

Abstract: The implementation of NEPA is largely delegated to agencies as long as they meet its objectives. Adaptation and the modification to better meet agency needs is possible. As science becomes increasingly complimentary to the decision making process, future debate is likely to focus on the 'where and when' science is included. Acadia National Park recognizes the important role science plays in the decision making process and has increasingly sought to involve science nearer a projects inception rather than during a formal or established review period.

Conclusion:

Saving time, funds, and a superior product may be the best incentives for involving scientific perspectives at a projects inception rather than waiting for an established review period within an established decision making process. With long term consequences at stake future managers would do well to solicit scientific perspectives during a projects inception guiding early parameters and the trajectory of a decision.

NEPA: The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) charges federal agencies and projects supported by federal funding with determining if and how their proposed actions will impact the natural or human environment. The purpose of the determination is to inform decision makers of environmental consequences so affects are factored into the decision. That a decision will be made is implied; inherent also is the notion a federal decision may negatively affect the environment. That the protection of the environment is not mandated but rather considered has caused NEPA to become statutory, a process, rather than regulatory legislation. While the implementation of this process has largely been delegated to departments and agencies, the determination of whether the goals and objectives of NEPA are satisfied delegated to the public, although in the last decade this delegation has increasingly come under the purview of the judiciary.

NEPA Process: With agencies responsible for developing their own internal process to meet the objectives of NEPA there exist parameters for adaptability and modification. Acadia National Park recognizes the important role science imparts on the decision making process and the requirement for managers to make decisions guided by science. Now that science is regarded as complimentary to the decision making process, future debates are likely to focus on the 'where and when' science is interwoven.

Methods: Acadia has increasingly sought to involve science nearer a projects inception rather than at its review stage. Recently, USGS fisheries scientists, Maine's IF&W, Acadia's biologist and hydrologist were invited to participate in the discussion with the engineering firm contracted to rehabilitate the bridges over Stanley Brook, a sensitive resource in Acadia National Park. That the discussion occurred was not inherently unique. However, the timing was. The researchers and staff were included within a few days of the engineer's first site visit and researchers had the opportunity to conduct a site visit and comment on the draft sketches rather than the 70% design. This early involvement saved engineering resources by providing timely, detailed, and well supported information which modified the project's scope during a stage when little investment in the design had occurred.

Update: NPS staff monitored water quality prior to, during, and after the bridge rehabilitation to measure the project's effect on Stanley Brook. Results indicate construction efforts did not negatively impact water quality.

