

Early Notice of Importance of Public Participation in Subsequent Environmental Review: A draft environmental impact statement will be prepared for comment. The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and to be available for public review. At that time the EPA will publish a notice of availability of the draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period for the draft environmental impact statement will be 45 days from the date the EPA's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register**. Comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible and may address the adequacy of the statement or the merits of the alternatives discussed (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 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 reviewers' position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could have been 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*, (9th Circuit, 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 the time 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 about 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 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.

In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to substantive comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed in the draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making a decision regarding the proposal. The Responsible Official will document the decision and rationale for the decision in a Record of Decision. The final EIS is scheduled for completion in August, 2004. The decision will be subject to review under Forest Service Appeal Regulations.

Dated: February 20, 2004.

Peter L. Clark,

Forest Supervisor, Rio Grande National Forest.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Madera County Resource Advisory Committee

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Resource Advisory Committee Meeting.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the authorities in the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 (Pub. L. 92-463) and under the secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-393) the Sierra National Forest's Resource Advisory Committee for Madera County will meet on Monday, March 15, 2004. The Madera Resource Advisory Committee will meet at the USDA Forest Service Office, North Fork, CA. The purpose of the meeting is: New RAC proposal presentations, review RAC post funding process, review Holistic Goal & Evaluation Criteria, Arrowhead presentation, and review Sierra Business Council book.

DATES: The Madera Resource Advisory Committee meeting will be held Monday, March 15, 2004. The meeting will be held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The Madera County RAC meeting will be held at the USDA Forest Service Office, 57003 Road 225, North Fork, CA 93643.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dave Martin, U.S.D.A., Sierra National

Forest, Bass Lake Ranger District, 57003 Road 225, North Fork, CA, 93643 (559) 877-2218 ext. 3100; e-mail: dmartin05@fs.fed.us.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Agenda items to be covered include: (1) New RAC proposal presentations, (2) review RAC post funding process, (3) review Holistic Goal & Evaluation Criteria, (4) Arrowhead presentation, and (5) review of Sierra Business Council book. Public input opportunity will be provided and individuals will have the opportunity to address the Committee at that time.

Dated: February 19, 2004.

Mark D. Lemon,

Acting District Ranger, Bass Lake Ranger District.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Catron County Resource Advisory Committee

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Catron County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) will meet in Reserve, New Mexico, on March 16, 2004, at 10 a.m. MST. The purpose of the meeting is to evaluate submitted projects and select projects for recommendation to be funded under Title II of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (Pub. L. 106-393), also called the "Payments to States Act."

DATES: The meeting will be held March 16, 2004.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Catron County Courtroom of the Catron County Court House, 101 Main Street, Reserve, New Mexico, 87830. Send written comments to Michael Gardner, Catron County Resource Advisory Committee, c/o Forest Service, USDA, 3005 E. Camino del Bosque, Silver City, New Mexico, 88061-7863 or electronically to mgardner01@fs.fed.us.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Michael Gardner, Rural Community Assistant Staff, Gila National Forest, (505) 388-8212, or Janet Porter, Catron County RAC Chairperson, at (505) 533-6384 or ctreasur@gilanet.com.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The meeting is open to the public. Committee discussion is limited to Forest Service staff and Committee members unless provided for on the agenda. However, persons who wish to bring Public Law 106-393 related