

Medicine Bow National Forest, Wyoming

Forest Supervisor Decisions

Laramie Daily Boomerang, published daily in Laramie, Albany County, Wyoming.

District Ranger Decisions

Laramie District: *Laramie Daily Boomerang*, published daily in Laramie, Albany County, Wyoming.

Douglas District: *Casper Star-Tribune*, published daily in Casper, Natrona County, Wyoming.

Brush Creek and Hayden District: *Rawlins Daily Times*, published daily in Rawlins, Carbon County, Wyoming.

Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming

Forest Supervisor Decision

Cody Enterprise, published twice weekly in Cody, Park County, Wyoming.

District Ranger Decisions

Clarks Fork District: *Powell Tribune*, published twice weekly in Powell, Park County, Wyoming.

Wapiti and Greybull Districts: *Cody Enterprise*, published twice weekly in Cody, Park County, Wyoming.

Wind River District: *The Dubois Frontier*, published weekly in Dubois, Teton County, Wyoming.

Lander District: *Wyoming State Journal*, published twice weekly in Lander, Fremont County, Wyoming.

Dated: November 9, 1998.

Lyle Laverty,

Regional Forester.

[FR Doc. 98-30658 Filed 11-16-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Pend Oreille Priest Beetle Project; Idaho Panhandle National Forests, Bonner County Idaho and Pend Oreille County, Washington; Colville National Forests, Pend Oreille County, Washington

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) to disclose the potential environmental effects of proposed activities in forest stands infested with Douglas-fir bark beetle. Activities include reducing fuels in urban interface areas, restoring historic vegetation patterns in areas of significant mortality, and accomplishing

other ecosystem restoration opportunities to benefit aquatic, watershed and wildlife habitat areas in the southern portion of the Priest Lake and the Newport Ranger Districts.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be received on or before December 17, 1998. The draft environmental impact statement is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review in January, 1999. A Final Environmental Impact Statement will be published no sooner than February 16, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments and suggestions on the proposal or requests to be placed on the project mailing list to Kent Dunstan, Priest Lake Ranger District, 32203 Hwy. 57, Priest River, ID 83856.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Pete Zimmerman, Sandpoint Ranger District, 1500 Hwy. 2, Suite 110, Sandpoint, ID 83864, (208) 263-5111.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Snow, ice and wind during the winter of 1996-97 damaged trees on the Idaho Panhandle (IPNF) and Colville National Forests. These events created a tremendous amount of forest debris on the ground in many areas including tops, limbs, and standing dead and down trees. Douglas-fir bark beetle populations increased after breeding in the winter storm damaged and weakened trees. Standing trees were attacked in the spring and summer of 1998. Aerial detection surveys conducted in 1998 showed extensive numbers of dead, mature Douglas-fir trees on national forest system, state, and private lands, especially in areas of past ice and winter storm damage.

Since the bark beetle outbreak is so widespread, we recognize there is not much we can do to control or stop it. There is, however, an opportunity to care for the lands affected by the beetle by focusing on restoration of the ecosystems where the beetle is causing significant amounts of the Douglas-fir trees to die.

With the amount of downed fuels and high level of public use in certain areas, the risk of severe fires is much higher. Fires igniting in these areas will be more difficult to control and the increased fuel loading is likely to result in more intense fires. Highly used recreation areas and areas adjacent to private land are particularly vulnerable because the potential for ignition is greater. In areas where urban or private values are at risk due to fuel accumulations related to the Douglas-fir beetle outbreak, fuels would be treated by timber harvest, burning

and/or piling so as to reduce the risk of losing these values to wildfire.

In many of the beetle-attacked stands, there is almost twice as much Douglas-fir on the landscape than what was historically present, and a significant decrease of seral species such as ponderosa pine, white pine and larch, which are more resistant to insects and some diseases. In these areas, the intent would be to restore stand composition and structure to more closely resemble historic vegetation conditions. Regeneration harvest activities would be proposed in stands of at least five acres in size where greater than 50% of the stand within the area is projected to die from the current Douglas-fir beetle outbreak. Activities include harvest, site preparation and/or fuels hazard reduction with fire or by mechanical methods and tree planting.

