



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**

# PLANNING BULLETIN

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Subject: Feasibility Study Milestones

**Applicability:** Guidance. This bulletin supersedes PB 2013-03: SMART Planning Milestones, which is hereby rescinded. This bulletin expands upon PB 2012-02: Planning SMART Guide, which defines the feasibility process milestones. This bulletin supersedes specific sections of ER 1105-2-100 (Planning Guidance Notebook) that reference feasibility study milestones, including: Appendix G exhibits G-3, G-4, G-5, Appendix H section H-4 (discussion of Feasibility Scoping Meeting and Alternative Formulation Briefing), and Appendix H exhibits H-3 and H-4.

- 1. Purpose.** The purpose of this planning bulletin is to clarify the decisions and processes associated with feasibility study milestones. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) feasibility study process is a progression of planning decisions from study scoping through the final recommendation of the Chief of Engineers for a specific water resources project. During the course of a feasibility study, five milestones mark the confirmation and endorsement of decisions made by the project delivery team (PDT) (e.g., developing an array of alternatives based on a defined water resources problem) *and* the PDT's proposed path forward. The feasibility study milestones are not simply the accomplishment of a series of tasks or the development of specific products. This planning bulletin does not add new plan formulation or evaluation requirements to those already in policy and guidance.
- 2. Applicability.** This guidance applies to all feasibility studies where the USACE planning decision document could lead to a recommendation for project authorization, including general re-evaluation studies. Studies and decision documents under the Continuing Authorities Program will follow the processes outlined in ER 1105-2-100, Appendix F. Watershed studies and reports will follow the processes outlined in Planning Bulletin 2016-03: Watershed Studies.
- 3. Milestones/Decision.** The five feasibility study milestones representing key planning decisions are the following: Alternatives milestone; Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) milestone; Agency Decision milestone; Civil Works Review Board milestone; Chief's Report milestone. The decision-makers and lead presenters for these milestones are shown in Table 1.
- 4. Read Ahead Materials.** The required read ahead materials for the Alternatives, TSP, and Agency Decision milestones are the report summary, the project study issue checklist, and the final presentation slides. The read ahead materials for the Civil Works Review Board are identified in paragraph 8d, below.

**Table 1: Milestone Decisions, Decision-Makers and Lead Presenters**

Primary Decision	Decision-Maker(s)
	Lead Presenter
<b>Alternatives Milestone</b>	
The PDT has a clear and logical formulation and evaluation rationale that indicates the PDT is making risk-informed decisions and has a clear direction on next steps to complete the study.	Chief of the Office of Water Project Review (OWPR)
	Lead Presenter: District Planning Chief
<b>TSP Milestone</b>	
The District is prepared to release the draft report and draft NEPA documentation for concurrent public, technical, legal and policy review and IEPR (if applicable).	Chief, HQUSACE Planning and Policy Division
	Lead Presenter: District Planning Chief
<b>Agency Decision Milestone</b>	
Corporate endorsement of the recommended plan and proposed way forward to complete feasibility-level design and the feasibility study report package.	Chief, HQUSACE Planning and Policy Division
	Lead Presenter: District Commander
<b>Civil Works Review Board Milestone</b>	
Corporate checkpoint that the draft Chief's Report, with accompanying final report and NEPA documentation, are ready for State and Agency Review and final NEPA review.	Deputy Commanding General-Civil and Emergency Operations (DCG-CEO)
	Lead Presenter: District Commander
<b>Chief's Report Milestone</b>	
The Chief of Engineers' recommendation to Congress.	Chief of Engineers

5. Alternatives Milestone. The Alternatives Milestone meeting marks the decision maker's agreement on a clear and logical formulation and evaluation rationale that indicates the PDT is making appropriate risk-informed decisions and has a clear direction on next steps to complete the study. Teleconference and web meeting are the preferred methods for conducting the Alternatives Milestone meeting. An in-person meeting can be held by exception, with the approval of the decision-maker.

a. Readiness for the Alternatives Milestone. The PDT has completed initial scoping, formulated alternatives, and completed an initial screening and preliminary evaluation to develop a focused array of distinctly different strategies for achieving the water resources objectives in the study area. The PDT has also engaged the vertical team and completed District Quality Control (DQC) review of milestone read aheads. The District Planning Chief, in consultation with the MSC Planning and Policy Chief, determines the readiness for conducting the Alternatives Milestone meeting. In a 3-year study, the Alternatives Milestone meeting would be expected within the first 3-6 months of the study.

