

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE



Average Time to Complete Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)

Executive Summary

The Washington Department of Ecology developed this report to satisfy a requirement in state law, Revised Code of Washington 43.21C.0311 (2), as excerpted below. This report outlines the approach and analysis of data used to determine the average time to complete a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

43.21C.0311

Final environmental impact statements—Expeditious manner— Time limit—Reports.

(2) Beginning December 31, 2018, and every two years thereafter, the department of ecology must submit a report on the environmental impact statements produced by state agencies and local governments to the appropriate committees of the legislature. The report must include data on the average time, and document the range of time, it took to complete environmental impact statements within the previous two years.

After reviewing every Final EIS included in this report, the average time for completing an EIS is **approximately 22.6 months**. The median value is 12 months. The range is from 5 months to 77 months.

The range of time to complete an EIS is due to the type and complexity of the proposal. SEPA is applicable to both non-project and project proposals. A Project EIS analyzes the impacts of specific project proposal. A non-Project EIS analyzes plans, policies and procedures. Timing to complete an EIS is dependent upon the complexity of the proposal, the level of analysis required to study the impacts of a proposal, and the level of public interest and the number of comments received. Other factors external to the SEPA EIS process may also drive the timeline, such as changes in the proposal and funding.

Background

The Washington Legislature enacted the State Environmental Policy Act in 1971. Commonly called SEPA, the law helps state and local agencies identify environmental impacts likely to result from projects and decisions such as:

- Issuing permits for private projects such as an office building, grocery store, or apartment complex.
- Constructing public facilities like a new school, highway, or water pipeline.
- Adopting regulations, policies, or plans such as a county or city comprehensive plan, critical areas ordinance, or a state water quality regulation.

The SEPA review process helps agency decision-makers, applicants, and the public understand how the entire proposal will affect the environment. SEPA can be used to modify or deny a proposal to avoid, reduce, or compensate for probable impacts. SEPA is a process intended to inform an agency decision. SEPA is not a permit decision.

SEPA requires the preparation of an EIS when the lead agency has determined the proposal is likely to result in significant adverse environmental impacts. The EIS process is a tool for identifying and analyzing probable adverse environmental impacts, reasonable alternatives, and possible mitigation.

Excessive delays in the environmental impact analysis process can add uncertainty and burdensome costs to those seeking to do business in the state of Washington.

Each year, several thousand proposals in Washington State are reviewed under SEPA. The majority of SEPA reviews are completed by local governments acting as the SEPA lead agency. Most SEPA reviews are done using an environmental checklist and 14-day public comment period. In reviewing all SEPA data for the time period covered in this report, Ecology found that Final EIS preparation accounted for less than one-half of 1% of all SEPA submittals.

SEPA submittals to Department of Ecology	Fiscal year 7/1/2018-6/30/2019	Fiscal year 7/1/2019-6/30/2020
Total number of SEPA records issued	6776	6167
Total number of Final EIS issued	12	5

When a proposal is likely to have significant impacts, a longer review as part of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is required. While many EISs are completed in less than two years, some EISs for unusually complex projects or projects with heightened public interest will often take longer than two years.

To complete this report, Ecology reviewed all SEPA Final EISs issued by state and local governments from **July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2020**. The data shows the average time and range of time for a lead agency to complete the EIS process. This time frame includes:

- Issuing a Determination of Significance and Scoping Notice
- Issuing a Draft EIS
- Issuing a Final EIS

This report does not include data on SEPA Supplemental EISs, which are a continuation of an existing process and SEPA Addendums, which add minor new information to an existing EIS process. Both Supplemental EIS and Addendum processes rely on existing documents and do not include a threshold determination, so any measurement of time would not be comparable to the time frame for EIS preparation.

