

chapters of the draft statement. Comments may also address the adequacy of the draft environmental impact statement or 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 Forest Service is the lead agency. Craig Smith-Dixon, District Ranger, is the Responsible Official. As the Responsible Official, he will decide which, if any, of the proposed plans will be implemented. He will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service Appeal Regulations (36 CFR part 215).

Dated: February 24, 2000.

Craig Smith-Dixon,

District Ranger.

[FR Doc. 00-5726 Filed 3-8-00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the White Mountain National Forest; Carroll, Coos, and Grafton Counties, NH and Oxford County, ME

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The purpose of this notice is to inform the public that the Forest Service intends to prepare an environmental impact statement for revising the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(5) and 36 CFR 219.12.

The Forest Plan guides the overall management of the Forest. Six primary decisions are made in the Forest Plan:

1. Forest wide multiple-use goals and objectives (as required by 36 CFR 219.11[b])
2. Forest wide management requirements (36 CFR 219.27)
3. Management area direction (36 CFR 219.11[c])
4. Lands suited and not suited for timber production (36 CFR 219.14, 219.16, 219.21)
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11[d])
6. Recommendations to Congress (for example Wilderness recommendation) (36 CFR 219.17)

The purpose for the revision rests in the requirements of the National Forest

Management Act and its implementing regulations (U.S.C. 1604[f][5] and 36 CFR 219.10[g]). Forest Plans provide direction for administering the National Forests. Forest Plans are revised every 10 to 15 years. The White Mountain National Forest Plan was approved in 1986. The Forest is nearing the end of the 10-15 year cycle.

The need to revise the Forest Plan is based on changed public expectations, changing agency direction, monitoring and evaluations, and the availability of new information. Specific indicators of the need are: (1) There is growing demand for all recreation uses on the Forest. There is demand for types of recreation uses on the Forest that are not currently being provided; (2) Agency goals and objectives, along with other national guidance for strategic plans and programs, have changed since 1986; (3) Results of monitoring and evaluation suggest the need for revision; and (4) A vast amount of new scientific information has been published since 1986, including technical reports published from research by the Forest Service, as well as universities and organizations that study forest ecosystems and forest management.

The process of revising the Forest Plan will focus on those items that have been identified as most in need of revision. To provide guidance for developing Forest Plan goals and direction the Forest developed a statement describing the role of the Forest in New England, which is basically to manage the White Mountain National Forest under the concept of ecosystem, social and economic sustainability. The issues identified through initial public outreach have been used to identify 23 Revision Topics. The 23 topics are:

1. Air Quality.
2. American Indian Consultation.
3. Biodiversity.
4. Budget and Cost Effectiveness.
5. Commercial Minerals.
6. Environmental Education/Visitor Information.
7. Fire.
8. Heritage Resources.
9. Land Acquisition and Exchange.
10. Monitoring.
11. Recreation Opportunities and Use.
12. Roadless Areas.
13. Roads.
14. Scenery Management.
15. Soil Productivity.
16. Special Uses.
17. Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Sensitive Species.
18. Timber Management.
19. Watershed and Aquatic Ecosystems.
20. Wild and Scenic Rivers.

21. Wilderness Management.

22. Wilderness Recommendation.

23. Wildlife Habitat Management.

Additional detail on the Revision Topics is available on request, in the form of the document titled "Need for Change, Description of Proposal for Revising the White Mountain National Forest". You are encouraged to review this additional document prior to commenting on the Notice of Intent. You may request the additional information by calling the phone number listed below, by writing or e-mailing to the addresses listed in this notice, or by accessing the Forest web page at www.fs.fed.us/r9/white.

The past thirteen years of Forest Plan implementation and information from new scientific studies have yielded information that was not available when the direction of the existing Forest Plan was developed. We propose to use the new information to update and add management direction for the previously described revision topics.

