

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area (SRA) Advisory Council****AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.**ACTION:** Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: An Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area Advisory Council meeting will convene in Stayton, Oregon on Monday, January 22, 2001. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m., and will conclude at approximately 8:30 p.m. The meeting will be held in the South Room of the Stayton Community Center located on 400 West Virginia Street in Stayton, Oregon.

The Opal Creek Wilderness and Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area Act of 1996 (Opal Creek Act) (Pub. L. 104-208) directed the Secretary of Agriculture to establish the Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area Advisory Council. The Advisory Council is comprised of thirteen members representing state, county and city governments, and representatives of various organizations, which include mining industry, environmental organizations, inholders in Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area, economic development, Indian tribes, adjacent landowners and recreation interests. The council provides advice to the Secretary of Agriculture on preparation of a comprehensive Opal Creek Management Plan for the SRA, and consults on a periodic and regular basis on the management of the area. The tentative agenda will include refining issue statements and describing the desired future condition of the SRA.

The public comment period is tentatively scheduled to begin at 8:00 p.m. Time allotted for individual presentations will be limited to 3 minutes. Written comments are encouraged, particularly if the material cannot be presented within the time limits of the comment period. Written comments may be submitted prior to the January 22 meeting by sending them to Designated Federal Official Stephanie Phillips at the address given below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For more information regarding this meeting, contact Designated Federal Official Stephanie Phillips; Williamette National Forest, Detroit Ranger District, HC 73 Box 320, Mill City, OR 97360; (503) 854-3366.

Dated: December 4, 2000.

Darrel Kenops,

Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Rural Utilities Service****Notice of Availability of a Programmatic Environmental Assessment****AGENCY:** Rural Utilities Service, USDA.**ACTION:** Notice of availability of a programmatic environmental assessment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), has prepared a programmatic level analysis of certain environmental effects of combustion turbines utilized for electric utility applications and offers guidance on § 1794.15 of its Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1794).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Lawrence R. Wolfe, Engineering and Environmental Staff, Rural Utilities Service, Stop 1571, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-1571, telephone (202) 720-1784. The E-mail address is: lwolfe@rus.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This programmatic analysis, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), is designed to reconcile RUS procedural requirements for environmental analysis with the emerging needs of a deregulating electric utility industry. Increasing demand for electricity combined with a lack of new generation and retirement of obsolete plants has produced acute shortages and price spikes in some areas of the country.

To better manage power supply needs and to prudently hedge their exposure to power market risks, RUS generation and transmission (G&T) borrowers and others have turned to combustion turbine (CT) technology. Technological advances during the 1990s produced significant improvements to economic and operational efficiencies of CTs. Nearly 90 percent of new electricity generating capacity between 1997 and 2020 is projected to be combustion turbine technology fueled by natural gas or both oil and gas.

In contrast to base load generating plants, construction and installation of CT plants typically have much shorter lead times (18-36 months) and generally cost much less. Rather than being custom constructed on site, CTs are assembled in a factory, delivered to the site substantially complete, and then are installed. CTs are not designed to be operated continuously, but rather, to meet peak load requirements. Thus, CT emissions are more infrequent and

generally lower than base load facilities that are designed to run continuously.

Unlike custom built generating resources, CTs are "off-the-shelf" products that are essentially identical in the details of acquisition, installation and operation at any given power rating. These common characteristics lend themselves to a common, *i.e.*, programmatic assessment of many of the environmental effects associated with such power plants. These common characteristics and range of sizes also make it easier for power suppliers to match their needs more closely as CT modules can be added incrementally. The environmental effects of the installation of a CT on a particular site are, of course, site specific and often unique. The evaluation and resolution of those issues often determine the ultimate siting of the CT.

It is common for a power supplier to order a CT and make progress payments during its fabrication long before the site for the CT has been selected or even identified. This is partially explained by the fact that power suppliers often have alternative sites on which to install the CT in the event that an environmental review process for the preferred site leads to a different outcome. In the unlikely event that a power supplier is unable to find any suitable site for a CT that it has ordered, it may assign or otherwise liquidate its position rather than incur significant losses. By proceeding with the siting process in parallel with the fabrication of the unit, the power supplier is able to address the growing needs for an adequate and reliable supply of electricity on a more timely basis than if the power supplier proceeded sequentially.

In order to assure a reliable and affordable power supply for rural America, RUS plans to advance funds to make progress payments on an otherwise eligible CT project while the site selection process for that CT project is pending. Any funds being requested for site development work or installation of the CT would, if approved, be conditioned upon the borrower meeting all other environmental requirements, including completion of a RUS site specific environmental review. RUS will not advance any funds for the site development or installation of any CT unless and until RUS has completed its environmental analysis of the specific site and determined that such site is acceptable.

Except for site specific issues, CTs present a set of common environmental issues. CTs use similar technology, have similar environmental impacts, have the same alternatives and otherwise raise