In stands affected by Douglas-fir beetle that do not meet criteria for urban interface or vegetation restoration, selective harvest treatment activities would be proposed in stands where less than 50% of the stand within the area is projected to die from the current Douglas-fir beetle outbreak and also in areas of special management need or where public safety issues are a concern. Activities include harvest and fuel hazard reduction by fire or mechanical methods.

Aquatic, watershed and wildlife restoration activities would include closing or obliterating roads for watershed health and wildlife security and modifying, by reconstruction, other road elements that pose risks to watersheds. These activities may not be associated with timber sales. Where activities are associated with timber sales and along haul routes, watershed restoration would be achieved when practical.

Prescribed fire use to reduce fuel hazard and to prepare sites for regeneration would not be limited to timber harvest areas but may also be used where harvest is not practical.

Pest management techniques, including application of pheromones to protect high valued stands, would be used in those areas where such treatment would likely be effective.

As part of the proposed action, timber harvest will not occur in: (1) Allocated old-growth that maintains old-growth characteristics, (2) Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas, (3) Inventoried Roadless Areas, (4) stands where a minimum number of snags cannot be maintained, (5) areas of known populations of sensitive plant species, (6) areas where they result in a likely to adversely affect determination for Threatened or Endangered Species, (7)

areas where harvest can affect sphagnum peatlands, and (8) proposed or designated Research Natural Areas. In addition, no permanent roads will be constructed as part of the Proposed Action. Temporary roads may be a part of the proposed action.

Preliminary issues identified are loss of road access, risk of fire in untreated areas, loss of timber value, effects on plants, wildlife and fish, and amount of ecosystem restoration accomplished.

The Forest Service will consider a range of alternatives. One of these will be the "no action" alternative, under which there would be no change from current management of the Forest. Additional alternatives will represent a range of strategies to accomplish the goals of this project. The Idaho Panhandle National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan and the Colville National Forest Plan as amended provide guidance for management objectives within the potentially affected area through its goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area direction. Inland Native Fish Strategy guidelines (USDA Forest Service, 1995) supercede Forest Plan guidelines established for riparian areas.

Public participation will begin with the publication of this notice. Comments provided by the public and other agencies will be used to develop alternative strategies to this proposal. The public is encouraged to visit with Forest Service officials during the analysis and prior to the decision. The Forest Service is also 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 actions.

The draft environmental impact statement is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review in January, 1999. At that time, the EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the draft environmental impact statement in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the draft environmental impact statement will be 45 days from the date the EPA publishes the Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**. A final environmental impact statement will be published after all comments are reviewed and responded to. Two Records of Decision will be published at that time: one for the Priest Lake Ranger District and one for the Newport Ranger District.

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, 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 but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental 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 regarding the proposed action, comments on the draft environmental impact statement should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft environmental impact statement. Comments may also address the adequacy of the draft environmental impact statement 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.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments may not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by

showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within a specified number of days.

We are the responsible officials for this environmental impact statement and will decide which projects will be implemented. Addresses are: Priests Lake Ranger District, 32203 Hwy 57, Priest River, ID 83856 and Colville National Forest, 765 S. Main St., Colville, WA 99114.

Dated: November 9, 1998.

Kent L. Dunstan,

District Ranger, Priest Lake Ranger District, Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

Dated: November 10, 1998.

Robert L. Vaught,

Forest Supervisor, Colville National Forest.
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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Coeur d'Alene Beetle Project, Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, Idaho Panhandle National Forests, Kootenai and Shoshone Counties Idaho

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) to disclose the potential environmental effects of proposed activities in forest stands infested with Douglas-fir bark beetle. Activities include reducing fuels in urban interface areas, restoring historic vegetation patterns in areas of significant mortality, and accomplishing other ecosystem restoration opportunities to benefit aquatic, watershed and wildlife habitat areas in the western and central portions of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be received on or before December 17, 1998. The draft environmental impact statement is expected to be filed with the