A range of alternatives will be considered when revising the Forest Plan. The alternatives will address different options to resolve concerns raised as revision topics listed above and to fulfill the purpose and need. A "no-action alternative" is required, meaning the management would continue under the existing Forest Plan. Alternatives will provide different ways to address and respond to public issues, management concerns, and resource opportunities identified during the scoping process.

The alternatives will display different mixes of recreation opportunities and experiences. We will examine alternatives that address the public's concerns for less timber harvest, for greater timber harvest, and meeting currently planned harvest levels. The alternatives will display different mixes of wildlife habitats across the forest. The mix will vary by the objectives of the particular alternative, though each alternative will be managed to contain the habitat necessary to maintain viable populations of wildlife species. Management of roadless areas will vary by the objectives of any particular alternatives, physical criteria for evaluating each individual roadless area, and public input. In addition, the alternatives will incorporate a range of Wilderness recommendations.

The environmental analysis and decision-making process will include many opportunities for public participation and comment so that people interested in this proposal may contribute to the final decision. The draft environmental impact statement is tentatively scheduled for release in

September 2001. The final environmental impact statement and decision are scheduled for August 2002.

We are now soliciting comments and suggestions from individuals, state and local governments, American Indians, federal agencies, and organizations on the scope of the analysis to be included in the draft environmental impact statement for the revised Forest Plan (40 CFR 1501.7). To be most useful, your comments should focus on (1) the proposed revision topics, (2) issues that you are concerned about that are not addressed in this notice, and (3) possible alternatives for addressing the 23 revision topics.

We will provide the public with general notices on opportunities to participate through mailings, news releases, and public meetings. In addition to formal opportunities for public comment we will consider received at any time throughout the revision process.

The Forest Service will host a series of meetings to (1) Present and clarify proposed changes to the forest plan; (2) describe ways that individuals can respond to this notice of intent; and (3) accept comments from the public on the proposal for revising the Forest Plan. Forest personnel will be available at the following times and locations to answer questions and accept input about this Notice of Intent.

April 10, 2000, 1:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.,
Holiday Inn, Concord NH.

April 11, 2000, 12:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.,
Radisson Hotel, Chelmsford MA.

April 12, 2000, 1 p.m. to 7 p.m.,
Rumney Town Hall, Rumney NH.

April 13, 2000, 12:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.,
Evans Notch Ranger District Office,
Bethel ME.

April 13, 2000, 12:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.,
Woodstock Town Hall, North
Woodstock NH.

April 14, 2000, 12:30 p.m. to 6:30
p.m., Saco Ranger District Office,
Conway NH.

April 18, 2000, 1 p.m. to 7 p.m.,
Androscoggin Ranger District Office,
Gorham NH.

Additional information on meeting schedules is available on the White Mt. National Forest web page at www.fs.fed.us/r9/white.

DATES: Comments on this Notice of Intent should be received in writing by May 9, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to: Forest Planning, White Mountain National Forest, 719 N. Main St., Laconia, NH 03236. Or direct electronic mail to: forestplan__whitemtn@fs.fed.us.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Bryan Armel, Forest Planner, at (603) 528-8788. TDD (603) 528-8722. E-mail address: forestplan/r9__whitemtn@fs.fed.us or access the Forest web page at www.fs.fed.us/r9/white.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This section contains more information about the process to revise the Forest Plan for the White Mountain National Forest.

Authorization

On November 14, 1997, the Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1998, H.R. 2107 was passed. Language in section 333 of the law specifically prohibits the expenditure or obligation of funds for new revisions of National Forest land management plans until new final or interim final rules for forest plan revision are published in the **Federal Register**. Later in 1997, the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and related agencies Appropriations Act of 1998, HR 2267 was passed. Language in section 630 of the law specifically permitted the White Mountain National Forest to proceed with developing its next Forest Plan. This subsequent law allows the White Mountain National Forest to proceed with revision in accordance with 36 CFR 219.10(g).

