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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

Economic Research Service

Notice of Extension of a Currently Approved Information Collection

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces an extension, by the Economic Research Service (ERS), of a currently approved information collection in support of the annual ERS report on agricultural real estate taxes.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received on or before February 26, 1997 to be assured of consideration.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS: Contact Fred Hoff, Associate Director, Information Services Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1301 New York Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20005-4788, (202) 219-0511.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Agricultural Real Estate Taxes.
OMB Number: 0536-0002.

Expiration Date of Approval: March 31, 1997.

Type of Request: Extension of currently approved annual information collection.

Abstract: Information on agricultural real estate taxes levied has been collected annually by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) since before 1938, when the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 officially directed that USDA collect such information. The information is collected annually via a mail questionnaire. The 1997 questionnaire is scheduled to be mailed in July. This information is used to calculate parity price indexes; estimate the changes in taxes; compare property taxes paid by farmers and ranchers among the States; and study farm and ranch costs, prices,

and income. It is also the basis for the USDA's annual farm and ranch real estate tax series, which summarize agricultural real estate taxes in terms of total taxes, taxes per acre, and taxes per \$100 of market value for each State. All requested information is collected annually from tax assessors on a simple one-page questionnaire enclosed with a postage-paid return envelope and a summary of the previous years results.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 50 minutes per response.

Respondents: Tax assessors in each of approximately 4,200 jurisdictions with agricultural land, usually counties.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 2,500.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 1.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 2,083 hours.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Kenneth Krupa, Natural Resources and Environment Division, ERS, (202) 219-0853.

COMMENTS: Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to: Fred Hoff, Associate Director, Information Services Division, Rm 224C, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1301 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005-4788, (202) 219-0511.

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Signed at Washington, DC, December 16, 1996.

Susan Offutt,

Administrator, Economic Research Service.

[FR Doc. 96-32452 Filed 12-20-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-18-M

Forest Service

Tansy Ragwort Control Project, Tally Lake Ranger District, Flathead National Forest, Flathead and Lincoln Counties, State of Montana

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental analysis to disclose the environmental effects of a variety of actions to control tansy ragwort, a non-native noxious weed, by preventing existing populations from producing seed in 1997 and beyond. These actions include aerial application and hand-spraying of herbicides, hand-pulling of individual plants, restriction of motorized travel on some sections of Forest Service roads, introduction of biological control agents, and intensive monitoring to determine the effectiveness of these actions and to provide up-to-date information on the status of the infestation.

An EIS is planned because aerial application of chemicals is classified as an action requiring the preparation of an EIS by Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 Chapter 20.6 (*Classes of Actions Requiring Environmental Impact Statements*). Considering the emergency situation of the current tansy ragwort infestation and the need to take action by early summer of 1997, the Flathead National Forest is exploring alternatives to what is outlined in the Forest Service Handbook, such as classifying aerial spraying as an emergency under 40 CFR 1506.11. We anticipate that tansy ragwort will spread and cause significant environmental effects if not action is taken beginning in early summer of 1997.

The project area is located in and near the Little Wolf Fire area approximately 21 air miles southwest of Whitefish, Montana.

The need for this proposal stems from a large infestation (approximately 1,500 acres) of tansy ragwort that was identified on the Tally Lake Ranger

District in the summer of 1996. If action is not taken in 1997, tansy ragwort is likely to spread to adjacent national forest and private lands and would have severe implications for livestock, agricultural activities, and native vegetation in northwestern Montana and possibly beyond. Tansy ragwort is poisonous to livestock and outcompetes native vegetation, which would adversely affect wildlife habitat. Tansy ragwort also has the potential to delay the establishment and/or reduce the growth of conifer seedlings within harvest units.

The purpose of this project is to control tansy ragwort by preventing tansy ragwort plants on the Tally Lake Ranger District from producing seed in 1997 and for as many years beyond 1997 as high number of tansy ragwort plants are detected on the district. These efforts will help prevent the spread of tansy ragwort to currently uninfested national forest and private lands and may eventually lead to long-term eradication of tansy ragwort on the Tally Lake Ranger District.

The Proposed Action consists of the following: aerial application of herbicide from a helicopter, application of herbicides with ground-based equipment, hand-pulling of tansy ragwort plants, introduction of biological control agents, restriction of motorized vehicles on some Forest Service roads, and continuation of intensive monitoring of tansy ragwort populations.

This Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS initiates the public scoping process. The Forest Service is seeking information and comments from federal, state, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may now be interested in or affected by the Proposed Action. These comments will be used in preparing the Draft EIS.

