

# Introduction to Public Participation

Public participation provides you with an opportunity to influence environmental decision-making. There are many different ways for people to participate in local, regional, and national-level decisions. These include both formal and informal opportunities, from providing written comments and speaking at public meetings to raising awareness among local communities.

## Why is public participation important?

Public participation is an important way to make your voice heard in government decisions that may affect you, your community, and your livelihood.

- ➔ Public participation through the submission of **public comments** can strengthen an environmental decision by providing diverse perspectives and new information about the planned action or its potential impacts.
- ➔ Other forms of participation, such as meeting with decision-makers, can raise awareness about a particular environmental action and encourage others to get involved.

## What is a “public comment”?

When government entities consider whether to undertake major actions that may have far-reaching effects, they typically must solicit public comments on the proposed action. For many federal-level actions, public notice and an opportunity to comment is required by law before the action can proceed.

These comment periods provide an opportunity for members of the public to provide input, share experiences, and propose specific changes. The proposed action may range from a physical construction project to a restoration planning process or anything between. The goal of commenting is to help the agency make an informed decision about how best to move forward based on a comprehensive understanding of the facts and issues.

You may provide comments on environmental actions in either written or verbal form:

- **Written comments** are essentially a letter to the decision-maker that explains your opinions about the decision (e.g., if it should be changed).
- **Verbal comments** are oral remarks made at a public meeting that explain your opinions about the decision.

**Remember:** Any comments that you submit to a government entity may be made open to the public, so do not include any information that you would not want others to see.