

ENVIRONMENTAL MILESTONES

This document provides information regarding environmental milestones dates that must be met within the FAA Airports Division, Southwest Region to ensure better planning discipline and environmental review, resulting in timely issuance of both Airport Improvement Program (AIP) entitlement and discretionary funds.

Background

A prerequisite of a grant offer is completion of the environmental review process. Timely completion of this process is linked to good airport planning and development of a coherent and disciplined airport Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Without good planning, it is difficult to know an airport's current and future development needs.

Sometime planning is very complex, causing Airports District Office (ADO) Program Managers (PM) to work on multiple fronts, trying to line up changing airport proposals with available AIP funding. Likewise, ADO Environmental Protection Specialists (EPS) work to provide environmental reviews and determinations for projects that may change all the way to the last possible date to issue a grant. Planning changes add to an already heavy workload for PMs and EPSs and should be avoided whenever possible.

To encourage good planning and relieve workload stresses in the ADO, the following information is offered regarding dates for environmental milestones.

Environmental Milestones

It has long been Southwest Region's position (since the 1990s) that airport sponsors begin the environmental process early and with enough time for the FAA to reach an environmental determination in a timely manner so AIP grants may be issued without delay. For several years at various state and FAA-sponsored conferences, the Region has encouraged through presentations the following timeframes be followed for the three different levels of environmental review:

- Categorical Exclusions – begin environmental process 1 year prior to the planned fiscal year (FY) of funding,
- Environmental Assessments – begin environmental process 2 years prior to the planned fiscal year funding, and
- Environmental Impact Statements – begin environmental process 3 years prior to the planned fiscal year funding.

March 31st Milestone: Similarly, for many years, the Southwest Region has called for timely development of capital improvement planning to enable the ADO EPSs to accomplish environmental determinations by **March 31st of the planned FY funding**. This environmental determination date is applicable to both AIP entitlement and discretionary funds but not to any

other funding source. All AIP-eligible projects must receive an environmental determination prior to the project being considered for AIP grant funds.

April 30th Milestone: Additionally, for projects seeking discretionary funding, FAA Order 5050.4B, paragraph 302.b.1 requires airport sponsors to provide the FAA with information about a proposed action and its associated impacts (extraordinary circumstances by **April 30th of the fiscal year preceding the FY** in which the sponsor is requesting funding. Similarly, paragraph 302.b.2 requires airport sponsors develop a schedule that provides them enough time to submit a final, FAA-accepted EA by **April 30th of the FY preceding the FY** in which the sponsor is requesting discretionary AIP funding.

December 31st Milestone: Finally, for entitlement only funded projects, Southwest Region requests airport sponsors submit environmental documentation no later than **December 31st for current fiscal year** entitlement projects.

Good Planning

To help ensure adequate CIPs and timely environmental determinations, ADOs work to confirm planned AIP projects in **September of the preceding FY** and immediately solicit outstanding environmental (and airspace actions) from the airport sponsor. While this September action may not be considered a requirement, it is representative of a best practice the ADOs take to ensure timely grant offers to airport sponsors for much-needed projects.