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## **RESULTS FROM NEPA PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT STUDY**

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### Note

This study is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of public involvement practices or attitudes within the Department of Interior. The study focuses on twelve Draft Environmental Impact Statements undertaken by four bureaus within the Department of the Interior. The study is intended to provide insight into some of the current thinking and practices in the field, and to generate ideas for both additional research as well as actions that OEPC and CADR can take in designing tools, policies, and programs to assist bureaus in carrying out their respective missions.

### Acknowledgements

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### 1.1. Summary of Key Findings

- Awareness of recent policy changes and guidances coming out of Washington D.C. is very low, but almost all respondents report that public involvement processes have changed for the better over the past several years.
- Rather than additional policies and regulations, respondents want more flexible guidelines and practical recommendations about how to structure good public involvement processes.
- Internet-based trainings are not a substitute for face to face meetings, horizontal knowledge exchange, and learning through simulations and hands-on practice.
- When looking for information about public involvement requirements and best practices, field staff and managers turn most frequently to sources within their own bureaus rather than DOI-wide sources.
- Bureaus are getting the public involved at earlier stages in the NEPA process, often during the scoping phase and sometimes even prior to the scoping phase. As the project moves into later stages, such as alternative generation and preferred alternative selection, innovations in public involvement drop off.
- Public hearings and one-way flows of communication are practices of the past. Today, public input is often gathered through topical meetings, open houses, one-to-one interactions, and interactive websites.
- Techniques like collaborative research and joint fact finding have not permeated into the language and practice of NEPA-mandated public involvement.
- Websites and other electronic resources are a blessing and a curse: while such resources make it easier to disseminate information to a wide audience, dealing with the high volume of comments generated through e-campaigns and form letters is a growing concern.
- Changing demographics and changing use of public lands present new challenges to managing public involvement. Increased urban and immigrant constituencies and changing recreation preferences effect the public involvement process.
- Good public involvement takes a considerable amount of time – and time is a resource that many respondents feel they need more of.

## 1.2. Summary of Recommendations

- This study did not include responses from regional support staff who are often very involved in the bureaus' NEPA processes. It would be useful to include these individuals in future study in order to get a more complete picture of how information flows and how tasks are accomplished.
- Given the ambivalence that many field staff felt towards leading public meetings, basic training in public speaking and meeting facilitation might help make these individuals more comfortable "getting up in front of the public." Training in more advanced process and dialogue management would also be beneficial.
- Field managers might benefit from advanced training that explores more innovative and collaborative forms of public involvement like joint fact finding, negotiated rulemaking, games / simulations, or advisory committees. Training should include hands-on practice with these new techniques.
- Changing demographics and changing uses of public lands present new challenges to managing public involvement. MUSIC interns could conduct a further study into how increased urban and immigrant constituencies and changing recreation preferences affect public land use and stakeholder priorities.
- How bureaus go about identifying and reaching less visible stakeholders is an area that could easily be improved. CADR and OEPC should consider developing something as simple as a checklist of stakeholder identification strategies or a multi-bureau list of best practices.
- Getting stakeholders more involved in the later phases of the EIS process, particularly during the alternative analysis and preferred alternative selection phases, would be beneficial for many projects. This could be accomplished through advisory committees, joint fact finding projects, or additional meetings.
- Contractors who are responsible for public involvement should be required to receive the same level of public involvement training as regular staff, and contractors should also be kept informed of the latest policies and practices.
- Some regional directors noted that they do not have a venue for sharing experiences or learning with other staff at their level. It might therefore be useful to develop a cross-bureau workshop for regional directors to share peer-to-peer learning and discuss leadership issues related to public involvement.
- Field staff were most interested in receiving, and could benefit most from, skills-based trainings, workshops, and resources. Some suggestions for trainings and resources include:
  1. Translating technical or scientific writing into information that is easy for laypeople to understand
  2. Stakeholder identification and public outreach techniques
  3. Meeting facilitation and dialogue management skills
  4. Mediation and alternative dispute resolution skills
  5. Best practices for structuring face-to-face public involvement activities including meetings, workshops, and seminars
  6. "How to" guide for setting up information dissemination channels like newsletters, fact sheets, and email lists
  7. Quick reference sheets for regulatory compliance

## 2. INTRODUCTION

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Increasing public involvement and engaging in more collaborative decision making have, over the past few decades, become priorities for Department of the Interior (DOI) natural resource management bureaus. But efforts to incorporate more collaborative processes in environmental decision making have been hampered by uncertainty about how to proceed within the existing NEPA regulatory framework. Because collaborative approaches are relatively new, some personnel are unsure of how, when, where, or why to use them in the decision making process.

