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

(AERP) is located within the Dixie National Forest, Escalante and Teasdale Ranger Districts. It is approximately 18 miles northwest of Escalante, Utah. The 81,104 acre project area is comprised of 4 major watersheds; Pleasant Creek, Boulder Creek, Antimony Creek, and Escalante River. The project is located in parts of Township 30 South, Range 2 East; Township 30 South, Range 3 East; Township 31 South, Range 1 West; Township 31 South, Range 1 East; Township 31 South, Range 2 East; Township 31 South, Range 3 East; Township 32 South, Range 1 West; Township 32 South, Range 1 East; Township 32 South, Range 2 East; Township 32 South, Range 3 East; Township 33 South, Range 1 West; Township 33 South, Range 1 East; Township 34 South, Range 1 West; Township 35 South, Range 1 West; and Township 36 South, Range 1 West.

Elevations range from 9,000 to 11,000 feet. The forest type is primarily Englemann spruce/subalpine fir, with a strong component of aspen. Other vegetation types represented include sagebrush, blue spruce, mixed conifer and ponderosa pine.

Dixie Forest LRMP management areas within the analysis area are: 1 General Forest Direction, 10A Research Natural Area, 2A Semi-Primitive Recreation Opportunities, 2B Rural and Roaded Recreation Opportunities, 4B Wildlife Habitat Management, 4D Aspen Management for Wildlife, 6A Livestock Grazing, 7A Timber Management, 9A Riparian Management.

Several actions are proposed within the project area to move existing conditions toward desired future conditions. These activities include commercial timber harvest, aspen regeneration, management ignited prescribed fire and travel management.

Activities proposed within the project area contribute to meeting the goals and objectives, management direction and standards and guidelines found in the Dixie LRMP.

Proposed Actions within 16,215 total acres of aspen forest would include using prescribed fire only, on an estimated 50 acres to regenerate a young healthy stand.

Use mechanical treatments with or without fire on approximately 3,100 acres of aspen forest. This includes both commercial treatments. Patch cuts or clear cut harvest treatments may be used in blocks of 40 acres or less where aspen areas are accessible (within ¼ mile of an existing road) and contain sufficient quality and volume to make it economical to harvest. Fire would be used after cutting treatments to remove residual conifer and stimulate additional aspen suckering. Approximately 50% of the harvest areas will be followed up by fire.

These activities are needed because the desired condition of the area is to maintain a mosaic of aspen and conifer stands with a variety of age classes across the landscape. Currently, many aspen dominated stands have either a growing component of understory conifer trees or lack of an aspen seedling class capable of replacing the maturing aspen. Most of the aspen stands across the landscape are of similar size and age class. The proposed treatments are designed to convert deteriorating aspen stands to young healthy aspen seedlings on approximately 20% of the existing aspen stands. This will enhance the opportunity to sustain aspen forests over the long-term in properly functioning condition and provide forest projects to forest industry.

The aspen acres proposed for prescribed fire are isolated and do not provide economic commercial opportunities.

The objectives of the treatments in the aspen component include: increase species diversity across the landscape to reduce catastrophic losses associated with forest pests and fire; increase the amount of aspen clones in the early to young stage on up to 20% of the existing stands; maintain aspen component within spruce/fir dominated stands; reduce conifer invasion in the aspen type; improve or maintain the visual form, color and textural diversity in the landscape viewed by forest users; improve structural diversity associated with wildlife habitat; and provide opportunity for community based forestry businesses. Proposed Actions within the 31,827 total acres of Englemann spruce/subalpine fir forests would include:

Approximately 200 acres of aspen within the spruce/fir type would be treated with prescribed stand replacement fire only to stimulate aspen regeneration and eliminate existing aspen and conifer trees.

Approximately 12,000 acres would be treated with commercial mechanical harvest. Tree thinning or an intermediate treatment under an individual tree selection system (reducing stand densities while maintaining a variety of tree sizes), would be implemented. An uneven aged structure is desired.

Approximately 1,600 acres of seral aspen within the spruce/fir would be regenerated with commercial harvest treatments with or without fire. Fire would be used after the cutting treatments to remove residual conifer and stimulate additional aspen suckering. Approximately 50% of the harvest areas will be followed up with fire. Treatments in blocks of 40 acres or less would be used.

These activities are needed because the desired conditions for the spruce/fir stands are to maintain land densities at moderate levels with a variety of age classes and to provide for a mix of aspen clones within this type. Forest management can prevent large scale mortality and loss caused by the spruce beetle. Many spruce/fir stands are densely stocked with trees and are declining in tree growth and vigor and lack larger size classes due to past spruce beetle activity. Seral aspen clones are maturing and succeeding to conifer trees.

