



# Chapter 1: Introduction

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# 1. Introduction

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The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) invests considerable resources, time, and talent in compiling detailed information about environmental issues, conducting environmental analysis, and preparing documents to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) [NEPA, 42 United States Code (USC) § 4321 - 4347]. This NEPA Manual (Manual) is a resource for CDOT staff, local agency representatives, and consultants engaged in these efforts.

## What is NEPA?

- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
- Requires federal agencies to assess and document the environmental impact of and alternatives to federal actions affecting the environment
- Includes the social and natural environments when considering potential impacts
- Includes interagency coordination and public involvement as fundamental objectives
- Potential project impacts and mitigation measures must be documented

## 1.1 Purpose of this Manual

The purpose of this Manual is to provide guidance on preparing and processing documents that comply with NEPA and other applicable state and federal environmental laws affecting transportation projects in Colorado. This Manual provides references and links to related federal and state laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies. It also provides “best practice” examples for various compliance processes where appropriate. It is intended that CDOT staff, local agency representatives, and consultants use this Manual to implement NEPA effectively, producing more consistent, improved environmental documents that decision-makers may use to make well-informed transportation decisions.

Users are encouraged to closely follow the level of detail and documentation presented in this Manual to standardize and streamline NEPA compliance throughout CDOT. Special situations may dictate a prudent variation from this content and format (within legal limitations). In such cases, documentation and approval by the CDOT project manager, in consultation with the Region Transportation Director (RTD) and the Region Planning and Environmental Manager (RPEM) or their representative(s), is required. Consultation with CDOT’s Environmental Programs Branch (EPB) may also be required. Depending on the funding mechanisms for the project, consultation with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) may also be required.

## Who are the “Users” of this Manual?

- Professional staff at CDOT, consultants working on CDOT projects, and local agency staff are the primary audience for this manual.
- Users should have a general understanding and some experience working with NEPA.
- Users should have a basic understanding of the required sections in a NEPA document



CDOT Policy Directive 1904.0 establishes that all divisions, regions, offices, and branches of CDOT, as well as consulting firms performing contracting work, use this Manual to maintain compliance with NEPA standards. This Manual sets forth uniform criteria and procedures for determining the applicability of NEPA requirements to specific projects and establishes procedural requirements for assuring compliance. Users of the Manual should periodically check for updated versions on CDOT's website. Additional guidance to improve the readability and functionality of NEPA documents for transportation projects is also included in the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC), and FHWA, Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents (AASHTO, ACEC, and FHWA, 2006).

CDOT's website: <https://www.codot.gov/>

## 1.2 Use of this Manual

This Manual has been organized to encourage its use by a wide audience of users. To facilitate an understanding of the information presented in this Manual, call-out boxes have been included throughout. These call-out boxes have been divided into two groups. Green-shaded boxes contain tips, tools, quotes, and other items that have been highlighted for use by the reader. Gray-shaded boxes include resources, such as websites, regulatory citations, guidance documents, and other references that the user can research for additional information.

To maintain consistency among NEPA documents, CDOT has compiled a standardized list of acronyms and abbreviations, as well as terminology that should be used in CDOT NEPA documents. Deviations from the standardized list of acronyms are not recommended because standardizing usage helps assure reader-friendly documents for the public. Acronyms and abbreviations are included in **Appendix A**, and typical NEPA terminology is included in **Appendix B**.

## 1.3 Organization of this Manual

This Manual is organized into 10 chapters:

- ▶ **Chapter 1: Introduction** - Provides the Manual purpose and organization.
- ▶ **Chapter 2: National Environmental Policy Act and Implementing Regulations** - Introduces major regulations and guidelines applicable to transportation projects.
- ▶ **Chapter 3: CDOT's NEPA-Specific Planning and Project Development Elements** - Discusses the NEPA elements of the CDOT overall transportation planning and project development process.
- ▶ **Chapter 4: Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (Class I)** - Outlines the preparation and process of an EIS and discusses document components and standard document sections.
- ▶ **Chapter 5: Categorical Exclusion (CatEx) (Class II)** - Discusses CDOT's process and procedures for preparing a CatEx.
- ▶ **Chapter 6: Environmental Assessment (EA) (Class III)** - Outlines the preparation and process of an EA and discusses document components and standard document sections.
- ▶ **Chapter 7: Stakeholder Involvement Guidance and Public Involvement Plan** - Summarizes how CDOT involves the public in the NEPA process and manages public comments.



- ▶ **Chapter 8: Document Review Procedures** - Outlines the CDOT NEPA document review procedures.
- ▶ **Chapter 9: Resource Considerations** - Includes resource topics often analyzed in NEPA documents and offers detailed resource-specific information about applicable regulations and policies, collection of baseline data, methodologies for impact analysis, best practices, and necessary consultation and coordination.
- ▶ **Chapter 10: National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Processes and Compliance for Other Federal Agencies** - Summarizes the environmental process for CDOT projects involving other federal agency funds administered through CDOT's Division of Transit and Rail.

For easy reference, this Manual includes the following appendices, which contain more detailed information on topics found throughout this Manual:

- ▶ Appendix A - Typical NEPA Abbreviations and Acronyms
- ▶ Appendix B - Typical NEPA Terminology
- ▶ Appendix C - Style Guide for NEPA Documents
- ▶ Appendix D - Quality Assurance (QA)/Quality Control (QC) Guidance for NEPA Documents
- ▶ Appendix E - Agency Coordination Plan Template
- ▶ Appendix F - Standard Language

## 1.4 Updating this Manual

Updating and revising this Manual will be an ongoing process because of the ever-changing status of environmental issues and laws. As a result, many of the processes and procedures in this Manual are subject to change. When this Manual is updated, the date in the footer of the affected section(s) will be changed to reflect the revision date.

While CDOT strives to keep this Manual current, it is the user's responsibility to ensure that any action taken complies with environmental laws and regulations and is based on the most current information available. This Manual lists websites and agency contacts that can assist a user with this task. This Manual will be updated regularly and revisions posted on CDOT's website.

Comments and suggestions for improving this Manual are welcome. For questions about this Manual and comments for consideration in the next revision, users may contact CDOT's Environmental Policy and Biological Resources Section Manager at EPB.

## 1.5 References

Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC), and Federal Highway Administration. 2006. *Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents*. May. Retrieved November 2022 from [https://environment.transportation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/IQED-1\\_for\\_CEE.pdf](https://environment.transportation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/IQED-1_for_CEE.pdf).

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). 1969, as amended August 9, 1975. 42 USC § 4321 - 4347. Retrieved September 2016 from <http://energy.gov/nepa/downloads/national-environmental-policy-act-1969>.