

>> The Bureau of Land Management presents Live from the BLM National Training Center in Phoenix, Arizona, a planning and NEPA forum, introducing the new BLM NEPA Handbook. And now the host of this forum, Cathy Humphrey.

>> C. Humphrey: Good morning, everybody. I'd like to welcome you to the planning NEPA forum. I think this is the ninth one we've had so far and today's topic is the new NEPA Handbook. I'm sure everybody is anxiously awaiting to see what we have to say. But before we do that we're going to get things started with Director Jim Caswell. He's going to welcome us. Director?

>> Dir. Caswell: Welcome. New NEPA guidance was issued this past year in the form of the NEPA manual and handbook. These are critical pieces of updated guidance to support our decision making. We spend a significant amount of time and money completing the NEPA analysis. The revised manual and handbook are tools for you and will make our process more efficient and effective. The National Environmental Policy Act is one of the laws that closely guides the mission of the Bureau. In fact, the BLM mission strongly echoes NEPA's goals of creating and maintaining conditions under which people and nature can co-exist in productive harmony. The BLM makes decisions every day on actions that affect our public lands, having an effective NEPA process is critical to making land management and resource decisions that are not only sound but also defensible when challenges arise to those decisions. Today we will review the new handbook, our how-to guide to do just that. It has been 20 years since we revised our how-to NEPA Handbook. In this time many concepts have evolved through practical application, case law and legislation. Our revised handbook addresses these changes, providing practitioners with more current and detailed guidance on how to use the NEPA process when

making decisions. The handbook team made revisions with a focus on improving the adequacy of analysis to support decision making. The outcome will give us better decisions, more understandable documents and make the process more efficient, avoiding redundant or unnecessary documentation. The handbook team expended a tremendous effort and passion to produce this how-to guide. I would like to recognize those names that appear on the screen. From recent hire to long-term BLM employee, these diverse folks demonstrate the level of commitment to sound resource decision making using the NEPA process. I'm excited about our new handbook and the opportunity it has to make your jobs in the field a little easier. I encourage you to be an active participant in this broadcast.

>> C. Humphrey: Thanks, Director, for that nice welcome and for starting us off right. First I would like to thank all the people that registered on DOI Learn. We always appreciate it when you register. And to all people that sent us questions in advance -- we probably got 20, 25 people that sent us questions or comments that they wanted us to address on the broadcast. We will do the best we can to address those. Some of the goals of today's broadcast we want to familiarize you with the new NEPA policy. To do that we're going to describe the philosophy and organization of how the handbook was put together because we feel like that will give you a good background on what's in there. We're going to describe, of course, the major differences between the 1988 handbook and the 2008 handbook. And we'll give you some perspectives from the field. Then, of course, we're going to answer your questions and comments throughout. So if you haven't had a chance to get a copy of the NEPA Handbook, this is how you do it. You go to the BLM website, WWW.BLM.gov, and then click on the information tab on the left, and then scroll

down to NEPA, click on that, and then scroll down the page and you'll see the NEPA Handbook towards the bottom. Any time you need a copy of that, that's how you find it. But I'm sure all of you have already gotten your copies. We developed this broadcast assuming that you're familiar with NEPA, you're familiar with the terminology and the concepts. So we're not going to spend time talking about the processes and how to do EAs, how to do EISs. We're going to mostly focus on the differences. So we're real happy to have those of you who aren't as familiar with the concepts and acronyms and the words, and if that's the case, just jot those things down and then talk to your NEPA coordinator or you can call anybody on the panel after the broadcast and discuss it with us -- with them. We've got three hours, and there's going to be lots of opportunities for you to participate. We'll have a short break in the middle but be sure to come back, because the best stuff is in the second half. If everybody so-called behaves themselves we'll keep the bridge open the entire broadcast, and that what that means is if you have a question, it will be like a classroom, you push in and ask us a question. If we get too many interruptions, we'll probably have to close it down and then just open it at certain times, but what we'll do is each person is going to talk a little bit and then you can ask questions after that. You can always fax or phone call in your questions. Those numbers are on your screen right now. If you could please keep your questions to ones that are broad and more applicable to the entire BLM that would be more helpful because we want to focus on the more fundamental changes that are in the handbook rather than your site specific, office specific questions. So if we get those kind of questions, then we will capture those and answer them off line. So, what I would like to do now is introduce Peg Sorensen. She is the NEPA lead in the

Washington Office. It's nice to see you, peg.

