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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

White Pass Ski Area Expansion, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Lewis County, Washington

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to analyze and disclose the environmental impacts of a site-specific proposal to modify the present special use permit of the White Pass Company, present operator of the White Pass Ski Area. This modification would authorize expansion into approximately 300 acres in Pigtail Basin, located between the current permit area and Hogback Basin, for the purpose of providing additional skiing opportunities. This action is proposed in response to an application by the White Pass Company to expand the permit area on the Packwood Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The White Pass Company current permit is administered by the Naches Ranger District of the Wenatchee National Forest. The proposed action is at White Pass, Washington, approximately 50 miles west of the city of Yakima. The purpose of the EIS will be to develop and evaluate a range of alternatives including a No Action Alternative, and possible additional alternatives to respond to issues identified during the scoping process. The proposed project will be in compliance with the direction in the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (March 1990), as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (April 1994), which provides the overall guidance for management of the area. The Agency invites written comments on the scope of this project. In addition, the agency

gives notice of this analysis so that interested and affected people are aware of how they may participate and contribute to the final decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of this proposal must be received by April 12, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments and suggestions to Sonny J. O'Neal, Forest Supervisor, Wenatchee National Forest, 215 Melody Lane, Wenatchee, Washington 98801.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Questions and comments about this EIS should be directed to Jim Pena, District Ranger, Naches Ranger District, 10061 U.S. Highway 12, Naches, WA 98937; Phone 509-653-2205.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Wenatchee National Forest is initiating this action in response to a request filed by the White Pass Company on January 7, 1997, to expand their current ski area permit boundary.

This is White Pass Company's second attempt to expand the skiing opportunities at White Pass. Their first proposal was submitted after passage of the Washington Wilderness Bill of 1984. The Bill, while increasing Wilderness lands within Washington by well over one million acres, also realigned the Wilderness boundary southwest of White Pass in the expressed interest of skiing potential in this area. White Pass Company's initial expansion proposal encompassed 1,300 acres, which included Hogback Basin and the development of three chairlifts. Subsequent litigation regarding the Forest's decision to authorize the expansion in combination with concerns regarding new wildlife information led to withdrawal of that decision by the Wenatchee National Forest Supervisor in 1992.

This new proposal has been developed following (1) the review and understanding of the issues raised during the first EIS attempt, (2) new environmental standards such as the Northwest Forest Plan and Aquatic Conservation Strategy, (3) recent discussions with interested groups regarding the new proposed action and (4) the continued search for an expansion location that best fits into the social, cultural, environmental and skier needs categories.

A range of alternatives will be considered, including a No Action Alternative. Other alternatives will be

developed in response to issues received during scoping. The major issues that have been identified to date include the following: Air quality, cultural/historic/religious uses, scenery, socioeconomics, wildlife habitat, and the cumulative effects of the proposed action with uses within the current permit area.

Public participation will be especially important at several points during the analysis. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies, and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed actions. This information will be used in preparation of the draft EIS. The scoping process includes:

1. Identifying potential issues.
2. Identifying issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Eliminating insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental process.
4. Exploring additional alternatives.
5. Identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e., direct, indirect and cumulative effects and connected actions.).
6. Determining potential cooperating agencies and task assignments.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for review by October 1997. At that time, copies of the draft EIS will be distributed to interested and affected agencies, organization, and members of the public for their review and comment. The EPA will publish a notice of availability of the draft EIS in the Federal Register. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA notice appears in the Federal Register. It is very important that those interested in the management of the Wenatchee and Gifford Pinchot National Forests participate at that time.

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 EIS'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 connections.

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 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.

The final EIS is scheduled to be completed by March 1998. In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to 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 the decision regarding this proposal. Sonny J. O'Neal, Forest Supervisor, Wenatchee National Forest is the responsible official. As the responsible official he will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service appeal regulation (36 CFR part 215).

Dated: May 4, 1997.

G. Elton Thomas,

Natural Resources Group Leader.

[FR Doc. 97-5958 Filed 3-11-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Canyons Forest Health Project, Tahoe National Forest, Sierra and Nevada Counties, CA

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement for harvesting in densely stocked timber stands exhibiting insect-related mortality and reduced health. The harvesting is proposed on approximately 2,500 acres within an 8,000-acre analysis area. The salvage, sanitation, and thinning of the stands is proposed to improve the forest health and remove some of the dead material contributing to the fuel loading in the area. Also being proposed are fuels treatments, site preparation, reforestation, timber stand improvement, and road construction, reconstruction, and decommissioning.

These actions were recently analyzed and decided within a larger project analysis area called the Worn Mill Environmental Assessment/Biological Evaluation (EA/BE) (September, 1996). Only about half of the area analyzed under the Worn Mill EA/BE document was put under contract (Toucan Timber Sale) in December 1996 prior to expiration of the Rescissions Act, Pub. L. 104-19. Since the decision on the Worn Mill EA/BE has also subsequently expired, the second half of the Worn Mill analysis area that was identified as needing forest health treatment will now be re-analyzed under the Canyons Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The agency invites comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis. In addition, the agency gives notice of the full environmental analysis and decision-making process that will occur on the proposal so that interested and affected people are aware of how they may participate and contribute to the final decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the analysis should be received in writing by April 1, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Caryn Hunt, Project Leader, Truckee Ranger District, 10342 Highway 89 N, Truckee, CA 96161.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Caryn Hunt, Project Leader, Natural Resources Department, Truckee Ranger District, (916) 587-3558.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A draft environmental impact statement is expected to be available for agency and public review by April, 1997. A 45-day comment period will follow the publication of the notice of availability of the draft EIS in the Federal Register. All comments will be analyzed and a final EIS and accompanying record of decision (ROD) will be issued. The final EIS should be available by June, 1997.

Written comments from the public should be submitted as indicated at the beginning of this notice. Comments

would be most useful if sent by the date specified and if they clearly address the issues and alternatives related to the proposed action.

The proposed action being considered includes salvage, sanitation, and thinning of the timber stands to address forest health concerns east of Boca and Stampede reservoirs and on the adjacent flats and slopes near Truckee, California.

Preliminary issues connected with the proposal include forest health, water quality, wildlife habitat, and wildfire/fuels concerns.

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 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 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 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 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. 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 responsible official for this environmental impact statement and decision is John H. Skinner, Forest Supervisor, Tahoe National Forest, 631