

products and benefits while maintaining the productivity and diversity of the soil, water, and forest resources. The goal of the proposed research activities is to improve understanding about and management of central Appalachian hardwood forests.

The Forest Service proposes to continue some research activities begun in the 1950s and to initiate some new research activities in the year 2000. These actions are consistent with the Research Work Unit Description; individual Study Plans; the Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Management Prescription 8, page 202, Vegetation; and the General Plan for the Fernow Experimental Forest.

The purpose of the research initiated in the 1950s was to study the effects of various silvicultural practices on forest productivity, species composition and diversity, wildlife populations, and ecosystem processes. This research continues and involves the application of experimental treatments, including diameter-limiting cutting on 186 acres, single-tree selection on 229.6 acres, a financial maturity harvesting method based on projected rates of return on investment on 343.4 acres, and small clearcuts on 26 acres.

The proposed new research activities would involve application of silvicultural treatments to stands of trees as part of an ongoing research experiment. The silvicultural treatments involve cutting individual trees, according to the silvicultural prescription, and removing the stems from the stand. Branches and tree tops remain in the stand. Rubber-tired skidders and cable logging systems will be used to remove the trees. Existing skid trails and roads will be utilized. No new permanent roads will be constructed. After completion of silvicultural treatments, roads and decks used in the logging process will be closed.

One of the purposes of the proposed new research activities is to evaluate the effectiveness of prescribed burning as a silvicultural and ecological tool on the central Appalachian forests. An area of 119 acres will be treated with prescribed fire. Research activities that include prescribed fires will be conducted according to State regulations administered by the West Virginia Division of Forestry. A slow-moving fire (1–5 ft/min) that produces high amounts of heat (2–4 ft flame lengths) conducted in the spring is deemed to have the most beneficial effect in improving oak competitiveness and will be used in these research activities. All personnel supervising and working on the fire will

have received training in the use of prescribed fire and in fire suppression.

Comments Are Requested

The Forest Service is soliciting comments from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations that may be interested in or affected by the proposed research activities in:

- Identifying potential issues;
- Identifying issues to be analyzed in depth;
- Eliminating insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental analysis;
- Identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed activities;
- Identifying and exploring alternatives to the proposed research activities; and
- Determining potential cooperating agencies and task assignments.

The following issues already have been identified:

- Potential impacts to Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species;
- Potential impacts on Biodiversity, including concerns about fragmentation of interior habitat, and loss of old growth habitat;
- Sediment impacts on streams from roads, skid trails, and log landings.

Comments received will be considered in 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 in March 2000. EPA will publish a notice of availability of the Draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the draft will be 45 days from the date the EPA notice appears in the **Federal Register**. Copies of the draft EIS will be distributed to interested and affected agencies, organizations, tribes, and members of the public for their review and comment. It is very important that those interested in the management of the Fernow Experimental Forest comment at that time.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on 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 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.

At this early stage, the Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of a draft EIS 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 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 Heritage, Inc. v. Harris*, 490F. Suppl. 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 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 EIS.

The final EIS will be completed in June 2000. In the final EIS, the Forest Service will respond to comments received in response to the environmental consequences discussed in the draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making the decision regarding this proposal. The responsible official will document the decision and the rationale for that decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service Administrative Appeal Regulations at 36 CFR part 215.

Dated: January 28, 2000.

Randle G. Phillips,

Deputy Chief, Programs and Legislation.

[FR Doc. 00–2748 Filed 2–8–00; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

John Day/Snake Resource Advisory Council, Hells Canyon Subgroup

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Hells Canyon Subgroup of the John Day/Snake Resource Advisory Council will meet on March 9 and 10, 2000, at the Baker Ranger District, 3165 10th Street, Baker City, Oregon. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. and continue until 5 p.m. the first day

and will begin at 8 a.m. and continue until 4 p.m. on the second day. Agenda items to be covered include: (1) Review draft CMP alternatives and, (2) Open Public forum. All meetings are open to the public. Public comments will be received at 1:30 p.m. on March 9.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions regarding this meeting to Kendall Clark, Area Ranger, USDA, Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, 88401 Highway 82, Enterprise, OR 97828, 541-426-5501.

Dated: February 3, 2000.

