

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Average Time to Complete Final Environmental Impact Statements



Introduction

Ecology prepared this report for the Washington State Legislature regarding the average time it takes lead agencies to complete a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the [State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\)](#)¹. This report is required under RCW [43.21C.0311\(2\)](#)², which states:

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.

Environmental Impact Statements 2022 to 2024

The SEPA EIS is a three-step process: issuance of a scoping notice; the issuance of a Draft EIS; and the issuance of the Final EIS. Scoping establishes the extent of analysis in the EIS. The Draft EIS provides analysis of significant adverse impacts and reasonable mitigation. The final EIS is used by decision makers to issue agency actions, see Table 1 and Figure 1.

¹ <https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/sepa/environmental-review>

² <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.21C.0311>

Table 1: Final Environmental Impact Statements issued July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2024

Lead Agency	Proposal Title	Date Scoping Notice Issued	Date Draft EIS issued	Date Final EIS issued	Months to Complete
City of Seattle	Seattle Industrial and Maritime Strategy*	7/8/2021	12/16/2021	9/29/2022	14.7
Washington State Department of Enterprise Services	Capitol Lake - Deschutes Estuary Long-Term Management*	9/26/2018	6/30/2021	10/31/2022	49.2
Washington State Department of Ecology	Goldendale Energy Storage Project	1/14/2021	6/6/2022	12/21/2022	23.2
Pierce County	Burley Lagoon Geoduck Farm	10/5/2016	10/4/2021	1/6/2023	75.1
City of Burien	Ambaum and Boulevard Park Community Plan*	7/1/2022	12/15/2022	4/6/2023	9.2
City of Spokane Valley	Painted Hills Planned Residential Development	10/26/2018	7/16/2021	6/5/2023	55.3
Pierce County	Pierce County 2023 Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan*	12/14/2020	4/4/2023	8/9/2023	31.8
Washington State Department of Ecology	Irrigation System Aquatic Weed Control National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit*	4/21/2017	1/18/2023	8/16/2023	75.9
Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC)	Horse Heaven Wind Farm	5/11/2021	12/19/2022	10/31/2023	29.7

Lead Agency	Proposal Title	Date Scoping Notice Issued	Date Draft EIS issued	Date Final EIS issued	Months to Complete
City of Tacoma	SeaPort Sound Plant Modernization	2/4/2021	11/10/2022	11/30/2023	33.8
City of Spokane	Final Draft South Logan Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan and the Final Planned Action*	9/8/2022	5/9/2023	12/1/2023	14.8
City of Redmond	Redmond 2050*	10/12/2020	9/20/2023; 6/16/2022	12/15/2023	38.1
City of Bellevue	City of Bellevue 2024-2044 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and Wilburton Vision Implementation EIS*	9/29/2022	4/27/2023	2/1/2024	16.1
City of Everett	Park District Project*	2/1/2023	10/25/2023	2/5/2024	12.1
City of Seattle	Seattle Transportation Plan*	6/16/2022	8/31/2023	2/22/2024	20.3
City of Bellingham	Barkley Urban Village - Planned Action Ordinance*	7/15/2022	12/8/2023	2/29/2024	19.5
University of Washington	UW Medical Center – Northwest Major Institution Master Plan Update*	3/27/2023	9/5/2023	3/1/2024	11.2
City of Renton	Rainier/Grady Junction TOD Subarea Planned Action EIS*	8/9/2022	1/24/2024	3/25/2024	19.5
Sound Transit	Operations and Maintenance Facility South	3/5/2021	9/22/2023	6/7/2024	39.1
King County	2024 King County Flood Management Plan*	11/7/2022	2/16/2024	6/10/2024	19.1

Lead Agency	Proposal Title	Date Scoping Notice Issued	Date Draft EIS issued	Date Final EIS issued	Months to Complete
Washington State Department of Ecology	Eight Mile Dam Rebuild and Restoration Project	12/18/2020	4/19/2023	6/20/2024	42.1
City of Bellevue	Lake Washington Wastewater Lake Line Management Plan *	7/7/2022	4/6/2023	6/27/2024	23.7

*Nonproject proposals

Summary Data

For the two-year time period from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2024, Ecology found the average time to prepare a Final EIS is 31 months, the median value is 23 months, and the range is nine to 76 months.

