

Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 61, No. 201

Wednesday, October 16, 1996

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

Notice of the Preparation of the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment and the Beginning of Forest Plan Revision Efforts for the Ouachita, Ozark-St. Francis, and Mark Twain National Forests

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: This Notice announces the U.S. Forest Service's participation in the preparation of the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment (OOHA). The Assessment is being prepared by the Southern and Eastern Regions of the National Forest System, the Southern Research Station, and the North Central Forest Experiment Station, in cooperation with other Federal and State agencies, in order to compile information about regional conditions and trends relevant to upcoming revisions of the land and resource management plans of three National Forests. Assessment findings will help establish the need for any changes in National Forest land and resource management plans and, possibly, land management plans of some other public lands in the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands. National Forest lands within the study area include those of the Ouachita, Ozark-St. Francis, and Mark Twain National Forests, totalling nearly 4.5 million acres. Other federal lands within the assessment area include National Park Service lands (Hot Springs National Park, the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Buffalo National River, and several smaller units); more than 20 reservoirs managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, including Lake Ouachita, Greers Ferry Lake, Eufala Lake, Bull Shoals Lake, and Table Rock Lake; and at least six National Wildlife Refuges administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

State Parks, natural areas, and wildlife management areas are found in each of the three states—Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma—in the assessment area. The majority of the land within the analysis area is in private ownership of many types and sizes. Several forest product companies have expansive holdings that are managed primarily for timber production.

This Notice also announces the beginning of efforts to revise the Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) for the Ouachita, Ozark-St. Francis, and Mark Twain National Forests. This is not the "Notice of Intent" (NOI) for the Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) that will accompany the Revised Forest Plans. Those NOIs will be issued at a later date.

The Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment will support and facilitate land and resource management decisions to be made in Forest Plan revisions. As the National Forests are providing information for the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment, they will also be conducting local efforts to complete each National Forest's Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS).

The Assessment will be used to help develop each National Forest's "Need for Change" section in the AMS. This information will then be used to publish the NOIs to prepare the Environmental Impact Statements, which will begin the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes associated with each Forest Plan revision.

Public involvement is critical throughout these processes and will be requested and accepted continually throughout these efforts. Formal public involvement with the Forest Plan revision efforts will also be conducted through "Scoping", following the issuance of the National Forests' NOIs.

DATES: The Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment is scheduled to be completed by January 1998.

The Ouachita, Ozark-St. Francis, and the Mark Twain National Forests are scheduled to complete the drafts of their Analyses of the Management Situation by mid-1998. During this same time period, these Forests are scheduled to issue NOIs to Prepare Environmental Impact Statements for Revised Forest Plans.

ADDRESSES: Requests for information, and comments concerning this Notice can be sent to Team Leader, Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment, USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 1270, Hot Springs, Arkansas 71902.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Preparation of the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessments

The Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment includes approximately 45 million acres within the states of Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Federal lands make up less than 15 percent of the area; but their importance for recreation, plant and animal diversity, forest cover, local economic development, wood products, water and minerals is substantial. The region as a whole is undergoing fairly rapid change, marked by population growth in many counties; market shifts; increased pressures on timber, water, mineral, and recreational resources; expanding transportation networks; and changing agricultural and silvicultural practices. Future decisions about public land management in the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands must be made within this context of social, economic, and environmental change. The Assessment will provide a synthesis of available information, including databases, maps, and research findings, that supports an interagency approach to ecosystem management on federal lands in the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands area.

Collection of existing broad-scale data concerning the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands is organized around three "themes"—(1) Social and Economic (Human Dimensions)—which includes social conditions and trends, economic conditions and trends, attitudes and values, and roadless areas and wilderness; (2) Terrestrial—which includes the Health of Forest Ecosystems, and Plant and Animal Resources; and (3) Aquatic/Atmospheric—which includes the present status and trends in water and air quality.

Public comment on the OOHA process began with a meeting of the Ouachita National Forest's Ecosystem Management Advisory Committee in Little Rock, Arkansas, March 28, 1996, and another meeting of the committee in Fort Smith, Arkansas, May 17, 1996. A public announcement and related press notice concerning the Assessment were

distributed on July 15, 1996. As the Assessment progresses, continued public involvement will be facilitated through additional meetings, newsletters, and electronic media.

2. Beginning of the Forest Plan Revision Efforts for the Ouachita, Ozark-St. Francis, and Mark Twain National Forests

This Notice announces that the Ouachita, Ozark-St. Francis, and Mark Twain National Forests have already started or are beginning efforts to revise their Forest Plans. These Forests are each in the very early stages of preparing an AMS, one of the first steps in the revision process. This step includes updating resource inventories, defining the current situation, estimating supply capabilities and resource demands, and determining the "Need for Change" (36 CFR 219.12(e)(5)).

