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PRESENTER: This is a good -- I like you guys already, by the way, because we got through the first step without anyone saying, "That's not what's supposed in a prep plan." Some past groups are kind of argumentative or all have a different perspective, and our goal is to kind of whip through those things and then get to the meat. So that appears to be working. We'll see how well we fare at subsequent stages, though.

I want to talk a little about a couple considerations that we have when we're thinking about what to do for social and economic analyses. You're starting an RMP and you have to lay out what you think you're going to be doing. In major terms, you know. If you're going to do a survey, for example, which is highly unlikely, I'll admit, you need to identify that very early in the process because you're going to have to pay somebody to do it. You're going to have to deal with the Paper Work Reduction Act, which requires us to obtain approval from the Office of Management and Budget every time we want to collect the same type of information from more than nine people. So focus groups, interviews in that, too, sometimes, yeah. Regularly violated but a nice thing to be aware of, at least.

So, you know -- and, frankly, social and economic analyses are probably not, you know, at the forefront of thinking at this stage of the process because we don't have the capacity to do much ourselves, so we're thinking, what can we do, what can we contract, who can we dump this on our planning team?

So there's a few thing to keep in mind at this point. One of them is the scope of alternatives and likely degree of change. Now, we don't have any alternatives yet at this point, obviously, or even any planning issues, but we have a pretty fair idea of what the major issues are going to be in a new plan or a plan revision or a plan amendment, and we probably have a pretty good idea of what our range of alternatives might look like, or at least how they're going to vary across that range of reasonable alternatives, and the likely degree of social and economic change that's likely to result. And for some things you may not be able to -- for some plans you may not be able to think of a lot of significant social and economic effects because, of course, NEPA is designed to look not at every little change that will happen but to identify the significant ones. So sometimes you may be able to correctly say, "Well, this doesn't seem like a big-ticket item. There's something else out there that's going to occupy a lot more of our time and interest."

Public decision maker, elected officials', stakeholders' level of demand for social and economic analyses is another important consideration when you're trying to decide, "Well, how much effort do we want to allot to the social arena or the economic arena?"

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You know, back a few years ago when Kathleen Clark announced kind of the cooperating agency policy, one of the -- this was the press release that announced that. I just want to read a line from it. "Clark said the cooperating agency relationship outlined in the revised planning regulations will ensure the planning process incorporates local knowledge of economic, social and political conditions and addresses local interests and values."

So you're empowering this group of people to be cooperating agencies, to be partners, and so, you know, they're probably going to have a little higher level of interest in social and economic impacts than the agency might have. So there it is important to talk to them early in the process and get their views on -- not on for or against but on kind of the scope and the scale of the analysis and what types of techniques you might have to do, because this will help you to determine, well, you know, can we just skate on this? Do we need to hire -- if we're contracting out the environmental analysis for the whole RMP, do we want to really make sure that their social and economic people are really good or do we want to split that off and sit important enough to analyze separately and maybe try to put a little more money in it? Time, funding, personnel, information limits. I mean, these aren't unique to the social or economic planning arena certainly. And, you know, what's left for social analyses in particular may be kind of the leftovers from what all of the important issues and the analyses required are.

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And so, you know, it's just -- if you just know that up front, then you can decide how to deal with it.

The level and type of effort for the entire plan, you know, the social and economic analyses that you do for an RMP are in that greater context. They're going to be in the same document as all of the other analyses. So, you know, you need to kind of -- your effort needs to be commensurate with what the issues and alternatives are going to look like, but also, you know, with what other types of the depth and breadth of the other analyses that are going to be in the plan. So that's kind of an I.D. team issue.
And then this last one is kind of interesting, and it can have agency -- it can be bounded by agency parameters or community parameters, but it's kind of the standard or institutional norm for this type of analysis and this type of plan, and there may be -- you may be doing an RMP in an area where there's several National Forests and maybe they have each done a major plan revision and have really spent a lot of time and effort dealing with a certain set of social issue from a certain group of stakeholders, for example.

Well, that's a blessing and a curse, maybe. It's a curse because then there will be the expectation that you put that same level of effort into it because they have created a public expectation, perhaps. But the blessing side of it is that maybe you can still use most of their data, or a lot of their data and a lot of their analyses may have some applicability.

So you got to kind of judge the social and political scene to determine what type and level of effort you're going to have to put into social and economic analyses as well as, you know, aspects of the plan revision itself and what the issues are.

But regardless of what you decide to do and what level of effort you decide to put towards social and economic analyses, as part of the plan we would strongly encourage you to have some kind of -- and we've called it stakeholder outreach involvement plan. To kind of distinguish it from -- I'm not talking about the regular public involvement effort under NEPA. I'm talking about something that you can take advantage of to help frame your social and economic analyses and help you collect information that's relevant. So, you know, there will be -- you know, you live in all the communities that you're working in and you have a sense of who's there and what the interest groups are and who the stakeholders are, and we're encouraging you to develop some kind of strategy from kind of an anecdotal catch as catch can, keep talking to the people I talk to level of effort at one end to some kind of systematic outreach effort on the other. But, you know, you can't talk, as should be clear from the discussion of social concepts, you can't talk about quality of life from existing data or from the census data or from the economic profile system. You might get lucky and there might have been somebody who has just done a study of the quality of life in a set of communities that are going to be affected by your plan, but chances -- you know, chances are that that may not be the case. Or you may live in a state that has pretty good existing data. Alaska has great data at the community level, but it still doesn't tell you about what adds to or detracts from the quality of life for those people. It doesn't tell you about their sense of place. You know, the only way you can get that information is by going out and talking to people, and so we're just suggesting you do that in a fairly systematic way if possible.

