
From: Susan Horn
Sent: Monday, August 09, 2004 1:12 AM
To: ADMIN-S&E
Subject: Don't undermine NEPA protections

August 09, 2004

Department of Homeland Security
Environmental Planning, Office of Safety and Environment Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Ridge and Homeland Security staff,

I strongly oppose and work to help others learn why they should oppose the Department of Homeland Security's current proposal for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. The proposal is unacceptable as it would allow too many exclusions from NEPA and could close off government activities that have previously operated in the public eye. What we need now more than ever is the truth to address these matters that affect ALL LIFE on this planet. Including you.

One of NEPA's purposes is to allow public review of agency actions that may adversely affect the environment. The department's proposal would impede that purpose with its overly broad use of categorical exclusions. While categorical exclusions are useful for exempting routine activities that pose no risk of environmental harm, some of the proposed exclusions involve types of activities that could cause significant harm. For example, construction of fences and barriers by the Border Patrol could impede wildlife migration and degrade wilderness values, while ground patrols in border areas could destroy or damage critical habitat for endangered species. Some proposed categorical exclusions, such as logging and disposal of waste and hazardous material, are completely unacceptable and further threaten the health of our country. Then there are other items that will need to be addressed appropriately however should be narrowed in scope to prevent abuse.

I support the mission of the Department of Homeland Security, however protecting the public at the expense of an open accountable government is against the foundation of our country. Further, the breadth of the undefined categories of information that would be withheld from public view is a tremendous expansion of the current policy that allows only classified information to be withheld from NEPA documents. Therefore, these categories are unwarranted for protecting national security. Information, such as analysis of a gas pipeline's potential for leaks and explosions, is critical to the public's ability to protect itself. It also will expose companies who are using our public lands irresponsibly to our people's detriment. In order to even be considered, this proposal would require extremely specific language to ensure responsible behavior of those who are being allowed to participate in our economy.

The proposal is extensively beyond what is necessary to protect national security, and risks destroying the very democratic ideals that the Department of Homeland Security was created to protect. I urge you to limit the use of categorical exclusions and the withholding of information as narrowly as possible.

Sincerely,

Susan Horn

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