Is policy direction outpacing day-to-day practice? Executive Order 13352, issued in August 2004, states that bureaus under the Departments of Defense, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, and the Environmental Protection Agency must “implement laws relating to the environment and natural resources in a manner that promotes cooperative conservation, with an emphasis on appropriate inclusion of local participation in Federal decision making, in accordance with their respective agency missions, policies and regulations” OMB followed up in November 2005 with a “Memorandum on Environmental Conflict Resolution” that directs agencies to “increase the effective use of ECR and build institutional capacity for collaborative problem solving”. The Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance (OEPC) has also issued a number of environmental memoranda over the past few years that are intended to guide DOI bureaus in NEPA public involvement compliance (see in particular ESM03-7, ESM03-6, and ESM03-4) and has also published new Departmental procedures for NEPA compliance in 2004 (516 DM 1-7).

### Study Objectives

The purpose of this NEPA Public Involvement Study (“the study”) is twofold: 1) to gain a better understanding of how DOI bureaus have responded to the abovementioned policy directives and guidances within the existing NEPA framework; and 2) to identify what additional resources could help field staff further improve public participation processes. Understanding what’s happening “in the field” will help OEPC and CADR develop programs, tools and policies to support DOI’s resource management bureaus.

The study was designed to examine a total of twelve cases--three cases each from the National Park Service (NPS), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Bureau of Reclamation (BR), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Cases were chosen through random sampling of all Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEISs) completed between January 2005 and February 2006 that were undertaken as part of a large-scale planning process (General Management Plan, Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Resource Management Plan, etc). Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with three levels of staff for each case: the Regional Director of the area that undertook the DEIS, the district manager with signatory authority over the DEIS, and the field staff person responsible for coordination of the DEIS. The rationale for interviewing these three groups was to be able to capture the thinking of a wide spectrum of functional levels, from practitioners to managers to more policy-oriented staff.

This study focuses on five research themes that were developed with the guidance of OEPC and CADR staff. For each theme, respondents were asked 2-5 questions (see Appendices II and III for the interview protocols). The themes are as follows:

1. Understanding of, and attitudes toward, collaboration and public involvement *in general*.
2. Awareness of, and attitudes toward, *new policies* regarding public involvement and collaboration.
3. Public involvement strategies and tools used during the recent DEIS process.
4. Availability and use of public involvement resources and training.
5. Additional resources and assistance that could improve public involvement processes.

### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS

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#### 3.1. Overview by bureau

Although the organizational culture and mission of each bureau is unique, the challenges that employees face in implementing sound public involvement are similar. Nearly all of the interviewees believe that the way that they approach public involvement has changed over the past several years. NPS respondents seemed the most confident and comfortable with public involvement in general and their own handling of processes, which is perhaps due to the long history of intensive public interaction that NPS has. FWS respondents recognized the importance of public involvement, but many expressed reservations about their ability to effectively communicate complex information and to manage potentially contentious process. BLM respondents were generally enthusiastic about public involvement, recounting how a shift in agency culture and increased use of BLM lands had resulted in more public engagement. Unlike the other three bureaus involved in this study, the BR cases were organized by project rather than land area, and the projects themselves were therefore somewhat different from those of the other bureaus. However, the issues that BR faces in terms of managing competing stakeholder interests and contentious processes are similar to those in other resource management bureaus.<sup>1</sup>

At NPS, there is at least one staff member dedicated to public involvement for each park unit,<sup>2</sup> and these staffers were usually involved in the DEIS cases examined in this study. In contrast, the BLM and BR projects included in this study seem to rely more heavily on the use of external contractors to manage public involvement processes. FWS respondents looked to their regional planning offices to provide direction and ensure that their actions have met NEPA requirements.

**Further research:** We did not interview staff from regional support offices who, we discovered, are often very involved in the bureaus' NEPA processes. The specific functions of regional staff vary by bureau. It would be useful to include these individuals in future study in order to get a more complete picture of how information flows and tasks are accomplished.

#### 3.2. Overview by staff function

##### *Regional directors*

Regional directors as a group were - not surprisingly - the most aware of policy changes from headquarters and were able to articulate the values and objectives that are being promoted via these policies. Many see limits to more innovative public involvement as a function of how challenging public involvement is perceived to be. This group would, of course, like to have more tangible resources in the form of dedicated budget and staff, but they would also like to be given time and recognition for the work that they are already doing in terms of public involvement. Respondents shared a number of concerns with putting new policies into practice including: how best to reach the public, the inherent difficulties of managing natural resources for multiple uses, and the importance of staff training. Respondents in this group talked about public involvement in its broadest sense – beyond the need for NEPA compliance and decision

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<sup>1</sup> An MIT-USGS Science Impact Collaborative (MUSIC) intern will be working with BR next year to study how adaptive management and collaboration can be incorporated into BR's decision making and management processes. The MUSIC program hopes that the information gained from the intern's work will be able to benefit other bureaus as well.

<sup>2</sup> According to one NPS respondent.

making process design, this group also spoke of the importance of fostering a public lands stewardship ethic amongst Americans.

### Field managers

This group presented a wide range of responses regarding their involvement in and attitudes toward public outreach. Four out of eight respondents were heavily involved in the day-to-day management of the DEIS case, while the other half assumed a more supervisory role. Responses from this group shed more light on the infusion of public participation as a value through their organization and in the way they “do business” than about specific NEPA-related policy changes.

