TIPS ON EFFECTIVE PUBLIC COMMENTS

NEPA Scoping Process:

Federal agencies are required to go through a public "scoping process" in order to determine the scope of issues that should be addressed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmenal Impact Statement (EIS). Scoping also helps the agency determine the likely significance of an action's impacts, and whether an EA or an EIS will be required.

The scoping period is the best time to identify:

- The issues and resources that the agency must consider when preparing an EA or EIS
- The potential impacts the proposed action may have on those resources
- The potential impacts that are likely to result from the proposed action
    - ecological, aesthetic, historic, cultural, economic, social, and health related impacts
    - **Direct impacts**: "are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place;"
    - **Indirect impacts**: "are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable (e.g., induced changes in land use patterns, population density, and related effects on natural resources and ecosystems);"
    - **Cumulative impacts**: "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time."

REMEMBER: You don't have to do the analysis for the agency. At the scoping stage, you just need to identify the issues and potential impacts that must be analyzed. You should also submit any research or supporting documentation that is relevant to assessing the significance of the project's potential impacts. The agency is obligated to consider this material when drafting the EA or EIS.

Quick Tips:

Follow directions provided to ensure you submit an appropriate comment

Understand the proposed action and what stage it is in the public process

- If you need help contact: DNRC, MT FWP, Conservation District, MSU Extension Service

Make it Personal

- Base your comments on sound reasoning, scientific evidence, and/or how you will be impacted by the agency's proposal.
- Be concise, and only comment on the proposed action; do not use this as a platform to address the agency in general
- Do not just say you agree or disagree; **explain** *why*
- Suggest alternatives and different language for things you do not like
- Provide specific examples to illustrate your concerns (*your own observations, monitoring data and experiences provide valuable information*)

Submit your comments before close of the comment period

Things to remember

- A comment is not a "vote"
- Form letters are only counted once and so may not be effective