Results

Table: SEPA Environmental Impact Statements 2018-2020**

Lead Agency	Proposal Title	Date Scoping Notice issued	Date Draft EIS issued	Date Final EIS issued	Months to complete
City of Lakewood	Lakewood Downtown Plan *	12-8-2017	3-16-2018	7-20-2018	8
City of Seattle	Seattle Center Arena (Key Arena)	9-7-2017	4-23-2018	8-30-2018	12
City of Seattle	City of Seattle - Land Use Code to remove barriers to construct accessory dwelling units in single-family zones.*	10-2-2017	5-10-2018	10-4-2018	12
University of Washington	Husky Stadium Transportation Management Plan*	11-28-2017	5-18-2018	11-9-2018	12
City of Seattle	Seattle Aquarium Ocean Pavilion	5-7-2018	8-30-2018	11-15-2018	7
Chelan County and Department of Ecology	Icicle Creek Water Resource Management Strategy*	2-11-2016	5-30-2018	1-13-2019	35
Ecology	Washington State's Proposed Changes to Water Quality Standards for Surface Waters of the State of Washington- WAC 173-201A*	5-1-2018	7-17-2018	1-16-2019	9
Lewis County	Skookumchuck Wind Energy	5-1-2018	10-30-2018	2-21-2019	10
King County	2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan*	6-26-2017	1-8-2018	3-7-2019	21

Lead Agency	Proposal Title	Date Scoping Notice issued	Date Draft EIS issued	Date Final EIS issued	Months to complete
Department of Ecology and Bureau of Reclamation	Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant and Keechelus Reservoir*	10-31-2013	1-9-2015	3-11-2019	65
Department of Ecology	Short-term modification of total dissolved gas criteria in the Snake and Columbia rivers*	11-16-2018	1-29-2019	3-21-2019	5
City of Rock Island	Rock Island Waterfront Subarea Plan Planned Action*	7-10-2018	1-7-2019	4-10-2019	9
City of Lake Forest Park	Lake Forest Park Town Center Vision/Plan*	9-26-2018	1-2-2019	8-8-2019	11
Klickitat County	Lund Hill Solar Project; develop a 150-megawatt solar energy facility.	11-16-2018	4-26-2019	8-26-2019	10
Department of Natural Resources and US Fish and Wildlife Service	Long-Term Conservation Strategy for the Marbled Murrelet*	5-13-2013	11-18-2016	9-20-2019	77
Department of Natural Resources	Alternatives for the Establishment of a Sustainable Harvest Level for Forested State Trust Lands in Western Washington	1-29-2015	12-2-2016	10-14-2019	57
Pierce County	Pierce County Community Plan Updates Non-Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)*	5-4-2018	4-5-2019	5-7-2020	25

*A non-project EIS in which a local government or a state agency is the lead agency for the adoption of plans, polices, and programs. For example, a local government does SEPA review on the development of a Comprehensive Plan update.

** For Final EISs issued from July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2020.

Next Steps

As outlined in RCW 43.21C.0311 Ecology will produce this report every two years on even numbered years. The next report will be issued in 2022.

Conclusion

This is the second report on “Average time to complete Final Environmental Impact Statements” produced by Ecology. The average time to complete a Final EIS varies depending on the type of EIS being produced. Non-project* EIS’s have greater range of time to complete than a project EIS.

Upon review of every Final EIS included in this report, the average time for preparation of an EIS is 22.6 months. The median value is 12 months. The range is from 5 months to 77 months.

While the average time to complete Final EIS cited in this report is consistent with the goals outlined in RCW 43.21c.0311, some complex proposals exceeded the goal. Generally, complex non-project proposals associated with agency and local government planning may take longer. In addition, SEPA EIS reviews that are combined with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews by federal agency may also take longer to complete.

References

- Washington State Department of Ecology SEPA register: [State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\) Register](#)
- RCW 43.21C.0311: [Final environmental impact statements-Expeditious manner-Time limit-Reports](#)

Publication information

This report is available on the Department of Ecology's website at:

<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/SummaryPages/2006018.html>

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