Karyn L. Wood,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 00-2985 Filed 2-8-00; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Notice of Proposed Changes in the National Handbook of Conservation Practices

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given of the intention of NRCS to issue a series of new or revised conservation practice standards in its National Handbook of Conservation Practices. These standards include Alley Cropping, Constructed Wetland, Firebreak, Forest Site Preparation, Forest Stand Improvement, Forest Trails and Landings, Prescribed Burning, Riparian Forest Buffer, Spring Development, Tree/Shrub Establishment, Tree/Shrub Pruning, Use Exclusion, Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment, and Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation. These standards are used to convey national guidance when developing Field Office Technical Guide Standards used in the States. NRCS State Conservationists who choose to adopt these practices for use within their States will incorporate them into Section IV of their Field Office Technical Guide. These practices may be used in conservation systems that treat highly erodible land or on land determined to be wetland.

DATES: Comments will be received on or before April 10, 2000. This series of new or revised conservation practice standards will be adopted after the close of the 60-day period.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Single copies of these standards are available from NRCS-CED in

Washington, D.C. Submit individual inquiries and return any comments in writing to William Hughey, National Agricultural Engineer, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Post Office Box 2890, Room 6139-S, Washington, D.C. 20013-2890. Telephone Number 202-720-5023. The standards are also available and can be downloaded from the Internet at: http://www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/practice_std.html.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 343 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 requires NRCS to make available for public review and comment proposed revisions to conservation practice standards used to carry out the highly erodible land and wetland provisions of the law. For the next 60 days, NRCS will receive comments relative to the proposed changes. Following that period, a determination will be made by NRCS regarding disposition of those comments, and a final determination of change will be made.

Signed at Washington, DC, on January 27, 2000.

Danny D. Sells,

Associate Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

[FR Doc. 00-2863 Filed 2-8-00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-16-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Submission for OMB Review; Comment Request

DOC has submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for clearance the following proposal for collection of information under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. chapter 35).

Agency: Census Bureau.

Title: Pollution Abatement Costs and Expenditures (PACE) Survey.

Agency Form Number(s): MA-200.

OMB Approval Number: 0607-0176.

Type of Request: Reinstatement, with change, of an expired collection.

Burden Hours: 160,000 hours.

Number of Respondents: 20,000.

Average Hours Per Response: 8 hours.

Needs and Uses: The Pollution Abatement Costs and Expenditures (PACE) Survey was conducted annually prior to 1995 but suspended due to Census Bureau budget limitations. The PACE Survey provided measures of the cost to private industry for the Nation's commitment to protecting the environment. This survey is an essential source of data for monitoring the impact of environmental programs on the U.S.

economy and responsiveness to these programs. The absence of the data over the past 4 years has highlighted the need for measures of private industry spending on pollution abatement activities. With support from the EPA, the Census Bureau proposes to reinstate this survey.

The survey will collect information similar to that previously collected: Pollution abatement expenditures, operating costs for pollution abatement, each by media, air pollution control, water pollution control and multi-media, and waste disposal. In addition, the survey will include the nature of the costs incurred, distinguishing between prevention and treatment. The survey will include approximately 20,000 establishments selected to represent manufacturing, mining and electric utilities industries defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) with emphasis on industries most heavily involved in pollution abatement activities. The survey sample will also include representation of establishments in the apparel and textile industry and manufacturing establishments with less than 20 employees. These groups had been excluded from the earlier survey design under the assumption that they contributed little or nothing to the estimates. Representation from these groups will be used to confirm the assumption.

The EPA will use the data to monitor the impact of environmental programs and to estimate cost projections for its regulatory impact analysis for proposed pollution regulations. Capital expenditures for pollution abatement is an important component of total capital expenditures when analyzing investment and productivity at the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. State and local governments, trade associations, the academic community, and private businesses will use the data to evaluate regional pollution abatement spending, local legislation, and performance of specific industries.

Affected Public: Businesses or other for-profit organizations.

Frequency: Annually.

Respondent's Obligation: Mandatory.

OMB Desk Officer: Susan Schechter, (202) 395-5103.

Copies of the above information collection proposal can be obtained by calling or writing Linda Engelmeier, DOC Forms Clearance Officer, (202) 482-3272, U.S. Department of Commerce, Room 5027, 14th and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20230 (or via the Internet at LEngelme@doc.gov).