Availability of Public Comment

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 will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decisions under 36 CFR parts 215 or 217.

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 FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that under 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 requester 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 90 days.

Release and Review of the Draft EIS

The DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) is expected to be filed with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and to be available for public comment in the fall of 2001. At that time, the EPA will publish a notice of availability in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the DEIS will be 90 days from the date the EPA publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, that it is important to give reviews notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviews 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 review's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDS*, 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 90-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 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. Reviews may wish to refer to the Council of Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provision of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

The responsible official is Robert T. Jacobs, Regional Forester, Eastern Region, 310 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53203.

Dated: February 14, 2000.

Robert T. Jacobs

Regional Forester.

[FR Doc. 5864 Filed 3-8-00; 8:45 am]

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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 May 8, 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) 720-9552. FAX: (202) 720-4120.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Preloan Procedures and Requirements for Telecommunications Program.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0079.

Type of Request: Reinstatement with change of a previously approved information collection.

Abstract: This program is necessary in order for the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to determine an applicant's eligibility to borrow from RUS under the terms of the RE Act. This information is also used by RUS to determine that the Government's security for loans made by RUS is reasonably adequate and that the loans will be repaid within the time agreed.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 9 hours per response.

Respondents: Small business or organizations.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 50.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 8.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 3,621.

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: March 2, 2000.

Christopher A. McLean,

Acting Administrator, Rural Utilities Service.

[FR Doc. 00-5640 Filed 3-9-00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-15-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Great River Energy Pleasant Valley Station, 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 publishing an environmental assessment (EA) for a project proposed by Great River Energy (GRE) of Elk River, Minnesota. The project consists of constructing a natural gas-fired simple cycle, combustion turbine power generation facility in Pleasant Valley Township in Mower County, Minnesota. The project will have a total of three combustion turbine units, two 155 megawatts (MW) units and one 124 MW unit, including a new 345/161 kV substation and other associated transmission facilities. The total electrical output from the facility is expected to range from 434 MW to 526 MW depending upon operating

conditions. RUS proposes to provide financial assistance to GRE for this project.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nurul Islam, Environmental Protection Specialist, Rural Utilities Service, Engineering and Environmental Staff, Stop 1571, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-1571, telephone: (202) 720-1414; e-mail: nislam@rus.usda.gov. RUS seeks written comments on the GRE proposal. Written comments should be submitted within 30 days of the publication of this notice to the above address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: GRE proposes to construct the power station in Pleasant Valley Township in Mower County, Minnesota. The primary purpose of the facility is to meet GRE peak electrical load during hot summer weather. Under those conditions the facility's expected output is about 434 MW of power. The generation unit consists of turbines similar to those found in commercial airline engines. The primary fuel will be natural gas and the distillate oil will serve as the back up fuel for the plant. The three units will have a total peak capacity of 526 MW. The generating power station will require approximately 24 acres of land. The preferred site for the generating station is located in the northwest quarter of Section 19, Pleasant Valley Township, Mower County, Minnesota. An alternative site was considered and is located approximately two miles south of the preferred site, in the south of the northwest quarter of Section 31, Pleasant Valley Township, Mower County, Minnesota. The following additional facilities will also be constructed. A 345/161 kV substation will be constructed at the plant site. A short, 345 kV transmission tap line, approximately 500 feet long, will be needed to connect to an existing Byron-Adams 345-kV transmission line. A new 161 kV transmission line, between 5 and 7 miles long, will be built from the plant site to the Sargeant Substation. The existing 69 kV line between the Sargeant Substation and south of the City of Brownsdale will be upgraded to a 161/69 kV line. This section of the line will be approximately 10 miles long. A 161 kV line will be built from Brownsdale to the Austin North Substation in Austin, Minnesota. A number of alternative routes have been considered for this section of the transmission line. Approximately three miles of new high pressure gas pipeline will be built to provide gas supply from the proposed generating station north to an existing gas pipeline. The expected water use is