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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.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Pretty Tree Bench Prescribed Burn Project, Dixie National Forest, Garfield County, UT

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for a Forest Service proposal to implement management prescribed burning and cutting and a travel management plan for the Pretty Tree Bench Project Area of the Escalante Ranger District, Dixie National Forest. The area is located approximately 14 miles northeast of Escalante, Utah and approximately 1 mile west of Boulder, Utah. The project would be implemented in accordance with direction in the Dixie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP).

The agency gives notice that the environmental analysis process is underway. Interested and potentially affected persons, along with local, state, and other federal agencies, are invited to participate and contribute to the environmental analysis. The Dixie National Forest invites written input regarding issues specific to the proposed action.

DATES: Written comments to be considered in the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) should be submitted by December 14, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments to: District Ranger, Escalante Ranger District, 755 West Main, P.O. Box 246, Escalante, Utah 84726.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions about the proposed action and EIS to Kevin R. Schulkoski, District Ranger, 435-826-5400.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed project covers an analysis area of approximately 33,938 acres of National Forest System Lands. There are approximately 2,749 acres of wilderness and an additional 1,459 acres of RARE II Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) within the project boundary. No treatment activities are planned within the wilderness acres. In the RARE II Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA), there would be management prescribed burning on 83 acres of ponderosa pine, management prescribed cutting and burning on 85 acres of pinyon-juniper, and management prescribed burning on 24 acres of sagebrush. No roads would be constructed or reconstructed in the IRA. Of the several thousand additional acres of unroaded/undeveloped land within the project boundary, approximately 60% were included in unroaded/undeveloped inventory in 1983/1984 and also included in the 1997 update prepared by the Dixie National Forest.

The proposed actions, including travel management and road closures, would occur in Sections 8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33, Township 32 South, Range 4 East; Sections 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35, and 36, township 32 South, Range 3 East; Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 25, 35, and 36, Township 33 South, Range 3 East; and Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34, Township 33 South, Range 4 East, Salt Lake Base Meridian, Garfield County, Utah.

The Proposed Action would implement management direction and projects identified in the LRMP. This project EIS will be tiered to the LRMP EIS, which provides goals, objectives, standards and guidelines for the various activities and land allocations on the Forest.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide the appropriate levels of prescribed fire and other management actions to create healthier vegetation conditions, enhance elk and deer winter range, reduce ground and ladder fuels in ponderosa pine and mixed conifer types and reduce density within the pinyon/juniper. In addition, the proposal includes a travel management plan which would close some roads year round and some roads on a seasonal basis. An Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) loop served by an existing trailhead

would be included. Under the proposal, no roads would be constructed or reconstructed and there would be no management activities in the Box-Death Hollow Wilderness Area. The treatments are designed to move the project area closer to proper functioning condition. The proposed actions would be located in Management Areas 7A (Wood Products and Utilization), 6A (Livestock Grazing), 2A (Semi-primitive Recreation), 5A (Big Game Winter Range), 8A2 (Box Death Hollow CO2) and 2B (Rural and Roaded Recreation Opportunities).

Under the Proposed Action, approximately 200-250 acres of sagebrush would be burned and reseeded. Where needed, to ensure that management prescribed fire will carry in the sagebrush component, pinyon-juniper would be cut and scattered. This activity is needed to increase the sagebrush age class variety which is presently mature to over-mature and being succeeded by pinyon and juniper.

Approximately 450-500 acres of oak would be burned with a repeat burn in 3-5 years if necessary. This activity is needed to move about 1/3 of the existing oak vegetation out of a single aged stand structure.

The Proposed Action would cut and burn 3,000-3,500 acres of pinyon-juniper with follow-up reseeded to control erosion. This stand replacement activity is needed because the current stand densities were not identified as desirable biological conditions. Treatment would eliminate the current stand structure and age class resulting in early seral vegetation conditions. The components of early seral conditions are: shrub, grass and forb species. These species are our desired biological conditions.

Prescribed fire would be used to underburn approximately 7,000 acres of ponderosa pine and if needed, this treatment would be repeated in 3-5 years. This activity is needed to alleviate the unnatural fuel build up and loading, which has resulted from fire suppression. Treatment would maintain existing ponderosa pine trees while reducing the risk of these pines to a catastrophic wildfire event.

In the mixed conifer, the Proposed Action would underburn approximately 300-350 acres and if needed, the treatment would be repeated in 3-5 years. This activity is needed to

decrease current levels of fuel loading and thus avoid large scale tree mortality from future catastrophic events.