b. Decision-Maker. The decision-maker for the Alternatives Milestone meeting is the Chief of OWPR.

c. Decision at the Alternatives Milestone meeting. The decision-maker at the Alternatives Milestone will assess the screening and preliminary evaluation process that has been completed, as well as the criteria and process that will be used for evaluation and comparison of the focused array of alternatives. At the conclusion of the Alternatives Milestone meeting, the decision-maker will determine whether the PDT is ready to move forward in evaluating and comparing the representative array of alternatives to identify the TSP.

d. Read Aheads. A Report Summary, incorporating an explicit discussion of risk drivers and consequences; the Project Study Issue Checklist; and the final District presentation slides will be provided no later than one week prior to the milestone date. Read ahead material is informational for the decision-maker. Read ahead materials are not reviewed for comment and response.

e. To support the decision, the District Planning Chief will describe the scoping process to ensure significant decision making factors are addressed, unnecessary analyses are avoided, risks are identified, and meaningful and efficient analysis and selection of alternative plans can occur. The discussion will also address how input was sought, feedback from knowledgeable resources was factored into the scoping process, and how other applicable topics unique to a particular study's scoping and decision-making process impact future proposed actions. The presentation and discussion will discuss the following assertions:

- The understanding of future without project conditions.
- The formulation of a representative array of distinctly different solutions, and how that array will be evaluated to identify the TSP before the next milestone. If there is a likely Locally Preferred Plan, that should be identified and discussed.
- The Federal interest in the problem.
- Status of environmental compliance activities.
- Study scope, schedule and funding stream.
- Likelihood the study will be compliant with the "3x3x3 rule", as described in the Implementation Guidance for Section 1001 of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) 2014 - Vertical Integration and Acceleration of Studies or the 8 February 2012 guidance memo, *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Feasibility Study Program Execution and Delivery*. If the study is unlikely to be compliant with the 3x3x3 rule, the PDT's next steps for the exemption process will be discussed.

f. Invited Milestone meeting participants include: Chief of OWPR (decision-maker); District Planning Chief (lead presenter); District Lead Planner and appropriate District staff; MSC Planning and Policy Chief and appropriate MSC planning staff; Agency Technical Review (ATR) Team Lead; Independent External Peer Review (IEPR) manager (if applicable); Planning Center(s) of Expertise (PCX) representative(s); Deputy, Planning Community of Practice (PCoP); the Regional Integration Team (RIT) Deputy and Planner; the HQUSACE Review Manager and members of the HQUSACE review team; and non-Federal sponsor representatives. Other Federal Agencies and Tribal Nations may be invited to the meeting.

g. Meeting Documentation. The decisions reached and any required follow-up actions must be documented at the Alternatives Milestone meeting and acknowledged by the decision-maker and the MSC and District Planning Chiefs before adjourning the meeting. Significant decisions

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made will be documented by the PDT in a Memorandum for the Record (MFR) and Decision Log, clearly listing the agreed upon array of alternatives and the study's scope, schedule and funding stream.

h. Post-Meeting Activities. If the decision-maker supports moving ahead with the study, the PDT will continue efforts to identify the TSP, including, but not limited to the following: conducting further analyses of the Future Without Project Condition to enable appropriate comparison with alternatives; evaluating and comparing the focused array of alternatives; selection of a TSP; identification of a Locally Preferred Plan (LPP), if applicable; continue environmental and cultural compliance documentation and activities (National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), etc.); and development of the draft feasibility report in preparation for concurrent review.

