

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

NAEP as a Partner and a Resource

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This issue was published after the annual conference of the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) in 2014 in St. Petersburg, Florida, but this article was written before that meeting. I hope you were able to make it, because 2014 is proving to be an exciting year for environmental professionals. In addition to the conference, you should know that NAEP serves its educational mission in other ways that can benefit you.

For a number of years, NAEP has hosted sessions on climate change, visual impact assessment, and transportation at its annual meeting, in addition to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) update track. At these sessions, NAEP serves as a forum for hot topics and a resource for agencies that participate in these sessions. Perhaps NAEP's longest-running partnership is with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). As many NAEP members are NEPA professionals, the CEQ is a valued agency for us. The CEQ representation is a key part of our annual meeting and webinars, and, in turn, the CEQ views our annual meeting and webinars as valued components of their outreach and training efforts. The CEQ has recognized the value of NAEP's NEPA annual reports and posts them on CEQ websites. In 2014, we have sought to strengthen our partnership with the CEQ. We hosted the compendium of NEPA training on our website, developed a body of knowledge that is needed to be a competent NEPA professional, and developed and promoted best practice principles for environmental assessments. We will strive to strengthen this partnership.

The current massive restructuring of the energy industry provides a focus for determining where the opportunities for

innovation in environmental permitting and NEPA compliance exist. NAEP's energy and environmental policy committee tracks these developments. In the background as energy restructuring takes place is climate change. Partly as a result of NEPA requirements, virtually every energy project is evaluated in light of its effect on climate. With regard to renewables, NEPA's effective policy emphasis on renewables and efficiency at the federal and state levels has led to new projects. Two examples are wind energy in the Great Plains and solar energy in the Southwest. Bakken oil-field development, which, though mostly private activities, are also receiving some NEPA scrutiny because some transmission and pipeline facilities cross federal lands or involve federal financing. Because of the "federal trigger" nature of NEPA (which applies only to federal funding or authorization), not all projects receive the same level of scrutiny. However, those that need the use of federal lands and that need federal permits are resulting in new mitigation opportunities for resources. Environmental professionals, including NAEP members, are involved in seeking and finding these mitigation opportunities, which can involve land conservation, species enhancement, and public and tribal partnerships to address environmental issues.

In addition to the US Department of Energy (DOE), the federal land management agencies are heavily involved in energy strategy. Another valued partner of NAEP, the DOE frequently participates in our conferences and has published its exemplary NEPA. *Lessons Learned Quarterly Reports*. The agency emphasis on NEPA compliance is known to most NAEP members who have attended the conferences. NEPA compliance for renewable energy development on federal lands and permitting for transmission of energy across federal lands are examples of where other agencies are heavily involved in energy strategy. NAEP can also serve as a partner and resource to these agencies. At the prompting of Congress and

constituents, many agencies are developing their own tailored NEPA processes and host separate communities of practice for their specialty areas of environmental impact assessment. We hope to strengthen our ties to the DOE, Department of the Interior (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service), and Department of Agriculture (National Forest System and Rural Electric Cooperatives) also.

NAEP has had a transportation committee for many years that considers many hot topics in transportation environmental analysis. The efforts at improving the quality of environmental documents are especially notable. Current departmental guidance is that transportation documents are to adhere to three principles that also apply to other NEPA documents: tell the story, keep it brief, and be legally sufficient. Another practice being promoted is the use of the annotated outline in place of a scoping report. The Department of Transportation agencies are using the annotated outline to present page-number goals, determine where graphics are needed, and focus on impacts specific to the type of project and its location. Another topic to watch in the transportation community is programmatic approaches to environmental and historic preservation review.

There are other natural constituencies that fit in with NAEP because compliance with their statute coincides with compliance with NEPA. The obvious ones are Endangered Species Act professionals—part of the greater biodiversity and conservation biology community—and practitioners in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act—archaeologists and architectural historians. But there are many other such constituencies concerned with wetlands, noise, air quality, water quality, waste management, and so forth. As you interact with these professionals as your project undergoes the permitting and compliance stages, encourage them to join and get involved with NAEP.