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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

Sawtooth Ridge Trail and Improvement Project, Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest, Okanogan County, WA

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Sawtooth Ridge Trail and Improvement Project. The proposed action is to develop new trails, improve existing trails, and improve campgrounds and other areas to provide a diverse network of trails for motorized and non-motorized trail use and protect resources in the Sawtooth non-wilderness backcountry.

The EIS will develop and evaluate a range of alternatives for providing motorized and non-motorized trails and access within the analysis area. The alternatives will include the no-action alternative, involving no change in current management, and no construction of new trails or improvement of existing trails, and additional alternatives in response to issues identified during the scoping process.

To date, a number of issues have been identified. The major issues focus on the following: on congestion at Horsehead Pass from Eagle Lake to Boiling Lake; conflicts between specific user groups; intrusion of recreationists into remote wildlife habitat within the late successional reserve (LSR); damage to riparian areas, stream banks, wet meadows, and other sensitive areas; lack of links between trailheads for motorcycles; and lack of trailhead and campground facilities to meet user needs.

This EIS will be consistent with and tier to the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource

Management Plans (Forest Plan) and the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (Northwest Forest Plan).

The agency invites written comments on this project. In addition, the agency gives notice of this analysis so that interested and affected people are aware of how they may participate and contribute to the decision making process.

DATE: Comment concerning this proposal must be received by January 30, 1998.

ADDRESS: Submit written comments and suggestions to Margi Gromek, Writer/Editor, Chelan Ranger District, 428 West Woodin Avenue, Chelan, Washington 98816.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Direct questions concerning proposed action and environmental analysis to Jim Archambeault, Project Coordinator, Methow Valley Ranger District, P.O. Box 188, Twisp, Washington 98856, phone 509-997-9738, or Margi Gromek, Writer/Editor, Chelan Ranger District, 428 West Woodin Avenue, Chelan, Washington 98816, phone 509-682-2576.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The purpose of this project is to provide trails and facilities for diverse motorized and non-motorized use in a mostly sub-alpine, semi-primitive recreation setting in the 77,000 acre Sawtooth non-wilderness backcountry. The need for the project is shown by: increasing use by all user groups in the area; conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users; commitments made in the Forest Plan to provide motorized, sub-alpine, semi-primitive recreation in the area; and concerns about soil and aquatic resources, particularly in LSRs and riparian areas.

The proposed action includes the following activities:

- Reduce congestion on Horsehead Pass from Eagle Lake to Boiling Lake by widening the trail and/or constructing turnouts.
- Construct a non-motorized user trail from the end of the Summer Blossom trail to the Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness boundary near Boiling Lake.
- Construct a motorized trail crossing Sawtooth Ridge near Bryan Butte from

Foggy Dew drainage to the Summer Blossom/South Navarra area.

- Provide legal access from Crater Creek and Foggy Dew trailhead to Foggy Dew Campground and from Safety Harbor to South Navarre trailhead on or adjacent to existing Forest Service roads.
- Improve Crater Creek trailhead and Foggy Dew Trailhead and campground to meet the needs of trail users, including adding group sites and possible closure on some sites not meeting the Northwest Forest Plan's aquatic conservation strategy.
- Restrict travel to designated trails to protect interior and remote habitats in LSRs, and Safety Harbor and Falls Creek areas; and
- Re-route trails, use educational signs and/or close trails in riparian areas and around lakes.

This EIS will be consistent with and tier to the amended Forest Plans which provide forest-wide and management area specific standards and guidelines and desired future conditions for the various lands on the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests.

The Okanogan Forest Plan primarily allocates the analysis area to Management Area 4M, which emphasizes year round semiprimitive motorized recreation opportunities in a generally unroaded setting. The remaining part of the project area on the Okanogan National Forest side is allocated to Management Area 5, which provides recreation and scenic viewing opportunities in a roaded natural setting; Management Area 25, which emphasizes intensive timber and range management; Management Area 14, which emphasizes wildlife habitat diversity, including deer winter range, while producing merchantable wood fiber; Management Area 26 which emphasizes deer winter range; and Management Area 26 which emphasize deer winter range; and Management Area 17, which emphasizes developed recreation opportunities in a roaded, extensively modified setting.

