Environmental Assessment Guidance

July 2026

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Journey.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Abbreviations

AASHTO	American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
ACEC	American Council of Engineering Companies
AJD	Approved Jurisdictional Determination
DWEE	Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment
EA	environmental assessment
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
Guidance	*Environmental Assessment Guidance* (this document)
HMR	Hazardous Materials Review
LPA	Local Public Agency
Manual	*Environmental Procedures Manual*
MSAT	Mobile Source Air Toxics
NDOT	Nebraska Department of Transportation
NEDS	Nebraska Environmental Documentation System
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NGPC	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
NRI	Nationwide Rivers Inventory
PEL	Planning and Environment Linkages
PQS	Professionally Qualified Staff
ROW	right-of-way
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	US Fish and Wildlife Service

Preface

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) developed this *Environmental Assessment Guidance* (Guidance) for the preparation of environmental assessments (EA) addressing the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NDOT will update the Guidance as processes and procedures are refined.

The Guidance and accompanying EA template provide a consistent document format and organization for required content in an EA. The template is a starter document for creating an EA and provides both standard language that should be used for all projects and example text that can be modified to fit the project. In this Guidance, Chapters 1 through 4 include the headings used in an EA and provide information for the author to help them prepare each chapter/section. The Guidance includes:

- best practices for preparing the EA;
- sources to reference for further assistance or clarification;
- locations where standard language in the EA template should be used.

Also to be used with this Guidance is NDOT's *Environmental Procedures Manual* (Manual), which discusses how to analyze each resource evaluated in the EA. This Guidance discusses what parts of the analysis should go in the EA. The following Manual chapters are most relevant to EAs:

- Chapter 3, Project Development and Documentation
- Chapter 5, Environmental Assessment
- Chapter 8, Resource Analysis

As new initiatives emerge regarding environmental document preparation, the NDOT Environmental Section will review these initiatives and incorporate them, as appropriate, into the Guidance. In addition, the following references can be used as general guidelines for improving the quality of environmental documents:

- *Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents* (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials [AASHTO], American Council of Engineering Companies [ACEC], and the Federal Highway Administration [FHWA] 2006)
- *Improving the Process for Preparing Efficient and Timely Environmental Review under the National Environmental Policy Act* (Council on Environmental Quality 2012)
- *Examples of Effective Techniques for Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents* (AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence and FHWA 2014)
- Implementing Quality Environmental Documentation (FHWA 2017)
- Plain Language website (US General Services Administration, n.d.)

Front Matter

Cover

Add the project name, project number, and control number to the EA cover. Use the standard text where included. The signature block and contact information tables (with no borders) are provided for both NDOT and a Local Public Agency (LPA). For state projects, delete the table sections for the LPA.

Contents

Update the table of contents after your document is complete by right-clicking and selecting "Update Field." Then select "Update entire table" and click "OK." Repeat this process for the lists of figures and tables.

Revise the example list of appendices shown in the EA template to only the appendices included in the EA. Several documents referenced in the EA will be available in NDOT's project file instead of provided as appendices. The general location of documentation is shown in Appendix A, which lists the resource reports that were prepared for the project with checkboxes to indicate whether the report is an appendix, is available in the project file, or is not applicable to the project.

The following appendices should be included in the EA as applicable; update the assigned letters if any are excluded:

- A Resource Report List – always included
- B Purpose and Need – always included
- C Alternatives – always included (if prepared)
- D Historic Properties – include only if there is a Memorandum of Agreement
- E Section 4(f) – include only if there is a Section 4(f) impact
- F Section 6(f) – include only for detailed Section 6(f) evaluations
- G Noise – always included (if prepared)
- H Resource Agency Coordination – always included
- I Public Involvement and Stakeholder Coordination – always included

Abbreviations

The EA template includes a list of standard abbreviations often used in EAs. It shows the preferred abbreviations for some agencies, such as DWEE for the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment.

Update this list as needed to define the abbreviations used in the EA. Abbreviated terms should be spelled out at first use in the EA and the abbreviation used thereafter.

Chapter 1 Project Purpose and Need

1.1 Introduction

The introduction should be clear and concise to give the reader basic information on the project and the EA process. Most of this section consists of standard language provided in the EA template. Include a figure showing the project location.

1.2 Project Location and History

1.2.1 Project Location and Setting

Describe the project location including the city, county, and state as well as the surrounding area (urban, suburban, rural) to help the reader understand the project's context and potential impacts. Identify the project termini and note major landmarks or features nearby. Include a reference to the project location figure.

