

Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 64, No. 187

Tuesday, September 28, 1999

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

Agricultural Marketing Service

[FV-99-328]

United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Okra

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is soliciting comments on its proposal to change the United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Okra. Specifically, USDA is proposing to provide for the "individual attributes" procedure for product grading with sample sizes, acceptable quality levels (AQL's), tolerances and acceptance numbers (number of allowable defects); replace dual grade nomenclature with single letter grade designations; and make minor editorial changes. These changes have been requested by the industry in order to improve use of the standards.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before November 29, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Written comments may be submitted to Harold A. Machias, Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 0709, South Building, STOP 0247, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-4693; faxed to (202) 690-1087; or e-mailed to Harold.Machias@usda.gov.

Comments should reference the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register** and will be made available for public inspection in the Office of the Branch Chief during regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) and on the Internet.

The current U.S. Standards for Grades of Frozen Okra, along with the proposed changes, are available either through the

above address or by accessing the AMS website on the Internet at www.ams.usda.gov/standards. The United States Standards for Grades do not appear in the Code of Federal Regulations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Harold A. Machias at (202) 720-5021 or www.Harold.Machias@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended, directs and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture "to develop and improve standards of quality, condition, quantity, grade and packaging and recommend and demonstrate such standards in order to encourage uniformity and consistency in commercial practices * * *." AMS is committed to carrying out this authority in a manner that facilitates the marketing of agricultural commodities and makes copies of official standards available upon request.

AMS is proposing to change the United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Okra using the procedures that appear in Part 36 of Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (7 CFR Part 36). The grade standards were last revised in September 1996.

AMS received a petition from the American Frozen Food Institute to change the U.S. grade standards for frozen okra to a new grading system. The current standards are based on cumulative scorepoints. It is proposed that the standards be modified to convert them to a statistically-based individual attribute grading system, similar to the U.S. grade standards for canned green and wax beans (58 FR 4295; January 14, 1993). This change would bring the standards in line with current marketing practices and innovations in processing techniques.

This change would replace dual grade nomenclature with single letter designations. "U.S. Grade A" (or "U.S. Fancy") and "U.S. Grade B (or "U.S. Extra Standard") would become "U.S. Grade A," and "U.S. Grade B," respectively. This revision also includes minor editorial changes. These changes provide a uniform format consistent with recent revisions of other U.S. grade standards. This format has been designed to provide industry personnel and agricultural commodity graders with simpler and more comprehensive standards. Definitions of terms and easy-to-read tables have been

incorporated to assure a better understanding and uniform application of the standards.

AMS is publishing this notice with a 60-day comment period which will provide a sufficient amount of time for interested persons to comment on the changes.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 1621-1627.

Dated: September 21, 1999.

Robert C. Keeney,

Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.

[FR Doc. 99-25095 Filed 9-27-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-02-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests, CO

AGENCY: USDA Forest Service.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) in conjunction with revision of the land and resource management plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) located in Delta, Montrose, Gunnison, Mesa, San Miguel, Ouray, Hinsdale, Saguache, Garfield, and San Juan counties, Colorado.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement in conjunction with the revision of its Land and Resource Management Plan (hereafter referred to as Forest Plan or Plan) for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests (GMUG).

This notice describes the specific portions of the current Forest Plan to be revised, environmental issues considered in the revision, estimated dates for filing the environmental impact statement, information concerning public participation, and the names and addresses of the agency officials who can provide additional information.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by January 31, 2000. The agency expects to file a draft environmental impact statement with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and make it available for public

comment in the fall of 2001. The agency expects to file a final environmental impact statement in the fall of 2002.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to: Carmine Lockwood, Planning Team Leader, GMUG National Forests, 2250 Highway 50, Delta, CO 81416.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Carmine Lockwood, Planning Team Leader, at (970) 874-6677, or Carol Howe, Assistant Planner, at (970) 874-6647.

Responsible Official: Lyle Laverty, Rocky Mountain Regional Forester at P.O. Box 25127, Lakewood, CO 80225-0127.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Pursuant to Part 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219.10(g), the Regional Forester for the Rocky Mountain Region gives notice of the agency's intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the revision effort described above. According to 36 CFR 219.10(g), land and resource management plans are ordinarily revised on a 10 to 15 year cycle. The existing Forest Plan was approved on September 29, 1983. Significant amendments were completed in 1991 to address land suitability for timber production, and in 1993 to address land availability for oil and gas leasing.

The Regional Forester gives notice that the Forest is beginning an environmental analysis and decision-making process for this proposed action so that interested or affected people can participate in the analysis and contribute to the final decision.