6. TSP Milestone. The TSP Milestone meeting marks the PDT's selection of, and the decision-maker's endorsement of, a TSP (and LPP, if applicable); and that the PDT is prepared to release the draft report and draft NEPA documentation for concurrent public, technical, legal and policy review and IEPR (if applicable). Teleconference and web meeting are the preferred methods for conducting the TSP Milestone meeting. An in-person meeting can be held by exception, with the approval of the decision-maker.

a. Readiness for the TSP Milestone. The PDT has completed the evaluation and comparison of a focused array of distinctly different strategies for achieving the water resources objectives in the study area; identified a TSP and possibly a LPP to carry forward; prepared a proposed way forward to develop sufficient cost and design information for the final feasibility-level analysis and feasibility report. The PDT has also engaged the vertical team and completed DQC review of milestone read aheads. The District Planning Chief, in consultation with the MSC Planning and Policy Chief, determines the readiness for conducting the TSP Milestone meeting. In a 3-year study, the TSP Milestone would be expected within the first 12-18 months of the study. Because the PDT is writing the feasibility study report as it goes, it is expected that a draft feasibility study report and draft NEPA documentation will be largely complete by the milestone meeting and concurrent review will be initiated within 30 days, and no more than 60 days, following the TSP Milestone.

b. Decision-Maker. The decision-maker for the TSP Milestone meeting is the HQUSACE Chief of the Planning and Policy Division.

c. Decision at the TSP Milestone meeting. At the TSP Milestone meeting, the decision-maker either: supports the selection of the TSP (and LPP, if applicable), the proposed way forward, and the release of the draft report and draft NEPA documentation for concurrent public, technical, legal and policy review and IEPR (if applicable); requests additional information required to support a decision; or terminates the study. If the decision-maker requires additional work before a decision regarding the release of the draft report, the release will follow confirmation of the adequacy of the work using agreed-upon quality control/quality assurance practices and approval of release by the decision-maker.

d. Read Aheads. A Report Summary, incorporating an explicit discussion of risk drivers and consequences, the Project Study Issue Checklist; and the final District presentation slides will be provided no later than two weeks prior to the milestone date. Read ahead material is informational for the decision-maker and is expected to have been coordinated within the vertical team prior to submission. Read ahead materials are not reviewed for comment and response.

e. To support the decision, the District Planning Chief will demonstrate that the alternative formulation, evaluation, and comparison conducted by the PDT supports the identification of the TSP. At this stage, there is typically not enough detailed information to conclude that the TSP will ultimately be the National Economic Development (NED) Plan or National Ecosystem Restoration (NER) Plan, and it is unknown if the sponsor's preferred plan is the NED or NER Plan or an LPP. Therefore, it is premature for USACE to request that the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) (ASA(CW)) waive the requirement for USACE to recommend the NED or NER Plan. PDTs should notify the vertical team of a likely LPP prior to the TSP milestone, present the likely LPP at the TSP milestone, and ensure NEPA compliance documentation in the draft report is broad enough to address the impacts of any potential LPPs. HQUSACE will alert the Office of the ASA(CW) of the potential for an LPP.

f. Invited Milestone meeting participants include: HQUSACE Chief of Planning and Policy Division (decision-maker); District Planning Chief (lead presenter); District Lead Planner and appropriate District staff; MSC Planning and Policy Chief and appropriate MSC planning staff; ATR Team Lead; IEPR manager (if applicable); PCX representative(s); Chief, OWPR; Deputy, PCoP; the Regional Integration Team (RIT) Deputy and Planner; the HQUSACE Review Manager and members of the HQUSACE review team; and non-Federal sponsor representatives. Other Federal Agencies and Tribal Nations may be invited to the meeting.

g. Meeting Documentation. The decisions reached and any required follow-up actions must be documented at the TSP Milestone meeting and acknowledged by the decision-maker and the MSC and District Planning Chiefs before adjourning the meeting. Significant decisions made will be documented by the PDT in a MFR and Decision Log, clearly listing specific actions/conditions required before the draft feasibility study report is released for concurrent review.

h. Release of Draft Report. If the decision-maker supports moving ahead with the study, the PDT will finalize the draft report and draft NEPA documentation and prepare to release for concurrent public, technical, legal and policy review and IEPR (if applicable). Release of the draft report is contingent on confirmation of the adequacy of the work following agreed-upon quality control/quality assurance practices. The draft report must be released within 60 days of approval. After 60 days, the district DPM and/or the District Commander, the district Chief of Planning, and the MSC Chief of Planning and Policy must meet via phone with the HQUSACE Chief of Planning and Policy Division to revalidate the TSP, the schedule, and secure re-approval of the release of the draft report.

