- V. Preparation of internal reports, plans, studies, and other documents containing recommendations for action which NPS develops preliminary to the process of preparing a specific Service proposal or set of alternatives for decision.
- W. Documents which interpret existing mineral management regulations and policies and do not recommend action.
- X. Stabilization by planting native plant species in disturbed areas.
- Y. Day-to-day resource management and research activities.

3.3 CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS FOR WHICH DOCUMENTATION IS REQUIRED

A variety of CEs exist for actions that generally result in some level of environmental impact but that do not have the potential to cause significant adverse impacts under normal circumstances. For such actions, documentation is required indicating that the action fits within a CE and that no extraordinary circumstances exist. Documenting the use of a CE provides the NPS an opportunity to demonstrate why a decision to use a CE is appropriate.

Available CEs:

A. Actions Related to General Administration.

1. Changes or amendments to an approved action when such changes would cause no or only minimal environmental impact.
2. Minor boundary changes.

Guidance: This CE applies to boundary changes that are accomplished through existing statutory authorities, such as including an area within a park boundary and maintaining the area as open space, or including a historic structure within the boundaries of a park unit and retaining that structure.

3. Reissuance/renewal of permits, rights-of-way, or easements not involving new environmental impacts.
4. Conversion of existing permits to rights-of-way when such conversions do not continue or initiate unsatisfactory environmental conditions.
5. Issuances, extensions, renewals, reissuances, or minor modifications of concession contracts or permits not entailing new construction.
6. Commercial use licenses involving no construction.

Guidance: Commercial use licenses are now known as commercial use authorizations.

7. Leasing of historic properties in accordance with 36 CFR Part 18 and NPS-38.

Guidance: NPS-38 is now Director's Order 38: Real Property Leasing.

8. Modifications or revisions to existing regulations or the promulgation of new regulations for NPS-administered areas, provided the modifications, revisions, or new regulations do not:
 - a. increase public use to the extent of compromising the nature and character of the area or causing physical damage to it,
 - b. introduce noncompatible uses that might compromise the nature and characteristics of the area or cause physical damage to it,
 - c. conflict with adjacent ownerships or land uses, or
 - d. cause a nuisance to adjacent owners or occupants.

Guidance: "Area" should be interpreted to mean NPS unit.

9. At the direction of the NPS Responsible Official, actions where NPS has concurrence or co-approval with another bureau and the action is a categorical exclusion for that bureau.

B. Plans, Studies, and Reports.

1. Changes or amendments to an approved plan, when such changes would cause no or only minimal environmental impact.
2. Cultural resources maintenance guides, collection management plans, and historic furnishings reports.

Guidance: This CE also applies to equivalent documents related to cultural resources.

3. Interpretive plans (interpretive prospectuses, audio-visual plans, museum exhibit plans, wayside exhibit plans).

Guidance: This CE also applies to equivalent documents related to interpretation.

4. Land protection plans which propose no significant change to existing land or visitor use.

C. Actions Related to Development.

1. Land acquisition within established park boundaries.
2. Land exchanges which will not lead to significant changes in the use of land.

Guidance: Land exchanges under this CE include transfers of jurisdiction in the District of Columbia.

3. Routine maintenance and repairs to non-historic structures, facilities, utilities, grounds, and trails.
4. Routine maintenance and repairs to cultural resource sites, structures, utilities, and grounds under an approved Historic Structures Preservation

Guide or Cyclic Maintenance Guide; or if the action would not adversely affect the cultural resource.

5. Installation of signs, displays, kiosks, etc.

Guidance: Other examples include wayside exhibits, small solar collectors on poles, boundary marking signs, and small solar or wind generator system installations on a building.

6. Installation of navigation aids.

7. Establishment of mass transit systems not involving construction, experimental testing of mass transit systems, and changes in operation of existing systems (e.g., routes and schedule changes).

8. Replacement in kind of minor structures and facilities with little or no change in location, capacity, or appearance.

Guidance: Examples of minor structures and facilities include comfort stations, pit toilets, fences, kiosks, signs, sheds, foot logs, small trail bridges, and campfire circles.

9. Repair, resurfacing, striping, installation of traffic control devices, repair/replacement of guardrails, etc., on existing roads.

