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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

Forest Service

Katka Peak Environmental Impact Statement Supplement, Idaho Panhandle National Forests, Boundary County, ID

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare a supplement to the Katka Peak environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service, will prepare a supplement to Katka Peak Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The notice of intent for the EIS was published in volume 57, number 137 of the Federal Register, pages 31491 through 31493 on July 16, 1992. This supplement will disclose environmental effects of a timber salvage and ecosystem rehabilitation project in the Katka Peak analysis area. A portion of the proposed activities are within the Katka Peak Roadless Area number 1-157.

The project area is approximately 7 air miles southeast of the community of Bonners Ferry. It is in the northwest portion of the Cabinet Mountains, Idaho Panhandle National Forests, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, Boundary County, Idaho. There are approximately 28,827 acres of National Forest lands within the analysis area. It includes portions of Township 61 North, Ranges 1, 2 and 3 East, and Township 60 North, Range 2 East, Boise Meridian, Boundary County, Idaho.

The decision to be made is to the extent, if anything, of activities to be accomplished for salvage, thinning, prescribed burning, watershed and fisheries habitat improvement and road reconditioning within the project area. Decisions concerning road closures for grizzly bear security habitat would affect only roads within the Boulder Bear Management Unit.

The purpose of the project is four-fold. It is to: salvage dead and dying timber; to trend productive and stagnating poletimber, sawtimber and plantation stands towards historical stocking levels and species composition; reduce the stocking of small diameter Douglas-fir, larch and other species that are invading historical dry site ponderosa pine habitat types; and, remove seed trees in previous harvest units which are now certified as regenerated.

The items covered by the 1994 Katka Peak record of decision to implement Alternative 7c are outside the scope of this analysis. This supplement will not result in any changes to the existing timber sales and related activities as analyzed and disclosed in the Katka Peak Final EIS and ROD.

This supplement to the EIS is necessary under 40 CFR 1502.9(c) due to significant new circumstances and information obtained since the Katka Peak Final EIS was completed. One significant new circumstance is the expanding market for commercial utilization of trees ranging in size from 4 to 7 inches in diameter at breast height. These small trees are increasingly in demand for pulp, posts and poles. Also, dead timber is being utilized in larger quantities for houselogs. These growing markets now make it feasible to use commercial forest product sales to treat timber stands that were designated for "deferred treatment" in the Katka Peak Final EIS and Record of Decision.

The scientific assessment for the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) has provided significant new information relevant to the project area. This area lies within the Northern Glaciated Mountains Region described in the ICBEMP assessment area. Specific recommendations for this region indicate a need to rehabilitate overstocked stands and to enhance dry site ponderosa pine habitat types by such techniques as mechanical stocking control (thinning) and prescribed fire.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions on the proposed management activities or requests to be placed on the public involvement list should be submitted on or before February 14, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments, suggestions or requests to District

Ranger, ATTN: Katka Peak Supplemental EIS (Kit Katkee Salvage Project), Bonners Ferry Ranger District, Route 4 Box 4860, Bonners Ferry, Idaho 83805-9764.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Barry Wynsma, Project Leader, phone (208) 267-5561.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Katka Peak Supplemental EIS (Kit Katkee Salvage Project) was initiated in October of 1995 pursuant to procedures in Section 2001 of Public Law 104-19 (Pub.L. 104-19). New direction issued by Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas and Department of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman on July 2, 1996 resulted in this project being subject to standard NEPA procedures for supplements to environmental impact statements. This project is no longer subject to Pub.L. 104-19 procedures because the estimated total volume of live timber proposed for removal in stocking reduction treatments is expected to exceed 25 percent, which is the upper limit for a salvage sale under Pub.L. 104-19.

This project-level EIS supplement incorporates the Katka Peak Final EIS and Record of Decision (July 12, 1994) and tiers to the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and Final EIS (September, 1987). The Forest Plan provides overall guidance of all land management activities on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

Use of prescribed fire, timber harvest, road closures, road reconstruction and obliteration, water quality improvement and instream fish habitat structures, and access management are all being considered to achieve or trend toward the desired condition.

