

The environmental assessments and findings of no significant impact have been prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1b), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 22nd day of July 1998.

Charles P. Schwalbe,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 98–19996 Filed 7–24–98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Saveno DeBorgiac Timber Sales and Road Rehabilitation; Superior Ranger District, Lolo National Forest; Mineral County, Montana

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to disclose the environmental effects of timber harvesting, prescribed burning, road access changes, and watershed rehabilitation in a 38,000 acre area near St. Regis, Montana.

DATES: Initial comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing no later than August 26, 1998. Comments received during the initial scoping will be considered in the analysis and do not need to be resubmitted during this comment time period.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Cindy Chapman Enstrom, District Ranger, Superior Ranger District, Box 460, Superior, MT 59872.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ron Mason, Saveno DeBorgiac Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Superior Ranger District, as above, or phone: (406) 822–4233.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The responsible official who will make decisions based on this EIS is Charles C. Wildes, Forest Supervisor, Lolo National Forest, Building 24 Fort Missoula, Missoula, MT 59804. He will decide on this proposal after considering comments and responses,

environmental consequences discussed in the Final EIS, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The decision and reasons for the decision will be documented in a Record of Decision.

The Forest Service proposed to harvest about 33,000 hundred cubic feet of timber from about 1700 acres (about 1030 of those acres to be burned after harvest), to reconstruct or recondition about 7.5 miles of road and stabilize and/or obliterate about 10.3 miles of existing road (primarily to mitigate existing water quality and fish habitat impacts), and to add new yearlong road closures to about 7.3 miles of currently open roads. New road construction would be limited to about 2.5 miles of permanent road and about 3.4 miles of temporary road.

Lands affected are within the Twin Creek, Savenac Creek, Timber Creek, McManus Creek and Packer Creek drainages, tributary to the St. Regis River, between Saltese and DeBorgia, Montana. The project area is bounded by Interstate 90 to the south and the divide between Plains/Thompson Falls and superior Ranger Districts to the north.

The purpose of this proposal is to carry out the goals and direction given in the Lolo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan with ecosystem management principles. Key elements of the purpose and need are:

- (1) Maintain existing elk security habitat;
- (2) Modify stand structures in lodgepole pine to reduce susceptibility to mountain pine beetle;
- (3) Accelerate succession in mid seral, moist mixed conifer stands where potential exists to develop late seral, multi-storied structures with old growth characteristics;
- (4) Replace the ponderosa pine communities which developed from poorly adapted seed from other states. The trees were planted in the early 1900's. These stands are experiencing extensive mortality from diseases, and are also increasingly susceptible to bark beetle attacks. These communities are also naturally reproducing, and degrading the locally adapted gene pool;
- (5) Develop stand structures that are equivalent to single story, moisture limited conditions resembling structures developed from very frequent, low intensity ground fires. The resulting stand structures will enhance growth and development of ponderosa pine, western larch and Douglas-fir stands;
- (6) The St. Regis River is a priority watershed for bull trout recovery; we will protect the species and seek opportunities to enhance and restore habitat;

(7) The St. Regis River is a Water Quality Limited Segment (WQLS). Increased sediment has resulted in the "cold water fishery" to be only partially supported. The proposal seeks opportunities to eliminate erosion and control sediment sources to improve water quality in the streams entering the St. Regis River; and

(8) Provide forest products in support of forest plan goals.

The decision to be made is to what extent, if at all, the Forest Service should conduct timber harvest, prescribed burning, road construction or reconstruction, road reclamation, and road closure in the Twin Creek, Savenac Creek, Timber Creek, McManus Creek and Packer Creek drainages, given the above purpose and need. This is a site specific project decision, not a general management plan nor a programmatic analysis.

Public scoping has been conducted on this proposal and the alternatives developed for this proposal.

While quite a number of issues have been identified for environmental effects analysis, the following issues are the one which so far have been found significant enough to guide alternative development and provide focus for the EIS.

(1) Water quality and fisheries habitat effects resulting from timber harvest and road construction and rehabilitation activities;

(2) Forest health issues pertaining to even-aged management and restoration; and

(3) Economic effects on local communities resulting from different access methods and resulting timber values.