Guidance: This CE also applies to road maintenance, rehabilitation, repaving, and reconstruction on existing roads within the existing road prism. Actions taken under this CE may also include repair or replacement of culverts, signs, surfacing of right-turn lanes at intersections in previously disturbed areas, seal coating a parking lot, maintenance of an existing gravel road in the same footprint, routine roadside brushing, routine ditching, adding gravel, grading, and other modifications.

10. Installation of wells, comfort stations, and pit toilets in areas of existing use and in developed areas.

Guidance: Other examples include pump houses and vault toilets.

11. Minor trail relocation, development of compatible trail networks on logging roads or other established routes, and trail maintenance and repair.

12. Upgrading or adding new overhead utility facilities to existing poles or replacement poles which do not change existing pole line configurations.

13. Issuance of rights-of-way for overhead utility lines to an individual building or well from an existing line where installation will not result in significant visual intrusion and will involve no clearance of vegetation other than for placement of poles.

Guidance: This CE also applies to the installation of overhead poles and utility lines that meet the other requirements of the CE (not just the issuance of a right-of-way permit for another entity).

14. Issuance of rights-of-way for minor overhead utility lines not involving placement of poles or towers and not involving vegetation management or significant visual intrusion in an NPS-administered area.

15. Installation of underground utilities in previously disturbed areas having stable soils or in an existing utility right-of-way.
16. Landscaping and landscape maintenance in previously disturbed or developed areas.
17. Construction of fencing enclosures or boundary fencing posing no effect on wildlife migrations.

Guidance: Other examples include installation or construction of exclosures or other internal fencing that may be used to control adverse effects of wildlife. This CE may also be used for security fencing around park buildings or facilities.

18. Construction of minor structures, including small improved parking lots, in previously disturbed or developed areas.

Guidance: Some examples of minor structures include adding a small support building such as a pump house or small equipment cache in an existing maintenance yard, bus stop (transportation) or picnic shelters, comfort stations, or similar small-scale structures; walkways, ramps, signs, or other small features incidental to the use of a developed area or to improve accessibility; small-scale development of new parking spaces adjacent to existing parking areas; addition or relocation of a small number of camping spaces in an existing campground or picnic sites in an existing picnic area and small, compatible additions to existing buildings (such as making an "L" into a "T").

19. Construction or rehabilitation in previously disturbed or developed areas, required to meet health or safety regulations, or to meet requirements for making facilities accessible for the handicapped.

D. Actions Related to Visitor Use.

1. Carrying capacity analysis.
2. Minor changes in amounts or types of visitor use for the purpose of ensuring visitor safety or resource protection in accordance with existing regulations.
3. Minor changes in programs and regulations pertaining to visitor activities.
4. Issuance of permits for demonstrations, gatherings, ceremonies, concerts, arts and crafts shows, etc., entailing only short-term or readily mitigable environmental disturbance.
5. Designation of trailside camping zones with no or minimal improvements.

E. Actions Related to Resource Management and Protection.

1. Archeological surveys and permits involving only surface collection or small-scale test excavations.
2. Restoration of noncontroversial native species into suitable habitats within their historic range and elimination of exotic species.
3. Removal of park resident individuals of non-threatened/endangered species which pose a danger to visitors, threaten park resources, or become a

nuisance in areas surrounding a park when such removal is included in an approved resource management plan.

Guidance: Resource management plan should be interpreted broadly.

4. Removal of non-historic materials and structures in order to restore natural conditions.
5. Nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities.

Guidance: Some examples include vegetation plots and monitoring, soil surveys, species monitoring, and other nondestructive research activities that require a research permit. This CE should be used for activities that are not covered under the CE for day-to-day resource management. [See CE 3.2 Y.]

6. Designation of environmental study areas and research natural areas.

F. Actions Related to Grant Programs.

1. Proposed actions essentially the same as those listed in paragraphs A–E above.

Guidance: This CE applies to approval of a grant by the NPS that would result in actions taken by others that are the same or similar to those listed in paragraphs A–E above.