1.2.2 Project History (if applicable)

Not all projects will require this section. If this section is not needed, delete "and History" from the Section 1.2 heading and update the table of contents. Include this section for projects that have had starts and stops, have had previous studies completed, or have been presented to the public previously. This section also provides useful background information for projects that are part of a larger corridor project.

This section should provide background on the project's development, including key milestones, decisions, previous studies, and a high-level timeline of the starts and stops in the project development process. This will help stakeholders understand the project's evolution and context.

If a Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Study was completed for the project, identify the components included (e.g., purpose and need, public involvement) and the conclusion of the study. Incorporate the PEL by reference. If changes have occurred subsequent to the PEL study identify those changes here.

1.3 Project Purpose and Need

This section identifies the purpose and need, which is crucial for defining the rationale behind the proposed action. The project purpose serves as a guiding principle throughout the planning and decision-making process.

During pre-NEPA activities, the purpose and need should be drafted as a stand-alone document and reviewed by the NDOT project team. Additional information on what should be included in the stand-alone project purpose and need can be found in Manual Section 3.3, Purpose and Need, and Manual Section 5.3.3, Purpose and Need. The purpose and need included in the EA should succinctly summarize both the purpose and the need. Provide the detailed Purpose and Need document in an appendix.

1.4 Project Study Area

This section defines and describes the geographic scope of the EA. The general study area for a proposed project (Project Study Area) is the area necessary to identify and address environmental concerns associated with all alternatives that are evaluated in detail. While the intent is to be all

inclusive, there are some resources that have unique study areas such as cultural resources and threatened and endangered species. Generally describe the current land use (for example, urban residential and commercial uses or rural farmsteads and farmland). Include a figure showing the Project Study Area. See Manual Section 8.1.1 for additional information on how to define the Project Study Area.

Chapter 2 Alternatives Analysis

This chapter identifies the alternatives considered and describes the alternatives carried forward and the preferred alternative. The No-Build Alternative is always carried forward. Typically, only one build alternative (the Preferred Alternative) is carried forward for analysis in the EA. See Manual Section 3.4, Alternatives, for additional details on considerations for the alternative development process. Additional information is available in Manual Section 5.3.4, Alternatives Analysis.

During pre-NEPA activities, the alternatives development and screening process may be drafted in a stand-alone Alternatives Analysis document and reviewed by the NDOT project team. If alternatives analysis is completed in a stand-alone document, it will be summarized in the following sections of the EA and provided in an appendix to the EA. If a standalone document is not prepared, the alternatives analysis should be discussed in the following sections.

2.1 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

Using the standard language in the EA template, list and briefly summarize the alternatives considered but eliminated.

2.2 No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative perpetuates the current condition. Using the standard language in the EA template, provide a short description of the No-Build Alternative. The No-Build Alternative is always carried forward as an alternative in the EA to serve as a baseline for comparison of impacts of the build alternative(s).

2.3 Preferred Alternative

In most situations, there is likely to be only one build alternative, the Preferred Alternative, that is carried forward in the EA for detailed analysis. See Manual Section 5.3.4, Preliminary Alternatives Analysis, and Manual Section 3.4.1, Early Identification of Reasonable Alternatives, for more information.

This section should describe the Preferred Alternative and the reasons it was selected. Use the standard language in the EA template and describe the Preferred Alternative. Include figures that show the Preferred Alternative, such as typical sections and interchange layouts. [The preliminary impact area of the Preferred Alternative will be shown on the Affected Environment figures.] If the Preferred Alternative would be built over multiple construction packages, note that in this section.

If more than one build alternative is being carried forward, follow the guidance for the Preferred Alternative for each action alternative being evaluated.

Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Impacts

The introduction to this chapter is standard language provided in the EA template. This chapter identifies environmental resources that would be affected by the proposed project and the anticipated direct and indirect impacts on those resources. Indirect impacts occur later in time or are further in distance but are still reasonably foreseeable. The study area for the environmental analysis depends on the resource and should be large enough to identify and address potential impacts. Environmental analysis should focus on significant issues, and impacts should be discussed in proportion to their significance.

This chapter considers two groups of resources:

- Environmental resources not in the Project Study Area. In Section 3.1, identify environmental resources that are typically studied as part of NEPA but are not within the Project Study Area.
- Environmental resources requiring detailed analysis. In Sections 3.2 through 3.23, review environmental resources that require detailed technical studies or analysis to determine the context and intensity of potential impacts.

Manual Chapter 8, Resource Analysis, provides information on how to analyze these resources. This Guidance discusses what information from the analyses should be included in the EA.

Include a reference to the Project Study Area figure in Section 1.4. If a resource study area is different from the Project Study Area, describe the resource study area in that section.

