

Generic Environmental Impact Statements (GEIS)

Overview of the purpose and regulatory requirements for preparing a GEIS

What is a Generic Environmental Impact Statement?

A Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) is an information-gathering tool that can be helpful for understanding complex environmental issues. The GEIS process is directed by Minnesota Rules (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/4410.3800>). The result of the GEIS process is a comprehensive report (Final GEIS) that includes important information and recommendations for making informed decisions.

In Minnesota, a GEIS can only be ordered by the Environmental Quality Board (Board). The purpose of the GEIS is to study environmental issues that are not adequately reviewed on a project-by-project basis. The GEIS process is a means of informing the public and regulatory agencies by providing a more comprehensive analysis of a given region, issue or type of activity. A GEIS can:

- Help Minnesota citizens, businesses, and decision-makers better understand an issue;
- Recommend changes to policies, programs and rules; and
- Provide information to help evaluate future proposed projects.

The preparation of a GEIS does not exempt specific activities from project-specific environmental review. While a GEIS is being prepared, other environmental review of a specific project can continue even if the project is within the scope of the GEIS.

What should Board Members consider before ordering a GEIS?

[Minnesota rules chapter 4410.3800 subpart 5](#) lists twelve criteria that the Board must consider when determining the need for a GEIS. Examples of some of those criteria include:

- If the review of a type of action can be better accomplished by a GEIS than by project specific review, and
- The need to understand the long-term past, present, and future effects of a type of action upon the economy, environment, and way of life of the residents of the state.

Who prepares the GEIS?

If the Board orders the preparation of a GEIS, it may act as the assigned governmental agency or assign a different governmental unit to complete the GEIS. Whether the GEIS is prepared by the EQB or another governmental agency, the document must be prepared using an interdisciplinary approach that ensures a joint review of natural, environmental, and social issues.

What is included in the GEIS?

A GEIS includes a “scoping” process that gives the public and regulatory agencies an opportunity to help define what issues will be included in the report, and describes how those issues will be evaluated (scope). At minimum, [Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410.3800 subpart 7](#) that the following information be included in the final GEIS report (in addition to content requirements specified by the scoping process):

- Any new data that has been gathered or the results of any new research that has been undertaken as part of the generic EIS preparation;
- A description and assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the activities described in the scoping process;
- Recommendations for reducing environmental harm; and
- If appropriate, a description of an alternative form of review that is proposed to be used to review specific projects whose impacts have been considered in the generic EIS.

When has a GEIS been used in the past?

Forestry GEIS: 1989-1994: In 1989, the Board ordered a GEIS on Timber Harvesting and Forest Management. The GEIS was managed by EQB and DNR staff: <http://iic.umn.edu/catalog/geis>

Animal Agriculture GEIS: 1998-2002: In 1998, the EQB ordered a GEIS on Animal Agriculture. The GEIS was managed by EQB staff: <https://www.eqb.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/geis/GEIS-AnimalAgFinal.pdf>

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