This group could have a strong role to play in sustaining public involvement over time. They are close to the resource being managed and, as supervisors, can help foster a collaborative culture in their offices. Although six out of eight respondents reported having long term careers with their bureaus, most of these had been in their current position for only a few years. Staff turnover and short term positions may present overarching challenges for improving the quality of public involvement. The academic literature on collaboration points to the importance of building trust through long-term, personal relationships. If field managers change positions every few years, these types of relationships with local stakeholders are difficult to build.

### Field staff

The diverse responses coming from this group reflect the way in which field staff are keyed in to the particular challenges of the DEIS that they are working on and to the considerations of their region and bureau. These individuals had primary responsibility for the coordination of the DEIS. Seven out of eleven respondents had worked on 2-5 EISs prior to the case for which they were interviewed, and one respondent had worked on over ten EISs. Bureau-specific policies and guidelines have quite an impact on the way they do business, though many were aware of DOI-wide guidelines as well. In fact, this group seemed more aware of bureau and agency policies than field managers, which may be a function of field staff’s familiarity with all matters of NEPA compliance. This group offered a number of different examples of how public outreach and engagement is being managed on the ground. Strong enthusiasm for the idea of public involvement was expressed, with the normal caveats about the challenges it presents and the time it takes. Field staff may be the best candidates for training and resources that emphasize skill-building in the fields of collaboration, public involvement, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR).

## 4. DETAILS BY RESEARCH THEME

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### 4.1. Understanding of, and attitudes toward, collaboration and public involvement in general

#### Regional directors

There is no direct opposition or resistance to public involvement, in fact it is seen as good business, but there is a recognition that it is difficult to successfully implement and to balance all of the public's diverse interests with the challenges of staying committed to a natural resource management mission. Typical responses to the question "*what are some general attitudes towards public involvement in your office or region?*" included "*we all live and breathe collaboration*" (FWS), "*its part of the job*" (BR), "*its just the way you conduct business today*" (BLM), and "*it's good business and necessary*" (NPS).

Regional directors identified a number of challenges for their organizations when dealing with public involvement. Several noted the problem of trying to manage multiple-use missions and the competing interests of uncooperative stakeholders. One director said "*The majority of folks do want to sit down and work with you, but there still are groups that are litigation industry, that is, its not in their interest to sit down in a public forum and do any discussing, negotiating or compromise. It's difficult when you have a wide range of folks to engage, some are putting in a lot of time and effort, and others sit back and force their perspective through litigation. That gets frustrating for our partners and our employees.*"

Others mentioned the need to communicate effectively with the public about the technical and scientific details relevant to the decision. Outreach, education, and engagement can be very time-consuming. The phenomenon of e-campaigns and form letters also presents new challenges for land managers when dealing with public comments – one recent project that a regional director mentioned received 64,000 electronic comments, many of which were form letters. Responding to all of these comments can be very time consuming and, because many form letters express ideological preferences rather than substantive suggestions directly related to the proposed action, such comments are often not particularly helpful to those who have to deal with them.

#### Field managers

Field managers expressed sentiments similar to those of the regional directors: their attitudes towards public involvement overall are positive; it is seen as good, common practice for government to be transparent and inclusive. General positivism aside, this group did not talk about the kinds of "cutting edge" public involvement strategies that are discussed in the field of environmental conflict resolution – strategies like joint fact finding, cooperative monitoring, adaptive management, or citizen science. Instead, respondents focused on public involvement practices like informal meetings and open houses as improvements to the traditional public hearing format.

**Recommendation:** Because attitudes towards public involvement are generally positive and knowledgeable, field managers might benefit from advanced training that explores more innovative and collaborative forms of public involvement like joint fact finding, negotiated rulemaking, games/simulations, or advisory committees. Training should include hands-on practice with these new techniques.

Some respondents did express a few reservations regarding public involvement. One BR employee said that "*nobody likes to go to a meeting and be faced with an angry public*" and

noted that managers have a responsibility to support their employees, particularly in difficult meetings. Frustration at the “*inevitability of being sued*” was cited once, as was frustration with additional layers of bureaucracy, which can lead to “*paralysis*.”

### Field staff

Though a range of attitudes towards public involvement are present - from caution to ambivalence to complete embracing of increased involvement as a means to improve outcomes - most respondents generally understood that public involvement was important. The following quotes illustrate the range of attitudes expressed:

- “*When the public is actively involved and engaged in the process we normally will obtain a better product.*”
- “*The vocal minority speak up. I'd love to get the average Joe citizen to get more involved but its hard to do.*”
- “*We need to do better public involvement and we recognize that it can tend to slow down a process.*”
- “*Even though it can be a rough road and it's not really something we like to do, in the end it pays off.*”
- “*Overall everybody understands how important it is to have people involved because it helps the process and the more you can get people involved, the less problems you have.*”
- “*Within our region, there is a genuine interest in hearing what the public has to say, and we think we're going to learn from them and find things we hadn't thought of.*”
- “*We put a lot of emphasis on public involvement and go further than we have to.*”
- “*Sometimes you have a bit of dread about it ... but you do it.*”

**Recommendation:** Given the ambivalence that many field staff felt towards leading public meetings, basic training in public speaking and meeting facilitation might help make these individuals more comfortable “getting up in front of the public.” Training in more advanced process and dialogue management would also be beneficial.

