

Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 63, No. 177

Monday, September 14, 1998

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.

AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Sunshine Act Meeting

TIME: 2:30–5:30 p.m.

PLACE: ADF Headquarters.

DATE: Tuesday, 15 September 1998.

STATUS: Open.

Agenda

2:30 p.m.—Chairman's Report

3:00 p.m.—President's Report

- Legislative Update
- FY 1998 Program Highlight
- Budget Request

5:30 p.m.—Adjournment

If you have any questions or comments, please direct them to Paul Magid, General Counsel, who can be reached at (202) 673–3916.

William R. Ford,

President.

[FR Doc. 98–24639 Filed 9–9–98; 4:47 pm]

BILLING CODE 6116–01–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Control of Noxious Weeds on Remote Sites, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and Umatilla National Forest; Columbia and Asotin Counties, Washington; Union, Baker, and Wallowa Counties, OR; Idaho County, ID

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) on control of noxious weeds on remote sites on two National Forests including aerial application of herbicides as a treatment on specific sites and under specific constraints. These sites are generally unroaded, back-country sites with difficult access.

National Forest System lands within the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, including lands within the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (NRA) and Hells Canyon Wilderness, will be considered in the proposal. Management actions are planned to be implemented beginning in 2000. 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 may become aware of how they may participate and contribute to the final decision.

DATE: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by October 31, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments and suggestions concerning this proposal to Karyn L. Wood, Forest Supervisor, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, P.O. Box 907, Baker City, OR 97814.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Direct questions about the proposed action and EIS to Chuck Quimby, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, P.O. Box 907, Baker City, OR 97814, phone (541) 523–6391.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed action is designed to treat existing populations of weeds to promote native and/or desirable plants, and treat existing populations of weeds to reduce weed seed sources. Projects will also evaluate means of avoiding the potential for spread of the existing infestations off-site. The action is needed to respond to the increased incidence, extent, and spread of unwanted nonnative noxious weeds in remote sites where access is difficult and hazardous, and where management of these infestations for control, containment, and reduction is consequently limited in effectiveness. These kinds of unwanted vegetation are legally designated as noxious weeds by State and Federal laws because they are generally unsuited as forage for either wildlife or livestock, may be hazardous if ingested, are often nonnative intrusions, compete with native plants, impact recreation and aesthetic values, and negatively impact wildlife habitat.

Treatment sites included in this proposal are scattered across uplands on the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla National Forests in northeastern Oregon. The primary management areas from the Forest Plans affected by this proposal include general forest, big game winter

range, HCNRA dispersed recreation/native vegetation, and wilderness. The primary targeted weed species for aerial application of herbicide is yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), although other noxious weeds will be included. All of the proposed treatment sites are being negatively impacted by the invading noxious weeds. For some of the sites, past impacts to the plant community may have contributed to the susceptibility of invasion by the noxious weeds through a reduction in native plant cover and vigor. Of the 14 sites to be considered in this analysis, six are within allotments where grazing by domestic livestock may occur, while the remainder are in areas either closed to domestic livestock or where no livestock have grazed for a number of years. All of the lands are used by big game, including elk and deer. Some of the sites are used by backcountry recreationists, while others are seldom used. All sites are upland sites located away from perennial water. These sites range in size from approximately 10 acres to 500 acres net, but cover several thousand gross acres because the weeds are scattered and do not necessarily fill all growing space. Estimated gross acreage covered for the 14 sites ranges from 4000 to 5000 acres with weed spread increasing this number each year.

The proposed action is intended to implement the Wallowa-Whitman Forest-wide integrated noxious weed environment (EA) and management plan, including supplemental decisions to incorporate additional sites, and the Umatilla integrated noxious weed EA. Both documents provide for management of noxious weeds throughout the Forests but have proven most effective on the more accessible sites (for example, along roads). The affected Forests are adjacent and share common habitats, noxious weed species, and problems associated with management of these infestations. These current environmental analyses and decisions for integrated noxious weed management on the two Forests provide for treatments described in an integrated weed management program. These include chemical, biological, manual, mechanical, and cultural. The treatment methods include backpack sprayer, wick application, and boom sprayer application of herbicides; release of approved biological agents; hand

pulling; lopping seed heads; discing or tilling; prescribed fire; revegetation; etc. However, aerial application of herbicide was not considered in prior analyses. This analysis will include aerial application as a possible treatment of the selected sites using an integrated weed management program.

The Regional EIS for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation (1998) and its associated mediated agreement, along with the Forest-wide environmental assessments, the biological assessments, and concurrence documents from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, all provide a strong background for controlling or mitigating the effects of treatment actions. Sites will be surveyed for the presence of threatened, endangered, proposed or sensitive species, and any necessary protective measures will be developed through the consultation process with the regulatory agencies.

This decision is needed due to the increasing incidence and spread of noxious weeds into back-country areas. These sites are remote and difficult to access with equipment and supplies used for treatment measures. In addition, they are difficult to treat effectively due to the hazardous conditions for on-the-ground workers and the difficulty in covering the site thoroughly enough to ensure that no plants are missed and allowed to go to seed. For these reasons, treatments allowed under the existing decisions have been shown to be inadequate, have caused individual hazards to applicators, and have been expensive to use on these less accessible sites.

This proposal tiers to the Regional FEIS for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation and to the EIS for each Forest's Land and Resources Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended through completion of the integrated noxious weed plans for the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. This project will also be consistent with all pertinent Forest Plan amendments, including; (1) Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-Producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (commonly referred to as PACFISH) and (2) Inland Native Strategies for Managing Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, Western Montana, and Portions of Nevada (commonly referred to as INFISH). The project also evaluates and incorporates scientific findings from the Interior

Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Program.

Public involvement will be especially important at several points during the analysis, beginning with the scoping process. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, local agencies, tribes, and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposals. The scoping process includes:

1. Identifying and clarifying issues.
2. Identifying key issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Exploring alternatives based on themes which will be derived from issues recognized during scoping activities.
4. Identifying potential environmental effects of the proposals and alternatives (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).
5. Determining potential cooperating agencies and task assignments.
6. Developing a list of interested people to keep apprised of opportunities to participate through meetings, personal contacts, or written comments.
7. Developing a means of informing the public through the media and/or written material (e.g., newsletters, correspondence, etc.).

Preliminary public issues identified during scoping to date include: risks to applicators while working on steep remote sites; treatment effectiveness and cost effectiveness; and risks of nontarget effects relative to the use of aerial application of herbicides as a treatment method.

Public comments are appreciated throughout the analysis process. The draft EIS is expected to be completed about February 1999. The final EIS is scheduled for completion about June 1999. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 90 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice of this early stage of public participation and 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 have been raised at the draft stage may

be waived or dismissed by the court if not raised until after completion of the final EIS. *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritage, 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 90-day comment period so 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 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.)

In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to substantive 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. The Responsible Officials are Karyn L. Wood, Forest Supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, and Jeff D. Blackwood, Forest Supervisor for the Umatilla National Forest. The inclusion of management activities in Congressionally designated areas (such as wilderness) may require a different signing authority depending on the final decision. The responsible officials will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to appeal under 36 CFR 215.

Dated: August 28, 1998.

Karyn L. Wood,

Forest Supervisor, Wallowa-Whitman NF.

Dated: September 3, 1998.

Jeff D. Blackwood,

Forest Supervisor, Umatilla NF.

[FR Doc. 98-24550 Filed 9-11-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M