

Attn: Council on Environmental Quality, docket number CEQ-2025-0002

March 26, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the interim final rule for the Removal of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementing regulations. The Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society (FMCS) submits this letter into the public record to demonstrate our opposition to this proposal. FMCS is an international society of professional scientists dedicated to the conservation of freshwater mollusks. Freshwaters are among Earth's most imperilled habitats and the proposed legislation would significantly impact not only the natural resources and ecosystem services these habitats support, but it would also harm the human populations that depend on them.

We are writing to express our strong opposition to this proposal. As written, the document would weaken NEPA implementation by increasing confusion and uncertainty regarding longstanding and valuable legislation enacted by Congress in 1969. Under NEPA guidelines, agencies are directed "to use all practicable means and measures, including financial and technical assistance, in a manner calculated to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and [to] fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans." 42 U.S.C. 4331(a). As such, NEPA is a foundational tool that protects the interests of the public and the environment, requiring federal agencies to consider the potential consequences of their actions in a transparent, standardized, and defined manner.

By proposing to rescind prior NEPA regulations that govern a coordinated, single, standardized approach to consultation in an effort to expedite permitting approvals, this interim final rule will reduce federal and state agency coordination and seems likely to impact the ability of agencies to consider cumulative effects, both of which are fundamental to supporting an efficient and effective NEPA process. Perhaps more alarmingly, this proposal will also affect the public's ability to participate in and comment on the full suite of environmental analyses and reports.

Freshwater mollusks are the most imperiled group of organisms in the United States, with nearly two-thirds of species being identified as at risk-of extinction. Because these animals are sensitive to a wide range of environmental disturbances, they are an excellent bellwether of ecological health and water quality. The proposed changes to NEPA regulations will dramatically impact the ability of stakeholders to safeguard this valuable resource and protect our waterways for the benefit of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society