Include an Affected Environment figure that shows the resources discussed in the affected environment (typically recreation sites, historic properties, utilities, hazardous materials, floodplains, wells, wellhead protection areas, and wetlands) along with the Project Study Area and the Preliminary Impact Area. This figure is typically one or more 11x17 sheets and may be provided in an appendix if needed due to page constraints.

Additional zoomed-in figures may be needed for individual resources to show project impacts, such as Section 4(f) impacts.

Describe environmental commitments and mitigation by resource. They can be copied and pasted into the EA and used verbatim or can be modified to fit the project.

3.1 Environmental Resources Not in the Project Study Area

Complete the table provided in the EA template to identify resources that do not occur in the Project Study Area and therefore do not require discussion in the EA. In the table, explanations should be brief, perhaps 1 to 3 sentences. Sections for resources addressed here can be deleted later in the chapter.

Environmental Resources Requiring Detailed Analysis

The introduction to the environmental resource analysis is standard language provided in the EA template.

3.2 Land Use

This section of the EA discusses the existing land use in the area (for example, residential, commercial, agricultural, developed or undeveloped) and the potential changes anticipated to those

uses as a result of the project (for example, conversion of undeveloped land to a transportation use). The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.2, Land Use, for additional resources on land use analysis.

3.2.1 Affected Environment

Describe the existing land use in the Project Study Area.

3.2.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.2.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss impacts of the Preferred Alternative, including temporary impacts that could occur during construction.

3.2.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to land use. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.3 Farmland

This section of the EA describes farmland and the potential impacts on farmland as a result of the project. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.3, Farmland, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on farmland analysis and complying with the Farmland Protection Policy Act.

3.3.1 Affected Environment

Describe the existing farmland in the Project Study Area.

3.3.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.3.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Explain whether the Farmland Protection Policy Act applies, and if so, explain the result of the Farmland Conversion Impact Rating analysis and any coordination with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Discuss impacts of the Preferred Alternative, including temporary impacts that could occur during construction.

3.3.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to farmland, including any coordination outcomes with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, as appropriate. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.4 Right-of-Way and Relocations

This section of the EA identifies any additional right-of-way (ROW) or easements that would be acquired for the project, as well as any anticipated residential, commercial, or other displacements. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.4, Right-of-Way and Relocations, for additional resources on ROW and relocation analysis.

3.4.1 Affected Environment

Describe the existing ROW in the Project Study Area, referring back to Section 3.2, Land Use, if appropriate, and referencing any applicable information for parcel data and ownership.

3.4.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.4.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss impacts of the Preferred Alternative, including temporary impacts that could occur during construction. State if additional ROW or easements would be required for the project, a description of the location of the acquisition needs, and parcel impacts.

Provide all applicable information on potential relocations associated with the project, including number and type of relocation (for example, two residences, one business, two outbuildings).

If ROW preservation was conducted at-risk in advance of the FONSI, disclose the acquisition and explain that it did not influence the alternatives process.

3.4.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to ROW acquisitions or relocations, as appropriate. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.5 Community Impact Assessment

This section of the EA discusses the Community Impact Assessment, including information on population (including demographic analysis consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 [race, color, national origin, and limited English proficiency]) (23 CFR 771.105(c)), housing, income and employment, tax base, and community resources and cohesion. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.5, Community Impact Assessment for additional resources on analyzing how a project would affect the people, institutions, neighborhoods, communities, organizations, and larger social and economic systems in the vicinity of the project. Include a figure showing the census geographies used in the analysis.

3.5.1 Affected Environment

Describe the census geographies used to analyze the community demographics, typically including the census tracts, places, and counties that intersect the project. Discuss the existing conditions for population and housing trends of the Project Study Area; the income, employment, and tax base; and the relevant community resources (for example, schools, emergency services, community events). Include a figure that shows these resources. Potential impacts on community cohesion should also be discussed by considering how the project will affect interactions among persons or groups and how it could change social relationships and patterns (FHWA, 2018). If a standalone Community Impact Assessment memo was prepared for the project, include a reference to it.

3.5.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative on the community, such as the perpetuation of existing congestion or poor access.

3.5.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Summarize the conclusions from the Community Impact Analysis for short- and long-term impacts as a result of the Preferred Alternative, to include any beneficial or adverse impact. Discuss the project impacts on population, housing, income, employment, the tax base, and community cohesion.

3.5.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to community impacts included in the Community Impact Assessment memo. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.6 Transportation

This section of the EA discusses the existing transportation network and potential impacts of the project on that network. The EA template includes standard language for this resource. See Manual Section 8.6, Transportation, for additional resources on transportation analysis.