Many respondents believe that the public “*needs to know what's going on in their backyard*” and are committed to the spirit of public disclosure. Expanding on this, one BR interviewee described how, since their office had hired a public relations specialist, their standing in the community had improved. This was because the specialist was able to respond more quickly to media inquiries, had time to engage with public leaders, and understood the importance of getting out digestible information in a timely manner.

## 4.2. Awareness of, and attitudes toward, new policies regarding public involvement and collaboration.

### Regional directors

Overall, it appears that regional directors are aware of new policies and memoranda regarding public involvement and collaboration, but these directives from headquarters are not what is driving organizational change. Rather, most view collaboration and public involvement as *“the smart and required way to do business”*, or *“just part of the job.”* There is some skepticism that each incoming administration takes their own tack with respect to collaboration and public involvement, but the underlying principles remain the same and are ones that the bureaus have a lasting commitment to. Several noted that former Secretary of Interior Gale Norton’s *“unflagging commitment”* was a positive reinforcement for the work they were doing.

A few talked about the difficulty of changing NEPA processes on demand. One respondent said *“OMB and CEQ and the President can fire off all of the memos they want, but down on the ground where we’re actually doing NEPA, you can’t just change your million dollar EIS because someone in Washington decides that they want to do it slightly differently.”* Another director mentioned that it would be too difficult to enact any changes on EISs that were already underway, but believed that they would make changes to future projects based on new policy directives.

Although no single policy directive appears to be driving change, all of the regional directors said that cultural and procedural changes had occurred over the past several years. These changes included more meetings and workshops with staff, implementation of new tools such as NPS’s Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) system, using cooperating agency status to involve other governmental stakeholders, increasing staff capacity for managing public involvement, and using new approaches to identify and involve the public.

### Field managers

Policies from Washington, D.C. are not directly changing the way that these individuals get their NEPA work done, but they are working to do more and better public involvement anyway. None of the eight respondents listed any policy, directive, or memo by name, though a few did say that there had been some bureau-specific changes to the way that public involvement is handled. Those who mentioned that change had occurred said that they relied on their regional coordinators or planners to communicate changes to them or manage the details of the changes. Public involvement is seen as necessary to doing good work, rather than as a response to any changes in policy direction or NEPA requirements. One BR manager said, *“We do make sure that we’re in compliance with the policy act [NEPA]. But that’s not what drives the criteria. Out here when you’re talking about water shortages and farmers being put out of business and species going extinct, it’s not a paper exercise.”*

### Field staff

Out of all the functional levels, this group was the most aware of a wide variety of policies and guidances both from their individual bureaus and from DOI management. This is not surprising, given that individuals in this group are most closely involved in the details of NEPA processes and compliance. Examples of policy changes that this group cited included the NPS Civic Engagement memo, changes to Indian Trust Assets, and the addition of cooperating agency status. It seems from respondents’ comments that changes have occurred over the span of a few decades, not a few years. One BLM staffer said that there had been a cultural shift in the agency that started taking place in the 1980s. Some respondents said that changes in public involvement was not of kind but of degree - that the process itself hadn’t changed but they have

simply begun to invite the public into a wider range of steps in the decision making process, particularly in the early phases of NEPA.

**Key finding:** Awareness of policy changes was fairly low for all of the groups that we surveyed. In every group, respondents reported that their organization was moving towards more public involvement, but not as a result of any specific directive. None of the respondents in any group felt that there was a trend towards less public involvement.

### 4.3. Strategies and tools used during the recent NEPA process

#### Regional Directors

Because regional directors are not usually involved with the day-to-day coordination of most EISs, the thematic questions asked of this group focused instead on financial and staff resource allocation. For the most part, public involvement is not a budgetary line item, but is instead rolled into the entire EIS project budget or sometimes broken out under the planning process. Some regions also have dedicated civic engagement personnel to lead trainings, share best practices, and advise staff working on an EIS.

Many of the regional directors said that public outreach and involvement is not limited to one function or title, but that it is integrated into the responsibilities of a wide variety of personnel roles. One BLM director noted that *“It’s no longer something you give to a planner to go out and conduct public meetings. There’s a much broader engagement today. We still have planners that help us with our NEPA work, but it’s more everybody’s responsibility.”* There is widespread recognition that many levels of staff are engaged in some kind of public involvement, and many directors expect that their staff have at least some proficiency and comfort in dealing with the public.