Opportunities will be provided to discuss the Forest Plan revision process openly with the public. The public is invited to help identify issues and define the range of alternatives to be considered in the environmental impact statement. Forest Service officials will lead these discussions, helping to describe issues and the preliminary alternatives. These officials will also explain the environmental analysis process and the disclosures of that analysis, which will be available for public review. Written comments identifying issues for analysis and the range of alternatives will be encouraged.

Issue identification (scoping) meetings will be scheduled for fall 1999. Alternative development meetings will be held in fall 2000. Public notice of dates, times, and locations for specific meetings will be provided in local newspapers and posted on the Forest's web site: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug>. Additionally, we will send notices and newsletters to those on the forest plan revision mailing list. Requests to be placed on this mailing list should be

sent to the comment address stated above.

The United States has a unique legal relationship with Indian tribal governments as set forth in the Constitution of the United States, treaties, statutes, Executive orders, and court decisions. As part of the overall effort to uphold the federal trust responsibility to tribal sovereign nations to the extent applicable to National Forest System lands, the Forest Service will establish regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with the tribal nations on a government-to-government basis. The Forest Service will work with governments to address issues concerning Indian tribal self-government and sovereignty, natural and cultural resources held in trust, Indian tribal treaty and Executive order rights, and any issues that significantly or uniquely affect their communities.

Forest plans describe the intended management of National Forests. Agency decisions in these plans do the following:

- Establish management areas and management area direction (management area prescriptions) applying to future activities in that management area (resource integration and minimum specific management requirements) 36 CFR 219.11(c);
- Determine suitability and potential capability of lands for resource production. This includes designation of suitable timber land and establishment of allowable timber sale quantity (36 CFR 219.14 through 219.26);
- Where applicable, recommend designations of special areas such as Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers to Congress.

The authorization of project-level activities on the Forest occurs through project decision-making, the second stage of forest land management planning. Project-level decisions must comply with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures and must include a determination that the project is consistent with the Forest Plan.

In addition to the programmatic decisions described above, the Forest is considering:

- Making site-specific decisions on travel management through identification of specific restrictions for individual roads and trails on the Gunnison Forest, and
- Identifying and analyzing instream flow requirements for site-specific decision.

Any site-specific decisions made in conjunction with the Forest Plan revision EIS would have a separate

decision document and the responsible official would be the Forest Supervisor.

Need for Changes in the Current Forest Plan

It's been approximately sixteen years since the current Forest Plan was approved. Experience and monitoring have shown the need for changes in management direction for some resources or programs. Several sources have highlighted needed changes in the current Forest Plan.

These sources include:

- Public involvement which has identified new information and public values;
- Monitoring and scientific research which have identified new information and knowledge gained;
- Forest plan implementation which has identified management concerns to find better ways for accomplishing desired conditions; and
- Changes in law, regulations, and policies.

In addition to changing public views about how these lands should be managed, a significant change in the information and scientific understanding of these ecosystems has occurred. Some new information is a product of research, while other information has resulted from changes in technology.

Major Revision Topics

Based on the information described above, Plan revision is warranted in light of the combined effects of these multiple needs for change. The preliminary revision topics that have been identified to date are described below.

1. Terrestrial Ecosystem Sustainability and Restoration

Planning Questions

- How will the forest be managed to restore or maintain healthy ecosystems?
- Should the forest be managed within historical range of variability for such things as fire size and frequency, size and distribution of openings, and mix of plant and animal species?
- Are some species or vegetation communities such as aspen and cottonwood declining?
- What are appropriate ways to improve forest health in addition to harvest and pre-commercial cutting?
- How much of the forest should be maintained in old-growth conditions and how should it be distributed in time and space?
- Are large ecological preserves needed to provide adequate habitat for some species? If so, how large, and

which conditions should be represented? What type of human activity, if any, should be allowed in such areas?

- What management direction is needed to ensure viable populations of threatened, endangered, sensitive and other focal species? How do various resource management regimes and human activities affect these species?
- What role should non-native species play in terrestrial ecosystems? What should be done about increasing populations of noxious weeds?
- What management direction is needed to identify, protect, and make available the traditional forest plant and animal products that American Indians enjoy through exercising their treaty rights, or other rights? How do various activities occurring on, or excluded from, National Forest System lands affect the availability of traditional forest products?

Background

A tremendous amount of new information and research results regarding managing terrestrial ecosystems for ecological sustainability has been issued since the Forest Plan was completed in 1983. The current Plan only partially addresses this subject in piecemeal fashion.