How long an environmental review takes varies, depending on the complexity of the proposal and the agency actions being analyzed. Generally, environmental reviews can be broken into two categories: project and nonproject documents.

A project EIS provides an analysis of significant adverse impacts directly modifying the environment in a specific geographical location. A nonproject EIS is used to inform decisions on policies, plans, or programs used to guide and regulate future project actions; it is not intended to make any decisions about whether a specific project should be built.

Of the 22 environmental reviews cited in this report, 11 were completed in the 24-month timeframe, consistent with the goal outlined in RCW 43.21C.0311. There were 15 nonproject EISs, while the other seven reviews involved specific projects. Ten of the environmental reviews completed within the 24-month goal were for nonproject actions. Detailed information about each proposal can be found on the state's [SEPA Register](#)³.

Role of EIS in SEPA Review Process

An EIS is just one type of review under the State Environmental Policy Act. Most proposals requiring an environmental review result in a determination of non-significance (DNS). This is a shorter review process done by a lead agency, followed by a 14-day comment period. Both processes are illustrated in Figure 1 on the following page. The EISs completed in the last two

³<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/separ/Main/SEPA/Search.aspx?SearchFields=All&DocumentType=EIS&DocumentSubType=FINAL&IssueStartDate=07/01/2022&IssueEndDate=06/30/2024&PageSize=10&SortColumn=SEPANumberDescending>

years (Table 1) are a small fraction of the total review documents. Out of 11,919 documents submitted to the SEPA Register during the two-year reporting period, only 22 were final EISs, as shown in Table 2 on page 6.

The determination of non-significance process is limited to proposals that do not result in likely significant adverse impacts to the environment. This process is less detailed and shorter than the EIS process, but still provides the fundamental administration of SEPA for proposals:

- Disclosure of environmental impacts;
- Ability to add mitigation to avoid, minimize, and compensate for proposed impacts; and
- Opportunity for public and agency input through notification and comment.

