



**Environmental Justice
Annual Implementation Progress Report**

February 15, 2013

**U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C.**



In fulfillment of the obligations outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Environmental Justice and Executive Order 12898, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has completed this annual implementation progress report. The report outlines USDA's ongoing commitments to environmental justice, including participation in interagency collaboration. Pursuant to the MOU, the report also outlines the Department's past efforts to revise its Environmental Justice Strategy, respond to associated public comments, and chart implementation progress.

Background

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation, and the enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Historically, low-income, minority and indigenous populations have carried some of the greatest human health and environmental burdens. In 1994, Executive Order 12898 was issued in order to focus Federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions in these communities with the goal of achieving environmental justice. Government agencies are required under the Executive Order to assess the potential for disproportionately high and adverse human health impacts from actions taken by the Federal Government. Thus, the US Government is committed to addressing concerns with how environmental problems disproportionately affect poor and marginalized communities in the United States.

Environmental justice calls for the need for full participation of all communities as equal partners in environmental decision making, including needs assessment, planning implementation, enforcement and evaluation. USDA was one of the first federal agencies identified in the Executive Order from 1994 to address the issue of environmental justice due to the broad sweep of the Department's agencies with respect to the environment. Given that USDA programs touch almost every American every day, the Department is well positioned to lead in this effort.

Since 1994, we have learned how to better realize healthy and sustainable communities in environmentally overburdened communities. In addition to making environments safe and clean from pollution, Federal agencies can also act to provide overburdened communities with access to environmental, public health and economic benefits that contribute to healthy and prosperous communities. Today, environmental justice at USDA refers to meeting the needs of underserved communities by reducing disparate environmental burdens, removing barriers to participation in decisionmaking, and increasing access to environmental benefits that help make all communities safe, vibrant, and healthy places to live and work.

On September 22, 2010, the Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group led by the Council on Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency reconvened for the first time in more than a decade. Later that year, the Interagency Working Group participated in the first White House Forum on Environmental Justice. Environmental justice leaders from across the country attended the day-long event. Chair Sutley, Administrator Jackson, Attorney General Holder, Secretary Salazar, Secretary Solis, Secretary Sebelius, and Secretary Napolitano each gave brief remarks throughout the day to illustrate the Obama Administration's



commitment to ensuring all Americans have strong Federal protection from environmental and health hazards. USDA Interagency Working group representatives participated in this forum.

Following the forum, the Interagency Working Group held several meetings to reinvigorate the provisions of the executive order on environmental justice. In August 2011, USDA Secretary Vilsack signed a memorandum of understanding on environmental justice along with 16 other federal department and agency heads intended to give agencies the appropriate support and momentum needed to move forward with environmental justice activities. Among other responsibilities, the MOU outlined the requirements that each Federal agency review and update existing environmental justice strategies “where applicable and as the agency deems appropriate,” and provide annual implementation progress reports.

Revising USDA’s Environmental Justice Strategy

Building on momentum from the White House Forum, and in response to the needs outlined in the Interagency MOU, USDA’s Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Harris Sherman, convened a meeting of key leadership from each mission area within USDA to form an environmental justice working group at the Department. The Departmental Working Group immediately set to the task of reviewing the Department’s 1994 Strategy and revising the plan to reflect contemporary issues and opportunities.

USDA’s previous strategy outlined three goals to achieve environmental justice within the Department. The first goal was to issue a Departmental Regulation establishing USDA’s environmental justice plan. The second was to incorporate environmental justice principles and objectives into all relevant USDA programs, policies, and systems. The third goal was to ensure effective implementation of USDA’s Environmental Justice Strategy. This approach helped to ensure that environmental justice principles and objectives were part of the day-to-day activities of USDA operations.

By integrating environmental justice into Departmental programs rather than creating new and costly programs and systems, USDA was able to effectively and efficiently meet many of the principles and objectives of environmental justice. Key accomplishments since 1994 include establishment of the USDA Civil Rights Assessment and Implementation teams, development of the environmental justice Department Regulation, and the making of a host of environmental justice investments through USDA program and loan activities.