Regional directors also spoke of public involvement broadly, and included the hiring of more public communications personnel as part of the overall shift in bureau culture and outreach tactics. Beyond meeting NEPA requirements, this group showed the most consistent concern for continual public outreach through a variety of non-traditional media such as Spanish and Chinese radio advertisements, interactive web sites, and community stewardship programs. A few spoke of the challenge of identifying non-traditional stakeholders, and how changing demographics (particularly increased urbanization and growing immigrant communities) have created challenges to serving the public.

**Further research:** Changing demographics and changing uses of public lands present new challenges to managing public involvement. How increased urban and immigrant constituencies and changing recreation preferences affect public land use and stakeholder priorities is an area for further study.

#### Field managers and staff

Responses for field managers and staff have been combined for this theme because the responses from both levels were similar. The similarity in responses is due to the fact that the questions asked for this portion of the study were objective “fact” questions as opposed to subjective “opinion” questions (see Appendix 2 for the list of interview questions).

Responses reveal both the ways in which strict compliance with NEPA requirements were met, as well as the innovations that are beginning to emerge as common practice. Stakeholders were engaged during many phases of the DEIS, but the majority of the innovations seem to be in the earlier stages – prior to scoping, during scoping, and during alternative generation phases - as opposed to during alternative analysis or alternative selection.

In general, it seems that public hearings with one-way communication are no longer the norm, and that the style of meetings has changed over time. Several FWS and NPS employees said that they had changed the format of some meetings from large, open sessions to smaller, topical discussions. Although smaller sessions lost the feeling of a truly open forum, they helped staff focus on specific stakeholder concerns without having to mediate between competing interests. One BR employee said that they had held separate meetings at three

different locations along a river on which they were proposing activity, in order to better understand how stakeholders would be impacted differently upstream, downstream, and at the site of the activity. Several respondents said that they attended external meetings (town meetings, club and organization events) in order to identify stakeholders and solicit input.

When asked “*how did you identify the stakeholders that you wanted to get input from?*”, responses varied widely. Some relied on traditional notices in newspapers and the Federal Register, others reached out via web and print newsletters; TV and radio advertisements; “*glossy*” postcards, attending external meetings, and holding workshops with community leaders. One respondent reported that she reviewed all of the complaints and comments that had been submitted over the past 5 years in order to get a sense of historical problems and to identify potential stakeholders. But three respondents said that they “*already knew who the stakeholders were*”, that the stakeholder identification process was “*not systematic*”, or that they relied on self-identification, existing mailing lists, or comments from previous EISs.

**Potential for improvement:** One area for public involvement innovation is in how bureaus go about identifying and reaching less visible stakeholders. CADR and OEPC should consider developing something as simple as a checklist of stakeholder identification strategies or a list of best practices from multiple bureaus.

When asked “*During which phases did you solicit input from non-governmental stakeholders?*”, many respondents cited pre-scoping, scoping, and alternative generation. One BR employee said that they had a “*freewheeling scoping and exploratory discussion. No ideas were thrown out. Every idea was put on the process agenda to be looked up. [There were] some wild ideas!*” One BLM field manager described how his office inserted an additional round of public meetings that took place during the alternative drafting phase. Respondents from seven out of twelve cases said that they sought input during the alternative generation phase (thought mostly this was done through newsletters and websites as opposed to meetings or focus groups). In three cases, public input was also sought during the alternative selection phase (again mostly through newsletter or website invitations to submit comments).

**Potential for improvement:** Getting stakeholders more involved in the later phases of the EIS process, particularly during the alternative analysis and preferred alternative selection phases, would be beneficial for many projects. This could be accomplished through advisory committees, joint fact finding projects, or additional meetings.

When asked “*how did you incorporate responses from public involvement into project plans and documents?*” answers varied widely. In many cases, public comments helped bureaus provide clearer information about the proposed action. One case at FWS and two at BR used public input to develop or refine scientific models that were used in the alternative analysis phase. One case at FWS and one at NPS said that feedback from the public will have a “*large impact*” on the selection of the preferred alternative. There was near-consensus from respondents that public input helps refine the set of proposed alternatives and leads to an overall improvement in the DEIS. While the majority of respondents felt that public input can be very helpful to generating new ideas and compelling bureaus to be more explicit in their reasoning, there is also the feeling that NEPA is “*not a vote*” and that final decision making power rightfully rests solely with the authority organization – the managing bureau.

Ten out of twelve cases used external contractors for at least some of the public involvement process. Sometimes contractors’ involvement was limited to either the production of PR

materials or the organization and tabulation of public comments, but other contractors were more actively involved in meeting facilitation or even management of the entire public involvement process. Contractors may represent an area for institutional learning, where best practices for public involvement can be cultivated and spread.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that external contractors who are responsible for public involvement are required to receive the same level of public involvement training as staff, and that contractors are kept abreast of the latest policies and practices.