3.6.1 Affected Environment

Describe the existing transportation network within the Project Study Area, including all modes of transportation and their conditions and characteristics. These modes of transportation include roadways, transit, rail, aviation, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

3.6.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative on the transportation network, such as roadway congestion (on both the road in question and on the transportation network as a whole) and poor access.

3.6.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss impacts, both beneficial and adverse, of the Preferred Alternative on the transportation network, including temporary impacts that could occur during construction.

3.6.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to the transportation network, as appropriate. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.7 Historic Properties

This section of the EA discusses the findings and conclusions of any identified Section 106 resource identification, potential impacts analysis, and coordination. This section would largely summarize the findings of the NDOT Section 106 PQS Memo. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.8, Historic Properties, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on analyzing historic properties.

3.7.1 Affected Environment

Use the standard language in the EA template regarding the evaluation of potential resources. Briefly discuss the archeological sites or architectural/structural resources identified within the Area of Potential Effects. Show the locations of historic properties (if allowed) in the Project Study Area in the Affected Environment figure. Discuss coordination with the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office and consulting parties as applicable, and complete the consulting parties table.

3.7.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.7.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Include any conclusion statements from the Section 106 PQS Memo for determination of National Register of Historic Places eligibility, anticipated impacts on any identified archeological sites or architectural/structural resources, and the determination of project effects (that is, no historic properties affected, no adverse effect, or adverse effect).

Include references to any relevant coordination documentation with the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, as well as any tribal consultation.

3.7.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to historic properties included in the Section 106 PQS Memo and the Memorandum of Agreement, as appropriate.

3.8 Visual

This section of the EA discusses the existing visual resources and anticipated visual or aesthetic impacts of the project. The EA template includes standard language for this resource. A Visual section is warranted in an EA when the viewshed in the Project Study Area is important. For example, a Visual section should be included for projects constructing a new roadway on a new alignment or with new elevated bridges, and for projects with new construction within view of a wild and scenic river, Section 4(f) property with a visual component, park, national monument (e.g., Scotts Bluff or Chimney Rock), or other area where viewshed may be an important element. See Manual Section 8.9, Visual, for additional resources on visual resource analysis.

3.8.1 Affected Environment

Identify the resources or areas that are being analyzed for visual impacts and describe the existing viewshed in relation to those resources.

3.8.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.8.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Describe how the project would affect sight lines, including any views that would be blocked, and how it may change the aesthetics of the area. Discuss any beneficial or adverse permanent impacts on the aesthetic value, and temporary visual impacts during construction.

3.8.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to the viewshed and aesthetics, as appropriate.

3.9 Section 4(f) and Section 6(f)

This section of the EA discusses both Section 4(f) of the US Department of Transportation Act of 1966 and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 properties and the anticipated impacts on these properties. They are discussed together because properties that are subject to Section 6(f) are also subject to Section 4(f) (although not the other way around). If Section 6(f) properties are not present, include discussion in Section 3.1 and not here.

The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) resources. See Manual Section 8.10, Section 4(f), and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on determining if there are publicly owned lands protected under Section 4(f) and how to analyze Section 4(f) resources. See Manual Section 8.11, Section 6(f), and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on determining if there are Land and Water Conservation Fund recreation areas protected under Section 6(f) and how to analyze Section 6(f) resources.

3.9.1 Affected Environment

If Section 4(f) properties are present in the Project Study Area, discuss the number and location of resources present, and the type of resource (that is, if the resource is a publicly owned park, recreation area, or wildlife or waterfowl refuge) with reference to Section 3.7. Also discuss the historic properties eligible for Section 4(f) protection, with reference to Section 3.8.

Provide the NDOT Section 4(f) Properties Identification documentation, which describes the potential Section 4(f) resources in the area and how they were identified and evaluated, is an appendix.

If the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) found that Section 6(f) properties are present in the Project Study Area, use the standard language in the EA template and add the date of NGPC review and the number and location of resources present. Refer to the NDOT and NGPC coordination in an appendix.

3.9.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.9.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss each Section 4(f) resource, the potential impacts, level of analysis (for example, *de minimis*, individual, net benefit), and document any conclusions or findings for each resource. Add a reference to any additional documentation developed for the project, as applicable, such as a Section 4(f) De Minimis Impact Determination Form, Programmatic Evaluation, and/or Individual Evaluation documentation.

Identify each Section 4(f) resource that is also Section 6(f) resource, the potential impacts, and the level of analysis, and document any conclusions or findings for each resource. If needed, describe the methodology used for the mitigation/conversion proposal for the affected land and fair market value analysis and the proposal package for the National Park Service. Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) impacts on a specific property can be discussed in a single paragraph.