Despite these many accomplishments, the USDA environmental justice working group concluded that further work in support of environmental justice should be undertaken by the Department. Through efforts across agencies within the Department, the working group updated and expanded the Department’s Environmental Justice Strategy in limited but important ways. A draft of the new strategy was posted for public comment in December, 2011. The group identified six goals related to expanding opportunities, capacity building, public participation, civil rights, employee training, and updating regulations that will guide the Department’s work on environmental justice moving forward.



Implementing the revised USDA Environmental Justice Strategy

As part of USDA's revised Environmental Justice Strategy, Secretary Vilsack required all USDA agencies to assign an environmental justice point of contact at the Senior Executive Service (SES) level. Environmental justice SES contacts have been charged on behalf of their agency with:

- Assuring responsiveness to future inquiries and comments from environmental justice communities and their advocates;
- Ensuring plan implementation by maintaining accountability within each agency to the USDA environmental justice plan performance measures;
- Keeping key agency leadership apprised of environmental justice progress; and
- Serving as an advocate for environmental justice in agency planning, program implementation, monitoring, and policy.

In February 2012, Under Secretary Sherman convened the first meeting of the agency environmental justice SES contacts to discuss implementation and reporting requirements and to conduct a brief training. The environmental justice SES training offered an overview of the basis for environmental justice in the Federal government, the requirements of Presidential Executive Order 12898, the definition of environmental justice, a synopsis of USDA's role and revised strategy, and the leadership responsibilities of the SES points of contact moving forward. Since that time, agencies submitted two biannual reports, and the Departmental Working Group periodically met to discuss implementation and potential interagency activities.

Implementation Progress

USDA agencies are focusing environmental justice activities in three broad areas: improving outreach and access to USDA information and resources; improving access to USDA technical and financial assistance; and updating USDA policies and guidance—particularly as they relate to assuring that agency actions will not have a disproportionate impact on low income and minority communities. Examples of USDA agency initiatives and activities are provided for each area below.

Improving Outreach and Access to USDA Information and Resources:

- The Agricultural Marketing Service's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) conducted an extensive outreach effort to introduce minority and socially disadvantaged farming communities to funding opportunities. Outreach activities included webinars, conference appearances, articles for the AMS industry newsletter and other publications. Of the \$55 million awarded in FY2012, \$4.9 million was allocated to 45 projects benefitting underserved communities and \$2.6 million to 44 projects aiding beginning, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers.
 - For example, the Nevada Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with Hungry Mother Organics, received a grant to survey the Hispanic community of northern



Nevada to assess demand for locally grown fruits and vegetables. Deliverables include a detailed report on survey findings regarding Hispanic purchasing habits; a series of five Spanish language classes on backyard farming and local food production; informational brochures for the public in Spanish covering topics addressed in classes; and an online educational video series filmed in English and in Spanish.

- The Economic Research Service's online Food Desert Locator is a tool that can be used to assist efforts to expand the availability of nutritious food in food deserts—low-income communities that lack ready access to healthy food. The tool pinpoints the location of food deserts around the country and provides data on population characteristics of census tracts where residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious foods. Expanding the availability of nutritious food is part of First Lady Michele Obama's Let's Move! Initiative to address the epidemic of childhood obesity. Other relevant research products from the Economic Research Service include The Food Environment Atlas, which assembles statistics on food environment indicators to stimulate research on the determinants of food choices and diet quality; the Atlas of Rural and Small-Town America, which helps community leaders, researchers and others understand the economic, demographic, environmental, and social forces affecting rural regions and communities; and the Indicators of Rural Child Health and Well-Being, explores the extent to which indicators of children's health and development reflect the effects of economic status and residential location, while taking into account other confounding environmental and behavioral risk factors.
- USDA has launched a Race, Ethnicity and Gender Data Collection Initiative. Section 14006 of the 2008 Farm Bill requires USDA to annually compile program application and participation rate data regarding socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers for each program that serves agricultural producers and landowners. The Office of Advocacy and Outreach is working with the National Agricultural Statistics Service to record this data submitted by Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Risk Management Agency into a database called *REGStats* to allow the public to view the information at national, state, and county levels.
- The USDA Forest Service's Research and Development group (R&D) works with American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities and intertribal organizations throughout the nation to meet information needs for culturally relevant responses to climate change. Forest Service R&D funded efforts are central to inter-tribal, multi-agency climate change networks in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, Hawaii and the Pacific, Rocky Mountains, Southeast, and Northeast. R&D also works with individual tribes on place-based responses to climate change that can serve as models for American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian communities throughout the United States and the world.
- The Forest Service is in the process of finalizing directives for the implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule, which set management guidance for each the Agency's local forest



