FCC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESSING

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), agencies must consider whether their major actions may have a significant effect on the environment. This document is intended to provide guidance to assist applicants, including licensees, registrants, and owners of facilities supporting FCClicensed service, in complying with the FCC's rules implementing NEPA, and does not replace the Commission's rules, which control in cases of ambiguity or difference in language.

The FCC's environmental rules require applicants proposing to construct facilities intended to support FCC-licensed services to consider whether these projects may have a significant environmental impact. As part of satisfying that requirement—and before (i) certifying that their facilities will have no significant environmental impact on an FCC application, if required, or (ii) initiating any associated ground disturbance prior to construction—applicants must evaluate whether a proposed project triggers an environmental assessment (EA).ⁱ Depending on that evaluation, applicants may need to prepare and file an EA that is subject to FCC review and public comment.

Specifically, applicants must prepare EAs for actions that may have a significant environmental impact when proposed facilities meet one or more of the circumstancesⁱⁱ listed below, unless another federal agency (*e.g.*, a federal land managing agency or the project's funding agency) has assumed responsibility for determining whether the facilities in question will have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment.ⁱⁱⁱ Pursuant to the FCC's environmental rules,^{iv} an EA is required for:

- (1) Facilities that will be located in an officially designated wilderness area;
- (2) Facilities that will be located in an officially designated wildlife preserve;
- (3) Facilities that may affect listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitats, or are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any proposed endangered or threatened species or likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitats, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973;
- (4) Facilities that may adversely affect districts, sites, buildings, structures or objects that are listed, or are eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places where the adverse effect has not been mitigated through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA);
- (5) Facilities that may affect Indian religious sites;
- (6) Facilities that will be located in a floodplain, if the facilities will not be placed at least one foot above the base flood elevation of the floodplain;
- (7) Facilities whose construction will involve significant change in surface features (e.g., wetland fill, deforestation or water diversion);
- (8) Facilities that will be equipped with high intensity white lights and located in a residential neighborhood, as defined by the applicable zoning law;
- (9) Facilities that will cause human exposure to levels of radiofrequency radiation in excess of the Commission-prescribed limits; and/or
- (10) Facilities that will be over 450 feet in height above ground level and will involve either new tower construction, tower modification or replacement constituting a substantial increase in size, or certain changes in lighting, thereby requiring that the EA address the proposed project's effects on migratory birds.

The FCC may also require an applicant to prepare an EA upon determining that a facility may otherwise have a significant environmental impact, either in response to an interested person's allegation or on its own motion.^v

Applicants may use the attached "NEPA checklist" to evaluate the applicability of each of the circumstances listed in section 1.1307. If an EA is required, applicants may consult the attached "EA Checklist" to confirm that their draft document includes the information required by section 1.1311.

NEPA CHECKLIST: Evaluating Potential Environmental Effects

Review this checklist to identify when section 1.1307 circumstances apply and to evaluate whether the proposed facility may have a significant environmental impact. The supporting documentation must be included in an EA, if required; it should be maintained by the applicant as proof of NEPA compliance if no EA is required. Contact Commission staff to determine EA requirements if a project is subject to an EA (or an Environmental Impact Statement) by another federal agency or will be located on Tribal or trust lands for which the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has assumed environmental review responsibility.

