

2817 to facilitate entry into the reading room.

Comments on the draft environmental assessment should be mailed or faxed to Mr. Martin Lowney, Director, USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services, P.O. Box 130, Mosely, VA 23120. Fax: (804) 739-7738.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Martin Mendoza, Jr., Director, Operational Support Staff, APHIS, Wildlife Services, 4700 River Road, Unit 87, Riverdale, MD 20737-1234, (301) 734-7921. For copies of the environmental assessment, write to Mr. Martin Mendoza, Jr., at the address listed above.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: APHIS, Wildlife Services, cooperates with Federal agencies, State and local governments, and private individuals to research and implement the best methods of managing wildlife to protect human health and safety and prevent damage to agriculture, property, and natural resources.

In this document, APHIS is advising the public of the availability of, and is seeking public comment on, a draft environmental assessment relative to the management by Wildlife Services of conflicts and damage caused by nonmigratory Canada geese in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The habitat preference, breeding and feeding behavior, and adaptability of nonmigratory Canada geese can involve conflicts with humans and affect human health and safety in a number of ways, including the following: by contaminating surface water and ground cover with fecal matter, causing damage to aircraft and other means of transportation as a result of collisions, and causing injury to approaching humans, especially children, through aggressive action. The draft environmental assessment examines the environmental impacts of Wildlife Services activities to manage conflicts and damage caused by nonmigratory Canada geese in Virginia.

We are making the draft environmental assessment available for public inspection and comment before issuing our final environmental assessment.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 426-426c.

Done in Washington, DC, this 7th day of October, 1998.

Craig A. Reed,

Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Wolfmann Projects, Willamette National Forest, Lane County, Oregon

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 a proposal to harvest trees, build roads, and conduct prescribed burns within the Blue River drainage of the Blue River Ranger District approximately 55 miles east of Springfield, Oregon. Approximately 800 acres will be harvested and approximately 1 mile of road will be constructed. Prescribed fire will be used to treat approximately 180 acres. The proposal results from an extensive landscape design and watershed analysis conducted in the Blue River watershed located entirely within the Central Cascades Adaptive Management Area (AMA). The Blue River Landscape and Monitoring strategy provides the framework for management of the area and is being implemented through the Blue River Landscape Administrative Study. The dominant theme of the study uses an interpreted range of "natural" variability of disturbance processes to guide landscape and watershed objectives, designs, and prescriptions. The need for the proposed action is to meet Willamette National Forest goals, objectives and commitments outlined in the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The proposed action includes testing an alternative approach to achieve the Northwest Forest Plan objectives consistent with the AMA emphasis; producing timber to support the local and national economy; and using fire as a management tool to introduce mortality, reduce fuels, and stimulate herb and shrub growth variability.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing on or before November 25, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments concerning this project to Lynn Burditt, District Ranger, Blue River Ranger District, P.O. Box 199, Blue River, Oregon 97413.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Please direct questions about the proposed action and environmental impact statement to Karen Geary, Integrated Resources Assistant, phone 541-822-3317.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Blue River Landscape Management and Monitoring strategy was developed as

an alternative approach to achieving the basic objectives underlying the Northwest Forest Plan. The purpose of the strategy is to develop and test a landscape management approach that approximates aspects of historical disturbance regimes within the Blue River watershed which is approximately 57,000 acres. The primary goal is to sustain native habitat, species, and ecological processes within historical ranges while providing a sustained flow of wood fiber. The central concept of this project is that we will be able to achieve these goals by approximating aspects of historical disturbance regimes through forest management practices. Timber harvest and prescribed fire will be planned to approximate historical fires regimes to the degree feasible while still meeting the underlying objectives of the Northwest Forest Plan. While this concept is largely untested, various projects are exploring this approach in a variety of settings across North America.

The Wolfmann Project is the second timber harvest proposal resulting from the strategy. It is the first proposal to use prescribed fire as a management tool in unharvested areas.

The strategy contains four major components:

1. *Special area reserves* allocated in the Willamette National Forest Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan, were delineated. The reserve boundaries and general management prescriptions described in the Forest Plan were adopted for these areas.

