

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 after completion of the final EIS may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, (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 the 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 statement. 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.

In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to substantive comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed at the draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making a decision regarding the Ashland Watershed Protection Project.

The Responsible Official is Linda Duffy, Ashland District Ranger on the Rogue River National Forest. The Responsible Official will document her decision and rationale for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service appeal regulations (36 CFR Part 215).

Dated: February 12, 1999.

**Linda L. Duffy,**  
District Ranger.

[FR Doc. 99-4644 Filed 2-24-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### Five Rivers Landscape Management Project; Siuslaw National Forest, Lincoln and Lane Counties, Oregon

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

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

**SUMMARY:** The USDA Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for a proposed action in the Five Rivers Watershed, designed to:

- Increase late-successional habitat in late-successional and riparian reserves;
- Restore the health of watersheds and associated aquatic ecosystems;
- Maintain the function and diversity of matrix (non-reserved) lands, while providing timber and other products and amenities; and
- Learn from various strategies for achieving late-successional conditions and aquatic conservation because no single strategy is known to work best.

The Five Rivers watershed is about 34 air miles southwest of Corvallis and 40 air miles northwest of Eugene, Oregon. Proposed activities include thinning plantations through commercial sales and service contracts, planting hardwoods and shade-tolerant conifers in suitable sites, decommissioning and closing roads, placing large woods in streams, planting conifers in riparian areas, maintaining and creating early-seral habitat, maintaining diverse dispersed recreational opportunities, and maintaining opportunities to harvest greenery and mushrooms. These proposed activities are linked by their interacting effects—through the networks of streams, roads, and forested stands—on this large project area. Efficiencies in planning are also expected.

The Five Rivers planning area comprises about 37,000 acres; of this total, 4,932 acres (13%) are private land. Of the 32,038 acres of National Forest land, about 15,530 acres (48%) have been previously harvested and regenerated. About 11,781 acres (37%) remain in mature condition, and about 5,000 acres (15%) are in hardwood or mixed conifer and hardwood. The project area has an average road density of 3.1 miles per square mile, and an average stream density of 7.9 miles per square mile. The project area does not include any inventoried roadless or designated wilderness areas.

The Forest Service proposal complies with the 1990 Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan,

as amended by the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, which provides guidance for managing this area. The Lobster/Five Rivers watershed analysis (1997) identified many opportunities to restore terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in the Five Rivers watershed, which the proposed action is designed to address. Some proposed project activities are expected to begin in fiscal year (FY) 2000, but when activities actually begin in a function of many factors—such as availability of funding, market conditions, contract size, and award date. For example, a timber sale planned for 2004 could take 4 or 5 years to complete, for a variety of reasons—for example, because of poor market conditions. Planned post-sale activities to be funded by timber receipts could thus be delayed as well. We expect the work to begin in FY2000 and continue through FY2015.

The Siuslaw National Forest invites written comments on this proposal. Site-specific comments are encouraged because they are the most useful for improving project design. The proposed actions are described in detail below to provide our current thinking in a way to help people understand the proposal. Considerable flexibility exists for developing strategies, depending on the issues raised.

**DATES:** Comments about the scope of the proposal should be received in writing by March 19, 1999.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments to Doris Tai, District Ranger, Waldport Ranger District, Siuslaw National Forest, P.O. Box 400, Waldport, Oregon 97394.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Paul Thomas, EIS Team Leader, Waldport Ranger District, Siuslaw National Forest, Phone 541-563-3211. Maps, referenced below, showing proposed actions for the Five Rivers Watershed Restoration Project, can be viewed at the Waldport District Office or on the Siuslaw National Forest Web site at [www.fs.fed.us/r6/siuslaw/projects.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/siuslaw/projects.htm).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The land managed by the Siuslaw National Forest is public land. In the project area, the Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP 1994) designates three land allocations that must be managed under specific guidelines intended to: move tree plantations in the late-successional reserves toward old-growth conditions; improve habitat for riparian-dependent species, including anadromous fish, in late-successional and riparian reserves; and harvest wood products from the remaining area (matrix) to benefit local economies. The Plan also provides a

process for evaluating management actions and identifying steps to modify activities to improve results (adaptive management).