3.9.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to Section 4(f) included in the Section 4(f) documentation and relevant to Section 6(f) resources included in the Section 6(f) documentation, as appropriate.

3.10 Utilities

This section of the EA discusses existing utilities in the area and the potential impacts on those utilities. The EA template includes standard language for this resource. See Manual Section 8.12, Utilities, for additional guidance on analyzing utilities.

The specific environmental impacts (such as wetland impacts) of utility relocations are not typically considered part of the project. However, when utility relocations are performed by the project contractor or are federally funded, the impact area associated with those relocations should be incorporated into the Preliminary Impact Area.

3.10.1 Affected Environment

Describe all utility systems that could be affected by the project, including electric power lines and telecommunication lines (overhead and underground), and water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and oil and natural gas pipelines (underground). Use the table provided in the EA template to summarize existing utilities in the Project Study Area. Provide narrative discussion of major utilities that exist in the Project Study Area, for example: an electrical substation or high-pressure gas lines or a sanitary sewer lift station. Note any coordination that has occurred with utilities. Show the locations of major utilities in the Project Study Area in the Affected Environment figure.

3.10.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.10.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Example text is provided in the EA template for this section. Describe how the project would affect utilities. Note routine utility impacts such as electrical distribution lines or buried telecommunication lines. Briefly discuss major utility impacts, such as transmission lines, pump stations, or cellular towers, to identify how the impact would be resolved. Describe necessary coordination efforts.

If utility relocation is performed by the project contractor or is federally funded, state which utilities are considered part of the project and state that the impact area for utility relocation is included in the Preliminary Impact Area.

Use the standard language provided in the EA template regarding relocating utilities in accordance with NDOT's utility relocation policy.

3.10.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to utilities. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.11 Air Quality

This section of the EA describes the existing air quality in the Project Study Area and the anticipated impacts on air quality, including temporary impacts during construction. The EA template includes

standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.13, Air Quality, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on air quality analysis.

3.11.1 Affected Environment

Use the standard language provided in the EA template regarding attainment status in Nebraska.

3.11.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative. If a qualitative Mobile Source Air Toxics (MSAT) analysis is required, the No-Build Alternative should be included in that analysis and the results discussed in this section of the EA.

3.11.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss the potential MSAT level of analysis and potential impacts on air quality from the project. This section should largely summarize the findings of the Air Quality PQS Memo that would document the Category 1 MSAT effects, Category 2 Qualitative MSAT analysis, or Category 3 Quantitative MSAT analysis process and findings.

3.11.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to air quality, as appropriate. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.12 Noise [and Vibration]

This section of the EA provides noise modeling results and describes the existing noise levels as well as the anticipated noise level and possible impacts of the project as a result of traffic noise. Temporary impacts during construction are also discussed. If there are properties sensitive to vibration near construction activities, include analysis and discussion of vibration impacts. The EA template includes standard language for this resource. See Manual Section 8.14, Noise and Vibration, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on noise analysis.

3.12.1 Affected Environment

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss the modeling of existing traffic noise levels, including how many receptors were identified along the Project Study Area and their Noise Abatement Criteria description. Complete the table provided in the EA template to summarize existing noise modeling results. Refer to the Traffic Noise Analysis Report prepared for the project.

3.12.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.12.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss the results of the noise model for the predicted design year traffic noise levels, how many receptors were impacted in the design year, if a noise barrier was evaluated, and the results of the noise barrier analysis.

Use the standard language provided in the EA template and complete the table summarizing receptors impacted by the Preferred Alternative.

Discuss the temporary noise impacts anticipated during construction.

3.12.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to noise from the Noise Study memo, as appropriate. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

If a noise wall is recommended reasonable and feasible, state that a noise wall is recommended and that additional coordination with impacted property owners would need to be conducted and a noise abatement stakeholder meeting would be held.

3.13 Hazardous Materials

This section of the EA discusses existing hazardous materials sites in the area and potential impacts on both the hazardous materials sites and the project. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.15, Hazardous Materials, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on hazardous materials analysis.

3.13.1 Affected Environment

Use the standard language in the EA template to discuss the Hazardous Materials Review (HMR) prepared for the project using the Nebraska Environmental Documentation System (NEDS) HMR Module.

Discuss how the sites were identified and which databases and other sources were used. Use the standard language in the EA template to describe the low, medium, and high potential categories for the sites to affect the project and complete the table of information on the sites identified. Show the locations of reviewed sites in the Project Study Area in the Affected Environment figure.

Also discuss any applicable information for bridges or structures that may have asbestos-containing materials or lead-based paint concerns throughout the Project Study Area and if any additional investigations or information is available for these sites.

