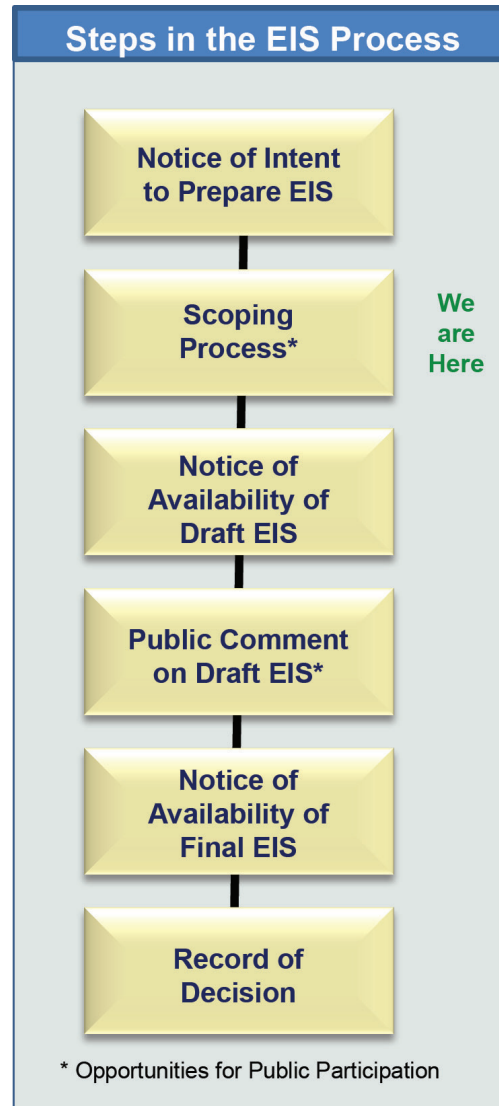


Public Involvement and the NEPA Process

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was enacted by Congress in 1969 to ensure 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 (i.e., air, water, geography, and geology) as well as the relationship of people with that environment (i.e., health and safety, jobs, housing, schools, transportation, cultural resources, noise, and aesthetics).

The Council on Environmental Quality 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 (NOA) 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 (ROD).

NASAfacts

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. A minimum of 30 days is required for the scoping period, during which time input is sought from the public, Federal agencies, state and local governments, and American Indian tribes about the scope of the EIS issues, alternatives, and analyses. Comments received during the scoping process are considered in developing the scope 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 American Indian tribes to provide comments. The public comment period begins with the publication of an NOA 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 decisionmaking

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 ROD can be issued. The ROD notifies the public of the decision made on the proposed action and the reasons for that decision. The ROD 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; that the public is involved; and that public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences.

How Can You Participate in the Proposed Mars 2020 Mission EIS?

The scoping process gives you the opportunity to attend scoping meetings and provide comments to help NASA determine the alternatives, issues, and environmental impacts to be analyzed in this proposed Mars 2020 mission Environmental Impact Statement. You will also have an opportunity to provide comments on the draft EIS after it is issued.

Comments can be submitted in the following ways:

- Verbally or in writing at the scoping meetings
- Via e-mail to mars2020-nepa@lists.nasa.gov
- By U.S. mail to Mr. George Tahu, Planetary Science Division, Science Mission Directorate, Mail Suite 3E46, NASA Headquarters, Washington, DC 20546-0001

For additional information on the proposed Mars 2020 mission Environmental Impact Statement, visit <http://www.nasa.gov/agency/nepa/mars2020eis>.

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