

CHAPTER 7 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

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7. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

7-1 OVERVIEW

This chapter is applicable to Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) only. The Affected Environment section of an EIS must provide a concise description of the existing environmental setting of the area(s) to be affected or created by the proposed action and alternatives under consideration in the EIS. The description should be a general description for the entire project area rather than a separate one for each proposed alternative.

All significant environmentally sensitive locations and natural and community features should be identified and discussed. However, this section should not, for security purposes, identify the specific locations of archaeological sites.

The Affected Environment section should focus on significant environmental and community issues and values. Photographs, illustrations, and other graphics, in conjunction with narrative, should be used to enhance the reader's understanding of the area.

Data development and analysis in this section should be in proportion to the significance of the impacts which will be discussed later in the document. That is, less important material of a general background nature should be identified and briefly summarized. On the other hand, where a detailed understanding of the impacts of the proposed action on the affected environment and community is warranted, then the information provided should be as specific as possible to establish for the reader a relationship between project actions and the environmental setting. The discussion should provide sound background information on the issue(s) or value(s) of interest and fully acquaint the reader with the potential consequences of failing to consider these concerns in developing the proposed action.

All major transportation projects should be evaluated through the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process using the Environmental Screening Tool (EST). During the ETDM process, the proposed project is entered into the EST by the ETDM Coordinator (see ***ETDM Planning and Programming Manual***). The Purpose and Need for the project is identified, and logical termini are located on a GIS based map. The Advance Notification (AN) package is distributed electronically as part of the programming screening event on the EST (***Part 1, Chapter 3 Advance Notification***). At the completion of the Programming Screen evaluation, the Class of Action for the proposed project should be determined. If this determination requires an EIS for the proposed action, pertinent information obtained from this process shall be provided in the Affected Environment section of the EIS.

7-2 PROCEDURE

7-2.1 Content of Affected Environment Section

The Affected Environment section shall succinctly describe the environment of the area(s) to be affected or created by the proposed action and the alternatives under consideration in the EIS. It shall provide concise descriptions of the existing environmental features, components, and resources that will be affected by the proposed action and alternatives. It shall also describe any potential effects which will result from implementation of the proposed action and alternatives.

This section shall be no longer than necessary for the reader to understand the potential effects of the proposed action and alternatives on the environment. To reduce paperwork and eliminate extraneous background material, the content of this section should be limited to data, issues, and values which will have a bearing on possible impacts, mitigation measures, and on the selection of an alternative. Data and analyses shall be commensurate with the importance and significance of the impact, with less important material summarized, consolidated, or simply referenced. Useless bulk should be avoided and efforts and attention should be focused on important issues in this section. Photographs, illustrations, and other graphics should be used with text to provide a clearer understanding of the area and the important issues. If there are other Federal actions or activities taking place or proposed to take place in the area then these should also be identified and their interrelationships discussed. Any speculated significant cumulative environmental impacts which could result from these actions should be described.

Because less important material is essentially summarized to provide a general setting of the existing environment, the Affected Environment section serves to accentuate only those environmental resources which are considered significant, important, and of social or environmental value to the community. This section, therefore, must focus its discussion on those issues and qualities which are considered important or significant. based on various processes and evaluations identified below or have been established by environmental resource agencies and/or the community in applicable plans and programs as having significance or substantive value. The Affected Environment section must provide detailed information on these concerns and elaborate on their relationship with the proposed action. The discussion provided must be descriptive in nature and factual. Where circumstances warrant, the analyst can surmise about future events and outcomes. The ETDM process, Sociocultural Effects Evaluation, public involvement, and scoping process are all useful tools for identifying significant issues and providing information pertinent to this section (***ETDM Planning and Programming Manual, Sociological Effects Evaluation Handbook, and Part 1, Chapter 8 and Part 2, Chapter 9***). The environmental impact analysis and evaluation of all the significant and important issues and concerns outlined in the Affected Environment section are to be contained only in the Environmental Consequences section of the EIS. That is, the discussion of the impacts of the proposed action and any associated findings or conclusions are NOT to be found in the Affected

Environment section, but are reserved for the impacts portion of the EIS, which is the Environmental Consequences section.

