Office of the Secretary, Interior

§ 46.415 Environmental impact statement content, alternatives, circulation and filing requirements.

The Responsible Official may use any environmental impact statement format and design as long as the statement is in accordance with 40 CFR 1502.10.

(a) Contents. The environmental impact statement shall disclose:

(1) A statement of the purpose and need for the action;
(2) A description of the proposed action;
(3) The environmental impact of the proposed action;
(4) A brief description of the affected environment;
(5) Any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented;
(6) Alternatives to the proposed action;
(7) The relationship between local short-term uses of the human environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity;
(8) Any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented; and
(9) The process used to coordinate with other Federal agencies, State, tribal and local governments, and persons or organizations who may be interested or affected, and the results thereof.

(b) Alternatives. The environmental impact statement shall document the examination of the range of alternatives (paragraph 46.420(c)). The range of alternatives includes those reasonable alternatives (paragraph 46.420(b)) that meet the purpose and need of the proposed action, and address one or more significant issues (40 CFR 1501.7(a)(2–3)) related to the proposed action. Since an alternative may be developed to address more than one significant issue, no specific number of alternatives is required or prescribed. In addition to the requirements in 40 CFR 1502.14, the Responsible Official has an option to use the following procedures to develop and analyze alternatives.

(1) The analysis of the effects of the no-action alternative may be documented by contrasting the current condition and expected future condition should the proposed action not be undertaken with the impacts of the proposed action and any reasonable alternatives.
(2) The Responsible Official may collaborate with those persons or organization that may be interested or affected to modify a proposed action and alternative(s) under consideration prior to issuing a draft environmental impact statement. In such cases the Responsible Official may consider these modifications as alternatives considered. Before engaging in any collaborative processes, the Responsible Official must consider the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) implications of such processes.
§ 46.420 Terms used in an environmental impact statement.

The following terms are commonly used to describe concepts or activities in an environmental impact statement:

(a) Statement of purpose and need. In accordance with 40 CFR 1502.13, the statement of purpose and need briefly indicates the underlying purpose and need to which the bureau is responding.

(1) In some instances it may be appropriate for the bureau to describe its “purpose” and its “need” as distinct aspects. The “need” for the action may be described as the underlying problem or opportunity to which the agency is responding with the action. The “purpose” may refer to the goal or objective that the bureau is trying to achieve, and should be stated to the extent possible, in terms of desired outcomes.

(2) When a bureau is asked to approve an application or permit, the bureau should consider the needs and goals of the parties involved in the application or permit as well as the public interest. The needs and goals of the parties involved in the application or permit may be described as background information. However, this description must not be confused with the bureau’s purpose and need for action. It is the bureau’s purpose and need for action that will determine the range of alternatives and provide a basis for the selection of an alternative in a decision.

(b) Reasonable alternatives. In addition to the requirements of 40 CFR 1502.14, this term includes alternatives that are technically and economically practical or feasible and meet the purpose and need of the proposed action.

(c) Range of alternatives. This term includes all reasonable alternatives, or when there are potentially a very large number of alternatives then a reasonable number of examples covering the full spectrum of reasonable alternatives, each of which must be rigorously explored and objectively evaluated, as well as those other alternatives that are eliminated from detailed study with a brief discussion of the reasons for eliminating them. 40 CFR 1502.14. The Responsible Official must not consider alternatives beyond the range of alternatives discussed in the relevant environmental documents, but may select elements from several alternatives discussed. Moreover, the Responsible Official must, in fact, consider all the alternatives discussed in an environmental impact statement. 40 CFR 1505.1(e).

(d) Preferred alternative. This term refers to the alternative which the bureau believes would best accomplish the purpose and need of the proposed action while fulfilling its statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical, and other factors. It may or may not be the same as the bureau’s proposed action, the non-Federal entity’s proposal or the environmentally preferable alternative.

§ 46.425 Identification of the preferred alternative in an environmental impact statement.

(a) Unless another law prohibits the expression of a preference, the draft environmental impact statement should