

South, Soda Springs, Idaho 83276, phone (208) 547-4356.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed mining activities would consist of two open pits, known as Panels B and C, topsoil stockpiles, mine equipment parking areas, access and haul roads, a power line extension, external overburden storage areas, and runoff/sediment control facilities. Mining would include best management practices for control of releases of sediment and dissolved metals. The proposed open pits would be located on either side of Smoky Creek. The creek would be crossed in two locations by road fills. One of these road fills already exists for the mine access road and would be widened to accommodate the 100-foot width of a new haul road. A second, new haul road fill would be constructed across Smoky Creek in a separate location. The existing Forest Service road in Smoky Canyon would cross the proposed haul roads at grade in two locations. The public road would be protected with traffic controls posted on either side. A culvert or retaining wall would be installed in Smoky Creek along the mining area to protect water quality during mining and would be removed along with any road fills not required for continued access road requirements during reclamation activities.

Existing mine, maintenance, administrative, and milling facilities would be used during the mine period. Ore from the new panels would be beneficiated in the existing mill facilities and tailings would be deposited in the existing tailings disposal facilities. Ore concentrate would be transferred to the Don Plant in Pocatello, Idaho via the existing slurry pipeline transportation system. Water usage would continue as in the past with no increase in water consumption for the operations.

Disturbed lands directly resulting from the proposed activities would total 656 acres. The new pits would include 353 acres and the rest of the disturbed acreage would be for roads, overburden disposal areas, and other support facilities. Approximately 605 acres of the proposed disturbance would be reclaimed by backfilling most of the proposed open pit areas, regrading fill slopes, spreading topsoil, planting of appropriate vegetation, and installation and maintenance of runoff and sediment control facilities.

The BLM and FS believe, at this 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 EISs must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to 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 EIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final EIS 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 60-day comment period for the draft SEIS so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the BLM and FS at a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the final SEIS.

Preliminary Issues

Initially identified issues include potential effects on: ground water and surface water quantity and quality, wildlife and their habitats, livestock grazing, wetlands and riparian habitat, socio-economics, and development of best management practices for mine operations.

Possible Alternatives

The SEIS will analyze the Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives. Other alternatives to be considered would include altering portions of the proposed mining facilities or sequence and design parameters to provide mitigation for resources of concern.

Tentative SEIS Project Schedule

The tentative project schedule is as follows:

- Begin Public Comment Period—March, 2000
- Hold Public Scoping Meetings—April, 2000
- Estimated date for Draft SEIS—February, 2001
- Public Comment Period on Draft SEIS—60 days from when the Notice of Availability is published in the **Federal Register**

Public Scoping Meetings

Two public scoping meetings will be held, each an open house type, from 7 pm–9 pm. The open houses will include displays explaining the project and a forum for commenting on the project. The meetings will be held as follows:

- Star Valley High School, Afton, Wyoming
 - BLM Field Office, Pocatello, Idaho
- Information on the dates for the scoping meetings can be obtained from

Linda Matthews, JBR Environmental Consultants, Inc., (801) 943-4144, (lmatthews@jbr-env.com).

Public Input Requested

The BLM and FS are seeking information and written comments from Federal, State and local agencies as well as individuals and organizations who may be interested in, or affected by, the proposed action. To assist the BLM and FS in identifying and considering issues and concerns related to the proposed action, comments for scoping, and later for the Draft SEIS, should be as specific as possible. Referring to specific pages or chapters of the SEIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the SEIS is most helpful.

Dated: March 15, 2000.

Jeff Steele,

Manager, Pocatello Field Office, Bureau of Land Management.

Harold Klein,

Acting Forest Supervisor, Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

[FR Doc. 00-7110 Filed 2-23-00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-84-P, 3410-11-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Gold/Boulder/Sullivan; Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln County, Montana

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The USDA–Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Gold/Boulder/Sullivan Project to disclose the effects of vegetative management through timber harvest and prescribed fire, and road management including road maintenance, reconstruction, and decommissioning. The Gold/Boulder/Sullivan project area encompasses the Gold Creek, Boulder Creek, and Sullivan Creek drainages approximately 12 miles southwest of Eureka, Montana.

The proposed activities are considered together because they represent either connected or cumulative actions as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.23). The purpose and need for action is to achieve desirable and sustainable conditions in forest stands, improve big game winter range conditions, improve visual quality, improve water quality, and provide goods and services.

The EIS will tier to the Kootenai National Forest Land Resource

Management Plan, as amended, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and Record of Decision (ROD) of September 1987, which provides overall guidance for forest management of the area.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be received on or before April 24, 2000.

