

Purpose and Need: In order to promote the recovery of riparian areas and continue the current trend of watershed improvement the grazing reductions are proposed. The riparian fencing and hardened cattle crossings should help improve/restore riparian vegetation and prevent streambank trampling.

Preliminary Issues

White Pine Blister Rust

Blister rust is a major cause in the decline of western white pine in the West Fork Potlatch project area. This is an exotic pathogen introduced in the early 1900's which has caused a 60 percent decline in western white pine since 1952 (O'Laughlin et al. 1993). As a consequence, forest stands within the planning area are now dominated by tree species which are less resistant to insects, disease, and wildfire (primarily Douglas-fir and grand fir).

Insects and Disease

Forest stands within the project area are generally composed of a diverse species mix of trees which are growing well; but, in many cases are becoming overcrowded. Many of the seral disease resistant larch, western white pine, and ponderosa pine, are being crowded by grand fir, Douglas-fir and other more shade tolerant less disease resistant species. The loss of white pine to blister rust, and the increased presence of susceptible species is inconsistent with historic (pre-european) settlement patterns.

Forest Habitat

Old growth and mature forest structure is an important component for many wildlife species. Timber harvest has the potential to change the amount and distribution of mature forest structure.

Watershed and Fish Habitat Conditions

Management activities (especially those in the earlier part of the century), in the Potlatch River subbasin have delivered large quantities of sediment without allowing for recovery thus altering the natural function of the stream system. Additional activities without allowing for recovery could compound these effects and have adverse effects on channel stability and designated beneficial uses. Management practices that cause fine sediment production to exceed the processing and transporting capability of streams, or that alter the natural timing of sediment transport, would have the greatest potential to impair stream integrity and salmonid populations, and therefore beneficial uses.

Effects Analysis

The direct, indirect, cumulative, short-term, and long-term, aspects of impacts on national forest lands and resources, and those of connected or related effects off-site, will be fully disclosed.

Preliminary alternatives in addition to the proposed action have not been identified. The issues discussed previously, and those provided in public comment, will drive the formulation of alternatives. Minimizing the number of alternatives by incorporating key design features common to all alternatives will help address many concerns while streamlining the environmental analysis.

The Forest Service predicts the Draft EIS will be filed in January of 1997 and the Final EIS in April of 1997. We will seek comments on the Draft EIS for a period of 45 days after its publication. Comments will then be summarized and responded to in the Final EIS.

To assist us in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action or the effects disclosure, comments on the DEIS 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 DEIS 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.)

We believe it is important to give reviewers notice at this early stage of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of DEIS's 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 DEIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final EIS may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Argon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022 (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 a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the Final EIS.

As Forest Supervisor, I am the Responsible Official for this project. My address is Clearwater National Forest, 12730 U.S. Highway 12, Orofino, ID 83544 (208-476-4541).

Dated: October 9, 1996.

Douglas E. Gochmour,

Acting Forest Supervisor.

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BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Summit Fire Recovery, Malheur National Forest, Grant County, Oregon

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to salvage harvest and reforest burned timber stands, construct and reconstruct roads, and apply herbicides to manage unwanted vegetation. The proposed project will be in compliance with the 1990 Malheur National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended, which provides the overall guidance for management of this area. The proposed project is within the Summit Fire area which lies within the Middle Fork John Day Watershed on the Long Creek Ranger District and will occur in fiscal year 1997. The Malheur National Forest invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis. The agency will give notice of the full environmental analysis and decision making process on the proposal so interested and affected people may participate and contribute in the final decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by November 20, 1996.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments and suggestions concerning the management of this area to John L. Shoberg, District Ranger, P.O. Box 849, John Day, Oregon 97845.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed project and scope of analysis should be directed to: Resource Planner, Robert Hammond; P.O. Box 849; John Day, Oregon 97845; phone 541-575-3000.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed action includes: salvage harvesting fire killed or dying timber; constructing and reconstructing roads; reforestation; and application of herbicides.

Salvage sales are proposed within the Middle Fork John Day River Watershed on the Long Creek Ranger District. This analysis will evaluate a range of alternatives for implementation of the timber sales. The area being analyzed is approximately 28,000 acres.