Several analysis concepts relating to ecological sustainability have been developed since the 1983 plan, such as: establishing the range of natural variability, comparing management to natural disturbance processes, maintaining biological diversity through coarse-filter and fine-filter assessments, delineating reference landscapes, and broadening focus from vertebrates to all native species. Traditional approaches also remain valid, such as conserving habitat for indicator or focal species, and recovering threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. The Forest will be analyzed using these techniques and the Plan revised to reflect the knowledge gained.

New Management Area (MA) Prescriptions have been developed since the 1983 Plan was approved. There is a need to develop new goals, make existing goals and objectives more specific, and to evaluate the present set of Management Areas, boundaries and prescriptions. Several existing Plan standards lack the sophistication required to account for key elements of ecological integrity, and variations in temporal and spatial scales. An improved monitoring strategy is needed to measure indicators of ecological integrity and sustainability at multiple scales. There is an opportunity to design

monitoring so that it provides a better foundation for adaptive management.

Particular aspects of this topic identified by past and current monitoring include: forest and rangeland health, insects and disease, fragmentation and connectivity of habitats, potential need for additional reserve areas, successional stage abundance and distribution, late successional forest structure, prescribed and natural fire/fuels management, forest cover and plant community conversions, soil productivity, control of noxious weeds and other undesirable species, riparian area health and management, and species-to-habitat relationships. The Plan will revise direction for threatened, endangered, sensitive, focal, and demand species (an expansion of the current management indicator species (MIS) approach).

Proposed Actions

Based on monitoring results, preliminary analyses, and public input, the following actions will be proposed in one or more EIS alternative:

- Define the desired conditions for terrestrial ecosystem sustainability for appropriate temporal and spatial scales.
- Base management practices on understanding and consideration of natural disturbance processes, including the intensity, frequency, and magnitude of those disturbance regimes.
- Increase use of prescribed fire both within and outside of Wilderness through natural and human ignitions.
- Utilize new methods and treat more acres with active vegetation management practices to improve forest health.
- Apply vegetation treatment areas and patch sizes which better reflect natural disturbance patterns.
- Exclude or modify existing human uses to better protect species at risk and to maintain or restore biological diversity.
- Aggressively treat noxious weed populations through various means, including mechanical, biological and chemical control.
- Develop a monitoring strategy that will measure appropriate indicators of ecosystem integrity and ecological sustainability at multiple scales, and will serve to facilitate adaptive management.

2. Aquatic Ecosystem Sustainability and Restoration

Planning Questions

- How do various activities occurring on the forest affect water quality and quantity, soil resources, and riparian areas?

- Where should limited watershed restoration funds be spent to provide the greatest return on investment in terms of enhancement or protection of aquatic ecosystem values?

- How can revised Forest Plan management direction further the implementation of the national "Clean Water Action Plan and Policy" and "Framework for Developing and Implementing Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) in Forest and Rangeland Environments"?

- What are the effects of water diversions on various stream ecosystems? What are the effects of various water storage facilities (reservoirs, ponds, and tanks) on aquatic ecosystems?

- In which drainages should the Forest Plan establish bypass or minimum instream flows as conditions for issuance or renewal of special use permits?

- On which streams or stream reaches should the Forest Service pursue settlement of claims for water rights in state court adjudications in order to protect aquatic ecosystem integrity?

- In which stream or lake systems is improved programmatic direction needed to ensure the viability of aquatic species or to restore dwindling populations? Which measures should be included?

Background

Watersheds have become the basic unit (at multiple scales) for assessing ecological conditions, restoration needs, and the sustainability of management prescriptions. Analysis is needed to ascertain the appropriate management framework for achieving maintenance and restoration of watershed integrity. The existing Plan does not adequately describe management parameters required to ensure that the characteristic diversity of biological and physical components and processes are managed to provide watershed conditions within their approximate range of natural variability. In keeping with changes in Forest Service management philosophy based on the Clean Water Action Plan commitments, recommendations from the Committee of Scientists, and mandates from the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water acts, watershed health and restoration will be a fundamental priority in the Plan revision. There is currently a strong body of law, regulation, and policy to ensure water quality protection (re: agency "Watershed Conservation Practices Handbook," FSH 2509.25, March 1999). This direction provides very little discretion as to planning and implementation of protection measures.

However, there is a zone of discretion with regard to the level and intensity of aquatic ecosystem restoration measures that should be pursued, based on anticipated benefits from investment, other resource trade-offs, and projected funding levels. These questions warrant examination as a primary revision topic.

Proposed Actions

The revised Plan will prescribe specifications and constraints (standards and guidelines) for management practices to:

- Maintain and restore watershed function and provision of beneficial uses.
- Protect and recover native aquatic and riparian dependent species and prevent the introduction and spread of non-native, invasive species.
- Restore aquatic resources, including but not limited to streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, source waters, wetlands, riparian areas, and floodplains.

