

Road, Carson, Washington 98610 or telephone 509-427-3200.

Dated: February 7, 1997.

Ted C. Stubblefield,
Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 97-3728 Filed 2-13-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Dry Smith Timber Sale, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Lewis County, Washington

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Cancellation of an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: On February 22, 1991, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Dry Smith Timber Sale on the Packwood Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest was published in the Federal Register (56 FR 7336). A draft EIS was released for public comment November 1993. A Notice of Availability for the draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on November 19, 1993 (58 FR 61090). Forest Service has decided to cancel the environmental analysis process. There will be no final EIS for the Dry Smith Timber Sale. The NOI is hereby rescinded.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions regarding this cancellation to Bill Uyesugi, Integrated Resource Planning Assistant, Packwood Ranger District, 13068 US Highway 12, Packwood, Washington 98361 or telephone 360-497-1100.

Dated: February 7, 1997.

Ted C. Stubblefield,
Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 97-3729 Filed 2-13-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

McCoy Timber Sales and Related Projects, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Lewis and Skamania Counties, Washington

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Cancellation of an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: On May 8, 1991, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the McCoy Timber Sales and Related Projects on the Randle Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest was published in the Federal Register (56 FR 21352). A draft EIS was released for public comment December 1993. A Notice of Availability for the draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on December 3, 1993 (58 FR 63954).

Forest Service has decided to cancel the environmental analysis process. There will be no final EIS for the McCoy Timber Sales and Related Projects. The NOI is hereby rescinded.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Direct questions regarding this cancellation to Buddy Rose, Integrated Resource Planner, Randle Ranger District, PO Box 670, Randle, Washington 98377 or telephone 360-497-1100.

Dated: February 7, 1997.

Ted C. Stubblefield,
Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 97-3730 Filed 2-13-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Meadow Timber Sales and Associated Activities, Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln County, MT

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) to disclose the environmental effects of timber harvest, prescribed fire, road closures, road obliteration, construction of temporary and specified roads in the western portions of the Tobacco River drainage. The Tobacco River drainage is located approximately 38 air miles northeast of Libby, Montana, near the communities of Fortine and Eureka, Montana.

The proposed actions to harvest and reforest timber stands, construct and reconstruct roads, prescribe burning, and restrict roads are being considered together because they represent either connected or cumulative actions as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.25). The purposes of the project are to provide timber to support local communities, regulate disturbance patterns and natural cycles to provide forest structure to maintain habitat for viable populations, and manage access to protect important wildlife habitat and provide recreational opportunities.

The EIS will tier to the Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and Final EIS of September, 1987, which provides overall guidance for forest management of the area. All activities associated with the proposal will be designed to maintain high quality wildlife, fisheries, and watershed objectives.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be received on or before March 17, 1997.

ADDRESSES: The Responsible Official is Edward C. Monnig, District Ranger, Fortine Ranger District, P.O. Box 116, Fortine, Montana, 59918. Written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis may be sent to him at that address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Joleen Dunham, Project Coordinator, Fortine Ranger District. Phone: (406) 882-4451.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The decision area contains approximately 21,500 acres within the Kootenai National Forest in Lincoln County, Montana. All of the proposed projects would occur on National Forest lands in the western portion of the Tobacco River drainage near Eureka, Montana. The legal location of the decision area is as follows: Sections 8-10, 14-29, and 33-36 of Township 36 North, Range 27 West; Sections 29-33 of Township 36 North, Range 26 West; Sections 4-9, 15-36 of Township 35 North, Range 26 West; Sections 1-3, 10-15, 23-26, and 35-36 of Township 35 North, Range 27 West; Sections 1-25 of Township 34 North, Range 26 West; Sections 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 24 of Township 34 North, Range 27 West; and Sections 18, 19, and 30 of Township 34 North, Range 25 West, Principal Montana Meridian.

All proposed activities are outside the boundaries of any roadless area or any areas considered for inclusion to the National Wilderness System as recommended by the Kootenai National Forest Plan or by any past or present legislative wilderness proposals.

The Forest Service to harvest approximately 14 million board feet of timber through application of a variety of harvest methods on approximately 3,026 acres of forest land. An estimated 0.8 miles of temporary road and 3.8 miles of specified road construction would be needed to access timber harvest areas. Approximately 2.4 miles of this new specified road construction would be managed with yearlong restriction to motorized use. An estimated 31 miles of road reconstruction would also be needed to access timber harvest areas. All temporary roads would be obliterated following completion of sale activities. An additional 24 miles of road no longer in use would be obliterated by various methods which include rehabilitation of stream crossings, recontouring, ripping and seeding, and installment of barriers resulting in abandonment. The type of method would be based on site specific conditions. An estimated 33 miles of existing road would be restricted year round to improve watershed conditions, minimize future road maintenance

costs, and to regulate overall open road density to improve big game security. The proposal also includes prescribed burning on approximately 4,200 acres to reduce the potential for future wildfires, prepare sites for regeneration, enhance wildlife habitat, and maintain forest health.