3.13.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.13.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss the results from the HMR, including sites identified as a medium or high potential for affecting the project. If the project activities include demolition or relocation of any bridges or structures identified in Section 3.14.1, discuss whether they may include asbestos-containing material or lead-based paint, the results of any further investigations, and if applicable, reference any avoidance or mitigation measures in Section 3.14.4.

Discuss the temporary contamination impacts anticipated during construction.

3.13.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to hazardous materials as developed and approved in the NEDS HMR Module.

3.14 Floodplains

This section discusses floodplains and floodways, and potential impacts on floodplains from the project. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.16, Floodplains, for additional resources on floodplain analysis.

3.14.1 Affected Environment

Provide a detailed description of the floodplains and/or floodways in the Project Study Area. List applicable information available within the Floodplain PQS Memo provided by the NDOT Roadway Hydraulics Section or Local Projects Engineer. Show the floodplain and/or floodway in the Affected Environment figure using Federal Emergency Management Agency or National Flood Insurance Program data. If the project is not within the 100-year floodplain, provide a brief description.

3.14.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.14.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Identify all project encroachments on a floodplain or floodway as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. If impacts occur in more than one floodplain jurisdiction, such as two counties, provide the impacts in each county.

Identify the functionally dependent floodplain crossings of the project and whether the project results in a rise (including the amount) or no-rise. Discuss 23 Code of Federal Regulations 650.111 and any non-functionally dependent impacts of the project. Discuss project encroachment and the determination of whether any encroachment is considered significant. Discuss the project's impact on flood risk as well as on the natural and beneficial floodplain values. If a floodplain map revision is needed (not common), summarize the status of the map revision as well as related coordination with floodplain management agencies.

Discuss temporary impacts using standard language provided in the EA template supplemented with project-specific details as needed.

3.14.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Discuss relevant project features including bridges, culverts and other elements that have been incorporated to avoid or minimize environmental consequences. Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to floodplains. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.15 Water Quality

This section of the EA discusses existing water quality in the area and potential impacts on water quality and stormwater. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.17, Water Quality, for additional resources on water quality analysis.

3.15.1 Affected Environment

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss the 303(d) List of Waters and define the five categories used to classify waterbodies. List the applicable DWEE technical report(s) along with their publication date(s). List any impaired stream(s) within the Project Study Area and their associated impairment(s).

Discuss the watershed(s) present in the Project Study Area and any receiving waters potentially affected by the project. Describe the regional geology as outlined by the US Geological Survey, aquifer system(s), and general surface water and groundwater flow direction within the Project Study Area.

Describe any wellhead protection areas and complete the table of registered groundwater wells in the Project Study Area provided in the template. Show the locations of wells and wellhead protection areas in the Project Study Area in the Affected Environment figure.

3.15.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.15.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

List the waterways that would be intersected or impacted by the project. Determine if any are 303(d) listed for impairments or identified by DWEE as high-quality waters (sources of municipal or domestic water supplies). Determine if project construction activities would contribute to or exacerbate impairments to 303(d) listed waterways or threaten the integrity of high-quality waters. This may include short-term and long-term impacts on aquatic life. Discuss what best management practices would be implemented during construction and how/if they would avoid project-related impairment(s).

If wellhead protection areas are present, discuss whether public drinking water sources or wells occur in the anticipated Preferred Alternative impact area. If public drinking water sources or wells are present, more detailed impact analysis may be required.

Discuss the number and type of wells that would be impacted by the Preferred Alternative. Discuss NDOT's methods to decommission or move wells directly affected by the Preferred Alternative.

If any Tier 1 or Tier 2 investigations for hazardous materials and groundwater contamination have been completed, summarize the results and their relevance to the Preferred Alternative.

If the project has the potential to impact water quality, discuss potential impacts and consistency with applicable state policies and ordinances. If needed, include information such as the amount of existing versus new impervious surface and opportunities to treat runoff from both existing and new impervious surfaces.

Use the standard language in the template regarding temporary construction impacts on water quality.

3.15.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to water quality use. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.16 Wetlands and Water Resources

This section of the EA discusses wetlands and water resources in the area and the potential impacts of the project on these wetlands and water resources. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.18, Wetlands and Water Resources, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on wetland and water resource analysis.

3.16.1 Affected Environment

Use the standard language provided in the EA template for the introduction to this section.

Describe when wetland and other water resource delineations occurred in the Project Study Area. Discuss coordination with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and DWEE regarding conducted site visits/delineations and/or reverifications conducted to verify the presence of resources. If the USACE reviewed and approved the findings of the wetland delineation, note the date. If an Approved Jurisdictional Determination (AJD) from USACE was requested and received, note the coordination and results. If aquatic resources are determined to be federally non-jurisdictional, describe any state waters, including isolated waterbodies, rivers, streams, and lakes.

