



Frequently Asked Questions for the Northern Corridor Project: Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

BACKGROUND

What is the Northern Corridor Project?

The Northern Corridor Project proposes a new highway to reduce congestion and improve east-west travel capacity between Interstate I-15 and State Route 18 in the greater St. George metro area. The highway would consist of the following:

- Multi-lane, divided highway, two 12 ft wide lanes, 20 ft center median, roadway fencing, lighting, and traffic signals;
- 10 to 14 ft wide paved trail for bicycles and pedestrians;
- New intersections at Cottonwood Springs Road and Red Hills Parkway;
- Roadway connections at Washington Parkway at Green Springs Drive and Red Hills Parkway;
- Phased construction, based on future traffic demand.

In 2018, the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) filed a Right-of-Way (ROW) application with the BLM for the Northern Corridor across public lands in the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (NCA); easements would be required for the highway across state, municipal, and private lands.

During 2019 to 2020, the BLM and FWS prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to disclose the impacts of the following federal actions:

- Issuance of a highway ROW across the NCA and Red Cliffs Desert Reserve (Reserve): 3 highway alternatives in the NCA/Reserve, 2 primarily or entirely outside the NCA/Reserve
- Amendments to the BLM's Red Cliffs NCA Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the St. George RMP;
- Issuance of an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) to Washington County for the Mojave desert tortoise.

In January 2021, the Secretary of the Interior signed a BLM Record of Decision (ROD), approving UDOT's ROW and RMP amendments; BLM granted UDOT a 1.9 mile long, 500 ft wide ROW across the NCA. The FWS signed a ROD and granted an ITP to Washington County.

From June 2021 to August 2023, several organizations (Plaintiffs) filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court-District of Columbia against the BLM and FWS for violations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The Department of Justice (DOJ) and Plaintiffs signed a Settlement Agreement that committed the agencies to complete a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and NHPA Section 106 consultations by November 2024. The DOJ filed a motion asking the District Court to remand the BLM's and FWS's 2021 decisions and vacate UDOT's ROW and Washington County's ITP.

In November 2023, the District Court remanded the BLM and FWS 2021 decisions for reconsideration but did not vacate UDOT's ROW or Washington County's ITP.

Where can I see a copy of the 2020 Final EIS and associated RODs?

The 2020 Final EIS and the BLM's and FWS's 2021 RODs are available to all interested parties on the BLM ePlanning website at: <https://ow.ly/pgkG50Q7AyR>

What are the alternatives or options discussed in the Draft SEIS?

The Draft SEIS considers six alternatives similar to those included in the Final EIS published in 2020:



- *UDOT ROW Alignment alternative (No Action, or No Change):* the BLM would affirm the ROW grant issued to UDOT in 2021 following an alignment that is approximately 4.5 miles long, 1.9 miles of which would be across BLM-managed lands. This alternative would have a similar analysis of effects as the “UDOT Application Alignment for the Northern Corridor” alternative described in the 2020 Final EIS. In this case, the FWS would affirm Washington County’s ITP. The changed circumstance related to the construction of the Northern Corridor across the Reserve described in the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) would remain triggered, and Zone 6 would remain in the Reserve.
- *T-Bone Mesa Alignment alternative:* the BLM would modify UDOT’s ROW grant across public lands in the NCA. This alignment would connect Green Springs Drive on the east to Red Hills Parkway on the west just north of the Pioneer Hills trailhead parking area. Under this alternative, the Northern Corridor would skirt the southern edge of T-Bone Mesa. The Northern Corridor would be approximately 4.2 miles long, 2.2 miles of which would be across BLM administered lands. In this case, the FWS would affirm Washington County’s ITP. The changed circumstance related to the construction of the Northern Corridor across the Reserve described in the HCP would remain triggered, and Zone 6 would remain in the Reserve.
- *Southern Alignment alternative:* the BLM would modify UDOT’s ROW grant across public lands in the NCA. This alignment would skirt the southern border of the NCA, connecting Green Springs Drive on the east to Red Hills Parkway on the west just south of, and slightly encroaching onto, the Pioneer Hills trailhead parking area. The Northern Corridor would be approximately 5.5 miles long, approximately 1.5 miles of which would be across BLM-administered lands. In this case, the FWS would affirm Washington County’s ITP. The changed circumstance related to the construction of the Northern Corridor across the Reserve described in the HCP would remain triggered, and Zone 6 would remain in the Reserve.
- *Red Hills Parkway Expressway alternative:* This alternative would convert Red Hills Parkway into a grade-separated expressway between I-15 and Bluff Street. Under this alternative, UDOT would no longer hold the ROW grant for the Northern Corridor across the NCA. The BLM may need to grant necessary ROW amendments to the City of St. George’s existing Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) Title V ROW for the Red Hills Parkway if the planned improvements exceed the boundaries of the existing ROW. Under this alternative, the FWS would amend Washington County’s ITP because it could no longer assume the Northern Corridor changed circumstance is occurring.
- *St. George Boulevard/100 South One-Way Couplet alternative:* Under this alternative, UDOT would no longer hold the ROW grant for the Northern Corridor across the NCA. This alternative would include modifications to St. George Boulevard and 100 South to convert the two roadways into a one-way couplet system between I-15 and Bluff Street, wherein St. George Boulevard would only accommodate westbound traffic and 100 South would only accommodate eastbound traffic. While this alternative meets the purpose and need of the project, it would have to be implemented by the City of St. George because it does not cross any BLM-administered lands. Under this alternative, the FWS would amend Washington County’s ITP because it could no longer assume the Northern Corridor changed circumstance is occurring.
- *Terminate UDOT’s ROW alternative:* Under this alternative, UDOT would no longer hold the ROW grant for the Northern Corridor across the NCA. This alternative would have a similar analysis of effects as, and represents an equivalency with, the “no action” alternative in the 2020



