

Dated: December 6, 1999.

**Bob Castaneda,**

*Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest.*

[FR Doc. 99-32606 Filed 12-15-99; 8:45 am]

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## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Natural Resources Conservation Service

### Emergency Watershed Protection Program

**AGENCY:** Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice of Availability of the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

**SUMMARY:** The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announces the availability of the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) for the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program. The draft PEIS assesses the potential environmental impacts of alternatives for administration of the EWP Program, which provides funding and assistance to localities requesting EWP assistance to address watershed impairments, caused by a natural disaster, which pose an immediate threat to life and property.

The original PEIS for the EWP Program was prepared in 1975. NRCS has conducted a comprehensive review of the program that has resulted in changes to improve the environmental, economic, and technical soundness of activities conducted under the program. This draft PEIS supports management decisions on how best to revise the EWP Program to continue to effectively and efficiently meet EWP statutory requirements. It analyzes a range of reasonable alternatives to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations while minimizing, to the greatest extent practicable, any potential adverse environmental or socioeconomic impacts.

### Comments Invited

To ensure that the full range of issues and alternatives related to the EWP Program have been addressed, NRCS invites comments on this draft PEIS. Written comments should be postmarked by close of business on February 14, 2000, to ensure consideration. Comments postmarked after this date will be considered to the extent practicable.

**WHERE TO COMMENT:** Written comments on the draft PEIS and requests for copies of the draft PEIS should be directed to: EWP-PEIS, Post Office Box 745, Falls Church, Virginia 22040-0745; telephone (toll free): 1-877-534-8692; or e-mail at [ewp@mangi.com](mailto:ewp@mangi.com).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** For matters relating to the EWP Program, please contact the Director, Watersheds and Wetlands Division, USDA-NRCS, Post Office Box 2890, Washington, DC 20013-2890; telephone: (202) 720-3527.

For matters relating to USDA/NRCS compliance with NEPA, please contact: Andree DuVarney, National Environmental Specialist, Ecological Sciences Division, USDA-NRCS, Post Office Box 2890, Washington, DC 20013-2890; telephone: (202) 720-4925.

Information may also be obtained from the NRCS Worldwide website at: <http://www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/BCS/enviro/nepa.htm> (general NEPA compliance information); <http://www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/programs.html> (EWP Program).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The EWP Program funds and provides technical assistance to sponsoring organizations (entities of government) to implement emergency measures for runoff retardation and soil erosion prevention to assist in relieving imminent hazards to life and property from floods, drought, and the products of erosion created by natural disasters that have caused or are causing sudden impairment of a watershed. The program is authorized by Section 216 of the Flood Control Act of May 17, 1950 (Pub. L. 81-516; 33 U.S.C. 701b-1) and by Section 403 of Title IV of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1978, (Pub. L. 95-334), as amended by Section 382 of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (Pub. L. 104-127) 16 U.S.C. 2204. NRCS regulations implementing the EWP Program are set forth in 7 CFR part 624.

NEPA only requires a PEIS be prepared for major Federal actions significantly affecting the environment. It is NRCS' preliminary opinion that the programmatic decisions being made about the EWP Program do not constitute such action, particularly when considered on a nation-wide basis. Nonetheless, NRCS considers NEPA and the PEIS process to be a useful tool to assist decision makers under certain circumstances. Therefore, the agency has made the decision to prepare a PEIS in this case to take full advantage of NEPA's public participation provisions, as a means of considering the concerns of individual members of the public and the State and

local government sponsors who play a critical role in the EWP Program and to fully consider the impacts of alternative EWP Program policies and activities.

The final PEIS on the EWP Program will supersede the PEIS prepared on the program in 1975. The purpose of the draft PEIS is to assess the impacts of a range of EWP programmatic alternatives. It will also factor in changes that are being proposed to the administrative rule, such as the use of floodplain easements to address recurring hazards. NRCS expects that States may desire to tier to the national programmatic NEPA analysis to facilitate rapid response to EWP Program emergency requirements in the future, while maintaining adequate environmental review coverage for the necessary decision making.

### Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed action is for NRCS to continue administering the EWP Program but with some revision for efficiency and effectiveness in program delivery, and to continue providing funding and technical assistance to aid appropriately sponsored entities in restoring watershed components to pre-disaster conditions.

Some of the changes NRCS is proposing action include:

1. Eliminate the terms "exigency" and "non-exigency";
2. Stipulate that "Urgent and Compelling" situations be addressed immediately upon discovery;
3. Set priorities for funding EWP sites;
4. Establish a cost-share rate of up to 75 percent for all EWP projects (except for projects in limited resource areas, where sponsors may receive up to 90 percent);
5. Stipulate that measures be economically, environmentally, and socially defensible;
6. Improve pre-disaster recovery readiness through interagency coordination, training, and planning;
7. Allow repair of impairments to agricultural lands using sound engineering alternatives;
8. Limit repair of sites to twice in a 10-year period;
9. Eliminate the requirement that multiple beneficiaries (property owners) be threatened before a site would be eligible for EWP Program repairs;
10. Apply principles of natural stream dynamics and bioengineering to the design of EWP practices;
11. Simplify the purchase of agricultural easements;
12. Repair enduring (structural or long-life) conservation practices;
13. Fund part of improved solutions;

14. Allow disaster recovery work in floodplain areas away from streams and in upland areas; and

15. Purchase easements on non-agricultural lands.

Signed at Washington, DC, on December 9, 1999.