and grassland units across the 193 million acres the Agency owns and manages. The directives, in key places, have direction to outreach to low income and minority populations. To help forests successfully outreach to these groups an implementation guide, *Environmental Justice & the 2012 Planning Rule*, is being developed. This guide provides more detail on how to outreach to low income and minority communities and how to assess environmental justice concerns in the Agency's land management planning processes.

- Farm Service Agency has entered into an agreement between the Office of Tribal Relations and the Indian Land Tenure Foundation to audit existing Conservation Reserve Program outreach and educational materials and make revisions to reach all 565 tribal entities by the end of 2013.
- Working in partnership with approximately 50 community-based organizations (CBO) nationwide, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is engaged in an extensive effort to make sure the 2012 Census of Agriculture mailing list includes all farms and ranches, regardless of size, location or type of operation. NASS partners with these CBO groups to provide hands-on assistance and support to local producers – including non-English speakers – in getting on the list to receive a Census form, promotion of the importance of reporting farm or ranch data, and will later provide help filling out the Census forms. In addition, NASS is targeting its media outreach efforts towards publications and broadcast outlets that reach small, minority and non-English-speaking producers. As part of this effort, NASS created a hard copy and a web-based handbook titled, “Partnering to Count and Serve U.S. Farmers”. This manual was a cooperative effort between NASS staff and staff from three CBOs in Texas. The handbook is a tool to guide relationship-building and effective partnering between NASS and CBOs to ultimately ensure that customers and clients served by CBOs are given the opportunity to be represented in the Census of Agriculture. Data from the Census is often used to target populations for further outreach and the provision of services.
- The Natural Resources Conservation Service launched a Conservation Planning Initiative Pilot Project. This initiative focused on the needs of four underserved groups in four states: California—Asian Americans; Washington—American Indians; New Mexico—Hispanics/Latinos; and Georgia-African Americans. The producers selected worked with NRCS certified conservation planners to develop comprehensive plans for their farms and ranches. These farms and ranches will serve as demonstration sites to showcase conservation practices and develop a greater understanding of the relationship between natural resource conservation, conservation planning and the installation of conservation practices and or systems.
- The Natural Resources Conservation Service has also completed an outreach and communications campaign plan. The effort includes a national strategic and systematic approach to develop information in four languages (Spanish, Hmong, Chinese, and Korean). The target audience includes small farmers, minority farmers, and underserved farmers, specifically women, Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and



Asians. The purpose of this campaign is to increase program participation and increase the number of conservation plans among these groups.

- The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) supports the USDA Food Safety Discovery Zone -- a 40ft. mobile exhibit that is a traveling showcase of USDA's Food Safe Families Campaign. The effort provides education and outreach to people who might not normally reach out themselves for information on safe food handling. FSIS has been revising the FSDZ script to better adapt messages to underserved audiences and intends to prioritize traveling to more at risk and underserved areas.
- The Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) produced a new brochure and two factsheets for Native American audiences to improve outreach and ensure better access to information for the tribal communities: "Partnering across Nations to Safeguard Native American Agriculture;" "APHIS Veterinary Services: Helping Protect Native American Livestock and Fisheries;" and "APHIS Wildlife Services: Controlling Wildlife Damage on Native America Lands." In addition, APHIS published the brochure "Protecting Plant Health" in Spanish and simplified Chinese. These materials share information about APHIS, its safeguarding role, and how communities can access APHIS to gain regulatory assistance or guidance.