Proposed salvage and ecosystem rehabilitation management activities would take place in timber stands with the highest treatment needs and with low potential for producing and delivering sediment to streams. Thinning treatments would remove trees between 4 and 9 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh). Activities would include: Approximately 1,800 acres of roundwood thinning (trees less than 7 inches dbh), approximately 3,800 acres of understory removal treatments, including salvage of dead/down timber; approximately 135 acres of final removal of seed trees in certified

regenerated harvest units (keeping reserve trees for wildlife); approximately 730 acres of plantations scheduled for precommercial thinning; approximately 340 acres of dry site ponderosa pine habitat enhancement treatments, using both mechanical methods and prescribed fire; approximately 11 water quality/fisheries improvement projects, mostly road stabilization on existing roads; and, access management to meet security habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species.

The proposal includes precommercial thinning and prescribed fire treatments in the Katka Peak Roadless Area (1–157). Approximately 329 acres of dry-site ponderosa pine habitat would be underburned and 217 acres of overstocked pole-sized timber stands would be precommercially thinned. There would not be any use of heavy equipment, no road construction, and no removal of forest products within the roadless area.

These proposed actions are being considered together because they represent either connected, similar, or cumulative actions as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.25).

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests Forest Plan provides the guidance for management of activities through goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area directions. The proposed salvage and ecosystem rehabilitation management activities are within Forest Plan designated management Areas 2 and 19. These areas can be described briefly as follows:

Management Area 2—Manage identified grizzly bear habitat to support a recovered grizzly bear population while providing for long-term growth and production of commercially valuable wood products.

Management Area 19—Manage for a semi-primitive recreation setting while providing low levels of timber harvest with minimum standard roads.

The Forest Service will consider two alternatives to the proposed action. One alternative will be “No Action” in which none of the proposed activities would be implemented. Another alternative will consider the effects of treating all stands that have a component of dead timber, that are overstocked, that are in ponderosa pine habitat that currently do not exhibit the historical species and stocking levels of this habitat type, or have final removal needs.

The supplement to the Katka Peak Final EIS will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental

effects of the proposed action and alternatives. Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities on both private and National Forest lands will be considered. Analysis of site-specific mitigation measures and their effectiveness will be disclosed.

Public participation is an important part of the analysis and decisionmaking process. Scoping began with publication of the proposed project in the October 1995 IPNF NEPA Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions and through newspaper articles and letters to interested persons. The public is encouraged to visit with Forest Service officials at any time during the analysis and prior to the decision.

The following preliminary issues have been identified at this time:

1. How will access management and project timing affect habitat and security needs for Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive and Management Indicator species?

2. How will the fisheries and water quality in the project area be protected, maintained, or improved?

3. What timber stands have stocking levels and species compositions that are above and outside of their historic range of variability? Also, what stands are experiencing or at risk of unacceptably high levels of insect and disease activity? In relation to stands experiencing high levels of tree mortality, what are the fuel loading concerns and are the stands in need of fuels reduction?

4. How will the project contribute to maintaining the customary flow of goods and services to communities?

5. How will the project affect the Katka Peak Roadless Area?

6. How will the visual resource be affected by the project?

7. How will the project protect sensitive plant species?

8. How will the project protect cultural resources?

This list may be expanded, verified or modified based on continuing public participation in this project.

The Draft Supplement to the Katka Peak Final EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review in February of 1997. At that time, EPA will publish a Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft Supplemental EIS in the Federal Register. The comment period on the Draft Supplemental EIS will end 45 days from the date the NOA appears in the Federal Register. It is very important that those interested in the management of the Katka Peak area participate at that time. To be most helpful, comments on the Draft

Supplemental EIS should be as site- and project-specific as possible and relate only to proposals made in the EIS supplement. The Final Supplemental EIS is anticipated to be completed by April, 1997.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice 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 and agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. versus 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 versus Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. versus 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 it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the final supplement to the Katka Peak Final EIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the draft supplement to the Final EIS should be as specific as possible. 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.

It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft supplement. Comments may also address the adequacy of the draft supplement or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the supplement.

I am the responsible official for this supplement to the environmental impact statement.

Dated: December 26, 1996.

Elaine J. Zieroth,
District Ranger, Bonners Ferry Ranger District.
[FR Doc. 97–887 Filed 1–14–97; 8:45 am]

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