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 cc:
 Subject: Comments on Potential Changes to NEPA

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To: NEPA Task Force
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Does NEPA need REVAMPING?

NEPA heralded in the first of many laws that were directed at environmental concerns. It was to be a comprehensive national policy and it called for "productive harmony" between "man and nature." It was followed by laws that addressed air pollution, land pollution, solid and hazardous wastes and a host of others that resulted in cleaner air, water, reduction in improper disposal of hazardous wastes, etc.. But NEPA was the first, and its goals were to create a collaborative process between federal agencies, and the people and systems that will be the recipient of outcomes of the federal decisions.

"The purposes of this Act are: To declare a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation; and to establish a Council on Environmental Quality."

Congress, recognizing the profound impact of man's activity on the interrelations of all components of the natural environment? declares that it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local governments, and other concerned public and private organizations, to use all practicable means and measures? to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans. (42 USC sec. 431(a))

NEPA gave a tool to decision makers in the federal government to: fulfill the responsibilities of each generation to future generations in caring for the environment; assure safe, healthful, productive, aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences; preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice; and achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The successes of NEPA are real and have had a resoundingly positive effect on our environment. It is considered a law that has limited development and negative environmental consequences on public lands. It has prevented projects that threaten endangered species and ecosystems containing those species, including the spotted owl.

NEPA has been to some degree instrumental in preventing the further degradation of our national forests by logging and mining industries. It has been used in evaluation of federal laws, making them clearer, more directed, with improved applications.

Recently the President has attempted to limit the effectiveness of NEPA, essentially to gut it with regard to marine resource uses and logging projects. Given the poor environmental record of our present administration, this will probably increase. This must not happen.

The goals of NEPA are thus clearly stated. What we do not need are changes that reduce the positive environmental impacts of NEPA. What we need, in fact, are changes that enhance public input early in the planning process for projects with environmental impacts, that ensure that government agencies do not start the process already have reached final decisions, thus making the process a farce, an exercise in futility.

We need to keep NEPA intact, to increase its environmental reach, to achieve the goals of the original legislation: fulfill the responsibilities of each generation to future generations in caring for the environment; assure safe, healthful, productive, aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences; preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice; and achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Respectfully Submitted,
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