Improving Access to USDA Technical and Financial Assistance for All Communities:

- USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach coordinated the StrikeForce Initiative that focuses on creating self-sustaining, long-term economic development in areas of pervasive poverty, unemployment, and general distress. In StrikeForce areas, USDA aims to increase economic opportunities by improving knowledge of USDA programs, expanding entrepreneurial opportunities, and improving food security through providing access to safe and nutritious food. In FY12, StrikeForce provided targeted outreach to more than 200 counties in Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Mississippi, Nevada, and New Mexico. In addition, affiliated targeted outreach occurred in 25 counties of the Colonias region of Arizona, Texas, and Utah. As a result, the Natural Resources Conservation Service funded almost 5,500 awards at approximately \$139.5 million in StrikeForce areas, Farm Services Agency funded approximately 1,600 awards at more than \$237 million, and Rural Development provided more than \$1.4 billion in funding to StrikeForce communities. Building off of the Office of Advocacy and Outreach's new strategic plan for the initiative, the Natural Resources Conservation Service will coordinate efforts in FY2013. Many StrikeForce investments were also made through USDA's Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Grant Program. In FY13 the Office of Advocacy and Outreach plans to develop a newsletter that will serve as a communication tool for internal and external stakeholders assisting socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers and landowners.
- The Office of Advocacy and Outreach also coordinates outreach efforts through USDA service agencies and partners with 1890 Land-Grant Universities' Cooperative Extension Programs and Hispanic-Serving Institutions. The USDA 1890 Program functions to



ensure that 1890 Land-Grant colleges and universities and the communities they serve have access to USDA programs and services. For example, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) provides grants and competitive cooperative agreements to historically low income and minority higher educational institutions, which totaled \$173.2 million in FY11. Many NIFA programs were aimed at underserved populations including grants for the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Program, the disabled through the “AgrAbility” program, and women operators through “Annie's Project.” The Office of Advocacy and Outreach’s 1890 Programs staff participated in the 6th Annual National Small Farms Conference, Memphis, TN, and partnered with their respective universities and state USDA service agencies—resulting in enhanced relationships among USDA agencies and small and limited resource farmers and ranchers across the nation.

- The Agricultural Marketing Service’s Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) offers grants to help improve and expand domestic farmers’ markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agri-tourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities. Of the \$9 million awarded through FMPP in FY2012 53 awards for \$3,720,476 supported projects in food deserts; 35 awards totaling \$2,519,420 supported projects in low income communities; 5 awards of \$379,524 supported American Indian projects; 7 awards for \$452,765 were targeted for Latino/Hispanic projects; and 7 awards totaling \$446,117 supported markets for refugee and immigrant groups.
 - For example, the Intertribal Agriculture Council received a grant to establish a mobile farmers market to increase availability of healthy traditional foods in food deserts. As a result, Native American producers will be able to access customers in urban areas with traditional products, encouraging product lines to continue and introducing or reinforcing new eating habits with traditional foods. In Mississippi, The Mississippi Delta Council for Farmworker Opportunities, Inc. received a grant to establish a farmers market and a family farm business center for small scale minority farmers, and to organize and promote community healthy food events to educate consumers. The effort will result in increased income and business training for small and limited resource farmers and will raise awareness of healthy eating practices and access to healthy foods for food desert residents.
- Through the First Lady's Let's Move in Indian Country Initiative, the Food and Nutrition Service has been working to transform the school and afterschool environments of 50 schools that serve Native youth through increased access to USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Programs. Food and Nutrition Service has also developed the La Mesa Completa toolkit and a companion webcast in Spanish for use by community and faith-based organizations to gain information on the various ways in which they can partner with USDA to ensure that Latinos have access to nutrition programs. FNS is working to expand its outreach and educational programs to bring awareness to initiatives such as "La Mesa" by collaborating with pastors across the country who will help funnel resources to low-income communities with a high concentration of Latinos.



- USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service manages the Market Access Program (MAP). Partner groups include commodity trade associations, State Departments of Agriculture, and four State Regional Trade Groups (SRTG's) as well as the Intertribal Agricultural Council (IAC). While all offer services to small and medium size enterprises (SME's) and adhere to USDA's EEO requirements, the SRTGs and IAC in particular reach out to and serve minority groups.
 - The Ginseng Board of Wisconsin (GBW) receives nearly \$400,000 in MAP funding annually to help develop markets for its growers. Approximately 20 percent of GBW's 150 growers are Hmong or predominately of Laotian and Cambodian decent. The Hmong growers as a group produce 50,000 lbs of ginseng per year. As a result of MAP support for research to trace the origin of ginseng, U.S. ginseng exports to the China/Hong Kong region totaled \$15.2 million in fiscal year 2010 and increased 20 percent in fiscal year 2011 totaling \$18.3 million.
 - The IAC receives about \$800,000 in MAP funds annually. With MAP support, IAC accompanies made new-to-export and/or new-to-market sales. For example, Coquille Cranberries, Umpqua Indian Foods, Swinomish Tribal Nation, and Alaskan Native Fisherman recently made sales and expected sales valued at about \$12 million to Europe and Asia.
- The Forest Service is working with Outdoor Nation, Catch a Special Thrill (CAST), the National Brotherhood of Skiers, and Wilderness Inquiry to increase access to recreation opportunities and provide leadership opportunities for culturally diverse and disabled young people from across the country. In 2012, the Forest Service established National MOUs with each of these organizations and attended key events, including Outdoor Nation Summits over the summer in New York, Denver and Atlanta; CAST's National Fishing Day, and will attend this February's National Brotherhood of Skiers Summit. The partnership reached 30,000 youth, 66% were from culturally diverse backgrounds. \$250,000 was made available for outdoor projects designed and led by youth participants.
- For FY 2012, Risk Management Agency awarded approximately \$12.8 million in cooperative agreements for crop education and risk management training to partners who would provide crop insurance education, outreach and training to the producer groups. These awards included diversity partnerships with (1) partners who represented minority or underserved producers; and, (2) universities, colleges and junior/technical colleges; not-for-profits; small businesses; States Departments of Agriculture, local, state and other Federal agencies. Producers reached by these efforts included: Asian American and Pacific Islander; Hispanic; African American; Native American; Women; New and Beginning Farmers; Producers in designated StrikeForce Areas; Returning Veterans; and, Small, Limited Resource and Socially Disadvantaged Producers. As part of this effort, Risk Management Agency is working to expand education opportunities among underserved communities which would offer resolution to currently-existing language barriers.



Updating USDA Policies and Guidance

- The Agricultural Marketing Service is in the process of updating auditing checklists and protocols for the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) and the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) grants to include checks for civil rights compliance. Civil rights compliance will be audited along with compliance to program General Terms and Conditions. Audits will be conducted by random selection and in response to any complaints filed against specific awardees. This process will be fully implemented by the end of the FY 2013 grants cycle. Existing environmental justice components are being updated to make requirements associated with these elements clearer to applicants and awardees.
- The Forest Service is developing an Environmental Justice Tool for Analysis to support field needs associated with planning and the agency's compliance associated with the National Environmental Policy Act. This tool will provide a step-by-step process enabling field employees to identify and analyze environmental justice issues as well as to provide outreach to environmental justice communities. The tool will be readily available on the Forest Service's Technical Information for Planning (TIPS) webpage and is expected to be completed in the spring of 2013.
- At the 2012 White House Tribal Nations Conference, held on December 5, 2012, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the release of the Sacred Sites Report. In 2011, Secretary Vilsack directed the USDA Office of Tribal Relations and the Forest Service to speak with tribal leaders about sacred sites and develop a report. The final report reflects information received through more than 100 meetings with Tribes, and Individual American Indian and Alaskan Natives, public comments received, and agency employee surveys. It also includes recommendations regarding how USDA can better address sacred sites issues. Implementation of some of the recommendations have commenced. Other identified recommendations are currently in planning phases through a Sacred Sites executive team.
- Farm Service Agency has been revising its National Environmental Policy Act regulations and handbook. These new regulations and handbook will reflect USDA's departmental regulations for environmental justice. The agency anticipates that the revision will be available for public comment by early spring.
- Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) Notice of Interim Rule Making published April 14, 2011, revises the term small business to clarify the requirement that entities must operate independent of governmental control to certain Tribal enterprises. The term was revised to allow such enterprises to remain eligible if they are operated in a manner consistent with the Department of the Interior's regulation governing the establishment of Section 17 Corporations. This clarification is necessary to enable this program to be effectively administered in Indian Country.