When asked why they chose the particular public involvement approach that they did, many respondents said that they relied upon past experience or “*what worked before.*” This presents some evidence of lack of innovation and may be an opportunity for OEPC and CADR to facilitate information exchange and disseminate best practices. None of the respondents cited time or budgetary constraints as factors when deciding which public involvement strategies to use. The researchers found this interesting, given that so many respondents said that lack of time was a major hurdle to “*doing good public involvement.*” This may indicate an encouraging level of commitment to pursue the best public involvement possible, regardless of the amount of time it takes. Alternatively, it may show that some individuals are not taking the time up front to design the best possible process. The barriers to instituting more innovative collaborative strategies may not be material or logistical, but rather may be a function of how familiar an employee is with a new approach and its aims.

In nine out of twelve cases, there were plans to keep stakeholders involved after the Record of Decision was issued. Respondents said that stakeholders would continue to be involved through newsletters, informal dialogue, and formal implementation processes, such as FWS’s “step down” plans, NPS’s trail management plans, and BLM’s long term management. The most intensive involvement described was the creation of an NPS Research Learning Center, which will be set up after the ROD is issued and run (in part) by local citizens.

**Innovations:** Below are some of the best practices for public involvement that were used in the cases studied for this report.

- “Listening stations” for one-to-one interaction with staff on specific topics
- Public education events and feedback solicitation before scoping phase began
- Announcements in TV, newspaper, and radio ads in multiple languages
- Meetings with individual stakeholder groups
- Topical discussions (biology, hydrology, etc)
- Public input into scientific models
- Interactive websites
- Well designed and glossy materials to grab attention
- Mail-in comment forms attached to outgoing newsletters
- Pre-project creation of public outreach plans
- “Refuge Manager for a Day” simulations and “games”
- Going out to talk to the public at town meetings, club events, etc.
- Blue ribbon scientific panels
- Setting up a collaborative education and research center with the involvement of the local public

#### 4.4. Availability and use of resources and training

##### Regional managers

When asked where they got information about public involvement, this group most often cited their own staff. Four out of nine respondents said that they relied on their staff or units like the Denver Service Center if they had questions about public involvement. Three respondents mentioned that they get information from the “top down” policy directives – one explained that with “if the DC office or the Department is developing new policy, we’re told about it and given an opportunity to provide feedback. New policy comes down through the chain of command.”

Six out of nine respondents had not attended any workshops or training sessions that dealt with public involvement within the last eighteen months, though many noted that they had done trainings in the past (often before they became regional directors). This lack of training attendance is not surprising, given the scope of these individuals’ responsibilities and the fact that the majority of public involvement trainings offered are not tailored to the needs of this group.

**Recommendation:** Two regional directors mentioned that they do not have a venue for sharing experiences or learning with other staff at their level. It might therefore be useful to develop a cross-bureau workshop for regional directors to share peer-to-peer learning and discuss leadership issues related to public involvement.

##### Field managers

This group cited bureau-specific policy documents and NEPA handbooks as their most consulted source of information. Five out of eight respondents said that they relied on regional planning staff or public affairs offices to provide guidance on processes. Significantly, no one in this group mentioned CADR or OEPC as a resource, and few talked about visiting websites, reading professional or academic literature, or consulting outside experts when learning about public involvement. This may be because of the diversity of responsibilities that interviewees with this title hold, where some are heavily involved in the public involvement process and others have a supervisory and coordination function.

Three out of eight interviewees had attended training that in some way dealt with public involvement in the past 18 months. One was a FWS project leaders meeting, another was a BLM alternative dispute resolution training, and the third was a BR training on NEPA and the Endangered Species Act. Some of those who had not attended any trainings or workshops within the past 18 months did say that they had received training further in the past.

**Recommendation:** Providing resources or training for field managers that emphasizes the principles of collaborative ecosystem management and techniques for ongoing public outreach might help this group build new institutional links that enable deeper public participation in the management of the nation’s natural resources.

##### Field staff

This group cited a wide variety of information sources that they turned to in managing the DEIS. Responses included referring to range of policies, guidances and bureau-specific handbooks. Some consulted prior EISs to determine what issues had been raised before. Many relied on professional networks, regional offices, formal training, word of mouth, and online documents. A number of specific courses, manuals, and resources were mentioned by name including DP-12 NEPA Handbook; “Civic Engagement” memo; FWS “Public Participation Handbook”;

documents from the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning; OEPC ESM 03-7, OEPC ESM03-4; FWS “Draft Outreach Plan”; NPS Planning Source Book; and a BR handbook.

Six out of eleven respondents also consulted with specialists in their respective bureaus. One BR employee mentioned working with the “*NEPA guru team*” in his policy office. An FWS employee sought advice from a fellow employee in a different office who had recently completed a DEIS. Several mentioned turning to public affairs specialists in regional offices for recommendations. Compared to the other roles, the field staff seem to be much more connected to diverse sources of information.

Yet, only three out of eleven of these respondents had received any training related to public involvement within the past 18 months. Four respondents mentioned that they would like more and better training opportunities. One BR employee mentioned DOI’s mandatory training prior to public hearings, but said that the online training course was “*fairly useless.*” Another mentioned that “*online modules are no substitute for classroom training*”, which helps employees learn together, share experiences, and network.