i. Post-Meeting Activities. The PDT will finalize the draft report and draft NEPA documentation and prepare to release for concurrent public, technical, legal and policy review and IEPR (if applicable). If the District Commander, in accordance with part 19.a. of ER 200-2-2: Procedures for Implementing NEPA and Section 2045 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007, as amended, extends the public review period for the draft report and NEPA

documentation beyond the initial 45-day period, the district shall notify the HQ Chief of Planning and Policy of the change in schedule in writing through their RIT prior to the end of the original review period. After concurrent review, the PDT will prepare a Review Summary that highlights significant comments and potential risks associated with agency endorsement of the TSP in preparation for the Agency Decision Milestone meeting. If significant changes to the TSP presented in the draft report are likely after concurrent review, the PDT may be required to address the comments and repeat the concurrent review process prior to the Agency Decision Milestone.

7. Agency Decision Milestone. The Agency Decision Milestone meeting marks the corporate endorsement of the recommended plan and proposed way forward to complete feasibility-level design and the feasibility study report package. Teleconference and web meeting are the preferred methods for conducting the Agency Decision Milestone meeting. An in-person meeting can be held by exception, with the approval of the decision-maker.

a. Readiness for the Agency Decision Milestone. The Agency Decision Milestone occurs after completion of the concurrent public, technical, legal, and policy review of the integrated draft report and NEPA document. In the event that the study requires IEPR, the milestone will be scheduled to follow receipt of the IEPR panel's findings, which could be up to 60 days after the public comment period, or longer if an extension is approved by the Chief of Engineers. The PDT will work to address outstanding issues (technical, policy, or legal) raised during the concurrent review that can be addressed without additional technical analysis or design; issues requiring additional technical analysis or design will be discussed at the Agency Decision Milestone meeting but addressed after the Milestone meeting. The District Planning Chief, in consultation with the MSC Planning and Policy Chief, confirms the readiness for the Agency Decision Milestone meeting, including that the analyses in the draft report and the recommendations as a result of the concurrent reviews are expected to be compliant with policy and that there is a capable non-Federal sponsor(s) ready to support project implementation. In a 3-year study, the Agency Decision Milestone would be expected within the first 18-24 months of the study.

b. Decision-Maker. The decision-maker for the Agency Decision Milestone meeting is the HQUSACE Chief of Planning and Policy, who will chair a HQUSACE Senior Executives Panel. Senior Executives invited to participate on the panel include: the HQUSACE Chief of Engineering and Construction Division; the HQUSACE Chief of Real Estate Division; the HQUSACE Chief of Operations and Regulatory Division; and the HQUSACE Director of Contingency Operations. A quorum is not required at the meeting and the chair can solicit feedback from Senior Executives in advance of the meeting if they are not available to attend.

c. Decision at the Agency Decision Milestone meeting. At the Agency Decision Milestone meeting, the Panel affirms the recommended plan and proposed way forward to acknowledge study and project risk that will be used in development of feasibility-level cost and design for inclusion in the final feasibility report. If the recommended plan and path forward is not endorsed, the Panel will identify required actions of the PDT and the study will not proceed into the feasibility-level analysis phase until the Panel endorses the recommended plan.

d. Read Aheads. A Report Summary, incorporating an explicit discussion of risk drivers and consequences, the Project Study Issue Checklist; and the final District presentation slides will be provided no later than two weeks prior to the milestone date. Read ahead material is informational for the decision-maker and the panel and is expected to have been coordinated within the vertical team prior to submission. Read ahead materials are not reviewed for comment and response.

e. To support the decision, the District Planning Chief will identify the recommended plan. The presentation and discussion will focus on the recommended plan; the objective evaluation of the significant public, technical, legal and policy comments; the PDT's plan to address or resolve comments; and the path forward to develop sufficient cost and design information on the recommended plan (and LPP, if applicable) for the final feasibility study report. The presentation and discussion will consider high or significant risks and management of those risks related to both the conduct of the study and the recommended plan.

