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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Beaver Creek Ecosystem Management Project; Kootenai National Forest, Sanders 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 Beaver Creek Ecosystem Management Project to disclose the effects of timber harvest, prescribed fire, road management and construction, noxious weed control, trailhead restoration, and lookout facility renovation in the Big Beaver and Little Beaver Creek drainages located approximately 8 air miles from Trout Creek, Montana. The purpose and need for this project was documented in the Beaver Creek Physiographic Area Landscape Assessment. The purposes are to provide for long-term sustainability of forest resources (i.e. vegetation resource, protection and enhancement of habitat for wildlife and fish species, recreation resources etc.), while contributing to natural recovery processes (which reduce impacts to resources) and enhancing recreational facilities for public use. The DEIS is expected to be filed with the EPA and available for public review by March 31, 1997.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be received on or before March 25, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis should be sent to James I. Mershon, District Ranger, Cabinet Ranger District, 2693 Hwy 200, Trout Creek, Montana, 59874.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John Head, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Cabinet Ranger District. Phone: (406) 882-4451.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The decision area contains approximately 55,000 acres within the Kootenai National Forest in Sanders County, Montana. All of the proposed projects are located in the Big Beaver and Little Beaver Creek drainages, which are tributary to the Clark Fork River, near Trout Creek, Montana. The legal location of the decision area is as follows: Sections 6-7, 17-19, and N 1/2 Section 20, T22N, R30W; Sections 1-30 T22N, R31W; Sections 1-5, 8-12, 13-17, 20-24, 25-29, 34-35, T22N, R32W;; Section 31, T23N, R30W; Sections 25-30, 31-36, T23N, R31W; Sections 25-26, 32-36, T23N, R31W, Principal Montana Meridian.

The Forest Service proposes to harvest approximately 19 million board feet of timber through application of a variety of harvest methods on approximately 5400 acres of forest land. An estimated 12 miles of temporary road and 120 miles of road reconstruction would be needed to access timber harvest areas. All temporary roads would be obliterated following completion of sale activities. The proposal also includes prescribed burning on approximately 3000 acres to enhance wildlife habitat. An estimated 38 miles of road would be treated by rehabilitation of stream crossings, recontouring, ripping and seeding etc. The type of treatment would be based on site specific conditions. To help provide habitat and food for wildlife associated with the alpine and subalpine ecosystem, white bark pine seedlings would be planted in high elevation communities on approximately 20 acres. The Forest Service also proposes to conduct channel rehabilitation on approximately one mile of stream. The methods used to restore the channel sections would include placement of channel stabilizing structures such as revetments, rock weirs, and sediment traps as needed. In addition, to help improve fish habitat large woody debris will be recruited on approximately 5 miles of stream. Some of the recruitment may include limited timber felling within the riparian areas. A lookout structure that is rented out to the public on a nightly basis is scheduled for renovation. Renovations may include painting, structural support and reroofing. Three trailheads, and numerous dispersed camping sites are

propose for rehabilitation. This rehabilitation would be based on site specific conditions and include such things as creating barriers (eg rock) for vehicle restriction where necessary. Trailhead work would include providing suitable parking and signing. In addition, the proposed action includes a noxious weed control program designed to slow the spread of knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) and stop any new infestations of other noxious plant species.

The Kootenai Forest Plan provides guidance for management activities within the potentially affected area through its goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area direction. The proposed projects encompass several management areas (MAs): 2,5,10,11,12,13,15,16,18 and 19. This proposal includes openings greater than 40 acres, to emulate historic disturbance patterns, and project specific Forest Plan amendments for: (1) Open road density in MA 12 (big game summer range); (2) removal of snag habitat in MA 10 (big game winter range); and (3) timber harvest in MA 13 (old growth). Project specific amendments are allowed when it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest plan standard (Forest Plan Volume (II-20).

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 will examine varying levels and locations for the proposed activities to achieve the proposal's purposes, as well as to respond to the issues and other resource values.

The EIS will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the alternatives. Past, present, and projected activities on both private and National Forest lands will be considered. The EIS will disclose the analysis of site-specific mitigation measures and their effectiveness.

Preliminary Issues

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

- Water and Fisheries Resources—Rivers and streams are complex and dynamic natural systems. The physical, chemical and biological conditions in

them are a result of all the natural and human-caused events within the watershed. There are three main concerns related to the water and fisheries resources and the effects of the proposed action. (1) Amount of large woody debris; (2) streamflow regime; and (3) sediment sources.

- Big Game wildlife—open road densities are currently over the recommended amount for big game habitat effectiveness and security. There is concern regarding the effect of the proposed action on big game security and habitat.

Other issues commonly associated with such activities include: effects on soils, air quality, sensitive plants, and old growth. This list may be verified, expanded, or modified based on public scoping for this proposal.

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, riparian habitat conservation areas and reforestation), road construction/reconstruction necessary to provide access and to achieve other resource objectives, and appropriate mitigation measures.

- Whether water and fish rehabilitation projects (including road obliteration) and other project area improvements (including work on trailheads, dispersed campsites, noxious weeds etc) should be implemented and, if so, to what extent.

- Whether or not wildlife enhancement projects (including white bark pine planting and 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 needs.

- Whether project specific Forest Plan amendments are necessary to meet goals and objectives of the Forest Plan.

- What, if any, specific project monitoring requirements would be needed to assure mitigation measures are implemented and effective.

Public Involvement and Scoping

Public participation is an important part of the analysis process, commencing with the initial scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7) which will begin with the publication of this notice. 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 be seeking 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 include:

- Identifying potential issues.
- Identifying major issues to be analyzed in depth.
- Identify alternatives to the proposed action.
- Explore additional alternatives which will be derived from issues recognized during scoping activities.
- Identify 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 60 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 March 31, 1997. 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 June 15, 1997. 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 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 an 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 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 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

Robert L. Schrenk, Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest, 506 US Highway 2 West, Libby, MT 59923 is 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 James I. Mershon, District Ranger, Cabinet Ranger District.

Dated: January 16, 1977.

Lawrence R. Cron,

Acting Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest.

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Intergovernmental Advisory Committee Subcommittee Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Intergovernmental Advisory Committee will meet on February 6, 1997, at the Red Lion Hotel, Columbia River, 1401 N. Hayden Island Drive, Portland, Oregon 97217. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. and continue until 4:00 p.m. Agenda items to be discussed include, but are not limited to: future IAC meeting topics and locations; relationship with Provincial Advisory Committees; review of Adaptive Management Area plans; FY 1996 implementation monitoring results; and the status of the Riparian reserve module.

The IAC meeting will be open to the public and is fully accessible for people with disabilities. Interpreters are