#### 4.5. Additional resources and assistance to improve public involvement

##### Regional directors

Most regional directors are not interested in more policies or guidances (“paperwork”) coming from Washington, D.C. The comment raised most frequently for this group was the need to develop the right skills and attitudes within their own staff. Two directors also mentioned money, specifically for more community outreach staff and materials. But even with these resources, many recognize that there is no guarantee of success. Coming to consensus and forging win-win solutions when different stakeholders hold opposing viewpoints is inherently challenging. One director said *“Something I don’t think anyone can give us is time and the recognition that getting the public involved in our decision-making process is time consuming...you can’t rush public participation if you’re really going to get meaningful input. It’s this non-tangible more than more training and more money.”*

##### Field managers

When asked what additional resource would assist them with public involvement, field managers were more likely to mention financial resources than were the regional directors. They wanted additional money to be able to provide more staff training, travel to workshops where they could network with other professionals, hire public involvement specialists, and bring in facilitators and mediators for contentious projects. One manager explained *“Since something like public involvement is discretionary training (compared to emergency training), it is harder for a park to justify spending money for staff to get trained in public involvement,”* and suggested that financial resources should therefore come from the national level and not out of individual park budgets.

One respondent suggested that a *“cookbook of public involvement”* showcasing examples of how complex projects had been managed in the past would be a useful resource. Another suggestion was to have a *“handy guide to NEPA”* that would very concisely show state and federal NEPA requirements side by side, thus providing a quick reference. These are both products that could be produced and disseminated by CADR and OEPC.

##### Field staff

Field staff offered a number of diverse suggestions for additional resources that would improve public involvement. The need for more training was echoed a number of times, as was learning how to cope with high volumes of comments. Two respondents mentioned the need to develop skills to *“write for the public”* and accurately condense extensive technical reports into something that *“someone with a high school diploma can understand.”* Other responses seemed to indicate that, even with all of these tools in place, more time would be the resource most needed.

Even more so than field managers, this group was interested in additional trainings, sources for best practices, and specific advice on how to set up outreach mechanisms like mailing lists. Two respondents also cited the need for flexible guidelines – not additional regulations – that would allow for meeting needs present in different types of situations.

**Recommendations:** This group was most interested in receiving, and could benefit most from, skills-based trainings, workshops, and resources such as:

- Translating technical or scientific writing into information that is easy to understand
- Stakeholder identification and public outreach techniques
- Meeting facilitation and dialogue management skills

- Mediation and alternative dispute resolution skills
- Best practices for structuring face-to-face public involvement activities including meetings, workshops, and seminars
- “How to” guide for setting up information dissemination channels like newsletters, fact sheets, and email lists
- Quick reference sheets for regulatory compliance

## Appendix I: Methodology

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This study used cases of recent Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEISs) from the following bureaus: National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation. Cases were chosen through random sampling of all Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEISs) completed as part of a landscape management plan between January 2005 and February 2006. Qualitative data was gathered during 45 – 80 minute unattributed telephone interviews with 3 levels of staff to ensure representation of a variety of different attitudes and actions across functional levels. The interviews followed a structured format (see list of questions in Appendices II and III), with opportunities for interviewees to expand on the issues that most occupied their attention. Field managers and staff were asked an identical set of questions, regional directors were asked a different set of questions.

Telephone interviews were conducted during February and March, 2006 by a team of 5 graduate student researchers, and the interviews were then compiled and analyzed by two members of the student research team.

Originally, the study team had intended to obtain 3 interviews for each of 3 cases per bureau, for a total of 36 interviews. However, we were unable to schedule interviews with some of the individuals involved in the DEIS cases chosen. The table below shows actual counts for each bureau and staff function, as well as the desired count. Responses were clustered and analyzed by bureau, staff function, and research theme.

	Regional Dir.	Field Mgr.	Field Staff	Totals
BLM	3	1	3	<b>7 (9)</b>
BR	1	2	2	<b>5 (9)</b>
FWS	2	2	3	<b>7 (8)<sup>3</sup></b>
NPS	3	3	3	<b>9 (9)</b>
Totals	<b>9 (11)</b>	<b>8 (12)</b>	<b>11 (12)</b>	<b>28 (35)</b>

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<sup>3</sup> Two of the FWS cases were within the same region, so the target number of interviews for FWS regional directors was 2, not 3.

**Appendix II: Interview Protocol for Field Staff and Managers**

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**Note: Interviewees did not see the below tables. They were asked questions and the interviewer recorded and classified responses.**

Interview #	
Date	
Interviewer	
Interviewee	

1. What prompted your office to undertake this DEIS?

Comments / quotes:	
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2. What was your role in the creation of this DEIS?