>> P. Sorensen: Thanks, Cathy. Greetings. I hope you've had an opportunity to get into the NEPA Handbook and see what's going on with it. It's a great tool and hopefully it will support your compliance with NEPA. It is one of the tools that we in the planning and NEPA shop want to make sure is available to support your efforts in the field. From my first exposure with the NEPA Handbook in 1988 I found it to be a fairly useful tool to help me work through the NEPA process. The NEPA team or handbook team has completely reworked or rewritten the NEPA Handbook and I think it makes it a much better document, exponentially better than the 1988 version. If you have copies of the 1988 version, by like you to dispose of them appropriately and replace it in your files with the 2008 edition. In the Washington Office my role as the NEPA lead is really to support the efforts and provide policy and guidance for the NEPA process and to answer your questions and concerns about it. Part of the way I do that is to interpret the NEPA law, the CEQ regulations and Department of the Interior policy. I also develop guidelines or guidance from the BLM specific perspective. Developing policy is not done in a vacuum. I coordinate with the Forest Service -- or other federal agencies, the BLM staff and with Department of Interior and CEQ. The policy that is developed that is based on NEPA -- it's based on NEPA. It steps down through the CEQ regulations, and then through the Department of the Interior implementation procedures, and in those Department of Interior implementation procedures, chapters 1-6 are the real broad overarching ones that all interior uses. BLM's procedures, which were revised in August of 2007, are in chapter 11. They provide our specific guidance for the agency. This includes, of course, the BLM categorical exclusions which you'll hear more about later on and a bunch of other topics

we'll also be discussing, because the handbook pulls all of those pieces, those reference and guidance pieces together, in a handbook so that you can have one-stop understanding and policy for your policy. However, I do encourage you to check out the guidance and resources that are on the web -- on the internet through the regulations and manuals and have them help you through the handbook. I'm pleased that the NEPA Handbook team today will have the opportunity to talk to you about their efforts and later on in the broadcast I will tell you what's happening in the Washington Office as it relates to NEPA, but for now let's get into the handbook. Cathy?

>> C. Humphrey: Peg, you said you coordinate with other agencies and BLM staff and the Departmental folks also.

>> P. Sorensen: Yes, I do.

>> C. Humphrey: Okay. All right. Great. I just wanted to clarify that. Now, peg is mostly going to be working behind the scenes, and she will be working with Mark Chamberlain of our office. They are going to be working on the faxes and phone calls, organizing them. So peg will step off the set and she'll be back with us later this afternoon. If you have any questions for her, we'll have some time more for her later. Now it's time to introduce our panel, we're all on the NEPA Handbook team and I would first like to start out with Ted Milesnick. Some of you have seen him before. He is the chief fire planning and research in the office of fire and aviation. He has been with the BLM for 38 years, and he had the honor of being the team leader for the handbook revision team. I'm glad you could join us, Ted.

>> T. Milesnick: Thanks, Cathy. I'm glad to be here. I really enjoyed being part of the NEPA team and I'm excited about sharing some of the

highlights of the handbook with all of you today.

>> C. Humphrey: And then on my right we've got Richard Hardt here from Eugene, Oregon, district office, ecologist and he has 14 years.

>> R. Hardt: It's wonderful to be here.

>> C. Humphrey: Next to Richard, Megan Conry, she is a planning and environmental coordinator. She's from the Roseburg District Office from Oregon. She's been with the BLM for almost four years, and didn't you start out your career as a Presidential Management Fellow in the Washington Office?

>> M. Conry: I did, Cathy, and while in the Washington Office, this was actually the first major project I worked on with BLM. So I'm definitely excited to be here.

>> C. Humphrey: I bet you're glad it's finished.

>> M. Conry: Very happy to have it finished.

>> C. Humphrey: Another member is NEPA Handbook team is Elizabeth Carls. She is a solicitor that's been with the Department for almost four years, about the same time as Megan, and she wasn't able to join us in person today but we have a little video clip from her. Elizabeth?

>> E. Carls: Hello. My name is Elizabeth Carls and I'm with the office of the solicitor in Washington D.C. Specifically I am a member of the division of land and water resources and the branch of the public lands, and one of our client groups is the planning group, and this is how I became involved in working with the NEPA Handbook revision team. And I very much appreciate opportunity to work with the team.

In particular, it was very interesting to come in really early on in the process and to be able to work out a lot of the ideas with the team as legal issues came up. It's particularly interesting to work with the Bureau of Land Management on NEPA issues because while the National Environmental Policy Act applies to all federal agencies, statistically it's really the Forest Service and the BLM who do by far and away the greatest number of NEPA documents, and this is, of course, due to the wide variety and the huge numbers of resources that both agencies manage. It's very important in complying with NEPA to make sure that environmental information informs agency decision making, and it's also very important for the BLM to be able to show the public and the courts that the agency is considering this environmental information while making the decisions it makes in managing the public lands. It was particularly interesting to work with the handbook team on all these legal issues, not only for the sake of the handbook, but also because at the same time we are constantly working on NEPA concerns in cases that we're working on or other initiatives in the Department and to be able to work out some of these ideas having to do with the NEPA compliance was very useful and helpful particularly with field people who are very experienced in doing NEPA on the ground. So I hope very much that you enjoy the rest of the broadcast. I hope you enjoy the NEPA Handbook and find it useful. Please feel free at any time to contact a member of the NEPA Handbook team or your local NEPA coordinator or if you have questions, feel free to contact the office of your local or regional solicitor or even us in Washington D.C. Thank you very much.

>> C. Humphrey: Thanks, Elizabeth, for that. So you heard it. If you have questions, talk to your solicitors, talk to the NEPA team,

NEPA coordi nator.