DATES: At this time, it is anticipated that a Draft EIS will be available by March, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments and suggestions or a request to be placed on the project mailing list to Jane Kollmeyer, District Ranger, Tally Lake Ranger District, 1335 Highway 93 West Whitefish, MT 59937.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jane Kollmeyer, Tally Lake District Ranger, (406) 862-2508.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Summary of the Current Infestation

The need for this proposal results from an infestation of tansy ragwort within and near the Little Wolf Fire area on the Tally Lake Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest, Flathead

County, Montana. Tansy ragwort is an aggressive non-native plant new to Montana that Flathead County will soon list as a noxious weed. The only other tansy ragwort infestation in Montana is less than 20 acres on private land in Mineral County near St. Regis. Small numbers of tansy ragwort plants were discovered on the Tally Lake Ranger District in 1993, and some of these plants were removed by hand pulling. However, tansy ragwort seeds remain viable in the soil for 15-30 years, so that species was not eradicated from the area.

The Little Wolf Fire of 1994 (approximately 15,000 acres) created ideal seedbed conditions for tansy ragwort, and human activity in the area may have contributed to its spread. Intensive field surveys for tansy ragwort began in the summer of 1996 and indicate that tansy ragwort currently occurs on approximately 1,500 acres in and near the Little Wolf Fire area on the Tally Lake Ranger District and in small "spot infestation sites" as far as seven miles from the fire perimeter. Tansy ragwort has not yet been found on nearby private agricultural lands in Star Meadows or the Flathead Valley.

Action is needed to prevent tansy ragwort from producing seed in 1997 and beyond. This would reduce the possibility that tansy ragwort will spread to private agricultural lands and would contribute towards the long-term goal of complete eradication of tansy ragwort from the Tally Lake Ranger District.

Potential Effects if the Infestation Spreads

Unless action is taken in 1997, noxious weed experts for both the Flathead National Forest, Flathead County, and the State of Montana expect that the acres infested by tansy ragwort will increase dramatically. Each tansy ragwort plant produces up to 150,000 seeds that may remain viable in the soil for 15-30 years. The plant would likely spread to adjacent national forest and private lands and would have severe implications for livestock, agricultural activities, and native vegetation in northwestern Montana—and possibly beyond.

If tansy ragwort spreads to private lands, it would likely infest pastureland for cattle, horses, and pigs, which are susceptible to tansy ragwort poisoning. These animals can die of liver failure after cumulatively ingesting tansy ragwort in amounts between 3-7 percent of their body weight. If tansy ragwort spreads to nearby private agricultural lands such as the Flathead Valley, it could contaminate hay fields,

which could lead to restrictions on hay exports. Also, this extremely aggressive plant could displace native vegetation important for wildlife forage as well as reduce the diversity of native vegetation. Tansy ragwort also has the potential to delay the establishment and/or reduce the growth of conifer seedlings within harvest units.

Proposed Actions for the Tansy Ragwort Control Project

The Proposed Action involves a variety of management activities designed to control tansy ragwort on the Tally Lake Ranger District by preventing existing populations from producing seed in 1997 and for as many years as high numbers of this plant are detected on the district. After initial evaluation of their effectiveness, the Interdisciplinary Planning Team considers these actions to be most likely to prevent tansy ragwort within currently infested areas from producing seed in 1997 and beyond. If seed production is prevented, tansy ragwort is not likely to spread to uninfested areas. The components of the Proposed Action have been designed to comply with applicable laws and regulations.

Aerial Spraying of 2,4-D (amine formulation) or Clopyralid Herbicide on Areas with Large, Continuous Populations

The Proposed Action involves applications of the herbicide 2,4-D (amine formulation) or clopyralid from a helicopter by a pilot licensed to apply herbicides. Approximately 1,450 acres would be sprayed with 2,4-D or clopyralid within the Little Wolf Fire area perimeter that are heavily infested with continuous populations of tansy ragwort. Either herbicide would be applied in 1997 and 1998 in both the early summer (between June 1 and July 15) and the fall (after mid-August). If monitoring in 1998 reveals that an unacceptably high number of tansy ragwort plants remain, aerial spraying may be used in 1999 and possibly in the year 2000. However, expectations are that aerial spraying in 1997 and 1998 would dramatically decrease the numbers of tansy ragwort, and aerial spraying beyond 1998 would not likely be needed.

The herbicides 2,4-D and clopyralid were chosen for aerial application because they meet EPA guidelines for application on the specific lands infested, considering such factors as soil types and location of streams and wetlands. Research on 2,4-D and clopyralid outlines acceptable application rates and expected environmental effects. The application

rate and specific lands proposed for treatment with 2,4-D or clopyralid are within guidelines outlined by the EPA.