Final EIS. Under this alternative, the FWS would amend Washington County's ITP because it could no longer assume the Northern Corridor changed circumstance is occurring.

Under the Red Hills Parkway Expressway, St. George Boulevard/100 South One-Way Couplet, and Terminate UDOT's ROW alternatives, the 6,812-acre mitigation area in the southwest area of St. George, known as Reserve Zone 6, would be removed from the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. However, the 3,471 acres managed by the BLM within Zone 6 would continue to be managed with the protections put in place under the 2021 St. George Field Office RMP amendments. The remaining 3,341 acres of land, which are either privately owned or managed by the Utah Trust Lands Administration, would no longer be afforded special protections by Washington County and would be subject to development under the amended ITP.

SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

What is a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement? Why is the BLM preparing a SEIS if the BLM already granted a Right-of-Way to the Utah Department of Transportation for the Northern Corridor and approved amendments to the Resource Management Plans?

A SEIS may be prepared if there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or impacts.

In January 2021, the BLM issued a ROW grant to UDOT for the Northern Corridor and approved amendments to the RMPs. In addition, the FWS issued a ROD approving the HCP and ITP to Washington County, which included take and mitigation associated with the Northern Corridor ROW. In response, the Plaintiffs filed a complaint in federal court against the Department of the Interior, BLM, and FWS alleging the decisions made violated NEPA, the NHPA, Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (OPLMA), the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act, and the ESA. The Plaintiffs stated the Final EIS did not fully address the changed conditions of wildfire in the region and the impacts it may have on the Mojave desert tortoise, tortoise habitat, and the spread of invasive annual grasses. In August 2023, a settlement agreement was reached that requires BLM and FWS to prepare a SEIS.

Will the Red Cliffs NCA and St. George Field Office RMP amendments be reconsidered as part of the SEIS?

The amendments to the Red Cliffs NCA and St. George Field Office RMPs will not be reconsidered in the SEIS, but the analysis associated with both RMPs will be reviewed.

How long will it take to complete the SEIS?

Per the settlement agreement, the BLM and FWS intend to conclude the process by November 2024.

How has the public been involved during the development of the SEIS?

The public was first notified of the Draft SEIS effort on November 16, 2023, when the BLM and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published the "*Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to Reconsider a Highway Right-of-Way Application and Associated Amendment of an Incidental Take Permit*" in the **Federal Register** (88 FRN 78781).

During the public scoping period, an open house style meeting was held in St. George on December 6, 2023. The BLM and FWS received 8,993 submissions from the public, agencies, tribes, and organizations during the comment period. Substantive comments were considered during the preparation of the Draft SEIS.

On May 10, 2024, the BLM and EPA published the "*Notice of Availability of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to Reconsider a Highway Right-of-Way Application and Associated Amendment of an Incidental Take Permit*" in the **Federal Register** (89 FRN 40504) announcing the



availability of the Draft SEIS for public review and comment. In addition, the BLM issued a press release and sent notifications via email to Cooperating Agencies, tribes, and the updated project mailing list.

