Notices

Federal Register
Vol. 62, No. 201
Friday, October 17, 1997

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Clancy-Unionville Vegetative Treatment/Travel Management Plan EIS; Helena National Forest, BLM Headwaters Resource Area, Lewis & Clark and Jefferson Counties, Montana

AGENCIES: Forest Service, USDA and Bureau of Land Management, USDI.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare Environmental Impact Statement and BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment.

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service and USDI, Bureau of Land Management are gathering information and preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a planning effort involving vegetative treatments and motorize travel management actions. This EIS will analyze the impacts of utilizing prescribed fire on grassland vegetation types and a combination of prescribed fire and tree removal within the forested vegetation. It will also evaluate the effects of alternative strategies for managing motorized travel uses throughout the affected area. Alternative travel management actions will address spatial, temporal and vehicle type allocations. Travel planning will also guide the long-term management of new roads needed to access the vegetation treatment areas. The project area is located immediately south of Helena, Montana, and totals 40,000 acres of public lands (including 5,000 acres of BLM lands).

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management propose to treat approximately 5750 acres of grassland and forested vegetation through prescribed burning and tree removal. On the National Forest, approximately 2800 acres would be treated with prescribed burning and 2200 acres of timber would be harvested. On the Bureau of Land Management lands approximately 750 acres would be harvested of which 250 acres would be treated further with prescribed burning.

Timber would be sold and removed using commercial thinning, selection, shelterwood, seedtree and clearcut harvest systems. Approximately 17.4 miles of new temporary road construction is needed to access treatment areas. Following treatment all but 1 mile of the temporary roads would be recontoured and physically closed. New road construction would occur in the Grizzly Gulch, Go Devil Creek, Whiteman Gulch, Little Buffalo Gulch, Jackson Creek, Lump Gulch and Quartz Creek vicinities.

The travel management proposal is to establish a ''Restricted Area'' designation for the entire area that would limit public motorized travel to designated routes. The use of some roads and trails would also be restricted to specific seasons and/or certain vehicle classes. Snowmobile users would be able to travel off routes in some portions of the area.

The proposal is designed to help achieve the goals and objectives of the 1986 Helena National Forest Plan and move selected areas towards the desired conditions identified from the Forest Plan. These needs are supported by the findings of the Divide Landscape Analysis (September 1996). This proposal would fulfill the vegetative management direction of the BLM Headwaters RMP and create some changes regarding travel management direction, ultimately requiring an amendment.

More specifically, the proposal has the following purpose:

- to create a more diverse forest with a wide variety of trees of varying ages, species and sizes.
- to minimize the threat of large scale, catastrophic wildfire by reducing the amount of forest vegetation (trees, shrubs and grasses) and litter on the forest floor. Vegetation treatments would be done in concert with the existing qualities of the urban/rural setting, while protecting the area's scenic and recreational amenities.
- to insure a variety of different plant and animal habitats which would meet the needs of the area's plant and animal species.
- to manage the area with designated roads and trails that serve the needs of a wide variety of public users, both motorized and non-motorized, while still protecting other resource values of the landscape.
- to produce an array of forest wood products (i.e. saw timber, post and pole material, firewood, Christmas trees) while still maintaining a sustainable forest.
- to improve water quality through sediment reduction measures and an up-dated travel management plan.

DATE: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing on or before November 17, 1997.

The draft EIS is scheduled for public release and comment in the spring of 1998.

ADDRESSES: The responsible officials are Tom Clifford, Forest Supervisor, Helena National Forest, Supervisor's Office, 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT. 59601. Phone: (406) 449–5201, and James R. Owings, Butte District Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 106 N. Parkmont, Butte, MT. 59701, Phone (406) 494–5059.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Denis A. Hart, Helena District Ranger, Helena Ranger District, 2001 Poplar Helena, MT. 59601. Phone: (406) 449–5490; or Merle Good, Headwaters Resource Area Manager, P.O. Box 3388, Butte, MT. 59702. Phone: (406) 494–5059; or Fan Mainwaring, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Helena Ranger District, 2001 Poplar, Helena, MT. 59601.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The prescribed burning, timber harvest, and temporary road construction would occur on National Forest and Bureau of Land Management lands in portions of Grizzly Gulch, Go Devil Creek, Whiteman Gulch, Little Buffalo Creek, Jackson Creek, Lump Gulch and Quartz Creek drainages of the Helena Ranger District of the Helena National Forest and Headwaters Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management. Included in the area being analyzed is all or portions of T.10N., R.4W., Sections 34–35; T.9N., R.4W., Sections 1–5, 8–12, 20–23, 26–29; T9N., R3W., Sections 29–33; T8N., R3W., Sections 12–14, 25–27, 35–36; T8N., R4W., Sections 7–8, 17–20, 29–30, Montana Principle Meridian.

