Notices

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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

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 01–103–1]

Veterinary Services; Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comments.

SUMMARY: We are informing the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has prepared an environmental assessment for a proposed study to determine the disappearance rate of bison fetuses in the environment. The environmental assessment documents our review and analysis of environmental impacts associated with the proposed study. We are making this environmental assessment available to the public for review and comment.

DATES: We invite you to comment on the environmental assessment. We will consider all comments we receive that are postmarked, delivered, or e-mailed by December 31, 2001.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by postal mail/commercial delivery or by e-mail. If you use postal mail/commercial delivery, please send four copies of your comment (an original and three copies) to: Docket No. 01–103–1, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3C71, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238. Please state that your comment refers to Docket No. 01–103–1. If you use e-mail, address your comment to *regulations@aphis.usda.gov.* Your comment must be contained in the body of your message; do not send attached files. Please include your name and address in your message and ''Docket No. 01–103–1'' on the subject line.

You may read the environmental assessment and any comments that we receive on the environmental assessment in our reading room. The reading room is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 690–2817 before coming.

APHIS documents published in the **Federal Register**, and related information, including the names of organizations and individuals who have commented on APHIS dockets, are available on the Internet at *http://www.aphis,usda.gov/ppd/rad/webrepor.html.*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Valerie Ragan, Senior Staff Veterinarian, National Animal Health Programs Staff, VS, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 36, Riverdale, MD 20737–1231; (301) 734–6954.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The mission of Veterinary Services (VS) of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is to protect and improve the health, quality, and marketability of domestic animals by preventing, controlling, and/or eliminating animal diseases and monitoring and promoting animal health and productivity.

Brucellosis is a contagious disease that affects animals and humans, caused by bacteria of the genus *Brucella. Brucella abortus* principally affects bison and cattle. In bison and cattle, brucellosis localizes in the reproductive organs and/or the udder, causing abortion in dams as well as systemic effects in males and females. Female cattle infected with brucellosis also suffer infertility and lowered milk production.

Brucellosis is spread when bacteria are shed in milk, aborted fetuses, afterbirth, or other reproductive tract discharges and are ingested by a susceptible animal. Cattle and bison have a tendency to sniff and lick an aborted fetus, which provides an avenue for the disease to spread if *Brucella* is present.

Brucellosis has caused devastating losses to farmers in the United States over the last century. It is estimated that the disease has cost the Federal Government, the States, and the livestock industry billions of dollars in direct losses and efforts to eliminate the disease. APHIS has estimated that if efforts to eradicate the disease were stopped, the costs of producing beef and milk would increase by an estimated $80 million annually in less than 10 years.

Brucellosis infection occurs in bison in Yellowstone National Park. Bison roam wild in Yellowstone National Park, and during winter and spring, some migrate outside of the park onto State and private lands. The prevention of the spread of brucellosis from bison to cattle in and around the park is an issue of concern.

VS, in cooperation with other Federal and State agencies, proposes to conduct an 11-week study in the West Yellowstone and Gardiner areas in Montana starting in March 2002 to determine how long a bison fetus remains in the environment as a potential source of *Brucella* organisms before it deteriorates or is consumed by scavengers. The research on the rate of fetal disappearance is supported in the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Bison Management Plan for the State of Montana and Yellowstone National Park, dated December 20, 2000. Also, the study will comply with step 1 of the Joint Bison Management Plan within the Record of Decision.

To provide the public with documentation of APHIS' review and analysis of the environmental impacts associated with this study, we have prepared an environmental assessment titled, ''Proposed Study for Bison Fetal Disappearance Rate,'' dated November 2001. The environmental assessment provides a basis for our conclusion that the potential impacts to the environment of the proposed study are expected to be insignificant.

The environmental assessment may be viewed on the Internet at *http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/es/vsdocs.html.* You may request paper copies of the environmental assessment from the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT.** Please refer to the title of the environmental assessment when requesting copies. The environmental assessment is also available for review in our reading room

(the location and hours of the reading room are listed under the heading **ADDRESSES** at the beginning of this notice).

The environmental assessment has been prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 27th day of November 2001.

W. Ron DeHaven,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 01–29724 Filed 11–28–01; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Interior Wetlands Environmental Impact Statement; Hiawatha National Forest, Chippewa County, Michigan

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) to analyze and disclose the environmental impacts of proposed land management activities, and corresponding alternatives, within the Interior Wetlands project area. The project is located on the Sault Ste. Marie Ranger District, Hiawatha National Forest, Chippewa County, Michigan, approximately 35 miles southwest of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. The project area is approximately 30,600 acres and management activities are being proposed on less than 15 percent of the area.