2. Grants for acquisition of areas that will continue in the same or lower density use with no additional disturbance to the natural setting.
3. Grants for replacement or renovation of facilities at their same location without altering the kind and amount of recreational, historical, or cultural resources of the area, or the integrity of the existing setting.
4. Grants for construction of facilities on lands acquired under a previous NPS or other federal grant provided that the development is in accord with plans submitted with the acquisition grant.
5. Grants for the construction of new facilities within an existing park or recreation area, provided that the facilities will not:
 - a. conflict with adjacent ownerships or land use, or cause a nuisance to adjacent owners or occupants, e.g., extend use beyond daylight hours;
 - b. introduce motorized recreation vehicles;
 - c. introduce active recreation pursuits into a passive recreation area;
 - d. increase public use or introduce noncompatible uses to the extent of compromising the nature and character of the property or causing physical damage to it; or
 - e. add or alter access to the park from the surrounding area.
6. Grants for the restoration, rehabilitation, stabilization, preservation, and reconstruction (or the authorization thereof) of properties listed on or

eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at their same location and provided that such actions:

- a. will not alter the integrity of the property or its setting;
- b. will not increase public use of the area to the extent of compromising the nature and character of the property; and
- c. will not cause a nuisance to adjacent property owners or occupants.

G. Actions Related to Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Post-fire Rehabilitation.³

1. Post-fire rehabilitation activities not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration, heritage site restoration, repair of roads and trails, and repair of damage to minor facilities such as campgrounds) to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management-approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire. Such activities must comply with the following (Refer to the ESM Series for additional, required guidance.):
 - a. shall be conducted consistent with bureau and departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans;
 - b. shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and
 - c. shall be completed within three years following a wildland fire.

3.4 PROCESS FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS REQUIRING DOCUMENTATION

This section details the process for applying and documenting CEs described in Section 3.3. The steps described below should be accomplished through an internal scoping process that uses an interdisciplinary approach.

1. Define the Proposed Action, Identify Issues, and Evaluate Associated Impacts

The first steps in the process should be to define the proposed action, identify potential issues, and evaluate associated impacts. Be certain to consider whether there are any connected or similar actions that should be considered as part of the proposal. [See Section 4.2 D: *Identifying Environmental Issues and Impact*, and Section 4.2 C: *Identifying Connected and Similar Actions*.]

You should complete this step with input from subject matter experts. You may wish to use an environmental screening form (ESF), which can be generated in PEPC, to assist with identifying issues and impacts, although you are not required to do so.

The steps described below should be accomplished through an internal scoping process that uses an interdisciplinary approach.

³ The DOI NEPA regulations include an additional CE for hazardous fuels reduction activities (43 CFR 46.210 (k)) that is not listed here. That hazardous fuels reduction CE is not available for use in areas within the jurisdiction of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit Court at this time, as discussed in the preamble to the final rule (73 FR 61305 October 15, 2008). As a matter of policy, NPS does not currently use this CE.

When evaluating impacts, be sure to consider cumulative impacts in addition to direct and indirect impacts. If your evaluation of impacts indicates there is a potential for significant adverse impacts as a result of implementing the proposed action, a CE may not be used unless the proposal is modified to reduce impacts to a level below significance.

2. *Determine Whether There is a CE That Could Apply to the Proposed Action*

After defining the proposed action and determining that there is no potential for significant adverse impacts, you should review the CE list to determine whether there is a CE that applies. As stated in Section 3.1, the proposed action does not have to be specifically described, but should easily fit into the category of actions described by the CE. If you are unsure whether a CE applies, you should consult with your REC.

3. *Determine Whether Any Extraordinary Circumstances Exist*

Prior to categorically excluding an action, you must consider the extraordinary circumstances listed in the DOI NEPA regulations and determine whether any apply. [See Section 3.5: *Extraordinary Circumstances*.] If any of the extraordinary circumstances apply, you may not use a CE. In such circumstances you must either modify the proposal so that extraordinary circumstances no longer apply, or prepare an EA or EIS (46.205).