The seral aspen component is being replaced by spruce/fir forest type. There is a lack of aspen clones in the early to young stage. More aspen is currently being lost than replaced by aspen regeneration. The invading conifer needs to be removed so that aspen regeneration may be initiated to sustain prue stand conditions for aspen.

The purpose of the proposed action in the coniferous forest is to: improve species diversity and forest structure and pattern characteristics; increase the number of mature (old) stage spruce; manage risk of bark beetles infestations and other insects and diseases at endemic levels; increase seral aspen and representation of young aspen clones in the spruce/fir type; and provide opportunity for community based forestry business.

Transportation Management would include the following road closures: 16.3 miles of existing roads would be utilized for harvest and regeneration activities and would be closed with physical barriers upon project completion; 39.6 miles of existing roads would be improved for project activities and would be obliterated and revegetated upon project completion; 13.25 miles of new road construction would be required for project implementation and then would be closed with physical barriers upon project completion; 7.6 miles of new road construction would be required for project implementation and then obliterated and revegetated upon project completion; approximately 15 miles of roads that are not being utilized for harvest activities will be closed and obliterated.

These activities are needed because many travel routes throughout the area were not properly located and constructed with proper drainage devices and have created erosion problems. Road densities are excessive

to the Forest Service ability to maintain roads to agency standards.

The purpose of the proposed travel management plan is to restore watershed values in areas where unacceptable soil and water resource damage is occurring (closing and rehabilitating unneeded roads will reduce the occurring adverse impacts); reduce long-term maintenance costs; provide access to treatment areas, trailheads, dispersed recreation areas, and other areas of high recreation use; provide for safe travel on Forest roads; and reduce road densities to maintain or improve wildlife habitat effectiveness.

Trailhead development is proposed as follows: Construction of a trailhead for the Powell Point trail (#6.0) at the junction of the Powell Point non-motorized trail and the end of FS road (#1516). Construction would include a parking area, signs and information kiosk. Construction of a trailhead for the Gap trail (#1.51) at the end of Forest road (#1370). Construction would include a parking area, signs and information kiosk. Construction of a trailhead at Clayton Guard Station to serve Grass Lakes (#1.61), Pacer Lake (#4.0), Poison Creek (#3.0) and Antimony Lake (#2.0) motorized trails. Construction would include a parking area, signs and an information kiosk. Construction of a trailhead for the North Creek lakes non-motorized trail (#1.5) Construction would include a parking area, signs and an information kiosk. Construct a parking area at the end of the road #0176 at Row Lakes.

The activities are needed because: a comparison of the desired future condition and the existing forest condition indicated that motorized and non-motorized recreation use is increasing. There is a need to provide safe public access for this use. Existing trailheads are essentially rudimentary and undeveloped. There is a need to design and construct trailheads which include information kiosk, parking and signing. Due to the absence of designated trailheads, damage to the soil and water resources has occurred. There is a need to reduce and prevent resource damage.

Preliminary issues that have been identified through scoping to date include road closures, management activities in areas which have unroaded characteristics, prescribed burning versus cutting in aspen stands and managing timber stands to favor aspen over spruce.

Tentative alternatives to the proposed action include: No Action (the project will not take place, but current management will continue); elimination of timber harvest in areas which have unroaded characteristics; and an alternative which regenerates aspen by burning and does not include commercial aspen timber harvest.

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, PO Box 246, Escalante, Utah 84726.

A public field review of the proposed project was held on September 29, 1998. Twenty one people representing different organizational, business, governmental and individual interests participated in the meeting.

Approximately 120 acres of private land lie within the analysis area. No actions are proposed on private land. The remaining acres lie within National Forest System lands. No federal or local permits, licenses or entitlements would be needed. There are no known conflicts with the plans and policies of other jurisdictions. The comment period for the DEIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register.**

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, 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. Versus NRDC, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978).

Also, environmental objections that could have been raised at the DEIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final EIS may be waived or dismissed by the courts. City of Angoon Versus Hodel, (9th Circuit, 1986) and Wisconsin Heritages, Inc versus 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 the time 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 DEIS should be as specific as possible, it is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft 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 DEIS is expected to be available for review by March 1999. The Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement are expected to be available by May 1999.

Dated: November 4, 1998.

Hugh C. Thompson,

Forester Supervisor, Dixie National Forest.

[FR Doc. 98–30509 Filed 11–13–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

National Agricultural Statistics Service

Notice of Intent To Seek Approval To Conduct an Information Collection

AGENCY: National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. No. 104–13) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulations at 5 CFR Part 1320 (60 FR 44978, August 29, 1995), this notice announces the intent of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to request approval for a new information collection, the Fruit and Vegetable Agricultural Practices Survey.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by January 20, 1999 to be assured of consideration.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS: Contact Rich Allen, Associate Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 4117 South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250–2000, (202) 720–4333.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Fruit and Vegetable Agricultural Practices Survey.