ADDRESSES: The Responsible Official is Bob Castaneda, the Kootenai National Forest Supervisor, 1101 Hwy 2 West, Libby, Montana 59923. Written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis should be sent to Glen M. McNitt, District Ranger, Rexford Ranger District, 1299 Hwy 93 N, Eureka, MT 59917.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Contact Ron Komac, Acting NEPA Coordinator, Rexford Ranger District, Phone: (406) 296-2536.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The project area is approximately 37,000 acres and has a favorable climate and good site conditions for forest vegetation. Proposed activities within the decision area include portions of the following areas: T34-36N; R28-30W.

Average annual precipitation ranges from 14 to 1000 inches. At higher elevations, most precipitation falls as snow. The decision area contains a combination of open-grown ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir in the lower elevations, adjacent to Lake Koocanusa; upland areas contain multistoried western larch/Douglas-fir intermixed with lodgepole pine, as well as uniform lodgepole pine stands.

Wildfire historically played a role in interrupting forest succession and creating much of the vegetative diversity that is apparent on the landscape today. Since the early 1900's, a policy of wildfire suppression has been in place on National Forest lands, interrupting the natural vegetation cycle. Existing stands in the lower elevations have a higher stocking level than occurred naturally and are dominated by Douglas-fir which is susceptible to bark beetles and root disease when stressed. Lodgepole pine in the upper elevations have experienced a high level of mortality due to mountain pine beetles and are not contributing toward a desired condition of forest health. A portion of the Decision Area is highly visible from the Tobacco Valley as well as the Scenic Byway (State Highway 37). A portion of the Mount Henry Inventoried Roadless Area is included within the project area. There are no treatments proposed for this area.

The Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan provides overall management objectives

in individual delineated management areas (MAs). Most of the proposed timber harvest activities encompass five predominant MAs: 11, 12, 15, 16, 17. Briefly described, MA 11 is managed to maintain or enhance the winter range habitat effectiveness for big game species and produce a programmed yield of timber. MA 12 is managed to maintain or enhance the summer range habitat effectiveness for big game species and produce a programmed yield of timber. MA 15 focuses upon timber production using various silvicultural practices while providing for other resource values. MA 16 is managed to produce timber while providing for a pleasing view. MA 17 is managed to maintain or enhance a natural appearing landscape and produce a programmed yield of timber. Minor amounts of timber harvest and/or other proposed activities such as prescribed burning are found in other MAs, including 2 (roadless recreation); 5 (viewing areas); 10 (big game winter range); 13 (old growth), 19 (steep slopes), 21 (research natural area), and 24 (low productivity areas).

Purpose and Need

The primary purpose and need for the project is to: (1) Achieve desirable and sustainable conditions in forest stands by reducing stand densities and species competition, and salvage of mortality due to insects or disease; (2) improve big game winter range conditions through the use of prescribed fire to rejuvenate browse species; (3) improve water quality by reducing road effects through road maintenance and reconstruction, and road decommissioning; (4) improve visual quality through feathering edges to reduce line and form; and (5) respond to the social and economic desires of the surrounding area by providing a range of products from the forested environment, while maintaining a resilient, sustainable forest environment over time.

Proposed Activities

The Forest Service proposes to harvest between 18100 and 35600 CCF (hundred cubic feet), equivalent to between 9.1 and 17.8 MMBF (million board feet) of timber through the application of a variety of harvest methods on approximately 2528 acres of forestland. Silvicultural systems include 826 acres of regeneration harvest, 1423 acres of improvement harvest, 118 acres of salvage, and 161 acres of removal of small diameter material. Some treatments would feather or thin stands adjacent to existing units with abrupt

edges to improve the visual setting for outdoor recreation.

Removal of trees would be accomplished by a variety of methods including: helicopter, tractor, and line skidding operations. Temporary roads may be needed to access some units to be harvested with ground-based systems. These temporary roads would be decommissioned after timber sale activities are accomplished.

The proposal also includes approximately 2,528 acres of prescribed in association with commercial timber harvest and approximately 3,316 acres of prescribed burning without commercial timber harvest. Prescribed burning without timber harvest is proposed within management area 13 (designated old growth).

The proposed action would result in four additional openings over 40 acres, ranging from 49 to 83 acres. The size of seven other large openings would be increased, ranging from 55 to 464 acres.

The proposal also includes .1 mile of temporary road construction, 64 miles of reconstruction to meet Best Management Practices requirements and decommissioning of four closed roads to restore natural drainage patterns.

Implementation of this proposal would require opening several miles of road currently restricted to public access. It is expected that public access would be allowed on a portion of these roads while management activities are occurring. Restrictions for motorized access would be restored following the conclusion of the management activities.

The proposed action includes precommercial thinning of sapling-sized trees on 2600 acres within managed plantations and natural stands that have regenerated after wildfire. Precommercial thinning would not occur in lynx habitat.