The Plan also proposes to:

- Identify current and foreseeable future Forest Service consumptive and non-consumptive water uses and rights needed to maintain or restore watershed integrity, including instream flow needs.
- Locate and designate reference watersheds and stream reaches.
- Prioritize specific watersheds for restoration by applying factors such as: past disturbance history; water quality impairment and riparian condition; inherent instability, disturbance sensitivity, and restoration capabilities; diversity of native plants, fish, and animals; special designations such as Wild and Scenic Rivers; recovery of threatened, endangered, or other sensitive species; ability to leverage restoration funds through partnerships; and, the opportunity to work with interested and willing federal, state and tribal governments, communities, adjacent land managers, and owners.

3. Roadless Areas and Unroaded Areas

Planning Questions

- Where are the roadless areas on the Forest, what are their characteristics, and which qualify for Wilderness recommendation?
- How can Congressionally designated Wilderness be managed to accomplish the principles of the Wilderness Act as related to human uses and natural processes?
- How should roadless areas not recommended for Wilderness be managed?

Background

Inventoried roadless areas (RARE II and Forest Plan inventoried areas) and other unroaded areas continue to be areas of high controversy and debate as to their appropriate and best use. Although the Colorado Wilderness Acts of 1980 and 1993 (Pub. L. 96-560 and Pub. L. 103-77) released undesignated roadless lands for other management, these Acts and federal regulation (36 CFR 219.17) require that these areas be re-evaluated for Wilderness designation during Forest Plan revision. Some "inventoried roadless areas" have always included roads. Many more roads have been developed through management practices and by users in the intervening decades. Actual Wilderness designation is a Congressional responsibility; Forests can only make recommendations. One current member of the Colorado Congressional delegation has drafted Wilderness legislation that would increase Wilderness on the GMUG. Ecological sustainability goals will likely lead to focused consideration of Wilderness additions in locations on the margins of existing Wilderness, or in lower elevations where Wilderness is less well represented.

The revision process will include a new inventory of roadless and unroaded areas, replacing the RARE II and previous Plan inventories as the basis for future analysis of "roadlessness." A roadless area inventory will be developed and areas capable of being designated for Wilderness will be identified. Areas not recommended for Wilderness will be studied for possible allocation to other management prescriptions. The issue has become more complex over time and now includes the need to assess values beyond potential Wilderness, such as: source drinking water areas, reference areas for research, areas of high or unique biodiversity, areas where other unfragmented landscapes are scarce, areas of cultural or historic importance, or areas that provide unique or important seasonal habitat for wildlife, fish, and plant species.

The inventory will be conducted according to most recent guidance defining unroaded areas. Current policy—which is in draft form—defines unroaded areas as any areas that do not contain classified roads (a road at least 50 inches wide and constructed or maintained for vehicle use, Interim Rule, 36 CFR 212, 2/11/99). Assessment methods will have to be developed to ascertain whether unroaded areas have sufficient size in a manageable configuration to protect the inherent

values associated with the unroaded condition.

Proposed Actions

The following actions will be proposed in one or more EIS alternative:

- Identify and recommend for Wilderness designation those roadless areas which meet basic requirements for Wilderness and would further the goals of the Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1131 (note)).
- For those roadless and unroaded areas not recommended for Wilderness designation, provide management prescriptions that allow for various levels of development.

4. Travel Management

Planning Questions

- What travel and transportation opportunities should the Forest provide to meet current and expected demands?
 - Where and what type of travel restrictions are needed to sustain aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem integrity during all seasons of use?
 - How can the Forest Service provide a wide range of recreational opportunities to people who are physically restricted from traveling by other than motorized means?
- What type of transportation system, in terms of amount of and standards for roads and trails, can the Forest manage and maintain to an adequate level, particularly considering declining budgets and greatly reduced road maintenance through timber sale contracts?
 - Which existing roads and trails should be closed (permanently or seasonally) and/or decommissioned?
 - How will travel management policies affect property inholders and landowners adjacent to the Forest boundary?
 - How do the GMUG's travel management policies fit with those of adjacent national forests and other land management agencies, particularly where routes cross jurisdictions?

Background

Issues and management concerns related to travel management have increased significantly since completion of the Plan and its amendments. Use numbers for traditional recreation travel, such as driving for pleasure, hiking, horseback riding, and motorbiking have grown steadily. Other modes, such as all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, and mountain bikes have dramatically increased over the last decade. Resource impacts and social conflicts have increased proportionally with these uses. All user groups want to

main or increase opportunities for their preferred uses. Plan monitoring reports have acknowledged existing impacts and the potential for increased adverse effects on soil, water, wildlife and heritage resources from increased use, development of unauthorized routes, and lack of maintenance on existing roads and trails. Semi-primitive areas are becoming more developed as use increases and new routes appear.