The Wenatchee Forest Plan allocates its portions of the analysis area to RM-1, ST-2, Re-2a, and GF:

- RM-1 emphasizes intensive range management;
- ST-2 provides for near natural appearing foreground and middle ground along scenic travel corridors;

—RE-2a emphasizes dispersed, unroaded recreation in a semi-primitive setting having existing or potential trails for motorbikes, hikers and horseback riders;

—GF emphasizes long-term growth and production of commercially valuable wood products at a high level of investment in silvicultural practices.

The Northwest Forest Plan primarily allocates the area to late successional reserve, which is managed to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems. Other lands in the project area are allocated to matrix and administratively withdrawn in the Northwest Forest Plan. Matrix is designed to provide connectivity between the LSRs, and habitat for species needing both late successions and younger forests. Administratively withdrawn areas are areas identified in the current Forest Plans where management emphasis precludes scheduled timber harvest. All allocations in the Northwest Forest Plan are overlaid with Riparian Reserve direction designed to maintain and restore riparian structures and functions, benefit riparian dependent and other species, enhance habitat conservation for species dependent on transition zones between upland and riparian areas, improve travel and dispersal corridors for many terrestrial animals and plants, and provide for greater watershed connectivity.

Most of the lands affected lie within the Sawtooth Roadless Area, inventoried in Appendix C of the Okanogan Land and Resource Management Plan, final EIS.

The analysis will develop a range of alternatives to address the significant issues, from the no-action alternative which would not construct or improve any facilities and would not change current management of the trail network, to alternatives that address the significant issues to varying degrees.

Public participation will be especially important at several points during the analysis. The Forest Service is seeking information, comments and assistance from Federal, State, Indian Tribes, local agencies, and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed project. This input will be used in preparation of the draft EIS. The scoping process began in April, 1996, and resulted in significant issues being raised that could relate to significant impacts to the environment. The scoping process includes:

1. Identifying potential issues;
2. Identifying significant issues to be analyzed in depth;

3. Identifying issues which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental analysis;

4. Exploring additional alternatives based on themes which will be derived from issues recognized during scoping activities;

5. Identifying potential environmental effects (i.e., direct, indirect and cumulative effects, and connected actions);

6. Determining potential cooperating agencies and task assignments;

7. Notifying interested members of the public of opportunities to participate in the process. Public involvement includes keeping the public informed through the media and/or written material.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by July, 1998. Your comments and suggestions are encouraged and should be in writing. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice at this early stage of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of a draft EIS 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. 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, 1022 (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 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 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.)

The final EIS is scheduled to be completed by January, 1999. In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed in the draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making a decision regarding the proposal. Sam Gehr, Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan National Forest, and Sonny O'Neal, Forest Supervisor for the Wenatchee National Forest are the responsible officials. The responsible officials will document the decision and rationale for the Sawtooth Ridge Trail and Improvement Project decision in the Record of Decision, which will be subject to Forest Service Appeal Regulations (36 CFR Part 215).

Dated: December 16, 1997.

Allen N. Garr,

Acting Forest Supervisor, Okanogan National Forest.

Dated: December 18, 1997.

Paul Hart,

Acting Forest Supervisor, Wenatchee National Forest.

[FR Doc. 97-33664 Filed 12-24-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Maximum Dollar Amount on Loan and Grant Awards Under the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program for Fiscal Year (FY) 1998

AGENCY: Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) hereby announces the maximum dollar amount on loan and grant awards under the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program for FY 1998. The maximum dollar award on zero-interest loans for FY 1998 is \$750,000. The maximum dollar award on grants for FY 1998 is \$330,000. The maximum loan and grant awards stated in this notice are effective for loans and grants made during the fiscal year beginning October 1, 1997, and ending September 30, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Patricia Wing, Loan Specialist, Rural