3. Public Involvement in Developing the "Need for Change" in an AMS

Determining the concerns and expectations of National Forest constituents and getting public input on how well current Forest Plans are working, or not working, are critical elements of describing the "need to change" a Forest Plan. An integral part of determining the need for change is public involvement. Each of the National Forests described above either have already, or will soon contact its interested publics to solicit their participation in this step of the Forest Plan revision process.

4. Relationship Between the AMS and a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement

In the past, a "Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement" was issued at the beginning of the forest planning process, including before the development of the AMS.

This time, we are first defining the current situation and an initial "need for change" in a Draft AMS, and then issuing a NOI prior to developing alternatives. This will allow us to incorporate a more definable "Proposed Action" and "Purpose and Need" into our NOIs, which will begin the formal NEPA process of preparing the EISs that will accompany the Revised Forest Plans.

5. Relationship Between the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment and the Process for Revising the Forest Plans for Each National Forest

Some individuals may be concerned that the Ozark/Ouachita Assessment will "delay" revising Forest Plans in the

Ozark/Ouachita Highlands. However, the OOHA is being conducted concurrently, and in support of, the Forest Plan revisions.

Many of the information needs for the Forest AMSs and for the OOHA are the same. The Assessment will support the revision of the Forest Plans by determining how the lands, resources, people and management of the National Forests interrelate within the larger context of the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Area. The OOHA, however, will not be a "decision document" and it will not involve the NEPA process. As broad-scale issues are identified and addressed at the sub-regional level in the Assessment, the individual National Forest's role in resolving those broad-scale issues will become a part of the "need for change" at the Forest level.

6. Issuing the Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS

The National Forests identified above will issue their NOI once they have developed the "Need for Change" section of their respective Draft AMSs. The Draft AMSs are scheduled to be completed by mid-1998; NOIs are also scheduled to be issued during this same time period.

Each NOI will include a description of a preliminary "Proposed Action", based on the "Need for Change" analysis in the Draft AMS, the preliminary issues, and some preliminary alternatives. Scoping to receive public comments on the preliminary proposed action, issues and preliminary alternatives will begin following the publication of the NOIs. These public comments will be used to further refine the "Proposed Action", the preliminary issues and the preliminary alternatives, to possibly identify additional alternatives, and to complete the AMS and the "Need for Change."

7. The Responsible Official

The Responsible Official for this notice is Bill Pell, Assessment Team Leader, USDA Forest Service, 100 Reserve Street, Box 1270, Federal Building, Hot Springs, Arkansas 71902.

Dated: October 9, 1996.

Bill Pell,

Assessment Team Leader.

[FR Doc. 96-26503 Filed 10-15-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Southwest Oregon Provincial Interagency Executive Committee (PIEC), Advisory Committee

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Southwest Oregon PIEC Advisory Committee will meet on October 24, 1996 at Brookings Inn, Brookings, Oregon. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. and continue until 4:15 p.m. Agenda items to be covered include: (1) Local area issues presentation; (2) Guidelines for new working groups; (3) Grazing committee report; (4) Year-end review of Province Advisory Committee work, and (5) Public comments. All Province Advisory committee meetings are open to the public. Interested citizens are encouraged to attend.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Direct questions regarding this meeting to Kurt Austermann, Province Advisory Committee staff, USDI, Medford District, Bureau of Land Management, 3040 Biddle Rd., Medford, Oregon 97504, phone 541-770-2200.

Dated: October 8, 1996.

Charles J. Anderson,

Acting Forest Supervisor, Designated Federal Official.

[FR Doc. 96-26444 Filed 10-15-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Advisory Committee Meeting; Cancellation

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Natural Resources Conservation Service is cancelling the meeting of the Task Force on Agricultural Air Quality scheduled for October 25, 1996, to provide time to complete the selection process for Task Force membership. A rescheduling of this meeting will be announced in the Federal Register in approximately 90 days under Notices. The original meeting was announced in the Federal Register of October 7, 1996 (61 FR 52406).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

George Bluhm, University of California, Land, Air, Water Resources, 151 Hoagland Hall, Davis, CA 95616-6827. Telephone (916) 752-1018, fax (916) 752-1552.

Dated: October 9, 1996

Richard L. Duesterhaus,

Deputy Chief, Science and Technology.

[FR Doc. 96-26478 Filed 10-15-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3014-16-P