And this is an example. It's an economic outreach strategy summary of involvement, and it just has the entity that needs to be contacted and a contact person and why you're contacting person, how you're going to do it, who's going to do it and when, and this is kind of a systematic effort to identify all of your groups of stakeholders, all of your important partners, and to make some kind of systematic effort to go to them and discuss at this early stage, the prep plan stage, what's coming. If you work for somebody, if you have a supervisor, what's the thing that they like least? Well, there's probably a lot of them, but in my experience it's being caught. It's being surprised by finding out about something they didn't know existed that you should have alerted them to because it's causing heat for them and they didn't hear about it from you. It's the same thing. You can start cementing relations with all of these different entities and all of your stakeholder groups by going and talking with them and just having kind of an initial discussion and getting a little feedback about what's coming and what level of effort they my expect to see or what analyses they expect to see. It's tricky. You don't want to confuse this with scoping, because that's kind of a separate process. You're scoping the analysis. You're not scoping the whole process here. This is just -- this is just one way to do that, and then you can collect information from all of these people. You're establishing a relationship can that benefit you throughout the planning process as you collect information that might be relevant to each stage of the planning process, and you're also helping to, you know, design a prep plan.

And this is nice, too, because it's not just you who is going to a supervisor or planning environmental coordinator or if you're in the Forest Service a district ranger or a forest supervisor and saying, "Well, I think this needs to be done. You need to give me more money for social analyses because I feel it's important." If you're talking to these entities and you can demonstrate that there is going to be -- people are going to look at this really closely, there's a high level of public demand for this set of social or this set of economic analyses and you can document that, you more likely to get those resources devoted to you, I would think.

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So I think this is my last one here. What we want to do, why we contact stakeholders, why we make this initial effort, why we kind of scope out the level of effort, is just so we can approach the planning process with an idea of what we're going to do, and this is kind of rare for social science. You don't see this kind of systematic effort too much, do you? And so we're just trying to take this, the social and economic arena, and put them on kind of a somewhat more of a level playing field where the other resource areas. And then, you know, after that, the chips fall where they may and the resources may be there or they won't be there. But at least we'll start out knowing what we'd like to do to fully describe the impacts we're going to have to describe in order to have an informed public and an informed decision maker, which is the goal of NEPA, really.

So, with that, we are going to segue into the next portion of this step, and you're finally going to get to hear from Joan. We've kept her under wraps.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: I just wanted to bring up something we're dealing with in our RMP, and we're in the prep planning process, is that we have a group that is particularly passionate about their developing surveys like to represent their small community and what they want in that area is -- I mean, they're really -- I think it's really great that you brought up a level playing field because there's other interest groups, not just this one interest group, and we try to stress to them that we're not going to make decisions based on surveys but on scientific data and other information that we come up with. But it's just really tough when you have this group pulling you, pulling you and you're spending a lot of time dealing with that one group and you want to make it still, like you said, a level playing field.

PRESENTER: In that case, it's certainly possible to work with them a little about it, and they may be doing -- they may have a good idea of how to do -- they may have a high capacity for doing a good research effort which you may be able to cite in your planning document, or it may something less than that.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: They are asking for input in their surveys to make sure that they are putting the proper BLM language, I guess. So I don't know how much input, I mean, is appropriate, but we're doing our best there, I guess.

PRESENTER: Are there expectations on their part that this will become part of the science basis for the planning document? Or are they doing it to bolster and make them politically stronger as an interest group by having quantitative data to show you?

CLASS PARTICIPANT: So far it sounds like all the above because, yeah, they do seem like they're trying to rile up the community and get them to kind of skew, I think, what they -- it seems like their survey was skewed toward one way. So I don't know. And so our thoughts were, if you're going to have a survey, include all of the things that are planned for the area and not just what you want so get an idea what is really representative for the area. So that's what we kind of commented there.

PRESENTER: I'll take another minute of Joan's time here, too, to just let you know about something, kind of a different project I'm working on, which this is actually the perfect intro for. I have some money from the Forest Service to develop what is being called protocol for community self-evaluations, and it's recognizing that a lot of people seeing that an agency isn't going to do a community survey, although in some cases we do, is going to go do one themselves, and it may have, you know, good scientific intent or it may have evil political intent, you know, but the goal of this project I'm working on is to develop kind of a workbook, a set of protocols that allows a community to work with an agency, whether it be the BLM or the Forest Service, or somebody else, and the agency is saying, okay, well, if you do this in this way, then it's a lot more likely that we will be able to use this as though we had collected it ourselves, and it outlines the various steps that the community would have to go through and the various options available to them in doing that kind of self-evaluation. And so with a tool like that, it's kind of a negotiation between -- it gives you a -- you say if you follow this stuff, then we'll take a look at it and we will be able to apply that. And it's information that will be beneficial to everyone because it's information that we might not have gone out and collected on our own. But it also gives you a filter for those political push surveys that are designed to just represent one viewpoint and then characterize that as a population's opinion.

So, it's not an uncommon scenario, and it's one that we'll try to address with a set of protocol like that. Because it's -- I mean, you certainly don't want to discourage that initiative and development of that capacity and that possible useful information source, but you would feel very uncomfortable making any promises about how it would be used if at all.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: I think right now we're just trying to emphasize that there's going to be other various avenues that they will be able to -- for public participation, and they've stressed interest in being a cooperating agency, but since -- they're an association, we're going to encourage them to go through the counties and the local government which are going to be cooperating agencies.

PRESENTER: Yeah, I would say you could just encourage them to -- you know, if they want the survey to have credibility to the public to work with people who do surveys and to make it as legitimate an effort as possible, and you may have to just leave it at that.

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