NORTHERN CORRIDOR PROJECT

Is authorizing a highway in the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area compatible with OPLMA's direction to protect the resources of the NCA?

In the settlement agreement, the BLM agreed to make a compatibility determination to ensure that the decision is compatible with law, regulation, and policy for a National Conservation Area.

Is BLM allowed to authorize highways through lands purchased through the LWCF?

The BLM will consider the legal framework provided for management of lands purchased with LWCF funds as part of the decision-making process.

Why hasn't the BLM identified a preferred alternative as is often done in draft environmental analyses?

The BLM wants to hold an open house for interested people and groups before identifying a preferred alternative to ensure we have current and robust comments from all interested parties about the various alternatives.

How long do I have to review and provide comments? How do I provide comments?

The announcement, published in the **Federal Register**, opened a 45-day public comment period. Comments must be received **by June 24, 2024**, and can be submitted in the following manner:

- By mail: Bureau of Land Management
Attn: Northern Corridor SEIS
345 East Riverside Drive
St. George, UT 84790
- Via ePlanning: <https://ow.ly/pgkG50Q7AyR>

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was passed by Congress in 1969 and signed into law on January 1, 1970. The NEPA process is intended to help public officials make decisions that are based on understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment.

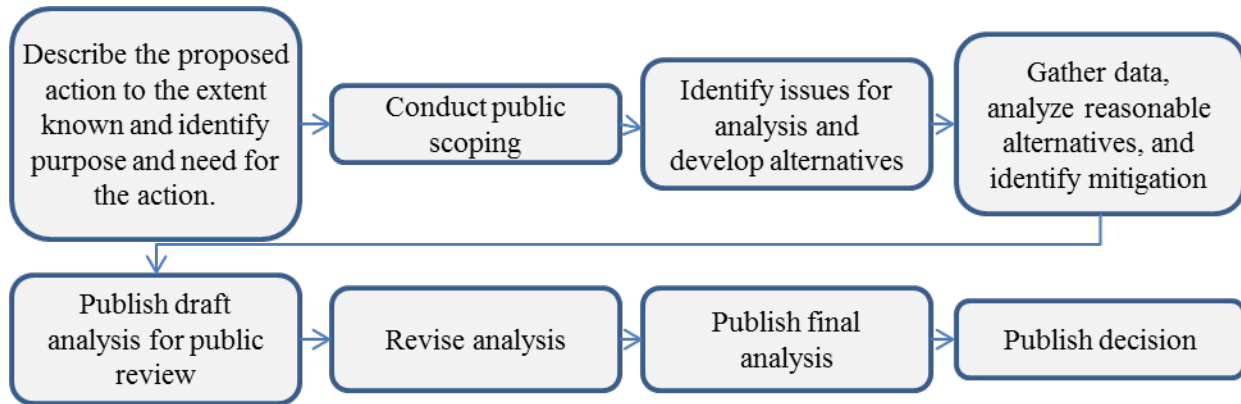
What is the process for preparing a SEIS?

The NEPA Process chart outlines the general process for NEPA compliance. Public involvement may occur throughout this process. Keep in mind, NEPA is an iterative process and some steps may be revisited.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) serves as the committee that interprets NEPA. CEQ regulations require NEPA documents to be "concise, clear, and to the point" (40 CFR 1500.2(b)). Analyses must "focus on significant environmental issues and alternatives" and be useful to the decision-maker and the public (40 CFR 1500.1). Discussions of impacts are to be proportionate to their significance (40 CFR 1502.2(b)). Similarly, the description of the affected environment is to be no longer than is necessary to understand the effects of the alternatives (40 CFR 1502.15). "Most important, NEPA documents must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail." (40 CFR 1500.1).



NEPA Process Chart



NEXT STEPS & FURTHER INFORMATION

What are the next steps?

At the conclusion of the public comment period, the BLM and FWS will review and respond to substantive comments, collect any additional necessary data, and update the analysis in the SEIS. A Final SEIS and RODs from the BLM and FWS are anticipated in November 2024.

Where else can I learn about the NEPA process and transmission corridors?

The CEQ’s Citizens Guide to NEPA is available at:

http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/nm/programs/planning/planning_docs.Par.53208.File.dat/A_Citizens_Guide_to_NEPA.pdf

See also the CEQ’s NEPA’s 40 Most Asked Questions at:

http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/nepa/webguide/40_most_asked_questions.html

You can find out more information about BLM’s electric transmission facilities and energy corridors by at: <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/energy/transmission.html>



Project Map