Forest Plan Amendments

The proposed action includes a project-specific forest plan amendments and a programmatic amendment to meet the goals of the Kootenai National Forest Plan.

A programmatic amendment to allow long-term MA 12 open road density to be managed at 1.1 miles/square mile, which exceeds the facilities standard of 0.75 miles/square mile. The roads currently open access high-use recreation facilities or are important access routes for forest users and have been managed as open roads for several decades. There is a social need to maintain these roads as open to motorized access.

A project specific amendment to allow harvest adjacent to existing

openings in up to 11 big game movement corridors. A Forest Plan amendment would be needed to suspend wildlife and fish standard #7 and timber standard #2 for this area. These standards state that movement corridors and adjacent hiding cover be retained. In this situation, high levels of mountain pine beetle activity have precluded alternative treatments. These opening sizes more closely correlate to natural disturbance patterns. Snags and down woody material would be left to provide wildlife habitat and maintain soil productivity.

MA-21; Research Natural Area Candidates

The proposed activities in the Big Creek Research Natural Area would involve fuel treatment activities prior to conducting an underburn in this low elevation area. The Kootenai Forest Plan scheduled two underburns for this area. Some smaller diameter understory trees would be removed in order for this burning to be successful. Any management proposals would be conducted with the full involvement of Forest Service Research.

Range of Alternatives

The Forest Service will consider a range of alternatives. One of these will be the "no action" alternative in which none of the proposed activities will be implemented. Additional alternatives may be considered to achieve the projects purpose and need and to respond to specific resource issues and public concerns.

Preliminary Issues

Tentatively, several preliminary issues of concern have been identified. These issues are briefly described below:

Transportation Systems: The implementation of the proposed action would permanently remove approximately 3 miles of road from the landscape which may affect the public's ability to use traditional routes.

Visual Resources: Implementation of the proposed action may alter the existing scenic resource within the project area. Although the proposed action is designed to improve the visuals of past harvest activities, some members of the public may feel that it will have additional scenic impacts.

Wildlife: The proposed action could potentially reduce existing cavity habitat in snags and reduce suitable hiding cover for wildlife security.

Management activities inside of a Research Natural Area: Typically, commercial thinning is not permitted within RNA's. In this particular case, a

commercial thinning is necessary in order to remove fuels prior to underburning. If these fuels are not removed, there is a high likelihood that a stand destroying fire could occur rather than a cool underburn which is characteristic for this site.

Decisions To Be Made

The Kootenai Forest Supervisor will decide the following:

- Whether or not to harvest timber and, if so, identify the selection of, and site specific location of, appropriate timber management practices (silvicultural prescription, logging system, fuels treatment, and reforestation), road construction/reconstruction necessary to provide access and achieve other resource objectives, and appropriate mitigation measures.
- Whether or not water quality improvement projects (including road decommissioning) should be implemented and, if so, to what extent.
- Whether or not wildlife enhancement projects (including prescribed burning) should be implemented and, if so, to what extent.
- Whether road access restrictions or other actions are necessary to meet big game wildlife security needs.
- Whether or not project specific and programmatic Forest Plan amendments for MA 12 and MA 21 are necessary to meet the specific purpose and need of this project, and whether those amendments are significant under NFMA.
- What, if any, specific project monitoring requirements would be needed to assure mitigation measures are implemented and effective.

Public Involvement and Scoping

In January 2000 preliminary efforts were made to involve the public in looking at management opportunities within the Gold/Boulder/Sullivan Planning Area. Comments received prior to this notice will be included in the documentation for the EIS. The public is encouraged to take part in the process and is encouraged to visit with Forest Service officials at any time during the analysis and prior to the decision. The Forest Service will seek information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in, or affected by, the proposed action. This input will be used in preparation of the draft and final EIS. The scoping process will assist in identifying potential issues, identifying major issues to be analyzed in depth, identifying alternatives to the proposed action,

identifying potential environmental effects of this project and alternatives (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).

Estimated Dates for Filing

While public participation in this analysis is welcome at any time, comments received within 30 days of the publication of this notice will be especially useful in the preparation of the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by June, 2000. At that time 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 publishes the Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**. It is very important that those interested in the management of this area participate at that time.

The final EIS is scheduled to be completed by September, 2000. In the final EIS the Forest Service is required to respond to comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed in the draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making a decision regarding the proposal.

Reviewer's Obligations

The Forest Service believes, at this early state, 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 an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, environmental objectives that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon v. Hotel*, 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 objectives are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider and respond to them in the final EIS.