Current agency policy ("Natural Resource Agenda", Dombeck, 02/03/99) directs forests to aggressively decommission old unneeded, unauthorized, and other roads that contribute to environmental degradation. An economically efficient and environmentally sound transportation network is essential for active forest management and the flow of goods and services.

The GMUG has invested a great deal into travel management planning for the Grand Mesa and Uncompahgre Forests. For the Gunnison Forest area, we will use Plan revision to conduct comparable analysis and make consistent decisions. Additional designation and/or separation of motorized and non-motorized uses will be needed to reduce conflicts. Site-specific travel management decisions for individual routes will be included in the revision process; any ground-disturbing closure or decommissioning actions will receive project-level analysis. The Forest will consider and apply those portions of the pending "Road Analysis Process" which are specified for forest-level planning, when the policy becomes final.

Proposed Actions

The following actions will be proposed in one or more EIS alternative:

- Identify a road and trail transportation network that provides an environmentally sound and socially responsive travel management system which is consistent across the entire Forest, and well coordinated with adjacent forests.
- Eliminate cross-country motorized travel ("green" areas) on those portions of the Forest not previously addressed in recent travel management plans. Specify travel routes by appropriate modes and season of use.
- Designate permanent or seasonal travel restrictions and those routes that will be decommissioned. Identify new road and trail alignments that are needed to enhance travel opportunities or protect resource values.
- Specify whether motorized use is allowed in each land area (MA) allocation and prescription; provide new goals, standards, and guidelines.

5. Recreation and Scenery Resources

Planning Questions

- What range, mix, and emphasis of recreation opportunities will best meet the demands of a wide variety of current and future users; while ensuring protection of scenic, biotic and physical resources.
- How much recreation use can be sustained from both the ecological integrity and visitor enjoyment perspectives? Do limits need to be placed on certain areas or types of use during various seasons?
- Should potentially conflicting uses, such as mountain biking and horseback riding occur in the same areas or be segregated?
- How should surface water uses, including types and levels of use on lakes and streams be regulated to maintain quality of the recreation experiences and protect natural resources?
- How should major recreation corridors and scenic byways be managed? What type of opportunities should be provided in these areas?
- What are appropriate development levels for campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, etc.? How many facilities can be adequately maintained under projected budget levels?
- How do national forest and private sector facilities and services best fit with each other?
- How should the Plan revision be used to address allocation of special uses, capacity and development levels? What program parameters, such as service day allocations, permit numbers, activities permitted, location and types of developments, should be established?
- Where and how should scenic quality be maintained or enhanced along major travel routes?
- How does scenic quality change over time? What are the implications of ecosystem dynamics and how should management intervene prior to or after changes? How much weight should be given to short-term versus long-term impacts and benefits?
- What is the relationship between scenic quality and air quality? What role should prescribed fire play?

Background

Recreation is a dominant use of the GMUG. Recreationists generate major economic benefits to local counties and communities, and a high percentage of recreation opportunities on the Forest are provided or enhanced by private enterprise. Public perceptions of national forest management are primarily based on personal experiences and visual impressions. Forest visitors

vary widely in their recreational interests. A range of recreation settings from pristine to highly developed is desired. This results in pressures for different land allocations. Generally expressed public sentiment, attitudes and values indicate strong desire for protection of natural scenic beauty. The current Plan discusses both Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) categories and Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs), but does little to establish management direction for either recreation or scenic resources. The existing Plan included an inventory, but very little in the way of firm direction on ROS allocations; it basically set ranges of ROS and VQO classes for most Management Areas. These allocations were based more on compatibility with other management area direction than on the characteristics of particular land areas. ROS objectives and consequences were poorly displayed. This topic area is strongly tied to travel management, as well as timber and other vegetation management activities.

The VQO framework has been replaced by the scenery management system. the ROS and scenery management frameworks can be used both to inventory existing conditions and to make decisions on management objectives. We will reassess management and public use needs related to these concepts. The ROS system will be used to describe desired recreation settings, conditions, compatible user groups, and appropriate levels of use for specific areas of the Forest. Project decision-making will have improved efficiency and support (e.g., in travel management) when the revised Plan clearly establishes the conditions we are trying to achieve in terms of recreation opportunities. Improved direction, including distinct descriptions for both winter and summer conditions, will substantially enhance recreation management and user experiences. These displays will also help more clearly define the conflicts and trade-offs between motorized and non-motorized recreational

Proposed Actions

- The Forest will be zoned into various classifications of "recreation opportunity spectrum" for summer and winter uses. There are seven broad classifications which range from primitive through urban, and they will be associated with a variety of resource management standards and guidelines in nearly all program areas.
- The Forest will be zoned into various classifications of "scenic integrity levels," ranging from very low

to very high. These classifications will be associated with a variety of management implications in nearly all program levels.