Summarize the findings of the delineation(s) and associated AJD (if applicable) and reference to the appropriate appendices that contain the full delineation report and agency coordination.

Describe wetlands and waterways under the appropriate subheadings. In the wetlands discussion, include the number of wetlands and open water features by type that were identified during the delineation(s) as well as their relative acreages and the total acreage delineated. Show the locations of the wetlands in the Project Study Area in the Affected Environment figure. Complete the wetlands and water resources table provided in the EA template.

In the waterways discussion, list the number and type of waterways delineated in the Project Study Area, specifically named waterways and perennial streams. Show the locations of waterways in the Project Study Area in the Affected Environment figure.

3.16.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.16.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Describe the Preferred Alternative's permanent and temporary wetland and waterway impacts. Complete the table provided in the EA template to summarize permanent and temporary impacts on wetlands and other waters of the US/state.

Document agency coordination. Outline the Clean Water Act permit(s) or authorizations needed or received from USACE. Also state whether a Title 117 Letter of Opinion has been provided, or is being coordinated, with DWEE.

3.16.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Describe wetland avoidance and minimization measures, if any. Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to wetlands and waters of the US from the Wetlands PQS memo. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

If mitigation is required and the location of the mitigation site is known at the time of the EA, potential impacts from constructing the mitigation site must be evaluated and described in all relevant resource sections.

If the mitigation site is not yet identified, include standard language noting that mitigation will occur at a minimum of 1:1 ratio, within proximity to the project and within the same HUC 6 watershed and that consultation with USACE will be reinitiated after a site is selected. Impacts from the mitigation site would then be addressed in the Errata or by re-evaluation.

3.17 Wild and Scenic Rivers

This section of the EA discusses designated or congressionally authorized Wild and Scenic Rivers and rivers listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI) in the Project Study Area. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.19, Wild

and Scenic Rivers, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on Wild and Scenic Rivers analysis.

3.17.1 Affected Environment

Identify and describe any Wild and Scenic Rivers and NRI-listed rivers in the vicinity of the project. Identify the boundaries or river areas and include a figure. Provide detailed information about the river, including its site and setting and its current designation. Identify the river-administering agency.

3.17.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.17.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Describe the impact of the Preferred Alternative on a Wild and Scenic River or NRI-listed river and summarize the results of the Section 7 or Section 10(a) evaluation with the river-administering agency, if applicable. Alternatively, document the river-administering agency's conclusion that a Section 7 or Section 10(a) determination is not needed, or that impacts on the Wild and Scenic River are not anticipated.

If applicable, include the following: For NRI-listed river segments, summarize the evaluation and determination of effect of the project on the river segment. Incorporate the Section 7 determination by reference. Describe NDOT's and/or the project sponsor's decision to implement any suggestions from the river-administering agency based on its review under Section 10(a). Summarize the coordination with the National Park Service on NRI-listed rivers.

3.17.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Document any attempts by the project sponsor to avoid or eliminate impacts on Wild and Scenic Rivers or NRI-listed rivers. Incorporate any applicable minimization and mitigation measures suggested by the river-administering agency wherever possible.

3.18 Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation

This section of the EA describes the fish and wildlife species that inhabit the Project Study Area as well as the vegetation in the Project Study Area and potential impacts from the project. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.20, Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on analyzing fish, wildlife, and vegetation.

3.18.1 Affected Environment

Provide a general discussion of the relevant ecoregions, Biologically Unique Landscapes (as defined by the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project), and protected wildlife areas. Consider common fish and wildlife species that may be present in the Project Study Area as needed. For example, urban-dominated areas may consist largely of common, introduced species while rural settings may provide greater habitat and species diversity. Discuss wildlife corridors, habitat connectivity and fragmentation, and other relevant information from the Habitat Connectivity Memo (if available). Briefly discuss noxious weeds and other invasive species. If the Project Study Area includes Biologically Unique Landscapes, wildlife management areas, or other large contiguous natural areas, this resource may need to be evaluated in more robust detail. If the Project Study Area is located

wholly within a municipality and lacks large, contiguous, natural areas, this resource should be excluded from evaluation.

3.18.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.18.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Discuss results of the habitat connectivity evaluations, as appropriate. Discuss if any native at-risk species or Biologically Unique Landscapes are anticipated to be impacted by the Preferred Alternative. Detail how revegetation in disturbed areas would use native seed mixes to improve plant species composition.

If the project involves publicly owned wildlife refuges, a Section 4(f) evaluation may be required to assess potential impacts on publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites. Consult the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional information on Section 4(f) evaluations.