f. Invited Milestone meeting participants include; HQUSACE Chief of Planning and Policy (decision-maker); the Senior Leaders Panel (HQUSACE Chief of Engineering and Construction Division; HQUSACE Chief of Real Estate Division; the HQUSACE Chief of Operations and Regulatory Division; and the HQUSACE Director of Contingency Operations); District Commander (lead presenter); District Planning Chief; District Lead Planner and appropriate District staff; MSC Director of Programs; MSC Planning and Policy Chief and appropriate MSC planning staff; ATR Team Lead; IEPR manager (if applicable); PCX representative(s); Chief, OWPR; Deputy, PCoP; the RIT Deputy and Planner; the HQUSACE Review Manager and members of the HQUSACE review team; and non-Federal sponsor representatives. Other Federal Agencies and Tribal Nations may be invited to the meeting.

g. Meeting Documentation. The decisions reached and any required follow-up actions must be documented at the Agency Decision Milestone meeting and acknowledged by the HQUSACE Chief of the Planning and Policy Division (decision-maker) and the MSC and District Planning Chiefs before adjourning the meeting. Significant decisions made will be documented by the PDT in a MFR and Decision Log, including specific actions to address significant comments received during the review of the draft report; and specific elements of analysis to develop sufficient cost and design detail for the final feasibility study report.

h. Post-Meeting Activities. If the Panel supports moving ahead with the study, the PDT will develop sufficient cost and design information on the recommended plan (and LPP) for the final feasibility study report and continue environmental and cultural compliance documentation and activities (NEPA, FWCA, ESA, NHPA, etc.). If there are significant changes to the TSP presented in the draft report after concurrent review, the public review may need to be repeated.

8. Civil Works Review Board (CWRB) Milestone. The CWRB briefing is the corporate checkpoint for determining that the proposed Report of the Chief of Engineers and the accompanying final decision and NEPA documents are ready to release for State and Agency (S&A) Review as required by the Flood Control Act of 1944, as amended (33 U.S.C. 701-1). The MSC and District Commanders will present the final results and recommendations for all Civil Works feasibility and post authorization reports that recommend new or additional Congressional authorization to the CWRB in HQUSACE.

a. Readiness for the Civil Works Review Board Milestone. Once a complete MSC Final Report Submittal Package is logged for HQUSACE review, a tentative CWRB date will be identified within 60 days of the log-in date. The HQUSACE team will complete its assessment and resolution of any identified issues within 42 days of the log-in date, unless exempted by the Director of Civil Works (DCW) due to excessive work load. If issues are not resolved by the completion of the assessment, the report will be returned to the MSC for additional work and revision. The CWRB date and time will only be confirmed after the HQUSACE policy assessment is complete and the CWRB Panel, including either the Deputy Commanding General-Civil and Emergency Operations (DCG-CEO) or DCW, have been pre-briefed and concur with finalizing the schedule for the CWRB. In all cases, the HQUSACE team will brief the DCG-CEO and DCW within 50 days of the log-in date. CWRB dates will normally be scheduled within two to three weeks of the CWRB Panel pre-brief. The goal is that all CWRBs will be scheduled and executed no more than 60 days following log-in of the complete MSC Final Report Submittal Package. In a 3-year study, the CWRB meeting would be expected within the last 3-4 months of the study.

b. Decision-Maker(s). The decision-maker is the DCG-CEO, who will chair the CWRB. The CWRB quorum consists of five (5) members from HQUSACE and the MSCs. All members are required to participate in person unless approval is received from the DCG-CEO. The panel must include at least three (3) HQUSACE representatives: the DCG-CEO who will Chair the Board; the Chief of the Planning and Policy Division; and either the Chief of the Engineering and Construction Division or a Senior Executive representing another community of practice. The DCW may participate as an additional member or as the Chair of the CWRB in the absence of the DCG-CEO. The panel will also include two (2) MSC Commanders not presenting to the CWRB. The Office of the Chief Counsel will serve in an advisory role.

c. Decision at the CWRB Milestone meeting. At the CWRB Milestone meeting, the DCG-CEO approves the release of the proposed Report of the Chief of Engineers and the accompanying final decision and NEPA documents for S&A and final NEPA reviews. The DCG-CEO also accepts that the identified study and project risk at the Agency Decision Milestone meeting has been satisfactorily addressed, and acknowledges the project risk and uncertainty being carried forward into Pre-construction Engineering & Design (PED). In those situations where the CWRB provides a contingent approval and identifies additional work or clarifications that are needed prior to releasing the report for the S&A review, the District will address the concerns and make any necessary changes to the report and submittal materials. The S&A review will not be initiated until the Chief, OWPR concurs that the Board's requirements have been met. Subject to the significance of the panel's concerns, the Chair has the prerogative to require a subsequent CWRB briefing, virtual or in-person, prior to the proposed Report of the Chief of Engineers being released.