- The revised Plan will provide updated programmatic direction for recreation facility developments, maintenance, special use permitting parameters, and private sector service objectives.

6. Timber Suitability and Forest Management for Commercial Products

Planning Questions

- Which portions of the Forest are suitable for timber harvest?
- What volume of timber and mix of products should the Forest provide? What harvest level is sustainable while ensuring ecological integrity?
- How important to local communities and economies are the wood products which the Forest provides?
- What is the financial efficiency of the Forest's timber sales program?
- Which logging systems should be applied to better enable forest vegetation treatments over a wider variety of terrain, and during more stages of stand development?
- How should recommended and allowable timber harvest prescriptions be adjusted, both in terms of type and spatial application limits, to account for new information relative to historic range of variation and natural disturbance regimes?
- Should logging occur in unroaded areas?
- Are new roads needed for harvesting? If so, to what standards should they be built? Should roads be maintained or obliterated after logging use? Should logging roads be open or closed to the general public?
- What are the appropriate specifications and constraints (standards and guidelines) for logging? What kinds of restoration practices should occur after logging and road building?

Background

Timber management continues to be one of the most controversial agency activities, as well as one of the most important for some local communities. The debate surrounding timber harvesting is generally waged in terms of related issues, such as biodiversity, community sustainability, and roadless areas. However, this topic remains significant in its own terms because of statutory mandates (e.g., the 1897 Organic Act (16 U.S.C. 473), and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1600(note))), emphasis

in current research and public dialogue (e.g., "Committee of Scientists Reports", 3/16/99; proposed legislation to ban logging on NFS lands, H.R. 2789), and the intensity of public emotion. The determination of lands suited and not suited for timber production and ASQ is required by NFMA (sec. 6(g)(2)(A)) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 219.14).

The 1991 significant amendment to the Forest Plan addressed most of the "timber" elements of the vegetation management debate. Timber demand was re-evaluated, and the suitable timber base and allowable sale quantity (ASQ) were recomputed using FORPLAN. Below-cost sales and the economic suitability of timber were key topics addressed in the amendment. Much of this analysis remains current, though stumpage prices, among other elements, have changed significantly. The Forest has completed new inventories since the 1991 timber amendment was adopted which will be useful in determining timber suitability. Plan implementation and monitoring have shown that portions of the suited base may have been inappropriately classified based on current standards. Updating the 1991 analysis is needed to account for new ecological and economic criteria, and other social aspects of the timber program.

The amended Plan for the GMUG identified 544,730 acres that are suitable for timber production and set an ASQ that averages 38.7 million board feet (MMBF) of wood products per year for the decade beginning in 1992. Programmed sale quantity, the amount expected to be offered for sale, is equal to the ASQ. In addition, the Forest estimated sales of 7 MMBF per year of non-chargeable products, mostly personal-use firewood. Actual volume sold has fallen well short of the projected levels. There are several reasons for this, the greatest of which is insufficient budget and skyrocketing timber project planning costs and time frames.

Traditional objectives for timber management have been supplanted with broader objectives for vegetation and fuels management to achieve integrated ecological goals. Plan revision must describe multiple land classifications for timber removal, including: lands not suitable for timber production, lands where timber harvest is permitted to accomplish other resource objectives, and lands where timber production is an objective.

Proposed timber sales in currently unroaded areas have generated much controversy. This revision topic overlaps with the Roadless Area and

Unroaded Area allocation and management. Harvesting aspen, harvesting mature / late-successional stands or large trees, regeneration harvest methods, patch size, logging systems, and cost efficiency of timber sales, are elements of this topic.

Proposed Actions

- The Forest land base will be classified into various categories of suitability for timber production within each Plan alternative, including lands: tentatively suited for timber production; not appropriate for timber production because they're occupied by administrative sites; not appropriate for timber production due to minimum management requirements that limit activities; not appropriate for timber production because of other multiple-use objectives; not cost efficient for timber production over the planning horizon; and, net suited lands appropriate for timber production.
- Allowable sale quantity and long-term sustained yield capacity will be identified for each Plan alternative.
- Programmatic direction (standards and guidelines) will be revised for harvest prescriptions and logging systems and road management.

Secondary Revision Topics

Preliminary topics discussed in this section are also important issues to be addressed in the Plan revision. However, they are likely not substantial or widespread enough to be major drivers in the EIS alternative themes or forest-wide management area prescriptions and standards.

