

So now we're going to shift gears a little bit and head to Alaska. We're going to have our first field perspective from Jolie Pollet and she's from the Alaska state office, and since she's joining us by phone she is going to give us her perspective on how you can use the handbook as one-stop shopping but instead of just having to look at us the whole time or something, she put together this wonderful slide show of scenery of Alaska. So you can look at some pictures of Alaska while she's talking to you about how she feels about the NEPA Handbook. All right. Are you here with us?

>> J. Pollet: Good morning. I'm here. Thanks for inviting me to share my perspectives about the new NEPA Handbook. I'm excited to talk about it. Our office is in Alaska and I'm sure those around the Bureau are looking forward to using the new NEPA Handbook. In Alaska we have already been using it almost daily it seems like and I'll talk about some of those examples of how we've been using the handbook since its release in January. I really like how the handbook can be one stop shopping for BLM NEPA guidance and what I mean by that is that the handbook includes the background language and the actual wording from the act and the actual language from CEQ guidance. So users can understand where a particular requirement or suggestion may be coming from, and I like being able to understand if something is merely a BLM suggestion or a requirement, a legal requirement to comply with the act. I think the handbook does a really good job of explaining where those guidelines come from in the handbook. I think users will find that helpful, especially in determining decision space, whether to include something or not to include something in a NEPA document. I think once the web guide is completed, it's going to be great to be able to easily access examples so we don't have to reinvent the wheel each time we in

encounter a new situation. I can't wait to see the examples in the web guide and then I can't wait for the opportunity to be able to add additional examples. So I sure hope there is a way we would be able to do that as we evolve maybe in the next -- maybe not quite 20 years for this new handbook but at least for the time being until we develop perhaps the next generation NEPA Handbook. I've also noticed in the past few months of using the handbook that it's been really easy to find what we've been looking for. We've been using this practically daily. So we have been able to use the table of contents and organization is outlined really well to be able to follow, as Megan was describing, the steps and able to guide us through the process. It's been really helpful that way. So I really am pleased with the organization. An example of that is just recently one of our offices was preparing an environmental assessment. We had some folks reviewing it, and we were noticing that the document wasn't flowing well. And with all our institutional NEPA knowledge we hadn't thought to look to the new NEPA Handbook. When we did, we found that in appendix 9 there's a suggested EA format and by editing the NEPA document to follow the new EA format we found that the document flowed much better. So it was a great thing to be able to have that guidance in front of us and to look through it and to help us improve our document. So that was probably the first way that one of our offices used the NEPA Handbook, is we looked at appendix 9 and revamped our EA to follow that format. And another example we were looking at the DNA guidance and the DNA worksheets in the NEPA Handbook, and we noticed that the new DNA worksheets follow a slightly different format and cover slightly different information than the old DNA worksheets. So yet another way of applying the new NEPA Handbook into action right away onto a real life project. And we also liked the way that the new DNA worksheets were developed. I

think it's more concise and it provides some more relevant information in one place. Also the NEPA Handbook came in handy recently because some of us in the office were having a discussion about some resource protection measures. We were trying to determine if they were part of their proposed action design -- design features of the proposed action or mitigation measures and so we were checking out chapters 6-5 and 6-8 to help us decide on this discussion whether these resource protection measures were actually designed features of the proposed action or mitigation measures. So we found it useful at that point as well. And in another example, we were really happy to find the categorical exclusion, the Departmental and BLM ones, all in one place. It really helped us to be able to focus a proposed action that we were developing and being able to see all the categorical exclusions in one place helped us focus that proposed action and actually kind of whittle it down and remove some things that were categorically excluded. It was a multi-part proposed action. So it was really nice to be able to have all those categorical exclusions in one place and be able to really zing through our proposed action in light of these categorical exclusions and help us decide what it was we were going to be actually analyzing in an EA. And having everything in one place has really improved the efficiency and the organization and we've been able to kind of find what we need really quickly. We don't have to search through a lot of other documents. I think that will also become more evident when the web guide is developed. So hopefully we can get that done quickly. Probably my most favorite thing about the handbook is how it deals with the discussion of the issues. And Richard had discussed that, how kind of a focus or a goal for the handbook was being able to streamline the process and be able to exclude a lot of extraneous information. We've been using the

new handbook to help us and help our I.D. teams focus on the relevant issues, and I like that quote in the handbook that says something about... we need to concentrate on the relevant issues rather than amassing needless detail. That's really starting to hit home in some of our offices here. EA's typically tend to go into a lot of detail and in the affected environment section, talking about EAs in this case, and probably we don't need to do that as much. But the handbook will be a nice way to reinforce that and to be able to help us do some heavy editing on EAs and help us work with I.D. teams so we can prepare more focused and more useful NEPA documents to help us get to better decision making. And that's the end of my examples, but as you can see just in the past few months, we've used the NEPA Handbook for quite a variety of reasons, and I think it's going to be a really valuable tool for NEPA specialists and others throughout all levels of the organization. I just want to say thanks for letting me participate and thanks for including me today on your NEPA discussion.

>> C. Humphrey: Well, thanks, JOLIE. We appreciate your time on this. And I like the slide show. You had some nice slides up there. So we have -- one thing I wanted to say is that some of the examples that you gave, they mimicked a lot what some of the folks turned in in advance, some of their comments. One of the questions we asked them is what did you like about the handbook, and some of the things you hit on, the format and the organization of it, the examples, brought says. So sounds like everybody is on a similar page.

