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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Black Hills National Forest, Bearlodge Ranger District, Sundance, WY—Rattlesnake Forest Management Project

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to implement multiple resource management actions in the Rattlesnake Project Area to implement the amended Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The proposed action includes approximately 11,000 acres of commercial timber harvest, 5,000 acres of non-commercial vegetation management, 6,000 acres of prescribed burning, three miles of road construction, road improvements, and watershed improvements. Prescribed burning is proposed in a roadless area.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received by December 3, 2008. The draft EIS is expected to be available for public review in March 2009, and the final EIS is expected to be completed by June 2009.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Rattlesnake Project, c/o Content Analysis Group, 172 E. 500 S., Bountiful, UT 84010. *Fax number:* (801) 397-1605. *Electronic mail:* bhnfcontentanalysisgroup.com. Comments may be hand-delivered to the Bearlodge Ranger District office, 101 South 21st Street, Sundance, Wyoming, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Elizabeth Krueger, Resource Planner, Bearlodge Ranger District, Black Hills

National Forest. Telephone number: (307) 283-1361.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of actions proposed under the Rattlesnake Forest Management Project is to provide biologically diverse ecosystems, protect basic resources, and provide for sustained commodity uses by reducing crown fire hazard and wildfire threats to private property, reducing risk of mountain pine beetle infestation, producing commercial timber now and creating conditions for future timber production, conserving and enhancing big game winter range, enhancing forest structural diversity, and conserving and enhancing late successional landscapes.

Proposed Action

The Rattlesnake Project Area covers approximately 42,171 acres of National Forest System land and 3,935 acres of interspersed private land east of Sundance, Wyoming. To reduce wildfire hazard, the Forest Service proposes to thin pine stands, construct fuel breaks, reduce fuels adjacent to populated areas and across the landscape, reduce pine competition with aspen and birch stands, and conduct prescribed burning. To reduce risk of beetle infestation, activities would include thinning and regeneration of pine stands. To produce commercial timber and create conditions for future timber production, proposed activities include regeneration and shelterwood removal in pine stands, thinning of merchantable and submerchantable pine, and reduction of burr oak competition. To conserve and enhance winter range, activities would include uneven-age management of pine stands, reduction of pine and oak competition with desirable forage, and prescribed burning. To enhance forest structural diversity, the proposal includes regeneration harvest in pine and conservation of stands that could develop into late successional forest. Road construction, repair, and improvement would occur in support of these activities. New roads would be closed following harvest, and existing roads not part of the National Forest System could also be closed in conjunction with this project. To conserve and enhance late successional landscapes (management area 3.7), the Forest Service would conduct

prescribed burning. Other proposed enhancement activities include watershed improvement through road and stream rehabilitation.

The Rattlesnake Project Area includes the 7,944-acre Sand Creek Roadless Area. Most of the Sand Creek area is unsuitable for timber harvest, and new road construction is prohibited in much of the area by Forest Plan direction, severely limiting opportunities for mechanical treatment. The Forest Service considers access to the area by commercial equipment impractical at this time and has chosen to focus on objectives that could be achieved by non-commercial means. As a result, the only action proposed in the Sand Creek Roadless Area is prescribed burning (2,386 acres), with the purpose of promoting late successional forest attributes.

Background

The Rattlesnake Project area encompasses the area of the Cement Project. The Forest Service approved the Cement Project on February 20, 2004. The project was litigated. Following a July 2005 wildfire that substantially altered forest conditions in the Cement Project area, the Forest Service withdrew the project. The complaint was subsequently dismissed in April 2006.

In the course of the withdrawal of the Cement Project decision and dismissal of the complaint, the Forest Service made several commitments regarding any new proposal in the Cement Project Area. These commitments pertained to addressing certain changed conditions; developing the range of alternatives; and soliciting and considering public comment on the new proposal. The Forest Service intends to honor these commitments in the analysis process for the Rattlesnake Project.