**Pearlie S. Reed,**

*Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service.*

[FR Doc. 99-32526 Filed 12-15-99; 8:45 am]

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### International Trade Administration

#### Applications for Duty-Free Entry of Scientific Instruments

Pursuant to Section 6(c) of the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials Importation Act of 1966 (Pub. L. 89-651; 80 Stat. 897; 15 CFR part 301), we invite comments on the question of whether instruments of equivalent scientific value, for the purposes for which the instruments shown below are intended to be used, are being manufactured in the United States.

Comments must comply with 15 CFR 301.5(a)(3) and (4) of the regulations and be filed within 20 days with the Statutory Import Programs Staff, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, DC 20230. Applications may be examined between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. in Room 4211, U.S. Department of Commerce, 14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC.

Docket Number: 99-028. Applicant: National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, Division of Intramural Research Programs, Laboratory on Genetics, 9000 Rockville Pike, Building 36, Room 3D06, Bethesda, MD 20892-4094. Instrument: Robot and Microplate Filler with accessories, Models Q-BOT and Q-Fill. Manufacturer: GENETIX, United Kingdom. Intended Use: The instrument is intended to be used for studies of cDNAs, genes, and mRNAs in support of research on the genomics of the nervous system with initial efforts focusing on the discovery of new genes and the study of gene expression patterns in mouse and human brains. Application accepted by Commissioner of Customs: December 2, 1999.

Docket Number: 99-029. Applicant: University of Florida, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, 337 Larsen Hall, PO Box 116200, Building 722, Gainesville, FL 32611-6200. Instrument: Fiber Raman Laser, Model FRL-1480-600. Manufacturer: IP

Fibre Devices Ltd., United Kingdom. Intended Use: The instrument will be used as a pump source to pump Er-doped waveguide lasers in lithium niobate that are being developed. The laser will also be used as a demonstration of the principle of optical pumping for the courses of the Photonics sequence (EEL 5441, EEL 6443) in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department. Application accepted by Commissioner of Customs: November 30, 1999.

**Frank W. Creel,**

*Director, Statutory Import Programs Staff.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### International Trade Administration

#### University of Vermont, et al.; Notice of Consolidated Decision on Applications for Duty-Free Entry of Scientific Instruments

This is a decision consolidated pursuant to section 6(c) of the Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Materials Importation Act of 1966 (Pub. L. 89-651, 80 Stat. 897; 15 CFR part 301). Related records can be viewed between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. in Room 4211, U.S. Department of Commerce, 14th and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC.

*Comments:* None received. Decision: Approved. No instrument of equivalent scientific value to the foreign instruments described below, for such purposes as each is intended to be used, is being manufactured in the United States.

Docket Number: 99-023. Applicant: University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405. Instrument: Microforge, Model MF-830. Manufacturer: Narishige Scientific Instrument Lab., Japan. Intended Use: See notice at 64 FR 57865, October 27, 1999. Reasons: The foreign instrument provides ultra-fine finishing of microelectrode tips for patch clamp studies using advanced fine polishing technology to eliminate imperfections on the tip surface that could damage delicate cell membranes. Advice received from: National Institutes of Health, October 21, 1999.

Docket Number: 99-024. Applicant: University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405. Instrument: Glass Microelectrode Puller, Model PP-830. Manufacturer: Narishige Scientific Instrument Lab., Japan. Intended Use: See notice at 64 FR 57865, October 27, 1999. Reasons: The foreign instrument provides: (1) A built-in power source to avoid voltage

fluctuations, (2) ultra-precise tuning of heater settings and (3) a digital display for monitoring settings while fabricating microelectrodes for patch clamp studies. Advice received from: National Institutes of Health, October 21, 1999.

The National Institutes of Health advised in its memoranda that (1) the capabilities of each of the foreign instruments described above are pertinent to each applicant's intended purpose and (2) it knows of no domestic instrument or apparatus of equivalent scientific value for the intended use of each instrument.

We know of no other instrument or apparatus being manufactured in the United States which is of equivalent scientific value to either of the foreign instruments.

**Frank W. Creel,**

*Director, Statutory Import Programs Staff.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 120999C]

#### Northwest Region Federal Fisheries Permits; Proposed Information Collection; Comment Request

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Proposed collection; comment request.

**SUMMARY:** The Department of Commerce, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork and respondent burden, invites the general public and other Federal agencies to take this opportunity to comment on proposed and/or continuing information collections, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

**DATES:** Written comments must be submitted on or before February 14, 2000.

**ADDRESSES:** Direct all written comments to Linda Engelmeier, Departmental Forms Clearance Officer, Department of Commerce, Room 5327, 14th and Constitution Avenue NW, Washington DC 20230 (or via Internet at LEngelme@doc.gov).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Requests for additional information or copies of the information collection instrument(s) and instructions should be directed to William L. Robinson, NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle WA 98112, 206-526-6140.