>> C. Humphrey: So in case everybody is surprised, we have two more people around the table. I forgot to mention when that we came back from the break. This is Chuck Otto, field manager from Pinedale, and you remember Peggy

Sorensen who joined us again just a few minutes ago. I think that answers the question. Are there any more push-to-talk questions on anything that we've covered or anything else in the handbook that's kind of a broad nature that will be interesting to the -- most the BLM?

>> C. Humphrey: Since I'm sure everybody is thinking furiously and looking up in their documents, while you're doing that, since Chuck is sitting here, what I would like to do is get his perspective, a field manager's perspective, on the handbook. I know that you started out in Washington D.C. and you were there when the NEPA Handbook was being worked on and you were part of the team. So now you're in the field implementing it. So how has the handbook worked for you?

>> C. Otto: In Pinedale we have a lot of projects on the plate there, and we do have a couple programmatic oil and gas EISs that have been completed so we're extensively using the 9390 categorical exclusions. We have a couple EISs coming up and we're hoping to use the handbook for those.

>> C. Humphrey: Great. So do you want to go through your --

>> C. Otto: Sure. First I'd like to say it's a pleasure to be here from wild and wonderful Pinedale, Wyoming. It's an interesting process being here in the broadcast booth. When they sat me down next to Ted they immediately realized two people with slightly receding hair lines were a problem, and went out and tried to get an emergency resupply of antiglare powder. I was amazed when that dump truck pulled up to the front of the Training Center here.

>> C. Humphrey: At least your outfits match.

>> C. Otto: I would like to provide a field manager and a field management perspective on the new NEPA Handbook. It's probably an understatement to say BLM field personnel are always looking for the most efficient and streamline ways to get work done in the field. Many of them would say that the NEPA process fits either of those definitions, however. However, it is part of the job, and any improvements to the process, and especially to making good decisions that can stand the test of time and the test of litigation, fit comes to that, are good investments. The new NEPA Handbook definitely helps with this process. You'll see here on your screen in a minute a picture of the JONAH infill project. The JONAH is an infill -- there it is. You've probably seen this picture before around the Bureau. This is an oil and gas developer's dream project and environmentalists worst nightmare. However, the Pinedale is an area with intensive natural gas development and due to the magnitude of discoveries has many layers of NEPA. The level of development resource impacts, the use of on site and off-site mitigation and the level of controversy in Pinedale mean we need to be writing the best NEPA documents we can at every level. Scoping and issue identification are key components of the NEPA process. Oftentimes you may meet with interested public's and it seems that everyone has a different idea on how to proceed or not. We'll be oftentimes in the field and we'll get a whole range of different perspectives and opinions. Ensuring we capture these ideas and present a reasonable range of alternatives is now a highlight of the new handbook. Pinedale is home to some of the largest natural gas reserves in the country as well as critical range for mule deer, prong horn antelope and sage grouse. Impacts can be large and on site mitigation may or may not always be enough to bring impacts down to what we would consider acceptable levels. We've used off-site mitigation extensively in the Pinedale area to

bridge this gap, analyzing the effects of proposed development on resources and issues identified through scoping is essential framework of NEPA and provides information necessary to the field manager in order to make an informed decision and that's really the key thing that we need to do in the field is make an informed decision. Identification of impacts and the ability to mitigate or not mitigate those impacts will present a true picture to the manager nod to decide whether to authorize the action or not authorize it. Because of this need, adding mitigation measures is also a new feature. How we insert mitigation into alternatives, proposed action and the record of decision are all items where advice and examples, especially in the soon to be completed online user's guide may help management and specialist as they develop their document. I think that online user's guide is going to be a key factor. It should provide lots of good information and good examples to folks. In addition to the major gas fields in the Pinedale area, Pinedale is also undergoing exploration in wildcat areas. As I said a minute ago in the major gas field for which a programmatic EIS has been prepared in the last five years, the Pinedale office is making extensive use of section 390 categorical exclusions as required by the energy policy act of 2005. These part of the new handbook and are included in the list of categorical exclusions and are found in appendix 2 of the new NEPA Handbook. Believe it or not, Pinedale actually does do other things other than oil and gas. We do have other workloads and in addition to the new energy CXs there's also a number of CXs covering small forestry and fuels reduction projects as well as -- we try to use all of those in the Pinedale field office and they all lead to more efficient processing of actions on public land. A note of caution by like to provide folks, though, is that they need to be applied judiciously and

consistently, because CXs really are a great tool for public land management in the field but we don't want to abuse that tool and lose the opportunity to use those in the future. To kind of finalize here, there's several areas where I think the new handbook is going to be essential to work in the field. I know most offices probably have collateral duty planning environmental coordinators at best oftentimes a lone planning and environmental coordinator out there. In Pinedale we've blessed to have several planners but due to the turnover in a lot of the energy offices it seems like we're constantly in a training mode either for planners or for Resource Specialists that are involved in writing EAs and working on our projects. I think the new handbook will be essential to -- as a training aid and also as a policy and reference guide in the future. I especially like the logic of organization that found in the handbook. Makes it easy for the most harried EA team lead or field manager to find something in the handbook and get an answer. I think you'll find that's a big improvement over the old document. I think it's well written, logically developed and easy to understand. It's been updated with the most recent changes in law, BLM regulations and court cases that have developed over the last few years. It will be a definite aid to those of us in the field dealing with the everyday workload of getting things done or as we say in Wyoming, gettin' her done.

>> C. Humphrey: Thanks, Chuck. I think you provided a valuable perspective on the NEPA Handbook to realize people can actually use it and not just stick it on the shelf.

>> C. Otto: You're welcome.

>> C. Humphrey: Appreciate that