1. Special Areas

Planning Questions

- Which area on the Forest qualify for Research Natural Area designation?
- Which rivers, or river segments, on the Forest are potentially eligible for addition to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System?
- Which portions of the Forest qualify for other special area designations?
- Should landscapes containing cultural or historic resource properties that are potentially eligible for, or already listed on, the National Register of Historic Places receive special land management prescriptions?
- What is the appropriate balance between providing for historic site preservation, or conservation, and recreational enjoyment, and allowing other activities that can affect the use of the cultural or historic site and its setting? What are the appropriate specifications and constraints (standards and guidelines) for activities

affecting cultural properties and their setting?

- What kinds of cooperation are needed between the Forest Service, the tribes, other agencies, and private individuals to protect these areas?

Background

The planning area includes several unique or outstanding areas and resources of outstanding physical, biological, or social interest. Collectively these are known as "special areas." Potential formal designations of special areas may include Wilderness (which was also discussed under Primary Topic 3, above); Wild and Scenic Rivers; Research Natural Areas; and special recreational areas with scenic, historical, geological, botanical, zoological, paleontological, archaeological, or other special characteristics. These special areas will influence land allocation and management in the revision. In some cases the Plan will make the designation as a special area, and in most cases it will simply make recommendations to another authority (e.g., U.S. Congress). Some areas received special designation after the last Plan was approved, such as, Tabeguache Area, Roubideau Area, Fossil Ridge Recreation Management Area and Wilderness, Powderhorn Wilderness, and other Wilderness additions, and have never been incorporated into the Plan or been given programmatic direction other than for travel management.

Ten areas have been inventoried to determine their potential for establishment as Research Natural Areas. The Plan revision will address establishment of RNA's including an assessment of the needs for additions to the RNA network.

There are five scenic byways on the Forest and a number of national trails. Proposals are under consideration for additional trails.

There are currently several historic properties on the Forest recognized to National Register of Historic Places. Heritage resources must be protected by law.

The Forest is part of the traditional homeland of the Ute Nation and there is an increased awareness of the sacred sites. Protection of these sites will be part of revision.

The purpose and authority for study of Wild and Scenic Rivers is in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of October 1, 1968, as amended. The GMUG includes two rivers (the East River) and Taylor River listed on the National Rivers Inventory. Both rivers were evaluated during development of the original Forest Plan and determined not to be

eligible for the Wild and Scenic River System. Other rivers and streams with potential for designation (e.g., portions of the Gunnison and San Miguel) are located off of National Forest System lands.

2. Coal, Leasable Minerals, and Mining

Planning Questions

- What lands are suitable for oil and gas leasing? What stipulations should be included in leases? What lands should be withdrawn from mineral entry because of conflicts with other National Forest uses?
- What types of activities or practices are suitable? What mitigation measures are needed? What kinds of restoration practices should occur after mining and oil and gas exploration or development?
- How should mineral and energy exploration and development be balanced with other considerations, such as heritage resources, aesthetics, human health, and ecosystem health and sustainability? What are the effects of exploration, development, and associated road construction on other uses of the Forest?
- What are the effects of mining and oil and gas activities beyond the local area?
- What kind of direction is needed for recreational planning or dredging?
- What special considerations are needed in Wilderness?
- What are the economic impacts in the local community of mining and coal, oil, and gas exploration and development?

Background

The 1993 Oil and Gas Leasing EIS established standard, controlled surface use, and no surface occupancy stipulations, in addition to determining the availability of land for leasing. No similar effort has been undertaken for coal or uranium. Leasing decisions continue to be made on a case-by-case basis, when in fact, many of the leasing stipulations for oil and gas (e.g., protection of riparian areas) appear to apply equally well to coal, uranium, and other resource programs. The Forest Service needs to determine what areas are suitable and available for oil, gas, coal, and uranium leasing and what stipulations should be placed on exploration and development. The revised Plan will develop separate stipulations for coal and uranium leases.

Most of the Forest is available for locatable (or "hard rock") mineral exploration and development under the Mining Law of 1872, unless areas are specifically withdrawn. The Plan revision will update programmatic

guidance to minimize adverse environmental impacts on Forest surface resources during mining operations for locatable minerals.

3. Landownership Adjustment

Planning Questions

- Which areas of the Forest need strengthened programmatic direction to guide land ownership pattern adjustments?
- How can goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines for lands adjustment be improved to prioritize agency action, enhance management efficiency, and assist local communities?

