

November 12, 1998

Re: Call-in Technical Inquiry 0376 – NEPA Call-In Floodplain Determination Procedures

Dear NEPA User:

This letter is in response to your July 23, 1998 request for a summary of procedures developed by NEPA Call-In to assist regional GSA personnel in making decisions about floodplain actions. Over the course of answering several floodplain-related Technical Inquiries (TIs), NEPA Call-In has established procedures which may facilitate the decision-making process and provide documentation to support the final decision. You would like a summary of floodplain decisionmaking assistance offered by NEPA Call-In as a result of our past research. This TI assumes those requesting information have an understanding of a Federal agency's obligation to comply with Executive Order 11988, 'Floodplain Management,' May 24, 1977.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

NEPA Call-In has identified the following four categories of assistance which can be provided to any GSA personnel requesting such assistance: 1) obtaining appropriate FIRMS, 2) obtaining a commercial floodplain determination, 3) consulting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and 4) gathering additional data from other Federal, State, and local sources. NEPA Call-In's detailed findings are provided below.

DETAILED FINDINGS

NEPA Call-In has developed four categories of assistance which can be provided to any GSA personnel to assist them in making decisions about floodplain actions. These four categories are:

1) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMS)

Since the first step in floodplain decisionmaking involves a determination of whether a property is within a regulatory floodplain, it is essential that a current original copy of the appropriate FIRM is on hand. NEPA Call-In has established an account with the FEMA Map Service Center for ordering FIRMS upon request. NEPA Call-In obtains a duplicate of each map requested for our files for future reference in case the requester has questions about the map. It is important to request maps through NEPA Call-In at the earliest possible time since FEMA may take up to two weeks for delivery.

2) Commercial Floodplain Determination of the Property

FIRMS typically contain enough information to determine the relationship of property to any nearby floodplain. To help confirm your floodplain determination based on the FIRM, commercial services are also available that provide official floodplain determinations with a fast turnaround time. NEPA Call-In has tested and established an account with one such service that can make floodplain determinations of property given the property address or a plat map with legal description. This type of service should not be relied upon as a sole source of information for GSA decisionmaking, but could be used to support other information obtained by personnel responsible for the floodplain action.

3) Contact Local Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Floodplain Management Services Program Office

NEPA Call-In maintains a list of regional USACE Floodplain Management Services Program (FPMS) representatives who offer floodplain guidance and assistance to Federal agencies. FPMS representatives can help interpret FIRMs and provide additional information about local floodplains, leading to a more informed decision about the floodplain action. NEPA Call-In suggests contacting your local FPMS representative for site-specific technical floodplain guidance.

4) Assistance in Contacting Additional Federal, State, and Local Floodplain Authorities

When there is still doubt about the property's relation to the floodplain, it is often helpful to contact other Federal, State, and Local floodplain authorities. NEPA Call-In will assist in contacting these organizations in order to obtain a broad base of information about the property in question in relation to the floodplain. Federal organizations may include FEMA, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), or Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). State organizations may include natural resource departments, environmental protection agencies, and the office of the State National Flood Insurance Program Coordinator. Local authorities may include city or county planning and permitting offices.

The materials in this TI have been prepared for use by GSA employees and contractors and are made available at this site only to permit the general public to learn more about NEPA. The information is not intended to constitute legal advice or substitute for obtaining legal advice from an attorney licensed in your state and may or may not reflect the most current legal developments. Readers should also be aware that this response is based upon laws, regulations, and policies in place at the time it was prepared and that this response will not be updated to reflect changes to those laws, regulations and policies.

Sincerely,

(Original Signed)

NEPA Call-In Researcher