-1	acility will be located in an officially designated wilderness area.	Yes	No
ed	erally-designated wilderness areas may be administered by federal agencies (e.g., the U.S. Forest Service	()	()
US	S), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)).		
Vile	lerness areas may also be designated by state or Tribal governments.		
	If the facility is in a non-federal wilderness area or is in a Federal wilderness area but is not subject to review	by and	other
	federal agency, an EA is required.		
	If the facility is not in a wilderness area, include a statement to that effect. If the facility is on USFS, BLM, NPS	S, or F\	WS
	land, submit documentation showing that it is not within a designated wilderness area.		
2)	acility will be located in an officially designated wildlife preserve.	Yes	No
w	ldlife preserve may be designated in a variety of ways. Federally designated wildlife preserves include	()	()
ati	onal wildlife refuges as well as some national parks, monuments, and preserves. Many states also		
esi	gnate preserves, protected areas, or fish and wildlife areas managed by a state Department of Fish and		
an	e or equivalent agency. Local and Tribal governments may also designate wildlife preserves.		
	If the facility is in a non-federal wildlife preserve or is in a federal wildlife preserve but is not subject to review	<i>w</i> by	
	another federal agency, an EA is required.	-	
	If the proposed facility is not located in an officially designated wildlife preserve, include a statement to that	effect	and
	explain any measures taken to confirm that the site is not within a designated wildlife preserve. The applicar	nt shou	ıld
	cite specifically to the sections of the relevant databases, maps, references, or information from the relevant		
	government agencies (e.g., Department of the Interior).		
)	acility may affect listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitats; or is likely to	Yes	N
o	ardize the continued existence of any proposed endangered or threatened species or likely to result in	()	(
e	destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitats.		
n	sult FWS resources to identify when this circumstance applies. Attach to the EA any relevant		
ori			
	espondence with FWS, Memoranda of Agreement/Understanding, Blanket Clearance Letters, Endangered		
	espondence with FWS, Memoranda of Agreement/Understanding, Blanket Clearance Letters, Endangered ies Act (ESA) Section 4(d) rules, or other conditions and recommendations.		
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		If the proposed facility may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, listed or proposed threatened or endar species or designated or proposed critical habitats in the action area, provide a letter from FWS concurring wi applicant's informal biological assessment. If any measures are proposed to mitigate effects on species or ha EA must outline those measures with FWS concurrence. For species that require ESA 4(d) Programmatic Biolo Opinions (<i>e.g.</i> , the northern long-eared bat ^{xii} and the American burying beetle ^{xiii}) the consistency letter provide	ith the bitats, ogical	the
		FWS needs to be included with the application.	leu by	
		If the proposed facility may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, listed or proposed threatened or endanger	od co	
		or listed or proposed designated critical habitats in the action area, xiv the applicant will need to prepare a form biological assessment as outlined in 50 CFR § 402.01 <i>et seq</i> . The applicant should first provide the formal biological assessment as outlined in 50 CFR § 402.01 <i>et seq</i> .	nal ogical	
		assessment to the Commission for initiation of formal consultation with the FWS. If any measures are propos	ed to	
		mitigate effects on species or habitats, the EA must outline any mitigation measures from the Biological Opini	ion.	
		acility may affect districts, sites, buildings, structures or objects significant in American history,	Yes	No
		itecture, archeology, engineering or culture, that are listed, or are eligible for listing, in the National	()	()
	•	ster of Historic Places.		
		sult the Nationwide Programmatic Agreement (47 CFR Part 1, Appendix C) (NPA) to determine how to		
		uate this circumstance. Summarize the results of the Section 106 consultation process in the EA. EAs should		
-		include copies of Forms 620/621 or cultural resources reports.		
		If the proposed facility is excluded from historic preservation review under Section III of the NPA, provide a st		
		describing why the facilities are excluded. Facilities constructed in industrial parks, strip malls, shopping cent		
		rights-of-way that are otherwise excluded under Section III.D or III.E of the NPA require a table summarizing t	ne res	uits
		of Tribal notification completed using the Tower Construction Notification System (TCNS).		
		For all proposed facilities requiring Tribal notification, provide a copy of the Applicant's TCNS "Notice of Organist of notified Tribal Nations and a table summarizing their responses.	nizatio	n
		For proposed facilities that would have no effect or no adverse effect on historic properties, provide a concur	ronco	
		letter from the relevant State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THP		
		provide other documentation demonstrating how the applicant complied with the NPA.	0, 01	
		For proposed facilities where an adverse effect on historic properties has been mitigated with an MOA, provide	de a co	nv
		of the executed agreement. ^{xvi}		, hà
ł	(5) E	acility may affect Indian religious sites.	Yes	No
		pplicant's documentation that it has completed the TCNS process will generally suffice to demonstrate	()	()
		ther the proposed construction may affect Tribal religious and cultural sites.	• •	` '
1		If the proposed facility might affect Indian religious sites, check with FCC staff to determine what should be in	clude	d in
		the EA. Any information regarding historic properties or religious or sacred sites to which a Tribal Nation attr		-
		significance may be highly confidential, private, and sensitive, and applicants should respect the wishes of the		1
		Nation with respect to the treatment of such information.		
ľ	(6) F	acility will be located in a floodplain, if the facility will not be placed at least one foot above the base	Yes	No
	floo	d elevation of the floodplain.	()	()
	Prov	ide a copy of the relevant Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) map showing the location of the		
	prop	osed facility relative to the 100-year floodplain. If that map is unavailable, provide the best available data.		
		If the facility will be located in a floodplain and elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevation of the	e	
		floodplain, provide documentation that the proposed structure and associated equipment will be at least one	foot	
		above the floodplain (e.g., local building permit, construction plans).		
		If the facility will be located in a floodplain and will not be elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one foot above the base flood elevated at least one flood elevated a	vation	of
		the floodplain, xvii provide an explanation of (i) why the facility (including equipment) will not be elevated and	(ii)	
		evidence of measures to be taken to ensure resilience in the event of floods and mitigation of impacts to the	floodp	lain.
		acility construction will involve significant change in surface features (e.g., wetland fill, deforestation,	Yes	No
		ificant tree removal, or water diversion).	<u>()</u>	()
		If the proposed facility and associated construction, including trenching, will cause any substantial change in t		
		character of the land used or in surface features, describe the nature and extent of the change, and discuss an		orts
		to mitigate these changes. ^{xviii} Examples of substantial change may include clearing trees, vegetation, desert c		
		shrubland, or topsoil to an extent that would cause a clearly detectable change in a forest or ecological comm	nunity	and
		may have an appreciable impact on that community; the diversion of a water course; and wetland fill.		
ļ		If the facility is located in a wetland, provide a copy of the permit or permits the applicant or its consultant re		
- 1		from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or other permitting authority authorizing the construction of the property	osed	
		antenna structure.		
		antenna structure. If the facility is not located in a wetland, provide a copy of the section of a map showing that the proposed an		
		antenna structure.		

