

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Forest Service****McNally Fire Roadless Restoration Project**

AGENCY: USDA Forest Service.

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

SUMMARY: The Department of Agriculture, Forest Service is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to address the impacts of the McNally Fire within the Rincon, Chico, and Cannell Roadless areas. In July and August of 2002, the Sequoia National Forest experienced the largest wildfire in its history. The Sequoia National Forest proposes to begin long-term ecological restoration on that portion of the fire damaged areas on the Cannell Meadow and Hot Springs Ranger Districts that are inside the inventoried roadless areas with the exclusion of those areas that lie within the Giant Sequoia National Monument. The McNally Fire Roadless Restoration Project would implement restoration measures on those watersheds that burned with a moderate to high intensity leading to heavy tree mortality and/or other adverse effects to forest resources such as soils, riparian areas, and wildlife habitat. The fire also killed hundreds of thousands of trees that if left untreated will contribute to high fuel loading over time and re-create high risks for another catastrophic fire. The goal of the project is to move the burned areas toward the desired conditions described in the Sequoia National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA).

DATES: The public is asked to submit any issues (points of concern, debate, dispute, or disagreement) regarding potential effects of the proposed action by April 25, 2003. The draft EIS is expected to be available for public comment in August 2003 and the final EIS is expected to be published in November 2003.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to: McNally Fire Roadless Restoration Project, USDA Forest Service, Sequoia National Forest, 900 W. Grant Avenue, Porterville, CA 93257.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tom Simonson, Ecosystem Manager, Sequoia National Forest, at the address listed above. The phone number is (559) 784-1500.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Purpose and Need for Action**

In light of desired conditions specified in the Forest Plan and the existing conditions within the project area outlined above, there is an immediate need to:

1. Accelerate the re-establishment of burned conifer stands to provide important habitat for such old forest species as the spotted owl, fisher, marten, and goshawk.
2. Restore ground cover to soils left unprotected by the fire in order to minimize erosion in the short term and to replace organic material over the long term.
3. Reduce existing fuels in order to reduce the risk of another stand-replacing fire, which would damage recovering habitats and riparian condition, thereby setting back the clock on development of old forest habitat and riparian restoration.

Proposed Action

This project proposes to restore approximately 17,700 acres of conifer habitat and 12,130 acres of Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs), of which 5,894 acres are within conifer habitat, with a combination of treatment and non-treatment methods. No roads would be constructed within the inventoried roadless areas. All the areas proposed for treatment are to be managed following the land management direction in the Forest Plan as amended.

Treatments that would be applied in a specific area depend upon the specific restoration need, the slope of the terrain, the degree of vegetation mortality, and the land management allocation. Where possible, dead trees that have commercial value and that are not needed to meet resource objectives would be removed from the site primarily by helicopter through a commercial timber sale. Restoration may require the removal of fire-killed trees to facilitate the future management of those stands. Standing dead trees may present safety hazards and physical barriers to the restoration activities and to future uses. Removal may also be needed to reduce future fuels accumulation to help mitigate future uncharacteristic wildfire effects. Other fuel treatments besides removal will include prescribed burning in combination with removal and/or the dropping and leaving of dead trees.

Felling of dead trees across the contour of the slope is proposed to stabilize sediment. Reforestation with conifers (planting and seeding) is proposed to re-establish habitats occupied by late-seral species prior to the fire, to link together suitable

remnant habitats, and to restore large expanses of old forest habitat. Large-diameter snags and logs will be retained in sufficient quantity to maintain legacy structures for both the late-seral species and their prey.

Riparian Conservation Areas (RCA) would also be treated to restore riparian values by re-establishing vegetation, reducing excessive fuel loadings, stabilizing stream channels and sediment, and improving ground cover conditions. Contour felling of dead trees is proposed to stabilize sediment. Planting and seeding of native plants, such as conifers and willows, is proposed to re-establish some of the riparian corridors and other special areas.

Responsible Official

The responsible official is Forest Supervisor Arthur L. Gaffrey, Sequoia National Forest, 900 West Grand Avenue, Porterville, California 93257.

Comment Requested

The comment period on the draft environmental impact statement will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes that, at this early stage, it is very 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 the 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 45 day 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 the final environmental impact statement. To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments should be as specific as possible.

Dated: March 14, 2003.

Arthur L. Gaffrey,

*Forest Supervisor, Sequoia National Forest,
USDA Forest Service.*

[FR Doc. 03-6685 Filed 3-27-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Notice of Mineral County Resource Advisory Committee Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the authorities in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Pub. L. 92-463) and under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (Pub. L. 106-393) the Lolo National Forest's Mineral County Resource Advisory Committee will meet on April 8 and April 22 at 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. in Superior, Montana for a business meeting. The meeting is open to the public.

DATES: April 9, 2003 and April 22, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Mineral County Courthouse, 300 River Street, Superior, MT 59872.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Robert Harper, Designated Forest Official (DFO), District Ranger, Superior Ranger District, Lolo National Forest, at (406) 822-4233.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Agenda topics for these meetings include the review and selection of project proposals, as authorized under Title II of Pub. L. 106-393. If the meeting location is changed, notice will be posted in local newspapers, including the Mineral Independent and the Missoulian.

Dated: March 24, 2003.

Deborah L.R. Austin,

Designated Federal Official.

[FR Doc. 03-7455 Filed 3-27-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Housing Service

Notice of Request for Extension of a Currently Approved Information Collection

AGENCY: Rural Housing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Proposed collection; comments requested.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces the Rural Housing

Service's intention to request an extension for a currently approved information collection in support of the regulation for Account Servicing Policies.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by May 27, 2003 to be assured of consideration.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jim Vollmer, Senior Loan Officer, Multi-Family Housing Portfolio Management Division, Rural Housing Service, STOP 0782, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-0782; Telephone: (202) 720-1060.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Account Servicing Policies.

OMB Number: 0575-0075.

Expiration Date of Approval: June 30, 2003.

Type of Request: Extension of a currently approved information collection.

Abstract: The Rural Housing Service provides supervised credit in the form of Multi-Family Housing and Community Facility loans and grants. 7 CFR part 1951, subpart A sets forth the policies and procedures, including the collection and use of information, regarding the application of payments on loans made under the programs administered by the agencies and the return of paid-in-full and satisfied promissory notes.

The programs are administered under the provisions of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (CONACT), as amended. Section 339(a) of the CONACT authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to make the rules and regulations necessary to carry out the programs authorized within the Act.

Information collection is submitted by Agency borrowers to the local Agency office servicing the county in which their operation is located and is used by agency servicing officials.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average .25 hours per response.

Respondents: Individuals or households and businesses and other for-profits.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 110.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 1.

Estimated Number of Responses: 110.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 28 hours.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Tracy Givlekian, Regulations and Paperwork Management Branch, at (202) 692-0039.

Comments

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to Tracy Givlekian, Regulations and Paperwork Management Branch, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, STOP 0742, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Washington, DC 20250. All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Dated: March 17, 2003.

Arthur A. Garcia,

Administrator, Rural Housing Service.

[FR Doc. 03-7393 Filed 3-27-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-XV-U

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Information Collection Activity; Comment Request

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35, as amended), the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) invites comments on this information collection for which RUS intends to request approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by May 27, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Director, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., STOP 1522, Room 4036 South Building, Washington, DC 20250-1522. Telephone: (202) 720-9550. Fax: (202) 720-4120.