2. FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
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Learning Outcomes

1. Understand what makes an EA an EA
2. Define the three fundamental concepts of environmental impact assessment
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- Exempt
- Exemption Memo
- Request for Categorical Exclusion
- Low Impact/Categorically Excluded
- Moderate or Unknown Impact
- Negative Determination
- Positive Determination with Conditions
- Exempt Exemption
- Environmental Assessment (EA)

Screen the activity:

High Impact:

Low Impact/Categorically Excluded:

Initial Environmental Examination (IEE):

Negative Determination

Positive Determination

Submit for Approval
THE THREE KEY CONCEPTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<table>
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<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<td>The existing environmental situation or condition in the absence of the activity</td>
<td>A desired accomplishment or output</td>
<td>The change from the baseline situation caused by the activity</td>
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The impact assessment process examines the impacts of activities on baseline situations.
KEY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT CONCEPTS

• Defining “activity”  • Defining “impact”  • Characterizing the baseline situation
ACTIVITY

The impact assessment process examines the impacts of activities. Under Regulation 216 an activity is:

A desired accomplishment or output. For example, a road, seedling production, or river diversion to irrigate land.

A project or program usually consists of many activities. Accomplishing an activity requires a set of sub-activities or tasks.

| ACTIVITY: Market access road rehabilitation | SUB-ACTIVITIES OR TASKS: Survey, grading, culvert construction, compaction, etc.. |
WE TRY TO USE “ACTIVITY” as ADS 201 does—i.e. what the rest of the world calls a project.

ACTIONS—the specific interventions implemented under an activity.

A single action may have many components—e.g. the action of rural road rehabilitation entails survey, grading, materials sourcing.

22 CFR 216 threshold determinations are assigned at the action level.
WHAT ARE IMPACTS?

The **impact** of an activity is the **change from the baseline situation** caused by the activity.

The baseline situation is the existing environmental situation or condition in the absence of the activity.

The baseline situation is a key concept in environmental impact assessment.

To measure an impact, you must know what the baseline situation is.
1. To measure impact, you must know the baseline situation.

2. The baseline characterization cannot be exhaustive. The environmental components most important when determining the baseline characterization are those components most likely to be affected by your activity and upon which your activity depends on for its success.

3. The baseline is not just a snapshot in time.
   - This chart of groundwater levels shows both variability and a trend over time.
   - BOTH are part of the groundwater baseline situation.
WHERE DO I OBTAIN INFORMATION ON THE BASELINE SITUATION?

1. YOUR ORGANIZATION:
   - **TALK** to staff who know the project, and know the sites.
   - **OBTAIN** project documents and information

2. DIRECT OBSERVATION:
   - **Go to the site(s)!** Look up publicly available satellite imagery before you go.

3. UTILIZE OTHER LOCAL TALENT & KNOWLEDGE:
   - communities, government, counterparts

AREN’T WE FORGETTING SOMETHING?

What about reports by donor organizations and international agencies? What about government statistics? GIS databases?

All these sources can be useful (and sometimes necessary)

But good local information is the most important input