Information for this section on environmental issues for the proposed action and alternatives may be obtained from the information included in the **AN Fact Sheet** which includes the results of GIS analysis for environmental issues using available GIS data and applicable maps. If the project went through a Planning Screen, a summary of agency comments for each environmental issue is included in the **AN Fact Sheet**. The AN also identifies the proximity of the proposed action to environmental resources and identifies potential impacts to these resources.

Information for this section may also be obtained from the **Final Programming Screen Summary Report**, which is created during the Programming phase. It is recommended that the District review pertinent information provided in the **Final Programming Screen Summary Report** to facilitate development of the Affected Environment section of the EIS.

The Affected Environment section shall also include full consideration of future community goals and objectives as established in the adopted **Local Government Comprehensive Plan** regarding growth management, land development and conservation in the affected area. If other supporting data exists which would aid in defining the importance of an issue then that material should be appended to the document or referenced appropriately. This section should also describe the scope and status of the planning process for the area. The adopted existing and future land use maps and the existing and future transportation plan for the area as contained in the **Local Government Comprehensive Plan** (generally found in the Need section) would assist the reader in relating the proposed project to the area wide planning process and future community goals.

Documentation shall be provided in this section to address the natural, physical, sociocultural, and economic aspects of the environment that will be affected or impacted by the proposed action and alternatives, including, but not limited to, the following topical issues:

1. Air Quality
2. Coastal Zone Consistency
3. Coastal Barrier Island Resources
4. Conservation / Preservation Areas
5. Contamination
6. Farmlands

7. Floodplains and Regulatory Floodways
8. Infrastructure
9. Utilities and Railroads
10. Economic Conditions
11. Comprehensive Planning
12. Land Uses
13. Mobility
14. Relocation
15. Social
16. Noise Sensitive Sites
17. Construction
18. Navigation
19. Aquatic Preserves
20. Outstanding Florida Waters
21. Wild and Scenic Rivers
22. Florida Scenic Highways
23. Pedestrian / Bicycle Facilities
24. Population and Community Growth Characteristics
25. Water Quality and Quantity
26. Water Resources

27. Wetlands
28. Wildlife and Habitat
29. Essential Fish Habitat
30. Vegetation
31. Historic Sites or Districts
32. Archaeological Sites
33. Recreation Areas
34. **Section 4(f)** Potential
35. Visual / Aesthetics
36. Other Sensitive / Protected Resources

The analyst should consider all of these areas in developing this section. It is important that the analyst keep in mind that this section strives to provide the reader with a solid understanding of the community and those qualities or values which are important to the environmental setting. Therefore, discussion on any of the topical issues listed above should be focused according to community and environmental worth. The depth of discussion for any of these topics is predicated on the extent of issue sensitivity and the value system of the affected community. In addition, the list provided is not all inclusive; therefore, additional topics or issues may be needed to fully establish a thorough understanding of the affected community area. The analyst should use care in defining community values, and much of the information developed to describe sensitive concerns should be the result of direct communication with the community at large and of special interest (see ***Sociocultural Effects Evaluation Handbook*** and the ***Public Involvement Handbook*** for additional information).

7-3 REFERENCES

1. Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President, 1978. Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act. Reprint 43 FR 55978-56007 and 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508.

2. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, October 30, 1987. Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents, FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A.
3. Federal Register, August 28, 1987. Volume 52, No. 167. Part 771 – Environmental Impact and Related Procedures. 23 CFR 650.
4. Florida Department of Transportation. Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Planning and Programming Manual. Topic # 650-000-002.
5. Florida Department of Transportation, Sociocultural Effects Evaluation Handbook.
6. Florida Department of Transportation. Public Involvement Handbook.