Jack pine stands experience a cyclical outbreak of jack pine budworm. Older trees are more susceptible to defoliation which can lead to mortality and dead tops. In the Interior Wetlands project area much of the jack pine is more than 60 years old. The jack pine in the project area experienced budworm defoliation during the 1991/1992 outbreak and is showing some defoliation during the outbreak that began in 2001. The Forest Service is evaluating the options available to develop a more evenly distributed age-class and to improve the vigor of jack pine stands in order to minimize the impacts of budworm defoliation. In addition to proposing jack pine salvage and regeneration in Interior Wetlands, the Forest Service evaluated some other management opportunities within the entire project area to implement the Hiawatha National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, 1986). The proposed action includes salvage and regeneration of jack pine, timber harvesting and regeneration of other species, changes to the transportation system, changes to the old growth system, timber stand improvement projects, and wildlife and fisheries habitat improvement projects.

Overall guidance of land management activities on the Hiawatha National Forest is provided by the Forest Plan. In order to meet the objectives and desired future conditions set forth in the Forest Plan, the following purpose and need has been identified for the Interior Wetlands project area: (1) Reduce the impacts of the jack pine budworm by creating a more evenly distributed age-class structure (which also improves habitat for sandhill crane, merlin, northern harrier, and other species), improving vigor, and increasing growth rates in jack pine stands. (2) Regenerate older aspen and mixed balsam fir/aspen/paper birch stands to maintain these forest types; provide habitat for white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, snowshoe hare, and other species; improve vigor, and increase growth rates. (3) Regenerate older black spruce stands to improve vigor and to increase growth rates. (4) Remove some trees in some jack pine, aspen, balsam fir/aspen/paper birch, northern hardwoods, paper birch, black spruce, red pine, white pine, and cedar to either concentrate growth on the remaining trees or to provide space for new trees to become established. (5) Provide useable wood products to local markets and improve timber age-class distribution, vigor, and growth rates on merchantable stems to ensure a more even flow of wood products in the future. (6) Prepare areas where jack pine and black spruce are being regenerated by reducing the slash and exposing mineral soil for a seedbed. (7) Manage an efficient transportation system through construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and decommissioning of roads. (8) Improve the quality and survival of some white pine stems damaged by white pine weevil and blister rust. (9) Evaluate stands currently in the old growth system and other stands to determine if there is a different arrangement of stands that could provide better existing old growth characteristics and better placement across the landscape. (10) Adjust wildlife opening system by creating openings or maintaining existing openings by removing woody encroachment to provide habitat for sandhill crane, black bear, ruffed grouse, and other species. (11) Improve fish habitat (primarily brook trout) by adding log bank cover and placing spawning gravel. (12) Design projects and/or develop mitigation measures, as appropriate, to minimize impacts to the resources to acceptable levels defined by laws, regulations, or policies.

A roads analysis for the project area will be conducted in conjunction with the EIS. The roads analysis is not a decision document but is necessary to make an informed decision. At a minimum, the roads analysis will identify: needed and unneeded roads; road associated environmental and public safety risks; site-specific priorities and opportunities for road improvements and decommissioning; areas of special sensitivity, unique resource values, or both; and any other information that may be needed to support project-level decisions. Adjacent landowners, citizens groups, State, local, and Tribal governments, and other Federal agencies are invited to comment on the transportation system.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the alternatives. Past, present, and projected activities on National Forest system lands will be considered. The DEIS will disclose the analysis of site-specific mitigation measures and their effectiveness. The DEIS is expected to be filed with the EPA and available for public review by November 2002.

DATES: Comments concerning the proposed action and scope of the analysis should be received within 30 days of this notice to receive timely consideration in the DEIS. A public meeting about this project will be held on December 4, 2001 at 6:30 pm.

ADDRESSES: Mail written comments to Stevan J. Christiansen, District Ranger, St. Ignace and Sault Ste. Marie Ranger Districts, 1798 West US–2, St. Ignace, MI 49781. The public meeting for this project will be held at the Trout Lake Town Hall on the main street of Trout Lake (M–123).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Martha Sjogren, Team Leader, St. Ignace Ranger District. Phone: (906) 643–7900 ext. 133. Email: *msjogren@fs.fed.us.*

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The information presented in this notice is included to help the reviewer determine if they are interested in or potentially affected by the proposed land management activities. The information