

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service**

[Docket No. APHIS–2011–0089]

Oral Rabies Vaccine Trial; Availability of a Risk Assessment and an Environmental Assessment**AGENCY:** Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.**ACTION:** Notice of availability and request for comments.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has prepared an environmental assessment relative to an oral rabies vaccination field trial in West Virginia. The environmental assessment, which is based on a risk analysis prepared to assess the risks associated with an experimental rabies vaccine, analyzes the use of that vaccine in field safety and efficacy trials in West Virginia. The proposed field trial is necessary to evaluate a wildlife rabies vaccine that will produce sufficient levels of population immunity in raccoons and striped skunks. We are making the environmental assessment and risk assessment available to the public for review and comment.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before September 7, 2011.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by either of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=APHIS-2011-0089-0001>.

- *Postal Mail/Commercial Delivery:* Send your comment to Docket No. APHIS–2011–0089, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A–03.8, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238.

Supporting documents and any comments we receive on this docket may be viewed at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2011-0089> or in our reading room, which is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 6902817 before coming. This notice and the proposed environmental assessment are also posted on the APHIS Web site at (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/regulations/ws/ws_nepa_environmental_documents.shtml).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Dennis Slate, Rabies Program

Coordinator, Wildlife Services, 59 Chennell Drive, Suite 7, Concord, NH 03301; (603) 223–9623. To obtain copies of the environmental assessment discussed in this notice, contact Beth Kabert, Environmental Coordinator, Wildlife Services, 140–C Locust Grove Rd., Pittstown, NJ 08867; (908) 735–5654, fax (908) 735–0821, or e-mail (beth.e.kabert@aphis.usda.gov). To obtain copies of the risk assessment (also the manufacturer's risk analysis with confidential business information removed), contact Dr. Patricia Foley, Risk Manager, Center for Veterinary Biologics, Policy, Evaluation, and Licensing, 1920 Dayton Avenue, Ames, IA 50010; (515) 337–6100, fax (515) 337–6120, or e-mail (patricia.l.foley@aphis.usda.gov).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

The Wildlife Services (WS) program in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) cooperates with Federal agencies, State and local governments, and private individuals to research and implement the best methods of managing conflicts between wildlife and human health and safety, agriculture, property, and natural resources. Wildlife-borne diseases that can affect domestic animals and humans are among the types of conflicts that APHIS–WS addresses. Wildlife is the dominant reservoir of rabies in the United States.

One of the activities undertaken by APHIS–WS to address rabies is an Oral Rabies Vaccination (ORV) program involving the distribution of coated sachet baits containing vaccinia-rabies glycoprotein (VRG) vaccine to stop the spread of specific raccoon (eastern States), coyote (Texas), and gray fox (Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona) rabies virus variants to new areas. While this vaccine has proven to be orally effective in raccoons, coyotes, and foxes, it does not produce detectable levels of population immunity in striped skunks. Because skunks infected with raccoon rabies likely serve as a source of perpetuating and maintaining this rabies virus variant (i.e., raccoon rabies), they may compromise the effectiveness of our ORV program.

APHIS–WS is the lead agency regarding a proposed action that will test the safety and efficacy of a new human adenovirus type 5-rabies glycoprotein recombinant vaccine (AdRG1.3) rabies vaccine in an effort to find a rabies vaccine that will be safe and efficacious in a variety of animal species including striped skunks, raccoons, foxes, and coyotes. APHIS'

Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) has prepared a risk assessment that will allow for experimental use of the AdRG1.3 vaccine.

The proposed field trial would take place within an approximately 559-square-mile area of Greenbrier, Summers, and Monroe Counties, WV, including portions of the USDA Forest Service National Forest System lands, excluding Wilderness Areas. The proposed rabies vaccine field trial is a collaborative effort between APHIS–WS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the vaccine manufacturer (Artemis Inc.), and the West Virginia Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Resources, and Natural Resources.

APHIS' review and analysis of the proposed action are documented in detail in an environmental assessment (EA) titled "Field Trial of an Experimental Rabies Vaccine, Human Adenovirus Type 5 Vector in West Virginia" (July 2011). The EA analyzes a number of environmental issues or concerns with the oral rabies vaccine and activities associated with ORV field trials such as capture and handling animals for monitoring and surveillance purposes. The EA also analyzes alternatives to the proposed action, including no action (no Federal funding or participation by APHIS–WS). We are making the EA available to the public for review and comment. We will consider all comments that we receive on or before the date listed under the heading **DATES** at the beginning of this notice.

The EA and the CVB risk assessment may be viewed on the Regulations.gov Web site or in our reading room (see **ADDRESSES** above for instructions for accessing Regulations.gov and information on the location and hours of the reading room). You may request paper copies of the EA and risk assessment by calling or writing to the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

The EA has been prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1b), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 4th day of August 2011.