The Assessment Report: Federal Lands in and Adjacent to Oregon Coast Province (1995, chapters C-F), the Late-Successional Reserve Assessment: Oregon Coast Province, Southern Portion (1997, chapter 3), and the Lobster/Five Rivers Watershed Analysis (1997, chapter 5) describe the current terrestrial, aquatic, and social conditions in the Five Rivers watershed. The Lobster/Five Rivers Watershed Analysis (chapter 6) identifies many opportunities for restoring terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in the planning area. In reviewing these documents, I identified the following needs and proposed actions to meet the current objectives:

A need for increased late-successional habitat in late-successional and riparian reserves. Late-successional reserves were designed to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems, which are required habitat for many species (NWFP 1994). Riparian reserve objectives include protecting and enhancing habitat for terrestrial plants and animals, as well as providing connectivity corridors between late-successional reserves. The watershed analysis showed that the amount of mature and late-successional forest, including large patches, has decreased over the last 100 years, and edge habitat, fragmentation, numbers of hardwoods, and early-seral habitat have increased. Natural stands have more diversity in tree species and structure, as well more coarse woody debris and snags, than do these plantations. To accelerate developing mature and late-successional habitat characteristics, I propose to thin about 3,250 acres of predominately Douglas-fir from both late-successional and riparian reserves—through commercial timber sales (map 1); to support these sales, about 16 miles of existing road would be temporarily reopened, and about 1.5 miles of new temporary road would be built. After stand development and coarse wood debris restoration objectives are met, about 32.1 million board feet would be available to harvest for manufacturing wood products. About 2,000 acres would be thinned through service contracts. A mixture of shade-tolerant conifers and hardwoods would be planted on 800 acres in existing plantations to add diversity to their future composition and structure.

A need to restore the health of watersheds and associated aquatic ecosystems. The Aquatic Conservation

Strategy in the Northwest Forest Plan is intended to restore and maintain the health of watersheds and the aquatic ecosystems they contain. The watershed analysis showed several streams with one or more aquatic habitat components—such as stream temperatures, channel complexity, and stream substrate characteristics—as at risk of or not functioning properly. To facilitate restoring hydrologic processes and conditions, I propose to decommission about 37 miles of road and close about 86 miles of road in the watershed (map 2). To mitigate for the loss of access to a private parcel, I will issue a special-use permit to build, use, and maintain a road across National Forest land (map 2). I am also proposing to evaluate alternative routes for Roads 32 and 3505 in the Upper Five Rivers subwatershed. To facilitate restoring hydrologic processes, I propose to place large conifers and root wads along 36 miles of stream (map 1). To provide for a future supply of conifers and facilitate shade development, 200 acres of alder- or meadow-dominated riparian areas will be planted with conifers and various hardwoods (map 1).

A need to maintain the function and diversity in matrix lands while providing timber and other products and amenities. Producing timber and other products is an important objective for the matrix lands, but the standards and guides of the Northwest Forest Plan are also designed to provide important ecological functions, such as the carryover of some species from one stand to the next and maintaining structural components such as logs, snags, and large green trees. The matrix is also managed to add ecological diversity by providing early-successional habitat. The watershed analysis showed that the habitat components in the matrix lands were similar in composition and structure to lands in late-successional reserves. To ensure that future management activities are able to meet management objectives, I propose to thin about 650 acres in plantations on matrix lands through commercial timber sales (map 1). To support these sales, about 3 miles of existing road would be temporarily reopened, and about 0.5 miles of new temporary road would be built. About 6.5 million board feet would be sold and harvested for manufacturing wood products. To maintain a diversity or seral classes, about 40 acres of existing meadows and plantations in matrix land will be maintained in early-seral condition (map 1).

A need to learn from a variety of strategies for achieving late-successional conditions and aquatic conservation

because no single strategy is known to work best. The Northwest Forest Plan identified the standards and guides for management activities. Adaptive management is a process of action-based planning, monitoring, researching, evaluating, and adjusting to improve future actions and to determine if the standards and guides are effective in achieving the goals of the Northwest Forest Plan. The high density of roads in the Siuslaw continues to fuel the debate over their long-term management, primarily related to the values associated with using and maintaining them versus their adverse effects on the terrestrial and aquatic environment. Debate also surrounds the question of whether the plantations will ever achieve old-growth conditions, with or without thinning and under-planting. I propose a management study to compare effects of different road-management strategies and their effects on resources. Four strategies have been proposed so far: no road access, no intervention; continued road access, continuous management; 10-year road closures, intermittent management; and 20-year road closures, intermittent management. Strategies with long road closures will require thinning to wider spacing and different stream-restoration strategies than strategies that keep roads open. The strategies would be distributed across the landscape in a way that makes comparing the results most valid. Details of the management study, reflecting public input, will be described in the draft EIS.

This analysis will consider a range of alternatives that will address the purpose and needs for the proposed project. The no-action alternative will be part of this range so that effects associated with not implementing any of the proposed activities can be evaluated. Preliminary issues considered significant include the effects on habitat of species associated with late-successional and old-growth forests, effects on aquatic habitats and hydro-logic processes, and changes in vehicle access to the watershed.