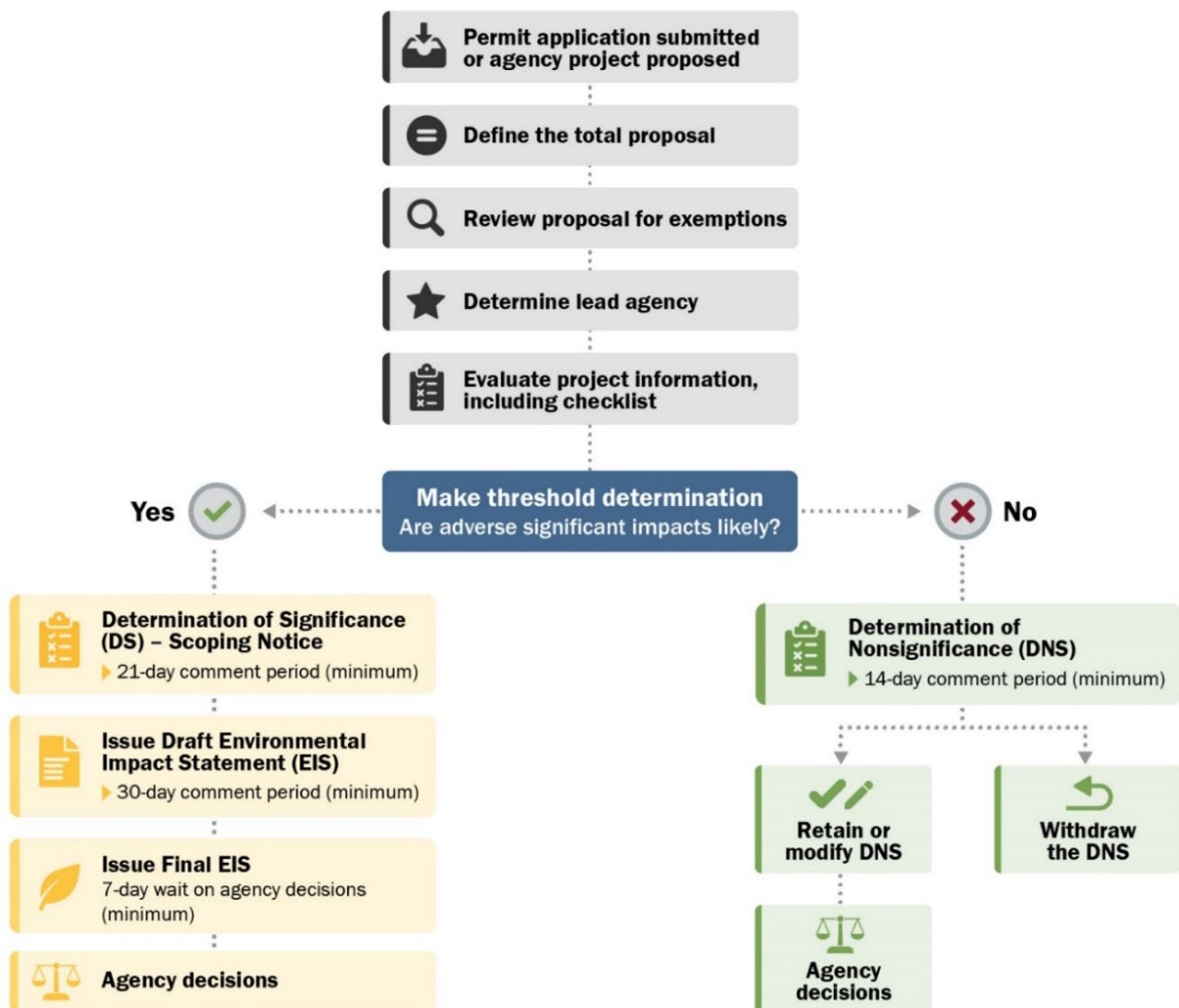


Figure 1: SEPA process diagram

If a project or nonproject proposal (plans, policies, and programs) is likely to result in significant adverse impacts, an EIS is required. A lead agency may also opt to prepare an EIS for their own proposal. A good example is when a city or county is completing a large public planning process, such as a local comprehensive plan under the state Growth Management Act.

The environmental review process provides information about projects and opportunities for public engagement to help communities achieve their urban planning goals. The State Environmental Policy Act includes planning-based options for communities to streamline permit and project reviews based on prior review at the planning phase. Common examples include:

- Transportation-oriented development
- Urban infill exemptions
- Planned actions

These planning-based options allow a Growth Management Act fully planning community⁴ to establish policies and regulations for specific areas. This includes establishing future exemptions under the State Environmental Policy Act or streamlining environmental reviews at the project level. As shown in Table 1 of this report, several communities fully planning under the Growth Management Act opted to conduct nonproject environmental reviews to access these planning tools. As a result, the jurisdictions reduced the number of environmental reviews required for subsequent individual projects.

The amount of time it takes for an agency to implement an environmental review depends on several factors including the complexity of the proposal, the nature of the agency action, and the resulting impacts. The number of environmental reviews and the process used to implement SEPA changes over time to reflect the needs and priorities of a community.

Table 2: Total SEPA documents issued July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2024

	Fiscal year 7/1/2022 to 6/30/2023	Fiscal year 7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024
Total number of SEPA records issued	6,267	5,652
Total number of Final EIS issued	6	16

⁴ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A.040>

Publication information

This report is available on the Department of Ecology's website at <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2406025.html>

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⁵ www.ecology.wa.gov/contact