

clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Use of Comments

All comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses when provided, will become a matter of public record. Comments will be summarized and included in the request for Office of Management and Budget approval.

Dated: April 7, 2000.

James R. Furnish,

Deputy Chief, National Forest System.

[FR Doc. 00-9290 Filed 4-13-00; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Windmill Timber Harvest in the Mill Creek Drainage, Gallatin National Forest, Park County, Montana

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice, intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service intends to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to disclose the environmental effects of the Windmill timber harvest and associated activities in the Mill Creek drainage located in the Absaroka/Beartooth Mountain Range, Gallatin National Forest, Livingston Range District, Park County, Montana.

The proposed timber harvest of approximately 5 mmbf from an estimated 650 acres of timbered lands and associated actions including road construction, reconstruction and restoration, prescribed fire and reforestation are being considered together because they represent either connected or cumulative actions as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.25).

The Windmill Timber Sale is one of 12 project being proposed on the Gallatin National Forest to contribute time volume to assist in the acquisition of four sections of land as directed by the Gallatin Land Consolidation Act of 1998 (PL 105-267). In addition, harvest of this sale would: contribute toward providing a flow of wood products from National Forest lands, proposed road restoration of roads would maintain or improve watershed conditions,

proposed prescribed fire would reduce the potential for catastrophic fires, and tree planting in regeneration units would address reforestation.

DATES: Written comments should be received by May 10, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments on proposed activities or a request to be placed on the project mailing list to Terri Marceron, District Ranger, Livingston Ranger District, 5245 Highway 89 South, Livingston, Montana, 59047.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: JT Stangl, Project Leader, Livingston Ranger District, Gallatin National Forest, Phone (406) 222-1892.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The project area consists of National Forest lands located in T6S, R9E, Sec. 10, 11, 14, 15, 19, 23, 24, 25 and 30; and T6S, R10E, Sec 32, 33, 34, and 35 and T7S, R10E Sec 2, 4, and 5, P.M. MT. The majority of activities would occur within the Counts, West Fork, Passage and Colley Creek areas in the Mill Creek drainage. Timber harvest is proposed on land that is designated as suitable for timber management by the Gallatin Forest Plan (USDA 1987). Timber harvest would occur outside of roadless area as designed using Region One protocol. New roads would be effectively closed to vehicle traffic after completion of post-sale activities. The EIS would also analyze the restoration of some existing roads, that are generally not open to motorized public use, to maintain or improve watershed conditions.

The USDA Forest Service, "Report to the Montana Congressional Delegation Proposed Gallatin Land Consolidation" (September 1997) and the Gallatin Forest Plan (USDA 1987) provides the overall guidance for management activities in the potentially affected area through its goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area direction.

Comments from the public and other agencies will be used in preparation of the Draft EIS. The scoping process will be used to: (1) Identify potential issues, (2) Identify issues to be analyzed in depth, (3) Eliminate insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a relevant precious environmental analysis, such as the Gallatin Forest Plan EIS, (4) Identify alternatives to the proposed action, (5) Identify potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative effects) and (6) Determine potential cooperating agencies and task assignments. Preliminary issues identified by Forest Service specialist include assessing if

proposed activities would effect: threatened and endangered species, sensitive fish, wildlife and plant species, ungulate habitat, Neotropical migratory bird habitat, management indicator species habitat, fragmentation, vegetative structural diversity, soils, water quality, noxious weeds, fire management, visual quality, cultural resources, recreation use special uses, roadless areas, and public safety. This list will be verified, expanded, or modified based on public scoping for this proposal.

Public participation is an important part of the analysis, commencing with the initial scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7). In addition to scoping, the public may visit Forest Service officials at any time during the analysis and prior to the decision. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individual or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. No public meetings are scheduled at this time.

The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review in November of 2000. At that time, the EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the Draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register**. It is very important that those interested in management of the Mill Creek area participate at that time. The Final EIS is scheduled for completion by the end of March 2001.