3.18.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures relevant to fish, wildlife, and vegetation, including revegetation with NDOT standard seed mixes. Common examples are provided in the EA template.

3.19 Threatened and Endangered Species

This section of the EA discusses threatened and endangered species in the Project Study Area and potential impacts on these species. The EA template includes standard language on the regulatory context for this resource. See Manual Section 8.21, Threatened and Endangered Species, and the NDOT Environmental Guidance Library for additional resources on threatened and endangered species analysis.

3.19.1 Affected Environment

Describe potentially affected species and their habitats and include documented occurrences from Natural Heritage Records found within the project Biological Assessment. Describe critical habitat presence, assess the suitability of various habitats, and note human-made structures that may serve as habitats. Summarize any surveys or studies conducted, including methodologies and findings, and a summary of consultations with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and NGPC.

3.19.2 Impacts of the No-Build Alternative

Use the standard language provided in the EA template to discuss impacts of the No-Build Alternative.

3.19.3 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Describe the potential impacts on threatened and endangered species due to the Preferred Alternative. Summarize the analysis conducted through the Programmatic Agreement review process, detailing effects on federally and state-listed species. If applicable, describe any off-project actions, such as wetland mitigation sites and associated impacts. Include information on completed or ongoing consultations with the USFWS and NGPC.

3.19.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Include any applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures, as well as species conservation conditions relevant to threatened and endangered species from the Biological Assessment. Describe other avoidance and minimization efforts during project development, if any.

3.20 Permits and Approvals

Use the table provided in the EA template to list the required permits, agreements, and approvals (including dates) required to construct the Preferred Alternative.

Chapter 4 Comments and Coordination

This chapter summarizes agency coordination and public involvement that have taken place during the development of this EA. Describe coordination with resource agencies and stakeholders. Summarize comments and responses. Provide agency coordination, including coordination letters, scoping meeting materials, and comments received, in an appendix. Provide public meeting materials and comments received from the public as well as stakeholder input in another appendix.

4.1 Resource Agency Coordination

Use the standard language provided in the EA template for this introductory section.

4.1.1 [Meeting 1]

Summarize the meeting that took place, including the date of the meeting and information relayed to the resource agency(ies), and summarize the comments received and responses to those comments. Meetings to be summarized may include pre-application meetings and agency scoping meetings. Refer to an appendix for relevant supporting information.

Include a similar section for each meeting.

4.2 Public Involvement and Stakeholder Coordination

Use the standard language provided in the EA template for this introductory section.

4.2.1 Public Meeting(s)

Most of the text for this section should be brought forward from the public meeting summary included in an appendix. State what outreach tools were used (for example, a public information open house meeting, a targeted mailer in the form of a public notification, a legal notice, a news release, temporary highway signs, a website, social media, and a 30-day comment period). State the type of public notification used and the number of individuals and public and private agencies on the distribution list. In addition, discuss when and where the public notice was placed. For the meeting itself, provide the logistical details of the meeting along with the number of attendees. Identify the number of comments received and areas of focus of those comments. Finally, use the table provided in the EA template to list the public comments and responses.

If more than one public meeting was held presenting the same information, they can be described in a single section. If more than one public meeting was held presenting different information, separate sections should be included for each meeting.

4.3 Opportunity for Public Hearing

Use the standard language provided in the EA template or include specific hearing logistical information if one will be held and it is known at the time of EA publication.

4.4 Availability of EA for Review

Use the standard language provided in the EA template. Add a website link to an electronic version of the EA, and list the locations where hard copies are available.

Chapter 5 References

Include the complete bibliographic information for the references cited in the text of the EA. The references shown here are cited in this Guidance.

AASHTO, ACEC, and FHWA. 2006. *Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents.* May. https://environment.transportation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/IQED-1_for_CEE.pdf.

AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence and FHWA. 2014. *Examples of Effective Techniques for Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents.* https://environment.transportation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ex_quality_intro_toc.pdf.

Council on Environmental Quality. 2012. *Improving the Process for Preparing Efficient and Timely Environmental Review under the National Environmental Policy Act.* Memorandum from Nancy H Sutley, Chair. March 6. https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/ceq-regulations-and-guidance/Improving_NEPA_Efficiencies_06Mar2012.pdf.

FHWA. 2017. Implementing Quality Environmental Documentation. *Every Day Counts*. February 1. https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc-2/iqed.cfm.

FHWA. 2018. Community Impact Assessment: A Quick Reference for Transportation. FHWA-HEP-18-005.

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/cia/quick_reference/index.cfm

US General Services Administration. n.d. Plain Language website. Accessed April 16, 2025. https://www.plainlanguage.gov/.