Project Coordinator	
Supervisory	
Comments / quotes:	

3. How many DEIS's have you worked on? (*NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: this question is less about a quantitative number than it is about gauging the interviewee's experience and comfort level with Environmental Impact Statements and the NEPA process*)

First one	
2-5	
5 or more	
Comments / quotes	

4. Have there been any policy changes in the last few years that affect the way you prepare NEPA documents and deal with public involvement? (*Do not prompt*) (*NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: If the interviewee says that there have been changes, ask the interviewee to name what those new policies are. Are they bureau-specific policies, memoranda from OEPC, CEQ/OMB guidelines, Executive Orders, a general cooperation zeitgeist, other?*)

Yes: Bureau-specific	
Yes: OEPC ESM's	
Yes: CEQ/OMB	
Yes: Executive Order	
Yes: Other	
No	
Comments / quotes	

5. Does the public involvement process you used differ from what you did a few years ago (as a result of policy or other changes)? If so, how?

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quotes	
How it differs	

6. During which phases did you solicit input from non-government stakeholders? (Prompt if necessary: scoping, design of scientific studies, alternative generation, or preferred alternative selection, other?)

Scoping	
Design of studies	
Alternative gen.	
Alternative selection	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes	

7. What options for public involvement did you consider? (Prompt if necessary: public hearing, written comments, facilitated dialogues, orientations, etc) Why did you choose the public involvement process that you did?

Written comments	
Public hearings	
Facilitated dialogues	
Orientations	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes	
Why chosen	

8. How did you go about identifying the stakeholders that you wanted to get input from?

Pub. Notice (specify)	
Invited participants	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes	

9. How did you incorporate responses from public involvement into project plans and documents? (NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: basically, this question is trying to get at whether or not the public involvement process changed anything: the scientific studies that were conducted, the alternatives that were considered, the decision about the preferred alternative, etc).

Alts considered	
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Scientific studies	
Alt selected	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes	

10. Did you use a contractor for all or part of the public involvement process? If so, what was the contractor responsible for? *(Prompt if necessary: dialogue facilitation, assessment, tabulation of public comments, responses to comments, etc).*

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quote:	

11. Are there plans to keep stakeholders involved after the Record of Decision? *(Prompt if necessary: adaptive management, collaborative monitoring, maintenance, cleanups, cashiering, office work, etc)*

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quote:	

12. Where and how did you get information and other resources for public involvement when preparing this DEIS? *(Prompt if necessary: training, consultation with CADR, regional public involvement specialists, external consultants like mediators, etc).* What was most useful?

Agency documents (specify)	
Other literature (specify)	
Consultation with experts	
Outsource (i.e., outside consultants)	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes:	
Most useful	

13. Have you attended any workshops or trainings on public involvement in the past 18 months? *(Prompt if necessary: NEPA training, White House Conference on Collaboration, CADR workshops, other)* If so, what was most valuable?

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quote:	

14. What sort of assistance or resources would help you with public involvement in future NEPA processes? *(Prompt / rephrase if necessary: what are the challenges to public involvement?)*

More specific guidelines	
Training	
Incentives (i.e., tying public participation to staff evaluations)	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes	

15. And finally, can you tell me about some general attitudes towards public involvement in your region or office?

Comments / quotes	
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**Appendix III: Interview Protocol for Regional Directors**

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Interview #	
Date	
Interviewer	

1. Have you attended any workshops, trainings or conferences on public involvement or collaboration in the past eighteen months (*Prompt if necessary: White House Conference on Collaborative Conservation, Collaborative Framework Workshop, regional training, other?*)

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quote:	

2. As I'm sure you know, there have been a number of policy initiatives over the last several years aimed at increasing collaboration and public involvement. (*Executive Order 13352 about collaborative conservation, the CEQ/OMB memo from last fall about environmental conflict resolution, memos from the Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance, etc*). What have you taken away from these recent policy initiatives? What do these policies mean for your organization?

Comments / quote:	
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3. Have you already implemented change within your organization to meet the new policies? If so, what have you done?

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quote:	

4. Do you currently have staff dedicated to public involvement? (*NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: find out the number of staff and their function. It would also be good to know if there are plans to expand or shrink this*)

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quote:	

5. Do you currently have budget dedicated to public involvement? If so, can you tell me about it? (*NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: find out how this money is spent - on staff, public outreach programs, contractors, specific projects, etc*)

Yes (specify)	
No	
Comments / quote:	

6. What are the biggest challenges *to your organization / in your work* to implementing these new policies?

Insufficient resources	
Insufficient guidances	
Logistics	
Reaching the public	
Other (specify)	

7. What are some general attitudes towards public involvement in your office / region?

Comments / quote:	
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8. Where and how do you get information and other resources about public involvement?

Agency documents (specify)	
Other literature (specify)	
Consultation with experts	
Outsource (i.e., outside consultants)	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes:	

9. What additional assistance or resources would be most useful to you in increasing public involvement?

More specific guidelines	
Training	
Incentives (i.e., tying public participation to staff evaluations)	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes	

10. What do you think are the biggest challenges *in general* with public involvement?

Insufficient resources	
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Motivation (“dealing with angry public”)	
Logistics	
Changing mandates	
Other (specify)	
Comments / quotes	

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Comments / quotes	
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