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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Southeast Galena Restoration, Malheur National Forest, Grant County, Oregon

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to improve the ecosystem health within a portion of the 127,000 acre Galena Watershed. The proposed restoration activities will be in compliance with the 1990 Malheur National Forest Land and Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended, which provides overall guidance for management of this area. Proposed restoration activities are located on the Long Creek Ranger District within the Galena Watershed. The watershed is located about 20 air miles northeast of John Day, Oregon. Implementation of proposed restoration activities are scheduled to begin in late fiscal year 2001. The Malheur National Forest invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis. The agency will give notice of the full environmental analysis and decision making process on the proposal so interested and affected members of the public may participate and contribute in the final decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by August 16, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments and suggestions concerning the management of this area to Douglas V. Robin, District Ranger, PO Box 849, John Day, Oregon 97845.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed project and scope of analysis should be directed to: Michael Hutchins, Resource Planner, PO Box 849, John Day, Oregon 97845, phone 541-575-3000.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The purpose and need for activities are, one, improve the health, vigor, and resiliency of forest vegetation to insects, disease, and wildfire. Two, reduce road related impacts, specifically impacts to water quality, fish habitat, and wildlife habitat. Three, improve riparian conditions in reaches of streams that do not presently meet riparian management objectives (RMOs).

The proposed action includes a variety of activities to meet the three purpose and need statements. One, improve stand conditions so they are more resilient to insects, disease, and wildfire. Restoration activities include prescribed fire to reduce excess fuel accumulations and reducing stocking levels through thinning to reduce severity of future wildfires. Another component of improving watershed health is reducing existing noxious weed sites through manual, mechanical, and chemical methods and reducing the potential for additional sites becoming established. Two, reduce road related impacts to water quality, fish habitat, and wildlife habitat. Specific actions include closing or decommissioning roads excess to resource needs, especially existing roads within sensitive areas such as riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs). An access and travel management (ATM) plan would be prepared to meet this action. Some roads may only need seasonal closures during wet months if they are needed for resource needs and do not cause adverse impacts to resources when they are open. Three, improve riparian conditions in streams not meeting RMOs by planting riparian vegetation and protecting plantings from browsing; increasing large wood to deficient reaches (possibly with helicopters and other equipment); performing instream activities such as installing baffles, log weirs, culverts capable of passing fish; rehabilitating key channels where flow regime has been modified by past activities; and reintroducing fire to key RHCAs.

The Galena Watershed is comprised of about 127,000 acres, of which about 10,200 acres are privately owned and about 4,000 acres are administered by other Federal agencies. Of the 113,000 acres administered by the Malheur National Forest, about 56,800 acres are proposed to be analyzed for possible restoration activities by this EIS. About

29,475 acres (52%) are in management area 1—general forest, about 10,580 acres (19%) are in management area 4—big game winter range maintenance, about 1,125 acres (2%) are in management area 7—scenic area, about 1,900 acres (3%) are in management area 13—old growth, about 1,730 acres (3%) are in management area 14—visual corridors, about 2,900 acres (5%) are in management area 21—wildlife emphasis with non-scheduled timber harvest, and about 9,090 acres (16%) are within RHCAs. The Southeast Galena Restoration EIS will focus restoration activities within the following subwatersheds: Davis/Placer, Vinegar, Vincent, Little Boulder/Deerhorn, Tincup/Little Butte, Butte, Granite Boulder, Beaver/Ruby (portion unburned by the Reed or Summit Fires), Dry/Sunshine (portion on south side of Middle Fork John Day River), and Coyote/Balance (portion on south side of MFJD River).

Preliminary issues identified will include effects on threatened, endangered, and proposed species; riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs); water quality; stand conditions (especially as they relate to increased insect populations and fuel levels); roadless areas; road densities; and forest wood products.

The scoping process will include: (1) Identifying potential issues; (2) identifying issues to be analyzed in depth; (3) eliminating non-significant issues or those which have been covered by a previous environmental analysis; (4) exploring additional alternatives; and (5) identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).

A full range of alternatives will be considered, including a no-action alternative. The no-action alternative will serve as a baseline for comparison of alternatives. This alternative will be no change from the current management of the Forest and will be fully analyzed. The proposed action will be considered and additional alternatives developed around the proposed action to address significant issues identified during the scoping and public involvement process. Issues gathered may vary action alternatives in the number, location, and type of project activities.

Comments received in response to this notice, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available to public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR part 215 and 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d); any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the freedom of information act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within a specified number of days.

Public meetings are anticipated to occur following issuance of the draft EIS. Public meetings will be announced in the Malheur National Forest's newspaper of record, the *Blue Mountain Eagle*.

The Forest Service is seeking information and comments from other Federal, State, and Local agencies; Tribes; organizations; and individuals who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. This input will be used in the preparation of the draft EIS.

Comments will be appreciated throughout the analysis process. The draft EIS will be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and is anticipated to be available for public review by June 2000. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date of EPA's Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**. It is important that those interested in the management of the Malheur National Forest participate at that time.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of draft EISs 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 completion of the final

EIS, may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F. 2d 1016, 1002 (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 important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 45-day comment period so 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 EIS. 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).

After the 45 day comment period ends on the draft EIS, the comments will be analyzed and considered by the Forest Service in preparing the final EIS. The final EIS is scheduled to be completed by March 30, 2001. In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to substantive comments received during the public comment period. The responsible official, Acting Forest Supervisor, Bonnie Wood, will consider in the comments, responses, environmental consequences discussed in the EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies in making a decision regarding this project. The responsible official will document the Galena Watershed EIS decision and rationale for the decision in the Record of Decision (ROD). That decision will be subject to review under Forest Service Appeal Regulations 36 CFR part 215.

Dated: July 8, 1999.

Bonnie Wood,

Acting Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Proposed Mann Creek Timber Sale and Other Activities Within the Mann Creek Subwatersheds, Payette National Forest, Washington County, ID

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The USDA Forest Service is proposing the following for the Mann Creek Subwatersheds: harvest and regeneration of timber; road decommissioning or obliteration to protect watershed conditions; and prescribed fire to reduce fuels and enhance plant growth and mountain quail habitat.

The agency gives notice of the environmental analysis and decision-making process so that interested and affected people know how they may participate and contribute to the final decision. The agency invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis and the issues it should address.

DATES: Comments on the scope of the analysis must be received by August 13, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to: David Alexander, Forest Supervisor, Payette National Forest, P.O. Box 1026, McCall, Idaho 83638.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed action should be directed to Dautis Pearson, NEPA Coordinator, phone (208) 253-0134; or John Baglien, District Ranger, phone (208) 549-4201.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The USDA Forest Service is proposing projects within the 26,438 acre Mann Creek Subwatersheds. Approximately 6-8 MMBF of timber from about 2,000 acres will be harvested by thinning and regeneration methods, using tractor, skyline, and helicopter logging systems. Approximately 800 acres will be regenerated.

This proposal follows direction in the Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. About 2-4 miles of road construction or reconstruction are planned. About 10-30 miles of road decommissioning or obliteration are planned.

Prescribed fire activities would occur on a total of about 4,000 acres of open ponderosa pine stands, dry Douglas-fir stands, aspen communities, and grass/shrublands to enhance plant growth and diversity.

Preliminary issues identified are forest health in stringer habitat, and the economic and resource effects of longer return intervals into the subwatershed.

Initial scoping began in June, 1999. Preliminary analysis is currently being conducted. The Forest Service will be seeking additional information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may