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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

Lower Eldorado Ecosystem Management Project, Clearwater National Forest, Clearwater County, Idaho

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to disclose the environmental effects of proposed timber harvest which would remove approximately 18.7 million board feet of timber from 2,146 acres and build 6.2 miles of new roads. To improve watershed conditions, the proposal would also close up to 30 miles of roads in the area which are no longer needed.

The area is located on the Pierce District of the Clearwater National Forest, Townships 33, 34, and 35 North, Ranges 6 and 7 East, Boise Meridian.

The purpose of the proposal and subsequent effects analysis is to meet the intent of the Clearwater Forest Plan, using an ecosystem management approach for the 13,995 acre analysis area. Management Areas (MA) within the analysis area include: MA-E1, emphasizing growth and yield of timber; MA-C4, emphasizing big game winter range and timber production; MA-M1, emphasizing research natural areas; MA-M2, emphasizing riparian management; and MA-A6, emphasizing historic travel routes.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by September 22, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Douglas Gober, District Ranger, Rt. 2, Box 191, Kamiah, ID 83536.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lois Hill, EIS Project Team Leader, (208) 935-2513.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In response to the public demand for sustainable forest management, the Forest Service has developed an ecologically based, integrated resource approach to the management of National Forest lands. "Ecosystem Management" means recognizing the complexity and interdependencies of resources within ecosystems, so the effects of management actions can be predicted and monitored after activities occur.

A landscape level vegetation assessment was conducted in 1996. The results indicate that the present species and age class distributions in this area would not have occurred under natural conditions. Large numbers of small trees are present, due to over fifty years of wildfire suppression. Crowded stands are susceptible to root rot pathogens, bark beetles, defoliators, and dwarf mistletoe. The loss of western white pine through blister rust, along with fire suppression, has led to a percentage of grand fir in many stands which is much higher than that which occurred historically. The 1996 assessment also indicated that late mature stands are lacking in this area, and often occur in smaller patches than would have occurred naturally. Natural patch sizes in this area ranged up to 20,000 acres.

The proposed action is designed to restore terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem health, and to provide benefits to people within the capabilities of the ecosystem. Vegetation treatments to reintroduce western white pine would be considered. Prescribed regeneration and intermediate harvest would improve forest composition and function. Commercial and precommercial thinning would improve species composition, moving toward a mix more consistent with historical conditions. Intermediate treatments in over-stocked, stressed sites would target grand fir, while maintaining desirable seral species such as western white pine, ponderosa pine, and western larch. Silvicultural management practices would be analyzed for their potential to keep old stands longer. Dead and dying timber in the area would be salvaged.

The proposal includes timber harvest of varying intensities, from rehabilitation only (slashing nonmerchantable dead trees and replanting) to clearcuts with reserve trees. Harvest practices may not follow traditional unit configurations or

prescriptions. The natural changes in tree densities, natural history, and health of the landscape will dictate how areas would be treated. Biological corridors and riparian areas in the natural landscape would be considered, as well as human imposed landscapes and restrictions such as visual quality corridors, cultural sites, and recreation areas. Harvest prescriptions may be scattered, span large areas, or overlap.

Because some streams in the area are not meeting desired instream conditions for cobble embeddedness, erosion sources in the watershed would be corrected by closing and stabilizing roads that are no longer needed. Culvert replacements, riparian planting, instream rock and woody debris clusters, channel constriction structures, log drop structures, and sediment traps would be proposed to improve fish habitat conditions or accessibility. The proposal would also include riparian planting to improve stream shading and woody debris availability.

Views from the Lewis and Clark trail, which runs through a portion of the analysis area, would be protected through site specific silvicultural prescriptions.

The decision to be made is what, if anything, should be done to address the following issues in the Lower Eldorado Project Area: (a) Treating vegetation to respond to concerns about overly dense stands; (b) increasing patch sizes to more closely resemble landscape patterns that occurred historically, while retaining as much of the late successional component as possible; (c) preserving scenic quality near the Lewis and Clark trail for the long term; (d) managing the road system to improve watershed conditions while maintaining an adequate long term transportation system in the area; and (e) increasing timber productivity and contributing to the Forest's sustained yield of timber products.

