

Reform, or even elimination, of environmental review for federal agency actions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a hot topic in the policy world right now – particularly with the Trump Administration making a range of significant changes to try and reduce the scope of NEPA.

But if we want to have a serious conversation about environmental review, it's important for us to talk about what we think environmental review does, and what it should do, to help protect the environment. Unlike regulatory statutes like the Clean Air Act or Clean Water Act, the benefits of NEPA (if any) are more diffuse and indirect, since NEPA does not impose any substantive environmental standards on federal projects. Understanding what those benefits are or should be is important to thoughtfully assessing whether we should keep NEPA as is, reform it in important ways, or just repeal the law. In my discussion, I'll draw on what we know about NEPA from some excellent work done by researchers (including [this recent review article](#)), as well as from how the statute has worked in practice.

In the next several blog posts, I'll explore why we might have NEPA and whether those goals are met in practice. I'll wrap up with my own assessment of NEPA and its future.