The salvage sales would be located north of County Road 20 and within the Granite Boulder, Ragged Ruby Beaver, Sunshine Dry, Big Boulder, Balance Dunston Coyote Horse, Jungle Elk Deep, Bear Hawkins Mosquito, and Big subwatersheds. The majority of the salvage harvest would be dead or dying timber. The proposed volume for all sales is estimated to be approximately 145 million board feet from approximately 12,000 acres.

Salvage harvesting is proposed within some Riparian Habitat Conservation Area buffers, the former Greenhorn Mountain and Jumpoff Joe RARE II areas, and the Vinegar Hill-Indian Rock Scenic Area. No new road construction is proposed within these areas. Salvage harvesting is also proposed within two dedicated old-growth stands, their accompanying replacement old-growth stands, and a Wildlife Emphasis Area. The Wildlife Emphasis Area is within the former Jumpoff Joe RARE II area.

Preliminary issues include: effects on former RARE II areas; a Scenic Area; anadromous fish; sensitive fish and wildlife species; fuel loads; water quality; and timber production.

A full range of alternatives will be considered, including a no-action alternative. Issues gathered through scoping may vary action alternatives in (1) the amount and location of acres considered for treatment; (2) the amount of roads constructed for access; and (3) the number, type, and location of other integrated resource projects.

Scoping process will include: (1) identifying potential issues; (2) identifying issues to be analyzed in depth; (3) eliminating insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a previous environmental analysis; (4) explore additional alternatives; and (5) identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).

The Forest Service is seeking information and comments from: other Federal, State, and Local agencies; Tribes; organizations; and individuals who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. This input will be used in the preparation of the draft EIS.

Comments will be appreciated throughout the analysis process. The draft EIS is to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

and will be available for public review by March 1997. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date of EPA's Notice of Availability appear in the Federal Register. It is important that those interested in the management of the Malheur National Forest participate at that time.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice, at this early stage, 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 completion of the final EIS, may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1002 (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 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.)

After the 45 day comment period ends on the draft EIS, the comments will be analyzed and considered by the Forest Service in preparing the final EIS. The final EIS is scheduled to be completed by July 1997. In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to substantive comments received (40 CFR 1503.7). The responsible official, Forest Supervisor, F. Carl Pence, will consider the comments, responses, environmental consequences discussed in the EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies in making a decision regarding the project. The responsible official will document the

Summit Fire Recover Project decision and rationale for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to review under Forest Service Appeal Regulations 36 CFR Part 215.

Dated: October 11, 1996.

F. Carl Pence,

Forest Supervisor.

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BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Water Rights Task Force Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meetings.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service announces meetings of the Water Rights Task Force established on August 20, 1996, in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, as amended. The chairman has scheduled the third meeting of the Task Force in Reno, Nevada, on November 11-12; the fourth meeting in Denver, Colorado, on December 16; and the fifth meeting in San Francisco, California, on January 16-17, 1997.

DATES: The third meeting will be held November 11 from noon to 6:00 p.m. and November 12 from 8:00 a.m. until noon. The fourth meeting will be held December 16 from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The fifth meeting will be held January 16 from 1:00 until 5:00 p.m. and January 17 from 8:30 a.m. until noon.

ADDRESSES: The third meeting will be held in the Crystal 5 Conference Room of the Reno Hilton Hotel, 2500 East Second Street, Reno, NV; the fourth meeting will be held in the 1st floor Auditorium of the USDA Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Regional Office, 740 Simms Street, Golden, CO; and the fifth meeting will be held in the Black Oak Room, 5th floor, 630 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA.

Send written comments to Eleanor Towns, FACA Liaison, Water Rights Task Force, c/o USDA Forest Service, MAIL STOP 1124, P.O. Box 96090, Washington, DC 20090-6090. Telephone: (202) 205-1248; Fax: (202) 205-1604.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen Glasser, Watershed & Air Management Staff, Telephone: (202) 205-1172; Fax: (202) 205-1096.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Water Rights Task Force is composed of seven members appointed by Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture to study and make recommendations on issues pertaining to water rights. At the forthcoming meetings, the Task Force