(8) Facility (antenna tower and/or sup	porting structures) will be equipped with high intensity white lights	Yes	No
which are to be located in residential	neighborhoods, as defined by the applicable zoning law.	()	()
□ If the facility will be equipped with	h high intensity white lights and located in a residentially zoned neighborhoo	od, the	: EA
must address the impact of the lig	ghting to residents. ^{xix}		
If the facility will be equipped with	h high intensity white lights but will not be located in a residentially zoned		
neighborhood, provide document	ation of the location's zoning classification or explain the absence of zoning		
□ If the facility will not be equipped	with high intensity white lights (i.e., FAA Lighting Style B, C, F, or G), docum	ent the	ē
lighting style to be used (if any). ^{xx}			
(9) Facility would cause human expose	ure to levels of radiofrequency radiation in excess of Commission-	Yes	No
adopted guidelines.		()	()
human exposure to radiofrequence	or an exemption pursuant to § 1.1307(b)(3), applicants must prepare an eval cy radiation confirming compliance with the limits in § 1.1310. Mitigation ac to ensure compliance with the limits pursuant to § 1.1307(b)(4). An EA is re mits set out in § 1.1310. ^{xxi}	ctions a	are
(10) Facility will be over 450 feet above	ve ground level (AGL).	Yes	No
New construction of a tower over 450 f	feet AGL, ^{xxii} replacement of a tower over 450 AGL that involves a	()	()
substantial increase in size to the origin	nal tower, modification of an existing tower over 450 feet AGL that		
constitute a substantial increase in size	e of a tower, ^{xxiii} or certain lighting changes to a tower over 450 feet AGL ^{xxiv}		
	facility's effects on migratory birds. Consult FWS guidelines for		
information on avoiding adverse effect			
locational features, National Wild Conservation Plan (HCP) areas, ar should cite specifically to the sect government agencies (<i>e.g.</i> , Depar	•	t .pplicar nt	nt
 If applicable, explain how the app lighting or motion-sensor lighting 	licant will provide lighting under the proposed tower and associated buildin is preferred.	gs. No	1
Explain how the applicant determ	ined whether there are Bald Eagle or Golden Eagle nests within 0.5 miles of	the	
proposed antenna structure.			
If the proposed facility requires m	itigation, or any measures are proposed to mitigate effects on migratory bir	[.] d spec	ies
or habitats, describe such measur	es. Include copies of any Blanket Clearance Letters, Memoranda of		
Agreement/Understanding, and o	ther FWS conditions or recommendations, as well as any conditions or		
recommendations of state wildlife	e agencies.		
□ If the proposed facility will include	e steady-burning lights, explain the reasons for using such lighting.		