Within the Aspen component, approximately 700 acres would be burned by stand replacing fire. If necessary, understory (encroaching) conifers would be cut to build a sufficient fuel bed to carry the fire. A temporary fence would be constructed to protect regeneration, if deemed necessary. This treatment is necessary to provide age class and structural diversity and strengthen the overall health of the community.

On approximately 1,000 acres of aspen, understory conifers would be removed through non-commercial cutting. This action is needed to promote younger age classes and diverse structure. Succession would be set-back allowing a more pure aspen stand condition.

Approximately 302 acres of aspen would be commercially and non-commercially clear cut in patches up to 40 acres. This action would provide for age and structure diversity and would strengthen the overall health of the aspen community.

The Proposed Action would emphasize the use of native seed in restoring disturbed areas and would also utilize non-native seed, where necessary for erosion control and big game forage. With the Proposed Action, a Travel Management Plan would be implemented. Major roads (arterial) would remain open all year and other roads (collector) would be opened seasonally or closed year round. An OHV loop trail would be developed from existing jeep trails, forest development roads (collector) and the Great Western Trail. The existing trailhead at the north end of Forest Development Road 566 is sufficiently developed to accommodate the additional use from the proposed OHV loop trail.

Preliminary issues that have been identified through scoping to date include concerns about commercial aspen harvest, use of native seed only, reconstructing and realigning certain wet sections of Road Draw road, and year long or seasonal closure of Road Draw road to provide a big game corridor. Other issues include concerns about cutting any trees in any inventoried unroaded/undeveloped areas and the effects of the proposal on roadless area characteristics.

Tentative alternatives to the Proposed Action include: No action (the project will not take place but current management will continue); elimination of any cutting, even for pre-ignition preparation, in unroaded/undeveloped

areas; The use of only native seed throughout the project; The reconstruction of Road Draw road; The closure of Road Draw road seasonally, or year long.

As lead agency, the Forest Service will analyze and document direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects for a range of alternatives. Each alternative will include mitigation measures and monitoring requirements.

Hugh C. Thompson, Forest Supervisor, Dixie National Forest, is the responsible official.

The Forest Service is seeking comments from individuals, organizations, and local, state, and Federal agencies who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action.

Scoping notices have been sent to the Dixie National Forest NEPA mailing list. Other interested individuals, organizations, or agencies may have their names added to the mailing list for this project at any time by submitting a request to: Kevin R. Schulkoski, District Ranger, Escalante Ranger District, 755 West Main, P.O. box 246, Escalante, Utah 84726.

A public review of the proposed project was held on February 3, 1998 with the Boulder, Utah City Council. In general, the Boulder City Council expresses concurrence with the Proposed Action. The entire project areas lies within National Forest System lands. No federal or local permits, licenses or entitlements would be needed. There are no potential conflicts with the plans and policies of other jurisdictions.

The comment period on the Draft EIS will be 45 days from the date of the EPA's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register**. It is very important that those interested in the proposed action participate at this time. To be most helpful, comments on the DEIS should be as specified as possible and may discuss the adequacy of the statement or the merits of the alternatives discussed (see CEQ Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA at 40 CFR 1503.3).

In addition, Federal court decisions have established that reviewers of the DEIS's must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to the reviewers' position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the FEIS, *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, (9th Circuit, 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages,*

Inc. v. Harris, 490 F. Supp.1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). This is to ensure that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at the time it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the final.

The DEIS is expected to be available for review by January 1999. The Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be available by March 1999.

Dated: November 6, 1998.

Hugh C. Thompson,

Forest Supervisor, Dixie National Forest.

[FR Doc. 98-30508 Filed 11-13-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Aquarius Ecosystem Restoration Project, Dixie National Forest, Garfield County, UT

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for a Forest Service proposal to implement an ecosystem restoration and associated road construction project on the Escalante Ranger District, Dixie National Forest. The area is located approximately 18 miles northwest of Escalante, Utah. The project would be implemented in accordance with direction in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Dixie National Forest (LRMP).

The agency gives notice that the environmental analysis process is underway. Interested and potentially affected persons, along with local, state, and other federal agencies, are invited to participate and contribute to the environmental analysis. The Dixie National Forest invites written input regarding issues specific to the proposed action.

DATES: Written comments to be considered in the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) should be submitted on or before December 13, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments to: District Ranger Escalante Ranger District 755 West Main, P.O. Box 246, Escalante, Utah 84726.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions about the proposed action and EIS to Kevin R. Schulkoski, District Ranger, 435-826-5400.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Aquarius Ecosystem Restoration Project