To be most helpful, comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible and may address the adequacy of the statement or the merit of the

alternatives discussed. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

Responsible Official

As the Forest Supervisor of the Kootenai National Forest, 1101 US Highway 2 West, Libby, MT 59923, I am the Responsible Official. As the Responsible Official I will decide if the proposed project will be implemented. I will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. I have delegated the responsibility to prepare the EIS to Glen M. McNitt, District Ranger, Rexford Ranger District.

Dated: March 15, 2000.

Bob Castaneda,

Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest.

[FR Doc. 00-7282 Filed 3-23-00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Mill Creek Timber Sales and Related Activities, Rogue River National Forest, Jackson County, OR

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Revised notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: On December 14, 1999, a notice of intent for the Mill Creek Timber Sales and Related Activities was published in the **Federal Register** (64 FR 69691). Further project design, analysis, monitoring of previous actions and scoping have identified changes to the proposed action that will subsequently change the responsible official. Analysis has identified the need to adjust the standards and guidelines for soil in the 1990 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Rogue River National Forest. As part of the decision for the Mill Creek Timber Sales and Related Activities, an amendment to the Forest Plan will be made to make the Forest Plan consistent with regional policy, standards and guidelines related to soil quality. An amendment to the Forest Plan is a Forest Supervisor's decision. Therefore the responsible official for this EIS changes from the District Ranger to the Forest Supervisor. In addition, further analysis and scoping have allowed clarification of the preliminary issues and the development of alternatives to

the proposed action. The following significant issues have emerged. *Soil:* activities associated with the proposed action (harvesting and activity fuels treatment) may cause direct or indirect impacts to soils by surface erosion, compaction, over-land flow, displacement, puddling, and a loss of site productivity (organic matter, nitrogen, water holding capacity, etc.). Activities in combination with past, other present and reasonably future actions may result in adverse cumulative effects to soils (especially considering existing skid trails per activity area and road density) and known detrimental soil areas. *Water quality:* activities may affect water quality via erosion, sediment production, and in combination with past, other present and reasonably foreseeable future actions may result in adverse cumulative effects. *Vegetation condition and forest health:* activities may affect the current mix of seral stages and the long-term health of forested stands; activities may also affect the current conditions associated with root disease, insect populations (pine and Douglas-fir beetles), blister rust, and Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe, that is affecting the current and long-term health of forested stands. *Wildlife:* activities may affect big game (deer and elk) wildlife by affected hiding and thermal cover, and forage ratios (winter range); activities may affect big game (deer and elk) wildlife travel corridors and migration routes and road densities. Activities may affect terrestrial wildlife habitat associated with late-successional or old-growth forests; this could affect the degree of forest fragmentation and connectivity. *Human social and economic value:* activities may affect portions of certain (non-inventoried) "roadless" areas that are currently unroaded; some people may value them for their late-successional (or spiritual) character. Activities may affect late seral or old-growth vegetation characteristics; some people believe such conditions should be preserved on public lands. Activities associated with the proposed action or its alternatives may generate various economic benefits/costs or overall present net values, depending on design.

The range of alternatives being considered includes a "no-action" alternative; the proposed action; an alternative designed to lessen adverse impacts to current soil conditions; an alternative that lessens the adverse impacts to big game cover, migration routes and connectivity of late successional stand types; and an alternative that would defer action in

areas currently exhibiting unentered character, would defer building additional roads for harvest access, and would not commercially harvest large trees.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the revised analysis should be received by April 14, 2000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Questions should be directed to Joel King, District Ranger, Prospect Ranger District, at 47201 Highway 62, Prospect, Oregon, 97536, phone 541-560-3400, e-mail jking/r6pnw_rogueriver@fs.fed.us.

Dated: March 10, 2000.

Gregory A. Clevenger,

Acting Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 00-7303 Filed 3-23-00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Helicopter Landing Tours on the Juneau Icefield EIS 2000, Tongass National Forest, Juneau Ranger District, Juneau, Alaska

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The Department of Agriculture, Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to disclose the environmental impacts of authorizing helicopter landing tours on the Icefield adjacent to Juneau, Alaska. A previous Notice Of Intent (NOI), published on February 3, identified the analysis and decision period as extending from 2000 to 2004. This is the revised NOI for the same project. The Proposed Action has been modified by changing the analysis and decision period to 2001-2005.

The proposed action is to issue special use permits (2001-2005) authorizing helicopter tour companies to land on the Juneau Icefield at specified locations and conduct tours. In addition to the regular glacier tours, this EIS will also analyze the effects of dog sled mushing tours, glacier trekking tours, and a combined fixed-wing/helicopter tour that would land at the lake at Antler Glacier. The majority of use would occur between May and September of each year. Tours would originate at private heliports and helicopter flight paths would transit a variety of private and municipal lands prior to entering the National Forest.

The proposed action would maintain the authorized helicopter landings on the Juneau Icefield at the 1999