Gregory L. Parham,
Administrator, Animal and Plant Health
Inspection Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Black Hills National Forest, Custer, SD—Mountain Pine Beetle Response Project

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: This project proposes to treat areas newly infested by mountain pine beetles on approximately 325,000 acres of the Black Hills National Forest. Treatments would occur in both South Dakota and Wyoming, and on all four Ranger Districts. Treatments would be carried out within the scope of direction provided in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Black Hills National Forest, as amended.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received by September 7, 2011. The draft environmental impact statement is expected in February 2012, and the final environmental impact statement is expected in August 2012.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Craig Bobzien, Forest Supervisor, Black Hills National Forest, 1019 N. 5th Street, Custer, SD 57730. Comments may also be sent via e-mail to comments-rocky-mountain-black-hills@fs.fed.us, with "MPB Response Project" in the subject line. Electronic comments must be submitted in Word (.doc), Rich Text (.rtf), or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) format.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Katie Van-Alstyne, project team leader, Black Hills National Forest, Mystic Ranger District, Rapid City, SD 57701, phone (605) 343-1567. Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose and Need for Action

The purposes of the project are to reduce the threat to ecosystem components including forest resources on National Forest System (NFS) lands from the ongoing mountain pine beetle epidemic, and to help protect local

communities and resources on adjacent lands of other ownerships from large-scale wildfire by reducing hazardous fuel levels.

Proposed Action

Background The Black Hills National Forest (the Forest) lies in the Black Hills of western South Dakota and eastern Wyoming. Of the roughly 1.5 million acres in the Black Hills, about 1.2 million acres are National Forest System (NFS) lands, with lands of other ownership comprising another 300,000 acres. The predominant tree species on lands of all ownerships in the Black Hills is ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosae*). Since 1997 the Black Hills area has experienced a significant increase in pine tree mortality from an outbreak of mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*). In many parts of the Forest beetle populations are at or approaching epidemic levels. The outbreak in the Black Hills is part of a larger bark beetle epidemic which has recently affected more than 40 million acres of forest land in the western United States.

In the Black Hills mountain pine beetles (MPB) typically prefer stands of dense, mature pine trees. Tree stands in this condition are frequent and continuous throughout the area. Once attacked by beetles, most trees typically die, and eventually fall to the ground, adding dead and dry fuels within an area already rated as having high wildfire hazard. Since 1980, due to several factors including drought the Forest has seen a dramatic increase in acreage burned by wildfires. In that period over 250,000 acres have burned, consuming forest resources and posing threats to lands of other ownership intermingled with NFS lands.

Proposal The primary management tools for reducing beetle-caused tree mortality are removing infested trees, and reducing the density of remaining trees to lessen the susceptibility to attack. The Forest Service is working to manage persistent and increasing populations of the mountain pine beetle across the Forest. As part of that larger effort the Forest is proposing the Mountain Pine Beetle Response Project (MPBRP—the project). The project would be conducted as an authorized hazardous fuels reduction project under the authority of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). The proposed action would treat newly detected infestations that may occur on about 325,000 acres of NFS lands to reduce and slow the spread of MPB. Specifically, newly infested trees would be removed, or made unsuitable for occupancy by beetles, before beetles can

mature and further disperse to other trees. Some surrounding mature trees at risk of infestation may also be removed. A variety of treatment options would be available for use depending on conditions encountered on infested sites. Actual treatments used at any specific location would be determined at the time of implementation. Treatment options would include commercial tree removal using ground-based or cable logging equipment, or helicopter; non-commercial methods such as chipping trees or cutting them into short sections; and spraying small areas of trees to prevent infestation. Some temporary road construction is proposed, although generally road access would use existing road templates where available. Roads would be closed after use.

Possible Alternatives

The No Action alternative would not authorize any actions on the project area at this time. Other alternatives may be developed in response to public comments.

Lead and Cooperating Agencies

No cooperating agencies have been identified.

Responsible Official

The Responsible Official for this project is the Forest Supervisor, Black Hills National Forest, 1019 North 5th Avenue, Custer, South Dakota, 57730.

Nature of Decision To Be Made

After considering the proposed action and any alternatives, the environmental analysis, and public comment, the Forest Supervisor will decide whether to conduct treatments to reduce and slow the progress of the beetle epidemic. If an action alternative is selected, the Supervisor will decide where treatments may occur, and what actions are appropriate and may be taken. Finally, the decision will include the scope of monitoring that should occur. No Forest Plan amendment is proposed.

Scoping Process

This notice of intent initiates the scoping process, which guides the development of the environmental impact statement. The Forest Service seeks to involve interested parties in identifying issues related to responding to and managing the ongoing insect outbreak. Public comment will help the planning team identify key issues and opportunities to develop appropriate responses and alternatives, and monitoring strategies, and to evaluate the effects of the proposal.