

Signed in Washington, D.C., on December 15, 1999.

Robert J. Prchal,

*Deputy Administrator, Insurance Services,
Federal Crop Insurance Corporation.*

[FR Doc. 99-32954 Filed 12-20-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-FA-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Bark Beetle Analysis Environmental Impact Statement Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District, Routt County, CO

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

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, and Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS will assess and disclose the environmental effects of an imminent bark beetle analysis. The area of the analysis is the Hahns Peak/Bears Ranger District and the portion of the Parks Ranger District East of the Continental Divide to the boundary of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest.

Over the next few months the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests will be developing a proposed action and making decisions on how to respond to a bark beetle epidemic. The public is strongly encouraged to participate in this process.

An epidemic will cause significant changes to the forest landscape, recreation experience, watershed conditions, and wildlife habitat—changes that many people will not consider positive. Spruce and pine trees on private lands throughout Routt, Moffatt, and Grand counties will be at risk, including trees in urban areas.

The Forest Service has been working since late spring to define the problems an epidemic will present. Along with key members of the community, Forest Service officials visited the Dixie National Forest in Utah to see how they were managing their current bark beetle epidemic. A community task force was developing that continues to meet regulatory. Field surveys have been conducted on National Forest System lands to estimate the potential effects of bark beetles on various resources. Extensive beetle population surveys have also been completed.

The U.S. Forest Service has a responsibility to manage National Forests for the public good. Various laws, regulations and policies frame the purpose of National Forests and provide

reasons for the Forest Service to manage a bark beetle epidemic. The guiding legal framework compels the Forest Service to:

- Prevent an epidemic from spreading to adjacent lands where possible,
- Maintain healthy and aesthetically pleasing stands of trees in the ski area,
- Restrict insect outbreaks in timber management, recreation, and scenic areas,
- Sustain the growing stock of timber,
- Protect the wildlife and plant species that depend on mature spruce forest, and
- Maintain watershed health.

DATES: Public Scoping began with a mailing to people who expressed an interest in the Routt Divide Blowdown. South Fork Salvage Analysis, and Upper Elk River Access Analyses, land owners within the Forest Service boundaries adjacent to the analysis area, and State, County, and local officials. There will be a 45-day public comment period following the publication of this notice.

On January 6, 1999, Forest Service specialists will host an open house for the public to discuss the Bark Beetle Analysis from 4:00 pm until 7:00 pm at the Forest Service Office, 925 Weiss Dr., Steamboat Springs, CO 80487.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be prepared and available after the scoping comment period. After a 45-day comment period from the date of this notice, a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will be prepared and available for the Bark Beetle Analysis.

ADDRESSES: Mail comment letters to and request further information from: Andy Cadenhead, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest, 925 Weiss Dr., Steamboat Springs, CO 80487, (970) 870-2220.

Responsible official: Jerry E. Schmidt, Forest Supervisor, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, 2468 Jackson Street, Laramie, WY 82070.

Jerry Schmidt,
Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99-32980 Filed 12-20-99; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Pendola Fire Restoration Project, Tahoe National Forest, Yuba County, CA

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest, will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for proposed timber salvage, wildlife habitat improvement, and non-native and invasive plant control projects within the 2,600-acre National Forest System land portion of the Pendola Fire Restoration Project analysis area located just north of Bullards Bar Reservoir and west of the town of Camptonville, California, near the Pendola Ranch. The project area is located within all or portions of T18N, R07E; T18N; R08E; T19N, R07E; and T19N, R08E MDB&M.

The agency invites comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis. In addition, the agency gives notice of the full environmental analysis and decision-making process that will occur on the proposal so that interested and affected people are aware of how they may participate and contribute to the final decision.