The Rattlesnake Project Area includes the Cement Project Area but is a new and separate proposal from the earlier Cement Project. Initial planning for the Rattlesnake Project began in October 2007 with a review of existing forest conditions and amended Forest Plan direction for management of the area. Circumstances affecting National Forest System lands in the Rattlesnake Project Area have changed substantially since 2004. (1) The Phase II Amendment to the Forest Plan was approved on October 31, 2005. This amendment altered management direction for the

Black Hills National Forest, including the Rattlesnake Project area, by adding broad-scale objectives increasing management emphasis on hazardous fuels, forest structural diversity, and habitat for rare species. These changes directly affect the type and extent of vegetation management actions the Forest Service takes in the Black Hills. (2) The Cement Fire of July 2005 burned 2,079 acres of National Forest System land in the Rattlesnake Project area. Approximately 77 percent of this area burned at moderate or high intensity, resulting in the mortality of an estimated 1,925,300 cubic feet of sawtimber. (3) Population adjacent to the Rattlesnake Project Area has increased in the last four years with subdivision of the Red Canyon Ranch. These developments could be affected by hazardous fuel conditions in the project area. (4) Mountain pine beetle populations have increased dramatically in an area about five miles south of the Rattlesnake Project area, causing high levels of pine mortality on several hundred acres. This infestation has the potential to spread to the Rattlesnake area. (5) The Forest Service has issued new regulations implementing the National Forest Management Act. These new regulations replace earlier direction under which the Cement Project decision was analyzed and approved. The new planning regulations make it clear that they have minimal application at the project level. This project would be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the new regulations.

Responsible Official

Steve Kozel, District Ranger, Bearlodge Ranger District, Black Hills National Forest, 101 South 21st Street, PO Box 680, Sundance, Wyoming 82729.

Nature of Decision To Be Made

The decision to be made is whether to approve the proposed action or alternatives at this time. No Forest Plan amendments are proposed.

Scoping Process

Comments and input regarding the proposed action are being requested from the public and other interested parties in conjunction with this notice of intent. The comment period will be open for thirty days, beginning on the date of publication of this notice of intent. A public meeting will be held on November 13, 2008, 6–8 p.m., at the Bearlodge Ranger District Office, 101 S. 21st St., Sundance, Wyoming. Response to the draft EIS will be sought from the interested public beginning approximately in March 2009.

Comment Requested

This notice of intent initiates the scoping process, which guides development of the environmental impact statement. It is our desire to involve interested parties in identifying the issues related to proposed activities. Comments will assist in identification of key issues and opportunities to develop project alternatives and mitigation measures.

Early Notice of Importance of Public Participation in Subsequent Environmental Review: A draft EIS will be prepared for comment. The comment period on the draft EIS will extend 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**. This notice is expected to appear in February 2009.

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 EISs 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 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 EIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft EIS. Comments may also address the adequacy of the draft EIS 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, including the names and addresses of those who

comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

(Authority: 40 CFR 1501.7 and 1508.22; Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 21)

Dated: October 23, 2008.

Craig Bobzien,

Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Bureau of the Census

[Docket Number 0810151360–81363–01]

Annual Wholesale Trade Survey

AGENCY: Bureau of the Census, Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of determination.

SUMMARY: The Bureau of the Census (Census Bureau) is conducting the Annual Wholesale Trade Survey (AWTS). The Census Bureau has determined a need to collect data covering annual sales, e-commerce sales, inventories, purchases, commissions, and operating expenses for the wholesale trade sector. These data are important inputs to the Bureau of Economic Analysis's preparation of National Income and Products accounts and its annual input-output tables.

ADDRESSES: The Census Bureau will furnish report forms to organizations included in the survey. Additional copies are available upon written request to the Director, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC 20233–0101.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. John P. Miller, Chief, Current Wholesale Branch, Service Sector Statistics Division, at (301) 763–2758, or by e-mail at John.P.Miller@census.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The AWTS is a continuation of similar wholesale trade surveys conducted each year for wholesale distributors; manufacturers' sales branches and offices (MSBOs); and agents, brokers, and electronic markets (AGBRs). This survey provides data on annual sales, e-commerce sales, inventories, and total operating expenses for wholesale distributors and MSBOs, purchases of goods for sale for wholesale distributors, and commissions and sales on the account of others for AGBRs.

The Census Bureau will require a selected sample of firms operating wholesale establishments in the United States (with sales size determining the probability of selection) to report in the