4. *Document the Potential Impacts of the Action Covered by the CE*

When using a CE that requires documentation, you must create a concise record that identifies the CE being used and which should document: (1) that the proposed action fits within the category of actions described in the CE; and (2) no extraordinary circumstances exist. [See *CEQ guidance: Final Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Establishing, Applying, and Revising Categorical Exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act*.] The standard NPS practice is to use a Categorical Exclusion Documentation Form, which can be generated in PEPC, in order to document the required information.

In addition to the information above, if you decide to use an ESF, you should include it in the decision file. Furthermore, if the proposed action triggers the need to comply with other laws, such as the ESA or NHPA, you should include the results of any studies or consultations related to other laws in the decision file. You may also include additional documentation pertinent to the action, such as notes from internal scoping meetings, photographs or field notes documenting a site visit, and documents generated from public involvement efforts (press releases, newsletters, public comments received, etc.). [See Section 4.9: *The Decision File*; see also *supplemental guidance: Compiling a Decision File for NEPA Reviews*.] The documentation you prepare should be as concise as possible in order to avoid unnecessary delays and administrative burdens. However, the level of detail, length of discussions, and amount of materials you include in the decision file will vary based on the type of action involved, the potential for extraordinary circumstances to apply, and the compliance requirements of other laws.

The superintendent must provide written approval of a CE that requires documentation (typically by signing the Categorical Exclusion Documentation

Form), and other required consultation processes (such as ESA Section 7, NHPA Section 106, and tribal consultations) must be complete prior to implementing an action covered by a documentable CE. [See Section 4.14: Integrating NEPA with Other Environmental Review and Consultation Requirements.]

3.5 EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

As described in Section 3.1 above, CEs apply under normal circumstances. When applying CEs, you must consider the impacts of the action in question to ensure that no extraordinary circumstances exist. If extraordinary circumstances do exist a CE may not be used and an EA or EIS must be prepared (46.205(c)). If you determine that extraordinary circumstances exist that preclude the use of a CE, you can modify the proposed action or apply mitigation so that extraordinary circumstances would no longer apply, and then use the CE. Significant impacts as referred to in the list of extraordinary circumstances below should be interpreted to mean significant adverse impacts.

The DOI NEPA regulations establish the following extraordinary circumstances and mandate that prior to categorically excluding an action, the NPS must consider whether the action would (46.215):

- a. have significant impacts on public health or safety;
- b. have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (EO 11990); floodplains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas;
- c. have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources (Sec. 102(2)(E));
- d. have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks;
- e. establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects;
- f. have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects;
- g. have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau;
- h. have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species;
- i. violate a federal law, or a state, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment;

- j. have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (EO 12898);
- k. limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007); or
- l. contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or nonnative invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and EO 13112).

3.6 USE OF CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS FOR ONGOING AND RECURRING ACTIONS

Many NPS actions, especially routine activities related to park administration and maintenance, are of an ongoing or recurring nature. Some examples of these types of actions include routine maintenance and repair of non-historic structures (CE 3.3 C.4) and trail maintenance and repair (CE 3.3 C.11). Such activities, although routine, are at the same time subject to NEPA. In the case of these examples and similar actions, a CE with documentation would typically be required. However, you may avoid preparing separate CE documentation for each instance that one of these types of activities is conducted by making use of “programmatically CEs.” Programmatic CEs provide NEPA documentation for multiple instances of an ongoing or recurring activity, when the activity or activities and the impacts that result, are predictable. For example, if your park unit routinely makes repairs to non-historic structures, you could develop a programmatic CE that serves as the NEPA review for routine maintenance and repairs rather than preparing CE documentation each time a repair is made.

When a CE is used in this manner, you should clearly describe the specific activities that are meant to be covered and describe any conditions that must be met for the CE to apply to a particular activity. Although a programmatic CE can be established to cover activities for some time, you should periodically review and updated the CE as necessary to ensure the documentation is still accurate and that no circumstances have changed that would warrant additional NEPA review. While in some cases an annual review may be appropriate, CEs used for ongoing and recurring actions should be reviewed every five years at a minimum, consistent with CEQ guidance regarding supplementation of EISs for ongoing programs (Q32).

You must also consider cumulative impacts and other required consultation processes when preparing and reviewing programmatic CEs. You are encouraged to consult with your REC if you have any questions about developing and using programmatic CEs.