- USDA's Office of Civil Rights is exploring creation of a Training Module for Environmental Justice tailored to Civil Rights and the interaction of Title VI and environmental justice. The office is also considering developing a policy and criteria for the handling of an environmental justice complaint by USDA's Office of Civil Rights and developing a White Paper on the National Environmental Policy Act and the Civil Rights Impact Analysis for environmental justice.
- The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) continues to assess approaches for producing comprehensive NEPA documents that include analysis of whether agency actions could have a disproportionate impact on minorities, low income populations, children, and unique geographic and historic areas. APHIS is actively striving to shorten the duration needed to make and announce decisions on petitions for determinations of non-regulated status for genetically engineered organisms by implementing new project tracking systems and process improvements. Faster and more efficient processing will allow new products to reach the public. APHIS has an ongoing commitment to develop and provide training on NEPA processes across the Agency. Training for agency decision makers, in addition to environmental and regulatory review staff focused on how to integrate environmental justice into NEPA analyses and decisionmaking. Training included one- and three-day seminars on preparing NEPA documents as well as special topic seminars focusing on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and climate change.

Interagency Initiatives

USDA continues to play an active role in the Interagency Environmental Justice Working Group. The IWG conducted 17 community dialogue sessions across the country between February 2011 and July 2012, as part of its effort to ensure that communities had a voice in helping to provide direction to federal agencies working to address environmental, human health and economic concerns. The sessions held were representative of the country in geographic, racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. Many communities voiced frustration with the limited access to information and resources. The IWG responded by creating two documents, the environmental justice Federal Interagency Directory, and the Community-Based Federal environmental justice Guide. In addition, federal agencies incorporated the community input into their agency environmental justice strategies. Other examples of USDA Interagency activities are outlined below.

- Recognizing that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides an important opportunity to advance the consideration of environmental justice through meaningful engagement of minority, low-income, and tribal populations potentially impacted by Federal actions, the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice (IWG) formed the NEPA Committee. The Committee is co-chaired by the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency, and currently includes representatives from approximately 20 departments and agencies. The Committee's purpose is to improve the efficiency of the NEPA process across the Federal government to enhance the consideration of environmental justice through the sharing of best practices and lessons learned. Thus, the NEPA Committee supports Federal agency NEPA implementation precisely to "focus Federal attention on the environmental and



human health conditions in minority communities and low-income communities with the goal of achieving environmental justice.”

- The USDA Forest Service actively participates on the NEPA Committee. Since its inception in May 2012, the NEPA Committee has taken several steps toward achieving its mission, and plans to build on these early accomplishments in 2013. Last year the NEPA Committee:
 - Commenced a series of inter-agency meetings to identify and promote best practices related to environmental justice and NEPA analyses, including those related to public engagement and to the mitigation and monitoring of environmental and human health impacts;
 - Commenced a series of cross-agency trainings on existing tools, methods, and agency-specific focal areas for further incorporating environmental justice analysis within the NEPA process. The trainings are designed to inform agencies of the current state of NEPA-related environmental justice efforts across the Federal family;
 - Commenced the drafting of a national NEPA training module on environmental justice. The national training module will provide Federal officials, at all levels, a foundational understanding of NEPA’s role in addressing environmental justice; and
 - Created the environmental justice Resources Compendium. This resource tool provides a compilation of publically available NEPA- and environmental justice-related documents from federal agencies (e.g., regulations, guidance, circulars) accompanied by hyperlinks for quick access.
- USDA's Rural Utilities Service Water and Environmental Programs (WEP) leadership is a key member of the Interagency Infrastructure Task Force (with EPA, HUD, IHS and DOI) working to improve access and sustainability within Native American and Alaskan Native Communities. The current focus of the task force is on the sustainability of tribal utilities. Recent activities have included hosting a series of calls, featuring presentations from Tribal Utilities on successful efforts and the unique challenges of achieving sustainable water and waste utilities within tribal communities. In addition, the ITF is working to target EPA and USDA Technical assistance funding to proposals addressing key sustainability challenges identified for tribal water and waste utilities. USDA is also leading an ITF working group to develop a single Preliminary Engineering Report outline that would be implemented by all federal funders of tribal water and waste infrastructure.
- USDA is an active leader in the Urban Waters Partnership. The Urban Waters Federal Partnership, comprised of 11 federal agencies and targeted in seven cities, aims to accelerate and coordinate on-the-ground projects that are critical to improving water