The Forest Service believes, at the early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of draft environmental impact statements must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts in agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 30-

day scoping comment period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in developing issues and alternatives.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues, comments should be a specific to this proposal as possible. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulatory for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

I am the responsible official for this environmental impact statement. My address is Gallatin National Forest, P.O. 130, Federal Building, Bozeman, MT 59771.

Dated: May 3, 2000.

Richard Inman,

Acting Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 00-9221 Filed 4-13-00; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

New Porter Bayou, Mississippi

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969; the Council on Environmental Quality Guidelines (40 CFR part 1500); and the Natural Resources Conservation Service Guidelines (7 CFR part 650); the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, gives notice that an environmental impact statement is being prepared for the New Porter Bayou Watershed, Bolivar and Sunflower Counties, Mississippi.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Homer L. Wilkes, State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 1321 Federal Building, 100 West Capitol Street, Jackson, Mississippi 39269, telephone 601-965-5205.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The environmental assessment of this federally assisted action indicates that the project may cause significant local, regional, or national impacts on the environment. As a result of these findings, Homer L. Wilkes, State Conservationist, has determined that the preparation and review of an

environmental impact statement are needed for this project.

The project concerns a plan for flood prevention and drainage. Alternatives under consideration to reach these objectives include systems for channel improvement.

A draft environmental impact statement will be prepared and circulated for review by agencies and the public. The Natural Resources Conservation Service invites participation and consultation of agencies and individuals that have special expertise, legal jurisdiction, or interest in the preparation of the draft environmental impact statement. Further information on the proposed action may be obtained from Homer L. Wilkes, State Conservationist, at the above address.

Dated: March 24, 2000.

Homer L. Wilkes,

State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS, Jackson, MS.

[FR Doc. 00-9364 Filed 4-13-00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-16-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Notice of Availability of the "Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Programs Manual—Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program"

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Agriculture.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) seeks comments on the proposed revision of the "Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Programs Manual—Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program." USDA asks for comments from RC&D Council members and other individuals; tribal, State, and local governments and organizations involved in either natural resource conservation or community development groups. These comments will assist USDA in policy development and implementation of the RC&D program. This manual is intended for use by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other USDA staff members, RC&D Council members, and others that either will develop RC&D applications or participate in the RC&D program.

EFFECTIVE DATES: Comments will be received beginning April 14, 2000. The comment period will end on June 22, 2000. All comments post-marked by June 22, 2000, will be accepted.

ADDRESSES: Address all requests and comments to: Terry D'Addio, National RC&D Program Manager, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Room 6013, South Building, 14th & Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Terry D'Addio, Natural Resources Conservation Service, (202) 720-0557; fax: (202) 690-0639; e-mail: terry.daddio@usda.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The "Conservation Programs Manual: Part 513—RC&D Program" is a document intended for use by NRCS and other USDA staff members, RC&D Council members, and others that either will develop RC&D applications or participate in the RC&D program. The purpose of this document is to provide policy guidance for the RC&D program, not to establish regulatory requirements. The RC&D program was authorized to encourage and improve the capability of State and local units of government and local nonprofit organizations in rural areas to plan, develop, and implement programs for resource conservation and development. Through the establishment of RC&D areas, the program establishes or improves coordination systems in communities and builds community leadership skills to effectively use Federal, State, and local programs for the communities' benefit.

Current program objectives focus on improvements achieved through natural resources conservation and community development. Such activities lead to sustainable communities, prudent land use, and the sound management and conservation of natural resources.

Assistance is provided, as authorized by the Secretary of Agriculture, to designated RC&D areas through their organized RC&D Councils (comprised of local elected officials and civic leaders). RC&D Councils, in association with local, State, and Federal governments—and other non-profit organizations—initiate and lead the planning and implementation of their locally developed RC&D area plans. Councils also obtain assistance from other local, State, and Federal agencies; private organizations; and foundations.

USDA prohibits discrimination in its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, or disability. Additionally, discrimination