ⁱⁱ Certain facilities in designated rights-of-way, as well as collocations on existing structures, need be evaluated only for effects on historic properties and for human exposure to radio frequency emissions. *See* 47 CFR § 1.1306(c) and Note 1. In addition, construction in an established "antenna farm" need be considered only for human exposure to radio frequency emissions. *Id.* at Note 3.

^{III} See 47 CFR § 1.1311(e).

^{iv} See 47 CFR § 1.1307(a), (b).

^v See 47 CFR § 1.1307(c), (d).

^{vi} "Listed species" are defined as any species of fish, wildlife or plant which has been determined to be endangered or threatened under section 4 of the ESA. *See* 16 U.S.C. § 1533.

^{vii} "Proposed species" is defined as any species of fish, wildlife or plant that has been proposed in the Federal Register to be listed under section 4 of the ESA. *See* 16 U.S.C. § 1533.

viii "Critical habitat" is defined in section 3 of the ESA. See 16 U.S.C. § 1533.

^{ix} U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service defines an "action area" as "all areas to be affected, directly or indirectly, by the federal action and not merely the immediate area involved in the action." *See* 50 CFR § 402.02(d). For example, an action area would include the site of the proposed antenna structure, its immediate vicinity, and any roads to be constructed to the tower site by the applicant.

[×] U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, *IPaC Information for Planning and Consultation*, https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/ (last visited June 2, 2022).

^{xi} If available, provide information about post-high school formal education including degrees held, areas of expertise, years of experience, and membership in any relevant professional accreditation organizations.
 ^{xii} Revised Tower Construction Guidance for Protection of the Northern Long-Eared Bat Under the Endangered Species Act, Public Notice, DA 21-1501 (WTB Dec. 2, 2021).

xiii Wireless Facility Construction Guidance Within the American Burying Beetle's Range, Public Notice, DA 21-1500 (WTB Dec. 2, 2021).

^{xiv} An EA is always required under this circumstance.

^{xv} If the proposed facilities are to be located on Tribal land (within the exterior boundaries of any Indian reservation or dependent Indian community) and the Tribal Nation has assumed the SHPO's functions pursuant to section 101(d)(2) of the National Historic Preservation Act, provide a letter from the THPO in lieu of the SHPO. If the proposed facilities are to be located on Tribal land and the Tribal Nation has not assumed SHPO functions, provide letters from both the relevant Tribal official and the SHPO.

^{xvi} An EA need not be filed when the FCC and applicants have entered into an MOA to mitigate effects of a proposed undertaking on historic properties, if the only basis for the preparation of an EA was the potential for significant effects on such properties. *See Implementation of State and Local Governments' Obligation to Approve Certain Wireless Facility Modification Requests Under Section 6409(a) of the Spectrum Act of 2012*, WT Docket No. 19-250, RM-11849, Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 35 FCC Rcd 5977, 6001, para. 46 (2020).

^{xvii} An EA is always required under this circumstance.

^{xviii} See 47 CFR § 1.1311(b).

xix See 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(1).

^{xx} See Federal Aviation Administration, Advisory Circular 70/7460-1, *Obstruction Marking and Lighting* (Nov. 16, 2020).

^{xxi} 47 CFR § 1.1307(b)(1)(i)(B).

^{xxii} National Environmental Policy Act Compliance for Proposed Tower Registrations, Effects of Communications Towers on Migratory Birds, WT Docket Nos. 08-61, 03-187, Order on Remand, 26 FCC Rcd 16700, 16731, para. 78 (2011) (Order on Remand).