Prescribed harvest treatments in this proposal are as follows:

Regeneration Harvest: Windfirm trees favoring western larch and ponderosa pine would be selected and designated to remain on site as reserve trees. Reserve trees would average about 10 trees per acre in a varied distribution. Reserve trees would include 1–2 acre islands and edge strips of approximately 40 trees per acre that would cover 5–15% of the stand area. All other merchantable trees would be harvested. Reserve trees would remain through the next rotation and form the upper story of a multi-storied stand. Underburning would occur to prepare site for regeneration of new seedlings. This treatment is proposed on 1,127 acres.

Improvement Cut: Stand densities would be reduced to 80–100 square feet of basal area per acre by removing the *lowest quality and least vigorous trees greater than 7 inches* diameter at breast height. Existing snags and large down woody material would be left on site. The remaining trees would provide a fully stocked stand of the best form and vigor to increase future options for higher quality old growth conditions. Underburning would occur to stimulate growth and vigor of shrubs and forbs, and create habitat for flammulated owl and other species that have adapted to open forest conditions. This treatment is proposed on 1,037 acres.

Thin from Below: Stand densities would be reduced to 60–80 square feet of basal area per acre by removing the *lowest quality and least vigorous trees less than 9 inches* diameter at breast height. Existing snags and large down woody material would be left on site. The remaining trees would provide a fully stocked stand to favor past range of species composition. Underburning would occur to help re-establish habitat that was created through past fire regimes. This treatment is proposed on 677 acres.

Patch Cut with Improvement Cut between patches: Harvest openings the size of 5–20 acres would occur in areas of insect and disease pockets and low vigor Douglas-fir thickets. The remainder of the stand would have densities reduced to 80–100 square feet of basal area per acre by removing the *lowest quality and least vigorous trees greater than 7 inches* diameter at breast height. Three entries would take place

throughout a 30-year period using the patch cut treatment removing approximately one-third of the stand area with each entry but retaining a component of mature trees throughout the next rotation as the upper canopy in a two-storied stand. Underburning would occur to stimulate growth and vigor of shrubs and forbs, create habitat for flammulated owl and other species that have adapted to open forest conditions, and re-establish habitat that was created through past fire regimes. This treatment is proposed on 185 acres.

Burning with Slashing: Underburning would be done outside harvest units to reduce fuel loads, provide a stand mosaic and wildlife betterment. The prescription would involve burning during the spring and early summer conditions which provide good smoke dispersion and safe burning conditions. The results would be a stand which includes areas of unburned material with some trees up to 9 inches diameter at breast height killed and up to 10% of the larger trees scorched with approximates past natural fires. This treatment is proposed on 1160 acres.

The Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan provides overall management objectives in individual delineated management areas (MA's). The proposed projects encompass five predominant MA's; 3, 11, 13, 15, and 16. Briefly described, MA 3 is managed to provide for opportunities for dispersed recreation activities in a natural-appearing environment using trails and primitive roads for access. MA 11 is managed to maintain or enhance the winter range habitat effectiveness for big-game species and produce a programmed yield of timber. MA 13 is designated to provide special habitat necessary for old growth dependent wildlife. MA 15 focuses upon timber production using various silvicultural practices while providing for other resource values such as soils, air, water, wildlife, recreation, and forage for domestic livestock. MA 16 is managed to produce timber while providing for a pleasing view. Timber harvest is proposed only in MA's 3, 11, 15, and 16. Prescribed burning for fuels and wildlife habitat is the only activity proposed in MA 13. This proposal includes openings greater than 40 acres in MA's 11, 15, and 16 to replicate historic disturbance patterns. If these large openings are included in the final decision, a 60 day public review will be provided during the comment period on the Draft EIS. Approval of the Regional Forester for exceeding the 40 acre limitation for regeneration harvest would be required prior to the signing of the Record of Decision. In addition,

site specific amendments to the Forest Plan regarding open road density in MA 15 and visual quality objectives in MA 16 may be necessary.

The Forest Service will consider a range of alternatives. One of these will be the "no action" alternative in which none of the proposed activities would be implemented. Additional alternatives will examine varying levels and locations for the proposed activities to achieve the proposal's purposes, as well as to respond to the issues and other resource values.

Preliminary Issues: Tentatively, several issues of concern have been identified. These issues are briefly described below:

—**Road Closures:** Specific roads will need to be closed to meet road densities for wildlife security and improve watershed conditions. Some individuals are concerned that too many roads are being restricted from public use and existing roads should be left open. What effect will these road closures have on the public's access to recreational areas?