quality and public health, restoring forest resources and fostering community stewardship in urban watersheds. Sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Urban Waters Ambassadors program will work with state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and other local partners to help metropolitan communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, to reconnect with their waterways. The Forest Service is especially active in taking a lead in Baltimore, Northwest Indiana, and Denver as designated agency leads. USDA is also working in the other locations: Washington, DC, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and New York City. Many of the locations are places where Forest Service research has been an important contributor to forming local plans for improving and investing in tree canopy.

Public Comments Received

USDA received nearly 100 comments reflecting diverse perspectives and valuable suggestions on the Department’s Environmental Justice Strategy. Responses to comments were included in the Department’s inaugural implementation progress report released in February of 2011. Since that time, several agencies have provided additional responses to comments detailed below. USDA remains committed to responding to comments on the Department’s environmental justice efforts and related inquiries. Comments may be addressed to EJSTRATEGY @ USDA.GOV.

Comments Received on the USDA Environmental Justice Strategy since February 2011

COMMENT	USDA RESPONSE
RUS should offer culturally appropriate technical assistance for Alaska Native communities focused on grant writing and needs assessments for key RUS programs.	RUS/WEP offers culturally appropriate technical assistance for Alaska Native Communities through its Technical Assistance and Training (TAT) Grant Program. One of the objectives of this grant program is to assist applicants in preparing applications for water and waste disposal loans and grants. 47 percent of TAT grant funds in FY 2011 were used to assist Alaska Native communities to provide technical assistance and training for water and wastewater operators and assist them in preparing applications for drinking water and wastewater grants, and to improve operations and maintenance of their existing water and waste treatment facilities.



<p>USDA's strategy should include commitments to intra- and interagency collaborations that will maximize impact and support holistic efforts to achieve environmental justice.</p>	<p>USDA is engaged in several inter and intra-agency initiatives. Other initiatives, aside from those outlined elsewhere in this report include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The Federal Radon Action Plan – coordinated by EPA, including HUD, USDA, DOE, BIA, DOD, HHS, CDC. To encourage radon resistant construction and mitigation○ The Healthy Homes Working Group – coordinated by HUD, including USDA, EPA, HHS, CDC, DOD, BIA, DOL. Focuses on all aspects of home health related to building construction.○ The Rental Policy Working Group – coordinated by the White House, includes HUD, USDA, and Treasury. One of the working groups focuses on Capital Needs Assessments and the incorporation of green building and energy-efficient selects for products and building systems. Another group focuses on energy-efficiency standards across agencies.○ The Interagency Lead Based Paint Task Force – coordinated by HUD and EPA to foster consistency and collaboration among government agencies to develop strategies, guidance, regulations and implementation to mitigate and eliminate the presence of Lead based Paints and the associated toxins and hazards from residential properties and child-occupied facilities.
---	--



Appendix:

Pertinent USDA Terms and Definitions

Environmental Justice: To the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, all populations are provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered on, are allowed to share in the benefits of, are not excluded from, and are not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by government programs and activities affecting the environment and its impact on human health.

Environmental Justice Communities: Minority and/or low-income populations, including American Indian and Alaskan Native populations.

Ensuring Access: To provide, to the greatest extent practicable, the opportunity for environmental justice communities to participate in planning, analysis, and decisionmaking that affects their health or environment, including identification of program needs and designs.

Low-income Population: Any readily identifiable group of low-income persons who live in geographic proximity. Low-income populations may be identified using data collected, maintained, and analyzed by an agency or from analytical tools such as the annual statistical poverty thresholds from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Reports, Series P60, Consumer Income and Poverty.

Minority: A person who is a member of one of the following population groups: American Indian and Alaskan Native; Asian and Pacific Islander; Black, not of Hispanic origin; or Hispanic.