



NEPA gave disadvantaged communities a voice, now Trump is threatening to take it away.

Using the pandemic as cover, the Trump Administration is laying siege to legal protections that have safeguarded the most vulnerable ecosystems and communities in our country. Not only are they ignoring the calls to end police brutality, but they are also hard at work dismantling laws that have given power to communities of color for decades. Last Friday, President Trump signed the executive order to roll back the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) while the nation is occupied with the coronavirus, an economic recession, and protests to hold police accountable. PCL condemns this cowardly response to the situation by our nation's leaders and calls on them not to use this crisis as political cover to dismantle critical and popular policies.

In January, the Council of Environmental Quality first announced its decision to rollback NEPA. This landmark law was signed by President Nixon in 1970 as one of our nation's first environmental laws. NEPA requires government agencies to consider environmental impacts when developing any large project by developing either an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) based on the information found. NEPA protects both vulnerable communities and the environment by allowing citizens to participate in the approval process through public hearings, comments, and even litigation if the agency prepares the environmental assessment incorrectly or fails to consider an important alternative.

However, the Trump administration's new rules would drastically reduce the number of projects qualifying for NEPA review by redefining key terms such as "major federal action," "effects," and "reasonable alternatives" to be less inclusive. The proposed rule removes the requirement for agencies to analyze cumulative impacts, which would result in less time studying the long-term effects on the environment. The rollback also reduces the timeline for public comments from 90 to 60 days, providing little time for concerned citizens to organize against a project. With the order signed on Friday, these rollbacks will be a major win for industry and development, but an incalculable loss for the environment and environmental justice.

Rolling back NEPA will have significant consequences especially on the low-income and minority communities. Since the NEPA process was developed as a way to include community participation in the planning process, reducing the number of projects qualified for a NEPA review will silence communities and force them to go along with projects that could jeopardize their health and livelihood. The NEPA review also includes a specific provision to consider the environmental justice aspects of the project, such as whether the project will create a public health hazard, disproportionately affecting minority and low-income populations and Native American tribes, and whether the project will harm the cultural, historical, or

economic aspect of the region. Projects will not consider any of these aspects if they are excluded from a NEPA review, resulting in more harm being done to disadvantaged communities with no way of addressing their concerns.

Rolling back NEPA is the last thing our country needs as a pandemic that disproportionately affects those with preexisting environmental diseases spreads across our country. Make no mistake, this decision will shorten life expectancy and make our country more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus. Not only will this rule cause irreversible harm to our environment, but it will also continue the cycle of silencing minority and low-income voices from the decisions that affect them the most. As our country is facing protests whose goal is to guarantee that minority voices are heard, President Trump is signing executive orders that will remove their voices from the decision-making processes. PCL stands with the protesters and the Black Lives Matter movement to ensure that and all voices are heard in decisions that have negative environmental impacts on our communities.

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