The proposed action could have both beneficial and adverse effects on these resources. In addition to the proposed action, a range of alternatives have been developed in response to issues identified during scoping. Alternatives planned for detailed study are:

- (1) No action; none of the proposed activities would be implemented.
- (2) Restoration of offsite ponderosa pine stands. Mid-seral stands will be treated to develop multi-storied stands with large trees, and dry sites with a history of high fire frequency will be thinned to develop open stands of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch. Approximately 77 percent of the volume will be helicopter yarded, 12 percent will be tractor yarded and 11 percent will skyline yarded.

Road work	Approximate miles
Construction, new roads	0.0

Road work	Approximate miles
Reconstruction, existing roads	2.7
Reclamation, existing roads	12.9
Construct and obliterate temporary roads	0.0
Reconstruct and reclaim, existing road	0.0
Change travel management	7.3

(3) Then lodgepole pine stands to make them resistant to mountain pine beetle attacks. Harvest from existing roads and from short-term and temporary roads on gentle ridgetops and upper sidelopes, harvest with no evenaged management cuts. Approximately 1 percent of the volume will be helicopter yarded, 64 percent will be tractor yarded and 35 percent will skyline yarded.

Road work	Approximate miles
Construction, new roads	0.0
Reconstruction, existing roads	2.7
Reclamation, existing roads	8.6
Construct and obliterate temporary roads	3.4
Reconstruct and reclaim, existing road	4.3
Change travel management	7.3

(4) Restoration of offsite ponderosa pine stands. Mid-seral stands will be treated to develop multi-storied stands with large trees, and dry sites with a history of high fire frequency will be thinned to develop open stands of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch. Thin lodgepole pine stands to make them more resistant to mountain pine beetle attacks. Approximately 43 percent of the volume will be helicopter yarded, 33 percent will be tractor yarded and 24 percent will skyline yarded.

Road work	Approximate miles
Construction, new roads	2.5
Reconstruction, existing roads	2.7
Reclamation, existing roads	6.7
Construct and obliterate temporary roads	3.4
Reconstruct and reclaim, existing road	0.4
Change travel management	0.0

(5) Restoration of offsite ponderosa pine stands. Mid-seral stands will be treated to develop multi-storied stands with large trees, and dry sites with a history of high fire frequency will be thinned to develop open stands of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch. Thin lodgepole pine stands to make

them more resistant to mountain pine beetle attacks. Approximately 20 percent of the volume will be helicopter yarded, 45 percent will be tractor yarded and 35 percent will skyline yarded.

Road work	Approximate miles
Construction, new roads	2.5
Reconstruction, existing roads	3.2
Reclamation, existing roads	2.6
Construct and obliterate temporary roads	3.4
Reconstruct and reclaim, existing road	4.3
Change travel management	0.0

Public participation is important to the analysis. People may visit with Forest Service officials at any time during the analysis and prior to the decision. No formal scoping meetings are planned. However, two periods are specifically designated for comments on the analysis:

- (1) During this scoping process; and
- (2) During the draft EIS comment period.

During the scoping process, the Forest Service is seeking information and comments from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. A scoping document will be mailed to parties known to be interested in the proposed action. The agency invites written comments and suggestions on this action, particularly in terms of issues and alternatives.

The Forest Service will continue to involve the public and will inform interested and affected parties as to how they may participate and contribute to the final decision. Another formal opportunity for response will be provided following completion of a draft EIS.

The draft EIS should be available for review in March, 1999. The final EIS is scheduled for completion in June, 1999.

The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes it is important, at this early stage, 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 it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewer's position and contentions.

Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC, 435 U.S. 519, 533 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage but 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 Heritage v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important 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 environmental impact statement.

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 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.

I am the responsible official for this environmental impact statement. My address is Lolo National Forest, Building 24, Fort Missoula, Missoula MT 59804.

Authority: 40 CFR 1508.220.

Dated: July 10, 1998.

Charles C. Wildes,
Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Task Force on Agricultural Air Quality

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Task Force on Agricultural Air Quality will hold a teleconference to discuss the relationship between agricultural production and air quality. The meeting is open to the public.