DATES: Comments should be made in writing and postmarked by January 7, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Written comments concerning the project should be directed to U.S.F.S., Tahoe National Forest, Downieville Ranger District, ATTN: Dennis Stevens, 15924 Highway 49, Camptonville, CA 95922.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jeane Masquelier, District Ranger, or Dennis Stevens, Project Manager, Downieville Ranger District, Camptonville, CA 95922 at (530) 288-3231.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On October 16, 1999, the Pendola wildfire started just north of Bullards Bar Reservoir. Before being controlled, the fire consumed over 4,565 acres of land on the northeast side of the reservoir, with approximately 2,600 of these acres being National Forest System lands. These 2,600 acres of National Forest System lands are being analyzed for projects within the Pendola Fire Restoration analysis area. The analysis area incorporates land within the Upper Mill Creek, Lower Mill Creek, Bridger Creek, North Yuba Arm of Bullards Bar Reservoir, and the Willow Creek Arm of Bullards Bar Reservoir watersheds, all of which drain into the North Yuba River, on which Bullards Bar Reservoir is situated. Located west of Camptonville, California, and north of and immediately adjacent to the reservoir at around 2,000 to 2,500 feet in elevation, the area is dominated by mixed conifer and hardwood forest, of which over 70 percent burned with moderate to high intensity, leaving scattered live tress, small patches of live trees, and many

areas that completely burned. The remaining 30 percent burned with a lower intensity, leaving partially burned or lightly underburned areas. This loss of vegetation has resulted in large areas of exposed soils, large amounts of new fuels, and the loss of standing timber. The fire also affected other important resources, such as wildlife habitat, visual quality, historic and prehistoric sites, fisheries, sensitive plant and animal species, and water quality.

In preparing the Environmental Impact Statement, the Forest Service will identify and analyze a range of alternatives that address the issues developed for this area. One of the alternatives will be no treatment. An ecological approach will be used to achieve multiple-use management of the Pendola Fire area. It also means that the needs of people and environmental values will be blended in such a way that this area's desired condition would represent a diverse healthy, productive, and sustainable ecosystem.

Public participation will be important during the analysis, especially during the review of the draft Environmental Impact Statement. The Forest Service is seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. We have already initiated consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the bald eagle and the California red-legged frog. This input will be used in preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Statement. The scoping process includes:

1. Identifying potential issues.
2. Identifying issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Eliminating insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental analysis.
4. Exploring additional alternatives.
5. Identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).
6. Determining potential cooperating agencies and task assignments.

Comments from other Federal, State, and local agencies, organizations, and individuals who may be interested in, or affected by, the decision are encouraged to identify other significant issues. Public participation will be solicited through mailing letters to mining claim owners, private land owners, and special use permittees within the Downieville Ranger District boundaries; posting information in local towns; and mailing letters to local timber

industries, politicians, school boards, county supervisors, and environmental groups. A public meeting is scheduled for January 6, 2000, at the Downieville District Ranger Station office, in Camptonville, CA, from 2 pm until 5 pm.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and be available for public review in February, 2000. The comment period on the draft Environmental Impact Statement will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is very 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 but that are not raised until after completion of the final Environmental Impact Statement 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 Environmental Impact Statement.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns of 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 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.

The final Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be available by April, 2000. The responsible official, the Forest Supervisor of the Tahoe National Forest, 631 Coyote St., Nevada City, CA

95959, will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision.

Dated: December 13, 1999.

Steven T. Eubanks,
Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Information Collection Activity; Comment Request

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35, as amended), the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) invites comments on this information collection for which RUS intends to request approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by February 22, 2000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Program Development & Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., STOP 1522, Room 4034 South Building, Washington, DC 20250-1522. Telephone: (202) 720-0736. FAX: (202) 720-4120.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Certification of Authority.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0074.

Type of Request: Extension of currently approved information collection.

Abstract: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) manages loan programs in accordance with the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended (7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*) (RE Act). A major factor in managing loan programs is controlling the advance of funds. One reason to control funds is so that the actual borrowers get their money. The use of RUS Form 675 allows this control to be achieved by providing a list of authorized signatures against which signatures requesting funds are compared. RUS Form 675 provides an effective control against the unauthorized release of funds by providing a list of authorized signatures. OMB Circular A-123, Management Accountability and Control, states that information should be maintained on a current basis and that cash should be protected from unauthorized use. This