Hand-Spraying of Herbicides Within Spot Infestation Sites

Many "spot infestation sites" exist outside large continuous areas of tansy ragwort within the fire perimeter. These spots total approximately 50 acres. Field crews licensed to apply herbicides would spray individual tansy ragwort plants within these spot areas with the appropriate herbicide for the site, meeting EPA label restrictions for applying these herbicides. Backpack spray units and pumps mounted on all-terrain vehicles would be used within these spot infestation sites.

The generic names of the four herbicides that would be considered for use in the spot infestation sites are (1) clopyralid, (2) picloram, (3) 2,4-D (amine formulation), and (4) a mixture of dicamba and 2,4-D (amine formulation). One of these four herbicides would be chosen based on an evaluation of site factors such as soil type, depth of water table, proximity to streams, and amount of organic matter.

Hand-Pulling of Tansy Ragwort Plants

If tansy ragwort occurs on sites where aerial or hand-spraying of herbicides would violate EPA restrictions for those herbicides and cause unacceptable environmental risk, tansy ragwort plants would be hand-pulled to prevent them from producing seed.

Introduction of Biological Control Agents

The Proposed Action involves introduction on the Tally Lake Ranger District of three insect species that have been previously used in Oregon to reduce tansy ragwort infestations. These species do not occur naturally in northwestern Montana, but they have been approved for use in northwestern Montana as possible biological control agents of tansy ragwort. They are the cinnabar moth [*Tyria jacobaeae* (L)], the tansy ragwort flea beetle [*Longitarsus jacobaeae* (Waterhouse)], and the ragwort seed fly [*Botanophila seneciella* (Meade)].

The currently available ecotypes of these three insect species performed well in the coastal climate of western Oregon where they were used in the 1980s to control large tansy ragwort infestations in the Willamette Valley. The available ecotypes are not expected to perform as well in the colder continental climate of northwestern Montana. However, introduction of these three species is proposed because they are approved for use as biological

control agents, are readily available, and are relatively low-cost.

Road Management Actions

Motorized vehicular travel would be restricted on some Forest Service roads to prevent the spread of tansy ragwort seeds to currently uninfested areas.

Intensive Monitoring

Field crews would be deployed in the snow-free seasons of 1997 through approximately 2005 to determine the status of the tansy ragwort infestation and the success of control measures taken.

Decision to be Made

The decision to be made is what, if anything, should be done in the vicinity of the Little Wolf Fire area to prevent tansy ragwort plants from producing seed in 1997 and for as many years as high numbers of tansy ragwort plants are identified on the Tally Lake Ranger District.

Preliminary Issues as Identified by Internal Scoping

This Notice to Prepare an EIS is the first step in the public scoping process; to date, virtually all scoping has occurred only within the Forest Services. Based on internal scoping, the following preliminary issues have been identified:

- (1) Effects of herbicides on aquatic organisms.
- (2) Effects of herbicides on non-target plants such as conifers, deciduous trees and shrubs, broadleaf forbs, and rare plants.
- (3) Effects of restrictions on motorized use of Forest Service roads by both the public and Forest Service personnel.
- (4) Monitoring in early 1997 may reveal a dramatic increase in the acres infested with tansy ragwort, and our site-specific proposal may not encompass enough of these infested acres to be an effective control action.

No alternatives responding to these preliminary issues have been developed at this time.

The EIS and Its Comment Period

The EIS will document the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the alternatives. Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions on both private and national forest lands will be considered. The EIS will disclose the site-specific features that reduce or eliminate potential environmental impacts.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and be available for public review in March, 1997. At that time, the

EPA will publish a notice of availability of the Draft EIS in the Federal Register. The public comment period on the Draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA's notice of availability appears in the Federal Register.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice at this early stage because 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. NRDA*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *Wisconsin Heritage, 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 the agency 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 Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.)

Following this comment period, the comments received will be analyzed, considered, and responded to by the Forest Service in the final environmental impact statements (FEIS). The FEIS is scheduled to be completed by June, 1997. Jane Kollmeyer, Tally Lake District Ranger, 1335 Highway 93 West, Whitefish, MT 59937 is the responsible official for the preparation of the EIS and will make a decision regarding this proposal considering the comments and responses, environmental consequences

discussed in the FEIS, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The decision and rationale for the decision will be documented in a Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to appeal under applicable Forest Service regulations. Notice is hereby given that we are requesting from the Chief of the Forest Service that the proposed 1997 aerial application of herbicides be considered a response to an emergency situation and this component of the Proposed Action should not be subject to a stay as described in 36 CFR 215.10(d).

Dated: December 17, 1996.