2. *Landscape areas*—The remainder of the planning area was subdivided into zones of similar ecological conditions and disturbance regimes (landscape areas). Vegetation management prescriptions were developed for each zone based on an interpreted range of historical conditions. For each landscape area, timber harvest and fire prescriptions were developed based upon the underlying fire regime, as interpreted from tree ring records. Timber harvest frequency, and rotation age (100-260 years) were based upon historical fire intensity, and the spatial patterns of timber harvest were based upon the spatial patterns of historical fires.

3. *Aquatic reserves* were then established to ensure that the full range of objectives in the Northwest Forest Plan would be met. Achievement of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives (ROD 1994) was given particular attention. These reserves were based, in part, on the type and intensity of upslope management in the local landscape area, and were designed to reflect general patterns of disturbance

processes. These reserves generally take the form of entire small subdrainages. They are strategically located to encompass areas of high aquatic habitat diversity, source areas for organic and inorganic material to streams, and to include habitat around the most productive pairs of spotted owls. In addition, corridor reserves were established on all fish-bearing streams. This network of reserves is considerably different from the network provided on Matrix lands in the Northwest Forest Plan.

4. *Watershed restoration*—this component of the project is intended to reestablish a resilient, interconnected aquatic network that is able to maintain aquatic habitats and processes with landscape disturbance processes operating at historical frequencies and intensities.

The landscape management strategy was evaluated to ascertain whether the approach would meet each of the nine Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives in the Northwest Forest Plan. Results of the evaluation concluded that these objectives would be met. In addition, an evaluation of northern spotted owl habitat concluded that the owls would find larger patches and less fragmented habitat under this management strategy than would be found managing under the interim guidelines for Matrix lands and Riparian Reserves in the Northwest Forest Plan.

The Wolfmann Project includes regeneration harvest in five "blocks" for a total of approximately 200 acres. Regeneration harvest means a new stand of trees will be started. The blocks are within Landscape Area 3 and will have a prescription that results between 15% and 50% of the canopy being retained following harvest. The blocks selected for consideration were identified through a long term scheduling exercise that identifies potential harvest for 200 years. The project also includes commercial thinning harvest on approximately 600 acres in 21 blocks. The stands which will be thinned range in age from 60 to 90 years old. Prescribed fire is proposed in three blocks for a total of approximately 180 acres. The 29 blocks are located in T. 14 S., R. 5 E sections 25 through 36 and in T. 15 S., R. 5 E sections 1, 2, 4, 5, 11 smf 12. This area is approximately 15 to 20 miles north of the town of Blue River, Oregon. The projects are located entirely within the Blue River watershed. The regeneration harvest portion has been called "Mann Regen" and the commercial thinning has been called "Bear Thin" in *The Forest Focus*

(Willamette National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA)).

Detailed ground review and alternative development will concentrate on these 29 blocks. Decisions will include identification of the timing and location of timber harvest and prescribed fire, silvicultural prescriptions, levels of green and dead tree retention, and the spatial patterns of retention trees. Actions connected to this proposal include construction of roads, reconstruction of roads, construction of landings for harvest units, prescribed burning to treat slash, tree planting to reforest the site, and mitigation measures as deemed necessary.

The analysis will consider a range of alternatives to the proposed action, including a no-action alternative. The Forest Service is seeking information and comments from Federal, State and local agencies, as well as, other individuals or organizations who may be interested in, or affected by, the proposed action. Information that would be especially useful would be identification of issues, exploration of additional alternatives based on the issues, and identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives to the proposal. Public involvement will include periodic mailings to interested persons, as the project progresses; public meetings will be held in Blue River, Oregon during October and November 1998. Information on time and locations will be announced at a later date.

Preliminary scoping identified potential issues related to slope stability, logging system economics, and spotted owl habitat.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review in January 1999. EPA will publish a notice of availability of the draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA notice appears in the **Federal Register**. Copies of the draft EIS will be distributed to interested and affected agencies, organizations, tribes, and members of the public for their review and comment. It is very important that those interested in the management of the Willamette National Forest participate at that time.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice at this early stage of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of a draft EIS 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 after completion of the final EIS 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 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 of 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).

The final EIS is scheduled to be completed in March 1999. 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 the decision regarding this proposal. Lynn Burditt, Blue River District Ranger, Willamette National Forest, is the responsible official. As the responsible official she will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service Appeal Regulations 36 CFR Part 215.

Dated: October 6, 1998.

Lynn Burditt,

Blue River District Ranger, Willamette National Forest.

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