Background

Landownership adjustment is generally considered a tool to accomplish resource or socioeconomic objectives, rather than a driving issue in and of itself. However, land exchange activity on the GMUG has far exceeded predictions of the existing Plan. Exchange proposals continue to generate intense controversy, particularly when they involve land within or near resort communities, where land values are high and open space is at a premium. Plan revision offers an opportunity to develop agreements about desired future patterns of land ownership that could be achieved through exchanges or purchases. Access to public land is often a related concern where private land development is happening, or likely will occur, adjacent to the Forest.

What To Do With This Information

This revision effort is being undertaken to develop management direction that will help attain the three basic agency goals of ecological sustainability, social and economic sustainability, and collaborative public involvement.

The Forest's role and responsibilities in promoting social and economic sustainability include: utilizing an effectively structured planning process that helps build public understanding of the interconnectedness of communities, economies and the Forest and its resources; applying continuous, open, and collaborative planning processes which enable well-reasoned community deliberation of sustainable choices; examining opportunities to help local communities meet specific needs; and providing for a wide variety of uses, values, products and services through decision-making and Plan implementation.

Early public participation will identify the topics to be addressed in

Plan revision. The preceding discussion of preliminary revision topics is based upon our assessment of Plan monitoring and evaluation results; public and agency input during project planning and Plan amendment efforts; and socioeconomic, demographic and political changes. We expect this list to change as people engage in the planning process.

Framework for Alternatives To Be Considered

A range of alternatives will be considered when revising the Forest Plan. The alternatives will address different options to resolve concerns raised as the revision topics listed above. A reasonable range of alternatives will be evaluated and reasons given for eliminating some alternatives from detailed study. A "no-action alternative" is required, meaning that management would continue under the existing Plan. Alternatives will provide different ways to address and respond to public issues, management concerns, and resource opportunities identified during the scoping process. In describing alternatives, desired vegetation and resource conditions will be defined. Resource outputs will be estimated in the Forest Plan based on achieving desired conditions. Preliminary information is available to develop alternatives; however, there will be additional public, agency, and tribal government involvement and collaboration for alternative development.

Consulting and Collaborating With Tribal Governments

The Forest Service will establish regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal nations on a government-to-government basis. The agency will work with tribal governments to address issues concerning Indian tribal self-government and sovereignty, natural and cultural resources held in trust, Indian tribal treaty and Executive order rights, and any issues that significantly or uniquely affect their communities. Correspondence, meetings, and field trips will be used in this effort.

Involving the Public

An atmosphere of openness is one of the objectives of the public involvement process, in which all members of the public feel free to share information with the Forest Service regularly. All parts of this process will be structured to maintain this openness.

The Forest Service is seeking information, comments, and assistance from individuals, organizations, tribal governments, and federal, state, and local agencies who are interested in or may be affected by the proposed action (36 CFR 219.6). The Forest Service is also looking for collaborative approaches with members of the public who are interested in forest management. Federal and state agencies and some private organizations have been cooperating in the development of assessments of current biological, physical, and economic conditions. This information will be used to prepare the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The range of alternatives to be considered in the DEIS will be based on public issues, management concerns, resource management opportunities, and specific decisions to be made.

Public participation will be solicited by notifying in person and/or by mail known interested and affected publics. News releases will be used to give the public general notice, and public scoping opportunities will be offered in numerous locations. Public participation activities will include (but will not be limited to) requests for written comments, open houses, focus groups, field trips, and collaborative forums.

Public participation will be sought throughout the revision process and will be especially important at several points along the way. The first formal opportunity to comment is during the scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7). Scoping includes (1) Identifying potential issues, (2) from these, identifying significant issues or those that have been covered by prior environmental review, (3) exploring alternatives in addition to No Action, and (4) identifying the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

Release and Review of the EIS

We expect the DEIS to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public, agency, and tribal government comment in the fall of 2001. At that time, the EPA will publish a notice of availability for the DEIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the DEIS will be 90 days from the date the EPA publishes the notice of availability 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 must participate in the environmental review of the proposal in such a way that their participation 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 DEIS stage but are not raised until after completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) 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 three-month 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 FEIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns relating to the proposed actions, 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. Comments may also address the adequacy of the DEIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the statements. In addressing these points, 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.

After the comment period on the DEIS ends, comments will be analyzed, considered, and responded to by the Forest Service in preparing the Final EIS. The FEIS is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2002. The responsible official will consider the comments, responses, environmental consequences discussed in the FEIS, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies in making decisions regarding these revisions. The responsible official will document the decisions and reasons for the decisions in a Record of Decision for the revised Plan. The decision will be subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 217.

Dated: September 7, 1999.

Lyle Laverty,

*Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region,
USDA Forest Service.*

[FR Doc. 99-25099 Filed 9-27-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-HJ-M