

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy Birthday to NAEP and NEPA!

When I arrived at DePaul University as an assistant professor in the Environmental Science Program in 1992, I was asked to teach our senior capstone course: “Environmental Impact Analysis.” The capstone gives our students an overview of environmental law and policy, but with particular focus on the history and evolution of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Students read the NEPA statute in its entirety, as well as several types of environmental documents, including environmental assessments (EAs), environmental impact statements (EISs), records of decision (RODs), and findings of no significant impact (FONSI). They learned about the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process and the steps for preparing these environmental documents. So what did I know about NEPA and EISs? Absolutely nothing. But I was undeterred by this challenge, and so I dived right into learning all that I could about NEPA. Years later I came across a wonderful text: *The NEPA Book: A Step-by-Step Guide on How to Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act* (Solan Press, 2001), by Ronald Bass, Albert Herson, and Kenneth Bogdan. This became the required text for the course. Ironically, at that time I did not make the connection between the authors’ affiliation with the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) and their prolific scholarship on NEPA! (Sorry guys!)

In 1998, I was asked by a friend of mine to provide some assistance in evaluating the environmental impacts of a proposed project in a suburban community located north of Chicago. A real estate developer was in the throes of purchasing a family-owned nursery, with the intention of tearing it down to build a 70,000-ft² 24-hour grocery “superstore,” a 5,000-ft² drive-through bank, and three 670-ft² 24-unit

condominiums. Some of the locals were concerned about traffic, noise, and light pollution emanating from the superstore. I turned this project over to my NEPA capstone class with instructions to conduct an EIA and prepare the appropriate environmental documents . . . all in eight weeks! They described the purpose of and need for action, the alternatives including the proposed action, the affected environment, and the environmental consequences, including taking a stab at cumulative impact analysis. Teams of students interviewed the nursery owner and local residents—some of whom were for, and some against, this project. The developer refused to meet with the students. They conducted a mock scoping meeting that was well attended by members of the community but was not attended by the developer. The students prepared a 160-page EIS in which they concluded that the environmental impacts associated with each alternative would be minimal and could be easily mitigated. They even suggested 19 mitigative steps for the developer to follow. The EIS was sent to members of the community and the developer, the students received their grade in the course, and many of them graduated and entered the environmental professions. A few years later, I was informed that the developer bailed out on the project in part due to my students’ EIS. He was not interested in spending the money to do the mitigations and had gotten some bad publicity in the local press, and the nursery owner by that time had jacked up the selling price of his property! Community members on both sides of this project were very complimentary of my students’ work and the EIS. Of course, I felt a sense of pride and satisfaction over having prepared my students to enter the environmental professions with at least a rudimentary understanding of NEPA and the EIA process.

I have not taught the capstone course in several years, so my NEPA knowledge has

grown a bit stale. However, as I approached the task of reading the manuscripts submitted for this very special issue of *Environmental Practice*, I felt that I could at least hold my own with respect to understanding the details presented in them. What a humbling experience. What I learned is how much I really don’t know about NEPA. I am truly impressed by the vast knowledge of the authors, many of whom have been intimately involved with various aspects of NEPA for decades, and many of whom have been regular contributors to *Environmental Practice*.

In his President’s Message, “Our NEPA Years,” Ron Deverman mentions three pillars undergirding the NAEP—ethics, stewardship, and sustainability. There is no dispute that environmental professionals have been true leaders in the development, application, and interpretation of environmental policy, particularly NEPA. It is also true that some NEPA practitioners consider the EIA process to be nothing more than a perfunctory compliance requirement of NEPA. However, as most of you reading this know, NEPA practitioners have a long and rich history of stewardship of both the human environment and the natural environment. As a new generation of environmental professionals enters the workforce primed to tackle new environmental challenges, we must instill in them the need to maintain fidelity to the three pillars by making by making the best informed, sound, fair, and ethical project decisions. The contributions to this issue of *Environmental Practice* reflect this fidelity, and they showcase some outstanding scholarship conducted by seasoned NEPA practitioners and present several interesting, thoughtful perspectives on the application and interpretation of NEPA. I know you will enjoy reading them. Happy 35th birthday to NAEP, and happy 40th birthday to NEPA!

James Montgomery