

Overview of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NEPA is a Federal law that serves as the U.S.'s basic policy for environmental protection. NEPA requires that all Federal agencies consider the potential impacts of their proposed actions on the human environment.

There are three primary levels of environmental review under NEPA: Categorical Exclusion (CX), Environmental Assessment (EA), and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Categorical Exclusion (CX)

A CX refers to a category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and are thus excluded from further NEPA review. A full list of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) categorical exclusions is available here: www.energy.gov/nepa/doe-categorical-exclusion-cx-determinations.

Environmental Assessment (EA)

An EA is a concise analysis that helps agencies determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or if no further analysis is needed. If an EA concludes that a federal action will not have significant environmental impacts, an agency will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If an EA identifies significant environmental impacts, an agency must move forward with the preparation of an EIS.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

An EIS is a detailed analysis of the potential environmental impacts of a proposed federal action and the range of reasonable alternatives.

What is a Presidential permit?

Executive Order 10485 requires the issuance of a Presidential permit for the construction, connection, operation, or maintenance of electric transmission facilities at the U.S. border. More information on Presidential permits and the permit application process is available here: www.energy.gov/gdo/presidential-permit-procedures.

In order to grant a Presidential permit, DOE first must determine that issuing the permit is consistent with the public interest. To make that determination, DOE will consider, among other things, the environmental impacts of the project by conducting an EA or EIS. DOE will also determine the project's impact on the reliability of the U.S. electric grid. Once DOE has completed its analysis, it will publicly issue its decision to grant or deny a Presidential permit.

What's the purpose of today's meeting, and what happens next?

Basin Electric has applied for a Presidential permit to construct a transmission line from North Dakota to Saskatchewan, Canada called the Tande and Wheelock to Saskatchewan Transmission Project.

To understand the potential environmental impacts of Basin Electric's proposal, DOE will prepare either an EA or an EIS pursuant to NEPA.

One of the first steps in the NEPA process is public scoping, during which DOE requests public input on issues and alternatives, which will help DOE define the scope of its environmental review.

Today's meeting offers an opportunity to learn more about the Tande and Wheelock to Saskatchewan Transmission Project and to submit comments that will inform DOE's environmental review.