

areas that completely burned. The remaining 30 percent burned with a lower intensity, leaving partially burned or lightly underburned areas. This loss of vegetation has resulted in large areas of exposed soils, large amounts of new fuels, and the loss of standing timber. The fire also affected other important resources, such as wildlife habitat, visual quality, historic and prehistoric sites, fisheries, sensitive plant and animal species, and water quality.

In preparing the Environmental Impact Statement, the Forest Service will identify and analyze a range of alternatives that address the issues developed for this area. One of the alternatives will be no treatment. An ecological approach will be used to achieve multiple-use management of the Pendola Fire area. It also means that the needs of people and environmental values will be blended in such a way that this area's desired condition would represent a diverse healthy, productive, and sustainable ecosystem.

Public participation will be important during the analysis, especially during the review of the draft Environmental Impact Statement. The Forest Service is 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. We have already initiated consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the bald eagle and the California red-legged frog. This input will be used in preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Statement. The scoping process includes:

1. Identifying potential issues.
2. Identifying issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Eliminating insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental analysis.
4. Exploring additional alternatives.
5. Identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).
6. Determining potential cooperating agencies and task assignments.

Comments from other Federal, State, and local agencies, organizations, and individuals who may be interested in, or affected by, the decision are encouraged to identify other significant issues. Public participation will be solicited through mailing letters to mining claim owners, private land owners, and special use permittees within the Downieville Ranger District boundaries; posting information in local towns; and mailing letters to local timber

industries, politicians, school boards, county supervisors, and environmental groups. A public meeting is scheduled for January 6, 2000, at the Downieville District Ranger Station office, in Camptonville, CA, from 2 pm until 5 pm.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and be available for public review in February, 2000. 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 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 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 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 of 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 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.

The final Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be available by April, 2000. The responsible official, the Forest Supervisor of the Tahoe National Forest, 631 Coyote St., Nevada City, CA

95959, will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision.

Dated: December 13, 1999.

Steven T. Eubanks,
Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99-32953 Filed 12-20-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

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 February 22, 2000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Program Development & Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., STOP 1522, Room 4034 South Building, Washington, DC 20250-1522. Telephone: (202) 720-0736. FAX: (202) 720-4120.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Certification of Authority.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0074.

Type of Request: Extension of currently approved information collection.

Abstract: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) manages loan programs in accordance with the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended (7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*) (RE Act). A major factor in managing loan programs is controlling the advance of funds. One reason to control funds is so that the actual borrowers get their money. The use of RUS Form 675 allows this control to be achieved by providing a list of authorized signatures against which signatures requesting funds are compared. RUS Form 675 provides an effective control against the unauthorized release of funds by providing a list of authorized signatures. OMB Circular A-123, Management Accountability and Control, states that information should be maintained on a current basis and that cash should be protected from unauthorized use. This

form allows borrowers to keep RUS up-to-date of any changes in signature authority and controls the release of funds only to authorized borrower representatives.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 0.1 of an hour per response.

Respondents: Small businesses and organizations.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 450.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 1.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 45.

Copies of this information collection, and related form and instructions, can be obtained from Bob Turner, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, at (202) 720-0696.

Comments are invited on (a) whether the 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 burden including the validity of the methodology and assumption 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 respondents, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Director, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Stop 1522, Room 4034 South Building, Washington, DC 20250-1522.

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: December 14, 1999.

Christopher A. McLean,

Acting Administrator, Rural Utilities Service.
[FR Doc. 99-33056 Filed 12-20-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-15-P

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 February 22, 2000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Program Development & Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., STOP 1522, Room 4034 South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250-1522. Telephone: (202) 720-0736. FAX: (202) 720-4120.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Request for Release of Lien and/or Approval of Sale.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0041.

Type of Request: Reinstatement without change of previously approved information collection.

Abstract: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) makes mortgage loans and loan guarantees to electric and telecommunications systems to provide and improve electric and telecommunications service in rural areas pursuant to the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended (7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*) (RE Act). All current and future capital assets of RUS borrowers are ordinarily mortgaged or pledged to the Federal Government as security for RUS loans. Assets include tangible and intangible utility plant, non-utility property, construction in progress, and materials, supplies, and equipment normally used in a telecommunications system. The RE Act and the various security instruments, e.g., the RUS mortgage, limit the rights of a RUS borrower to dispose of its capital assets.

The RUS Form 793, Request for Release of Lien and/or Approval of Sale, allows the telecommunications program borrower to seek agency permission to sell some of its assets. The form collects detailed information regarding the proposed sale of a portion of the borrower's system. RUS telecommunications borrowers fill out the form to request RUS approval in order to sell capital assets.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 2.84 hours per response.

Respondents: Small businesses or organizations.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 75.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 1.

Estimate Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 213.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Bob Turner, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, at (202) 720-0696.

Comments are invited on (a) whether the 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 burden including the validity of the methodology and assumption 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 on other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Director, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Stop 1522, Room 4034 South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250-1522.

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: December 14, 1999.

Christopher McLean,

Acting Administrator, Rural Utilities Service.
[FR Doc. 99-33057 Filed 12-20-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-15-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Alabama Electric Cooperative; Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) is issuing an environmental assessment with respect to the potential environmental impacts related to the construction and operation of a 496 megawatt combined cycle electric generation plant and associated facilities. RUS may provide financing assistance to Alabama Electric Cooperative for the project.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Bob Quigel, Rural Utilities Service, Engineering and Environmental Staff, Stop 1571, 1400 Independence Avenue,