—**Old Growth:** Values associated with old growth forests include maintaining old growth dependent species and the aesthetic, spiritual and emotional values which people place on undisturbed stands of old trees. While the Kootenai Forest Plan requires a minimum 10% of the Forest to be retained as Old Growth habitat (MA 13), there is a concern that additional areas of mature interior forest should be protected. What effect will proposed activities have on the old growth habitat and old growth dependent species?

—**Timber Supply and Forest Health:** Some individuals are concerned that the Forest Service is not placing enough emphasis on providing goods and services to the public. In addition, there is concern that the health and vigor of forest stands could be improved through more aggressive timber harvest and management. How will the proposed activities improve timber growth and produce economic benefits to the public?

—**Re-Introduction of Prescribed Fire:** A key component of the proposal is the use of prescribed fire as a tool to restore the role that wildfires played in the structure of a pre-1900 forest landscape. How will the proposed activities affect the risk of wildfire to resources and private property?

Public Involvement and Scoping: On August 15, 1996 an advertisement was placed in the Tobacco Valley News, Eureka, Montana, requesting public comment and information concerning

the Meadow Project Area. In addition, on August 16, 1996 a letter was mailed to approximately 250 individuals comprising the mailing list for the Meadow Project Area requesting written comments. Taking into account the comments received and information gathered during preliminary analysis, it was decided to prepare an EIS for the Meadow Timber Sales and Associated Activities. Comments received prior to this notice will be included in the documentation for the EIS.

This environmental analysis and decision making process will enable additional interested and affected people to participate and contribute to the final decision. The public is encouraged to take part in the process and is encouraged to visit with Forest Service officials at any time during the analysis and prior to the decision. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. This input will be used in preparation of the draft and final EIS. The scoping process will include:

- Identifying potential issues.
- Identifying major issues to be analyzed in depth.
- Identifying alternatives to the proposed action.
- Considering additional alternatives which will be derived from issues recognized during scoping activities.
- Identifying potential environmental effects of this project and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).

Estimated Dates for Filing: While public participation in this analysis is welcome at any time, comments received within 30 days of the publication of this notice will be especially useful in the preparation of the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by August, 1997. At that time, EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS in the Federal Register. The comment period on the Draft EIS will be a minimum of 45 days from the date the EPA publishes the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register.

The Final EIS is scheduled to be completed by October, 1997. 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.

Reviewers Obligations: 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 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 environmental impact statement stage 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 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 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 discussed. 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.

Responsible Official: Edward C. Monnig, District Ranger, Fortine Ranger District, Kootenai National Forest, P.O. Box 116, Fortine, Montana, 59918, is the Responsible Official. As the Responsible Official, I will decide which, if any, of the proposed projects will be implemented. I will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service Appeal Regulations.

Dated: February 4, 1997.
Edward C. Monnig,
District Ranger, Fortine Ranger District.
[FR Doc. 97-3800 Filed 2-13-97; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

Water Rights Task Force Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meetings.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service announces meetings of the Water Rights Task Force established on August 20, 1996, in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, as amended. The chairman has scheduled the sixth meeting of the Task Force in Denver, Colorado, on March 3, 1997, and the seventh meeting on March 13, 1997, in Portland, Oregon.

DATES: The sixth meeting will be held March 3rd from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the seventh meeting will be held March 13th from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. All times are local.

ADDRESSES: The sixth meeting will be held in the Summit #2 Conference Room of the Denver Airport Fairfield Inn, 6851 Tower Road, Denver, Colorado. The seventh meeting will be held in the Crown Zellerbach Room of the Red Lion Hotel (Jantzen Beach), 909 North Hayden Island Drive, Portland, Oregon.

Send written comments to Eleanor Towns, FACA Liaison, Water Rights Task Force, c/o USDA Forest Service, MAIL STOP 1124, PO Box 96090, Washington, DC 20090-6090. Telephone: (202) 205-1248; Fax: (202) 205-1604.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen Glassner, Watershed & Air Management Staff, Telephone: (202) 205-1172; Fax: (202) 205-1096.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Water Rights Task Force is composed of seven members appointed by Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture to study and make recommendations on issues pertaining to water rights. At the forthcoming meetings, the Task Force will work on its assigned responsibilities. All meetings are open to the public. However, time for the public to address the Task Force will be provided only at the Portland meeting on March 13, 1997, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.. Discussion is limited only to Task Force members and Forest Service personnel. Persons who wish to bring water rights matters to the attention of the Task Force may also file written statements with the Forest Service liaison at the address listed earlier in this notice either before or after each meeting.

Notice of the establishment of the Water Rights Task Force was published in the Federal Register on September 11, 1996 (61 FR 47858). The Task Force terminates either in August of 1997 or upon submission of a final report.