Jane Kollmeyer,

*District Ranger, Tally Lake Ranger District,
Flathead National Forest.*

[FR Doc. 96-32480 Filed 12-20-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 0870-00-M

Canal Hoya Timber Sale; Stikine Area Tongass National Forest Petersburg, Alaska; Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement

The Department of Agriculture, Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Canal Hoya Timber Sale on the Wrangell Ranger District.

The proposed action would harvest approximately 20 MMBF of timber on about 1000 acres in both the Canal and Hoya Creek drainages using a variety of harvest methods that leave various densities of trees in harvested areas. Two log transfer sites would be constructed, one near Canal Creek and another east of Hoya Creek. The log transfer sites could utilize a floating, removable structure. Both helicopter and cable log yarding systems would be utilized and depend on approximately 12 miles of road to be constructed in both drainages.

The purpose and need for this project is to provide approximately 20 MMBF of timber from suitable timber lands to assist in providing a continuous wood supply to meet society's needs. Based on Forest Plan direction, a preliminary analysis suggests that timber could be harvested in the project area on up to 1000 acres to provide approximately 20 million board feet using a variety of harvest methods and silvicultural techniques across the landscape that promote industrial wood production and minimize the visibility of harvest units.

The desired landscape condition for this area is a multi-aged, multi-structured forest landscape which meets some of the requirements of wildlife and provides for long-term timber production and scenery. This is

consistent with the Tongass Land Management Plan direction for lands within the project area. Since it is anticipated that a new revision of the Tongass Land Management Plan will be signed during this planning process, we will strive to be consistent with the goals and objectives for the existing plan and the revised plan in the Environmental Impact Statement for the Canal Hoya timber sale.

A range of alternatives to the proposed action will be considered, which will respond in various ways to environmental issues. One of these alternatives will not harvest the area. Other alternatives will consider various levels of harvest in Hoya Creek, Canal Creek or both, along with alternative road locations and mitigation measures.

The decision required to be made is: (1) if, where and how much timber harvest should occur in the Canal Hoya area, and if so, (2) where should road and log transfer facility development occur to facilitate harvest and, (3) what mitigation measures and monitoring will be implemented.

Federal, State, and local agencies, potential contractors, and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in, or affected by, the decision are invited to participate in the scoping process. This process will include:

1. Identification of potential issues.
2. Identification of issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Determination of potential cooperating agencies and assignment of responsibility.
4. Examination of various alternatives.

The Forest Supervisor will hold public meetings during the planning process but these meetings have not been scheduled at this time. There will be frequent correspondence with individual persons who indicate an interest in this project by responding to initial scoping letters and/or the Stikine Area Project Schedule which is published quarterly.

The analysis is expected to take approximately 5 months. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement should be available for public review by April of 1997. The Final Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled to be completed by September 1997.

Abigail R. Kimbell, Forest Supervisor, Stikine Area, Tongass National Forest, is the responsible official.

Written comments, suggestions or questions concerning the analysis and Environmental Impact Statement should be sent to Scott Posner/John Stevens, ID Team Leaders, Wrangell Ranger District, Stikine Area, Tongass National Forest,

P.O. Box 51 Wrangell, Alaska, 99929, phone (907) 874-2323.

Dated: December 9, 1996.

Abigail R. Kimbell,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 96-32453 Filed 12-20-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Maximum Portion of Guarantee Authority Available for Fiscal Year 1996-97

AGENCY: Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: As set forth in the final rule under 7 CFR subpart B of part 4279, effective on December 23, 1996, each fiscal year the Agency shall establish a limit on the maximum portion of guarantee authority available for that fiscal year that may be used to guarantee loans with a guarantee fee of 1 percent and/or guaranteed loans with a guarantee percentage exceeding 80 percent.

Allowing the guarantee fee to be reduced to 1 percent and/or exceeding the 80 percent guarantee on certain guaranteed loans that meet the conditions set forth in subpart B of part 4279 will allow for the targeting of projects in rural communities that remain persistently poor, experience long-term population decline and job deterioration, and other related criteria.

Not more than 7 percent of the Agency guarantee authority will be reserved for loan requests with a guarantee fee of 1 percent, and not more than 15 percent of the Agency guarantee authority will be reserved for guaranteed loan requests with a guarantee percentage exceeding 80 percent. Once the above quarterly limits have been reached, all additional loans guaranteed during the remainder of that quarter will require a 2 percent guarantee fee and not exceed an 80 percent guarantee limit.

Written requests by the Rural Development State Office for approval of a guaranteed loan with a 1 percent guarantee fee and/or a guaranteed loan exceeding 80 percent must be forwarded to the National Office, Attn: Director, Business Programs Processing Division, for review and consideration prior to obligation of the guaranteed loan. The Administrator will provide a written response to the State Office confirming approval or disapproval of the request.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kenneth E. Hennings, Senior Loan Specialist, Business Programs