The areas of proposed tree removal and prescribed burning are within

Management Areas T–1, T–4, T–5, L–1, R–1, W–1 and M–1 described in the Helena Forest Plan. The Forest Plan direction states that:

—T–1 Lands available and suitable for timber production. Although these areas consist primarily of suitable forest lands, there are inclusions on non-forest and non-productive forest lands.

—T–4 Productive timberland within sensitive viewing area of many major travel routes, use areas and water bodies. Most of the area is suitable forest land, but there may be inclusions of non-forest or non-productive forest land.

—T–5 Suitable timberlands interspersed with natural openings, generally with existing livestock allotments.

—L–1 Generally nonforested forage producing areas where forage production is optimized and timber harvest and prescribed fire may be used as tools for this purpose, but not for timber management sake.

—R–1 These management areas consist of large blocks—greater than 3,000 acres—of undeveloped land suited for dispersed recreation. These areas provide opportunities for semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation and are characterized predominantly by natural or natural appearing environment where there is a high probability of isolation from man's activities.

—W–1 This management area consists of a variety of wildlife habitat ranging from important big game summer range to big game winter range.

—M–1 Non-forest and forested land where timber management and range or wildlife habitat improvements are currently uneconomical or environmentally infeasible.

The affected area of this EIS includes portions of Management Units (MUs) 8, 23 and 24 as described in the BLM Headwaters RMP of 1984. These MUs were identified as having high forest land values with a high priority for management. This vegetative treatment analysis will meet the RMP directive to complete a Compartment Management Plan in this area. The RMP designated MUs 8 and 24 as open to motorized travel and available for permitted motorized event consideration. MU 23 is classified as restricted to motorized travel and closed to motorized events. The travel management proposal complies with the RMP direction for MU 23 and is inconsistent with the direction for MUs 8 and 24. Therefore, Plan Amendment procedures will be followed in this EIS planning effort.

The decisions to be made, based on this environmental analysis, are:

1. Whether or not to treat the forested and nonforested vegetation at this time, and if so, what areas to treat, and what treatment methods would be employed.

2. What roads, trails, and areas need to be closed or restricted to ensure resource protection and what roads, trails and areas should remain open for motorized users.

If it is decided to implement the proposal, activities may begin as early as 1998 and take up to 3 years to implement.

This EIS will tier to the Helena Forest Plan Final EIS of April 1986 and the BLM Headwaters RMP of 1984 that provide program goals, objectives and standards and guidelines for conducting management activites in this area. All activities associated with the proposal will be designed to maintain or enhance the resource objectives identified in the two plans. The Forest Service will also strive to meet the objectives further refined in the Divide Landscape Analysis.

The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are seeking information and comments from Federal, State, local agencies and others organizations or individuals who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management invite written comments and suggestions on the issues for the proposal and the area being analyzed. Information received will be used in preparation of the Draft EIS. Preparation of the EIS will include the following steps:

1. Identification of potential issues.

2. Identification of issues to be analyzed in depth.

3. Elimination of insignificant issues or those that have been covered by a relevant previous environmental analysis.

4. Identification of additional reasonable alternatives.

5. Identification of potential environmental effects of the alternatives.

Prescribed harvest treatments in this proposal include: a) unevenaged management techniques such as individual tree selection and group selection; b) intermediate treatments such as commercial thinning; and c) regeneration treatments include seedtree, shelterwood, and clearout harvest methods. Alternatives to this proposal will include the ''no action'' alternative, in which none of the proposed treatments would be implemented. Other alternatives will examine variations in the location, amount and method of vegetative management.

The preliminary issues identified are:

1. The effects of the vegetative treatments on existing noxious weed populations.

2. The effects of the vegetative treatments and temporary road construction on wildlife resources.

3. The effects of the vegetative treatments on existing recreation use.

4. The effectiveness of the vegetative treatment upon forest health and forest fuel accumulations.

5. The effects on threatened, endangered and sensitive plant and animal species.

6. The effects on motorized and non-motorized recreation use.

7. The economic trade-offs of implementing this proposal.

8. The effects on cultural resources within the project area.

9. The effects upon public safety and adjacent private lands from log hauling and prescribed burning.

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management will analyze and disclose in the DEIS and FEIS the environmental effects of the proposed action and a reasonable range of alternatives. The DEIS and FEIS will disclose the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental effects of each alternative and its associated site specific mitigation measures.