The Forest Service will be seeking additional information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies; tribes; and other individuals or organizations who may be interested or affected by the proposed project. Field trips and public scoping meetings are not scheduled at this time, pending comments from the public. Comments from other agencies are being sought and will be used in preparing the draft EIS. The scoping process will:

- Identify potential issues;
- Identify key issues to analyzed in depth;

- Eliminate non-key issues or those that have been covered by relevant previous environmental analyses;
- Identify alternatives to the proposed action;
- Identify opportunities for cooperative restoration projects on private land; and
- Identify potential environmental effects (that is, direct, indirect, and cumulative effects) of the proposed action and alternatives.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by June 1999. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days after the EPA publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**. The final EIS is scheduled to be available in September 1999.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues on the proposed project, comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible. Referring to specific pages or chapters of the draft statement is also helpful. Comments may address both the adequacy of the draft EIS and the merits of the alternative 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.)

At this early stage, I believe that giving reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in reviewing environmental processes is important. 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 the agency to the reviewer's position and contentions (*Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 533; 1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage but that are not raised until the final environmental impact statement is completed 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 those court rulings, participation by those interested in this proposed project by the close of the 45-day comment period is essential, so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service when it can consider and respond to them in developing issues and alternatives in the final EIS.

After the 45-day public comment period, the comments received will be reviewed and considered in preparing the final EIS. The forest supervisor of the Siuslaw National Forest is the responsible official for this EIS. After considering public comments and responses, environmental consequences discussed in the final EIS, and applicable laws, regulations and policies; as the responsible official, I will reach a decision on this proposal. This decision and the evidence supporting it will be documented in a record of decision, which is subject to Forest Service appeal regulations (36 CFR Part 215).

Dated: February 9, 1999.

**James R. Furnish,**

*Forest Supervisor.*

[FR Doc. 99-4646 Filed 2-24-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### **Rimrock Projects, Umatilla National Forest, Grant, Morrow, and Wheeler Counties, Oregon**

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

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

**SUMMARY:** The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to implement ecosystem management projects designed to promote long-term resilient, sustainable watershed conditions. Project guidance is provided by the Ecosystem Analysis of the Wall Watersheds (September 1995). The project area is located on the Heppner Ranger District and lies approximately 25 miles southwest of Heppner, Oregon, within the Wall Creek watershed (subwatersheds 24A-G).

Proposed project activities consist of in-channel fish structure maintenance, hydrologic stability projects (road obliteration/decommissioning, road resurfacing/reconstruction), wildlife enhancement projects, aspen habitat enhancement, noxious weed treatments, range improvements, recreation opportunities, landscape prescribed fire, and restoration of forest stand structure/composition using a variety of silvicultural treatments including commercial timber harvest. The proposed action is designed to reduce risks to ecosystem sustainability, prevent further degradation of forest health, reduce risks of catastrophic wildfire, improve or maintain water quality and aquatic habitat, and provide

economic return to local economies. The proposed projects will be in compliance with the 1990 Land and Resource Management Plan FEIS for the Umatilla National Forest, as amended, which provides overall direction for management of this area.

**DATES:** Written comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received on or before March 31, 1999.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments and suggestions to the Responsible Official, Delanne Ferguson, District Ranger, Heppner Ranger District, P.O. Box 7, Heppner, Oregon 97836.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Charlene Bucha Gentry, Project Team Leader, Heppner Ranger District, Phone: (541) 676-9781.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The decision area contains approximately 42,000 acres within the Umatilla National Forest in Grant, Morrow, and Wheeler Counties, Oregon. It is within the boundary of the Wall watershed which includes Lower, Middle, and Upper Big Wall; Porter; Lower and Upper Wilson; and Indian subwatersheds. The legal description of the decision area is as follows: R.25E. T.6S. sections 24-28 and 32-36; R.25E. T.7S. sections 1-5, 9-15, 23-25, and 36; R.26E. T.6S. sections 16, 19-23, and 26-35; R.26E. T.7S. sections 1-36; R.26E. T.8S. sections 1-6, 8-16, and 24; R.27E. T.7S. sections 13-36; R.27E. T.8S. sections 2-10 and 16-19; and R.28E. T.7S. sections 19, 30, and 31, W.M. surveyed. All proposed activities are outside the boundaries of any roadless or wilderness areas.

Fish habitat projects include maintenance and restoration of in-channel structures. Proposed hydrologic stability projects include 34 miles of road obliteration or decommissioning, 37 miles of road resurfacing, 47 miles of road reconstruction, installation of a culvert to replace a low-water ford (Forest Road 23), and installation of three low-water fords designed for fish passage (concrete approaches with a suspended grate) on Forest Road 23 and 2300100 where they intersect with Big Wall Creek. Aspen habitat enhancement includes removal of encroaching conifers, construction of ungulate-proof fences, prescribed burning, and mechanical root stimulation. Range improvements consist of the construction of barbed wire fencing on three creeks to protect riparian areas. Bull Prairie Reservoir has silted in considerably in the 32 years since its construction. Excavation of three identified areas along the shoreline of the reservoir would remove cattails, deepen the lake shoreline, and enhance