Preliminary alternatives to the proposed action have been developed in response to issues raised during internal scoping. They include: (a) An alternative which would propose no timber harvest adjacent to the Lewis and Clark Trail; (b) an alternative which would minimize new road construction; and (c) an alternative which would reduce overabundant immature and mature stands in the Lolo drainage;

Public participation will be an important part of the analysis. Internal scoping began with the development of the Pierce Ranger District Five Year Plan in early January, 1997. External scoping will begin with this notice. Public meetings to announce this proposal, including at least one field review of the project area, will be scheduled between July and September of 1997. Issues which emerge from internal and external scoping will be used to develop additional alternatives to this proposal.

The lead agency for this project is the U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Service will cooperate with other Federal agencies, as well as County, State, and tribal governments who display an interest in the project, and who require assessment and concurrence.

The responsible official for decisions regarding this analysis is James Caswell, Clearwater National Forest Supervisor. His address is 12730 Highway 12, Orofino, ID 83544.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review in January, 1998. At that time, the EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the draft environmental impact statement will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**. The final EIS is scheduled to be completed by May, 1998.

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 Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR part 215 or 217.

Dated: July 31, 1997.

James L. Caswell,
Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Treasure Mountain Winter Sports Area Conceptual Development Plan; Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln County, Montana

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to develop the Treasure Mountain Winter Sports Area which includes management of a 1,700+/- acre tract of land of which approximately 242 acres would be devoted to alpine ski trail development. The ski area would have a vertical rise of 2,700 feet with the potential to increase to 3,500 feet and would include a separate beginner/teaching slope with its own chairlift as well as trails and chairlifts for novice, low intermediate, intermediate, advanced intermediate and expert skiers. The proposal includes the construction of ski trails, chair lifts,

base lodge and facilities and parking facilities. The base lodge will provide the full range of skier services including food service, rest rooms, lockers, rental, retail and first aid. The proposal also includes a forest plan amendment to change Kootenai Forest land allocations from MA8 (Proposed Wilderness), MA-13 (Designated Old-growth), MA-14 (Grizzly Bear habitat) and MA-16 (Timber with viewing allocation) to MA6 (Developed Recreation).

The proposed Treasure Mountain Winter Sports Area is approximately five miles west of US Highway 2 and one mile south of Libby in Lincoln County, Montana, ninety miles south of the Canadian border and thirty miles east of the Idaho border. The proposed ski area is located adjacent to the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness Area and within the Municipal Watershed for the town of Libby, Montana. Approximately half of the proposed ski area is located within the Inventoried Roadless Area #671—Cabinet Face East. The decision area is also occupied Grizzly Bear habitat.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be received on or before September 8, 1997.

ADDRESSES: The Responsible Official is Robert L. Schrenk, Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest. Written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis should be sent to Lawrence A. Froberg, District Ranger, Libby Ranger District, 12557 US Hwy 37 N, Libby, Montana, 59923.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Charnon, Project Coordinator, Libby Ranger District. Phone: (406) 293-7773.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Historical Context

A preliminary proposal for the Treasure Mountain Winter Sports Area was presented to the Libby Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service, Libby, Montana, in September 1990. This was followed by a request for land designation change presented to the U.S. Senate in 1991. An evaluation of the proposed Treasure Mountain Winter Sports Area was compiled in June 1992 followed by modifications to the evaluation in 1994. In March 1995, the Lincoln County Economic Development Council was presented with a Conceptual Development Plan and Feasibility Study prepared by Barnhart Malcolm, Inc. The evaluation of this report was that the proposed Treasure Mountain Winter Sports Area site has superior physical attributes for regional destination alpine ski potential customers to generate cumulative positive cash flow. Finally, in November