Public participation is especially important at several points of the analysis. Interested parties may visit with the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management officials at any time during the analysis. However, two periods of time are specifically identified for the receipt of comments. The first comment period is during the scoping process when the public is invited to give written comments to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land management. This period extends for 30 days from the date of publication of this notice, in the **Federal Register**. The second review period is during the 45 day review of the DEIS in and when the public is invited to comment on the DEIS.

The DEIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review in March 1998. At that time, the EPA will publish a notice of availability of the DEIS in the **Federal Register**.

The comment period on the DEIS will be 45 days from the date the notice of availability is published in the **Federal Register.**

At this early stage in the scoping process, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management believe it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviews of DEIS

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). Secondly, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage, but that are not raised until after completion of the FEIS 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. 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 objects are made available to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management at a time when they can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the FEIS.

To assist the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the DEIS should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft statement. Comments may also address the adequacy of the DEIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the statement. (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.)

After the comment period ends on the DEIS, the comments will be analyzed and considered by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in preparing the FEIS. The FEIS is expected to be filed in July 1998.

Dated: October 6, 1997.

Tom Clifford,

Forest Supervisor, Helena National Forest.

Dated: September 29, 1997.

James R. Owings,

Butte District Manager, Bureau of Land management.

[FR Doc. 97–27542 Filed 10–16–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Squirrel Meadows-Grand Targhee Resort Land Exchange; Targhee National Forest, Teton County, Wyoming

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to document the analysis and disclose the environmental impacts of a proposed land exchange with Booth Creek, Inc., dba Grand Targhee Resort.

In this proposed exchange the Targhee National Forest would trade parcels of National Forest System Lands totaling about 265 acres to Booth Creek, Inc., for a private parcel totaling approximately 330 acres. The National Forest System lands to be conveyed are located at the base of the Grand Targhee Resort, 7 miles east of Alta, Wyoming. The lands to be acquired are located at Squirrel Meadows, 26 miles east of Ashton, Idaho.

Values of the parcels will be appraised following a process stipulated for Federal land adjustments. In order for the exchange to take place, the appraised values of the lands must be equal. Differences in appraised values may be made up by reducing the acreage of National Forest System lands offered for exchange, or by including a cash payment. The cash value may not exceed 25 percent of the appraised value of the Federal lands to be conveyed.

DATES: Written comments concerning the scope of the analysis described in this notice should be received on or before December 1, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Teton Basin Ranger District, Attn: Jack Haddox, PO Box 777, Driggs, ID 83422. The responsible official for this decision is Robert W. Ross, Jr., Director, Recreation and Lands, USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, 324 25th Street, Ogden, UT 84401.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions concerning the proposed action and EIS should be directed to Patty Bates, Teton Basin District Ranger, Targhee National Forest, phone: (208) 354–2312.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Targhee National Forest is proposing to exchange up to 265 acres of National Forest System lands within the Grand Targhee Resort permit area for 330 acres of private land at Squirrel Meadows. The final acreage will be decided through an appraisal process pursuant to the Uniform Federal Appraisal Standards for land adjustments. Values must be equal in order for the exchange to proceed. If it becomes necessary to equalize values the National Forest System acreage may be reduced from the proposed 265 acres. In the event the values cannot be equalized by the adjustment a cash equalization payment of up to 25 percent of the appraised value of the Federal lands may be made by either party.

The decision to be made is whether to proceed with the exchange as proposed; modify the exchange; or withdraw from the exchange. Public scoping will be completed through letters, news releases and public meetings. Dates have not yet been set.

Preliminary issues identified are:

(1) Impacts from potential development of the exchanged lands at Grand Targhee on the base area and in Teton Valley, Idaho.

(2) Impacts on wildlife in the area of Grand Targhee from potential development and increased use of the area in general.

(3) Impacts on the Jedediah Smith Wilderness from the potential increased use and development of the grand Targhee area.

(4) Creation of a private inholding within the boundary of the Targhee National Forest.

(5) The effects on grizzly bears (listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act) and other threatened, endangered and sensitive species from the potential development of the exchanged lands and potential development of the lands if they are not exchanged.

Other issues may be identified during the scoping period. Written suggestions and comments are invited on the issues related to the proposal and the area being analyzed. Information received will be used in the preparation of the Draft EIS and Final EIS. For most effective use, comments should be submitted to the Forest Service within 45 days from the date of publication of this notice in the Federal Register.

The Forest Service is the lead agency. The Forest Service estimates the draft EIS will be filed in May, 1998, and the final EIS will be filed in December, 1998.

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

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give