d. Read Aheads. Using the final report package (ER 1105-2-100, Exhibit H-7), the RIT will prepare and provide a read-ahead package for the CWRB members two weeks prior to the CWRB meeting. The read-ahead package will include the following materials:

- Fact sheet (prepared by OWPR for CWRB members only)
- Cover page
- Table of contents



- CWRB agenda (with names)
- List of expected attendees
- Project map
- Sponsor letter of support
- Report summary
- Proposed Chief of Engineers Report
- ATR certification
- IEPR Summary Report, plus, summary of proposed draft USACE responses
- District Counsel legal certification

e. To support the decision, the District presentation and discussion will focus on the results of the water resources development study and the recommendations contained in decision documents for projects that require congressional authorization; significant or high risk review comments made on the final report; significant changes to the proposed project since the Agency Decision Milestone; the path forward as the recommended project moves forward into PED including outstanding risk; and lessons learned. It will build on the information and risks presented at the Agency Decision Milestone and illustrate how the District followed through on the approved path forward. This presentation is expected to be complementary, but not redundant to the information provided at Agency Decision Milestone meeting.

f. Milestone meeting participants include: the Civil Works Review Board Panel; the District Commander (lead presenter) with support from the District Planning Chief, the project manager, and/or the Deputy District Engineer for Project Management; the MSC Commander (quality assurance brief) with support from the MSC Planning and Policy Chief and/or the MSC Director of Programs; the HQUSACE Review Manager (policy and independent reviews); the Chief, OWPR; and a representative from the HQUSACE Chief Counsel's office. All panel members and presenters are expected to participate in person unless approved by the DCG-CEO. Office of the ASA(CW) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) representatives will be invited to attend in person. Attendance by non-federal sponsor and/or Tribal Nation representatives and other federal agencies may be in-person or virtual at their discretion. Other supporting staff and interested observers, with virtual attendance expected, include the District Lead Planner and other members of the PDT; members of the MSC quality assurance team; the ATR Team Lead and members of the ATR team; PCX representative(s); relevant USACE Communities of Practice; and the IEPR manager (if applicable).

g. Meeting Documentation. The RIT in cooperation with the District PDT will be responsible for documenting the discussion during the CWRB meeting. A draft MFR of the meeting is expected to be distributed to the HQUSACE policy review team and the MSC for comment no later than one (1) week following the CWRB action and finalized by the RIT and provided to meeting attendees no later than two (2) weeks following the CWRB meeting.

h. Post-Meeting Activities. Consult ER 1105-2-100 Appendix H for actions that occur after the CWRB which lead to authorization of the project by Congress. Required activities include: S&A Review; final NEPA review if applicable; final assessment and documentation of review findings by the HQUSACE review team; revision of the Project Summary after completion of S&A review; and finalizing the Chief of Engineer's Report.

9. Chief's Report Milestone. The Chief's Report milestone is marked by the signature of the Chief of Engineer's Report. HQUSACE is responsible for the Chief's Report content and schedule. The S&A and final NEPA reviews are concurrent with HQUSACE's final policy compliance review. The Chief, OWPR will certify policy compliance after completion of the S&A and final NEPA reviews and OWPR will finalize the Chief's Report for the Chief's signature and the Record of Decision for signature by the ASA(CW). After the policy compliance certification has been completed, the Regional Integration Team (RIT) will process the Chief's Report for signature and will schedule briefings for the HQUSACE Chief of Planning and Policy, the DCW, the DCG-CEO, and/or the Chief of Engineers, as needed.

10. This Planning Bulletin will be incorporated in the next update of Appendices G and H of ER 1105-2-100, the Planning Guidance Notebook, and rescinded at that point.

11. Point of contact for feasibility study milestones is Ms. Susan B. Hughes, 202-761-4121.



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