^{xxiii} See id., citing Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for Review of Effects on Historic Properties for Certain Undertakings Approved by the Federal Communications Commission, 47 CFR Part 1, App. C, at § III.C; see also Nationwide Agreement for the Collocation of Wireless Antennas, 47 CFR Part 1, App. B, at § I.C.

^{xxiv} Order on Remand, 26 FCC Rcd at 16731, para. 78. An EA is required if lights are to be added to an unlit antenna structure, or if red steady lights are to be added to an antenna structure. See 47 CFR § 17.4(c)(1)(iii).

ⁱ See 47 CFR § 1.1312.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST: Assessing EA Sufficiency

Pursuant to 47 CFR § 1.1311, an EA must meet certain requirements. If an EA is required after completing the previous checklist, use this checklist to evaluate if the draft EA will meet the section 1.1311 criteria considered during the Commission's review. Commission staff may contact applicants with questions and may return an EA that does not meet these general requirements.

(1)	invironmental Assessment (EA) must meet the following: The EA should not be conclusory or argumentative, and should explain the environmental consequences in	Yes	No
(1)	sufficient detail to enable the agency to reach a determination about the proposal's environmental impact. 47 CFR § 1.1311(b).	()	()
(2)	The EA must include a description of the facilities as well as supporting structures and appurtenances. 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(1). (The description should include, for example, any equipment, parking, fencing or access road construction associated with the site, tree-clearing of guy wire paths, as well as any trenching, power lines and poles, or construction associated with the provision of utilities. The EA should also include the total project footprint and analyze the associated impacts.)	Yes ()	No ()
(3)	The EA must include a description of the site and surrounding area and uses. 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(1).	Yes ()	No ()
(4)	The EA must include a statement on the site's zoning classification, and communications with, or proceedings before and determinations made by, zoning, planning, environmental, or other local, state, Tribal, or federal authorities on matters relating to environmental effects. 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(2).	Yes ()	No ()
(5)	The EA must include a statement as to whether construction of the facilities has been a source of controversy on environmental grounds in the local community. 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(3).	Yes ()	No ()
(6)	The EA must include a discussion of environmental and other considerations which led to the selection of the particular site and facility. 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(4).	Yes ()	No ()
(7)	The EA must include a discussion of the nature and extent of any unavoidable adverse environmental effects. 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(4).	Yes ()	No ()
(8)	The EA must include a discussion of any alternative sites or facilities which have been or might reasonably be considered. 47 CFR § 1.1311(a)(4). (Reasonable alternatives include those that are practical or feasible from the technical and economic standpoint and using common sense, rather than simply desirable from the standpoint of the applicant. Consideration of these alternatives need not require detailed analysis, but should state why they are impractical or infeasible. A no action alternative could be "no service" or "no improved service.")	Yes ()	No ()
(9)	The EA must include a discussion of any site feature that has special environmental significance (<i>e.g.</i> , wildlife preserves; migration paths for birds and wildlife; sites of archaeological, historic, or architectural value; natural or designed landscapes). 47 CFR § 1.1311(b).	Yes ()	No ()
(10)	The EA must specify the effect of the facilities on any historically significant properties that are listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places. 47 CFR § 1.1311(b).	Yes ()	No ()
(11)	The EA must describe any substantial change in the character of the land utilized (<i>e.g.</i> , deforestation, water diversion, wetland fill, or other extensive change of surface features). 47 CFR § 1.1311(b).	Yes ()	No ()
(12)	In the case of wilderness areas, wildlife preserves, or other like areas, the EA must include a discussion of the effect of any continuing pattern of human intrusion into the area (<i>e.g.</i> , necessitated by the operation and maintenance of the facilities). 47 CFR § 1.1311(b).	Yes ()	No ()
(13)	The EA must include evidence of site approval from local or federal land use authorities. 47 CFR § 1.1311(c).	Yes ()	No ()
(14)	The EA must include any other information the FCC has requested, if applicable.	Yes ()	No ()