

humane treatment of guinea pigs, hamsters, and rabbits during transportation in commerce.

The purpose of this notice is to solicit comments from the public (as well as affected agencies) concerning our information collection. These comments will help us:

(1) Evaluate whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility;

(2) Evaluate the accuracy of our estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used;

(3) Enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and

(4) Minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, through use, as appropriate, of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other collection technologies, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses.

**Estimate of burden:** The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average .125 hours per response.

**Respondents:** Intermediate handlers, carriers, "A" and "B" dealers (as consignors), USDA accredited veterinarians.

**Estimated annual number of respondents:** 1470.

**Estimated annual numbers of responses per respondent:** 1.408.

**Estimated annual number of responses:** 2070.

**Estimated total annual burden on respondents:** 260 hours. (Due to rounding, the total annual burden hours may not equal the product of the annual number of responses multiplied by the average reporting burden per response.)

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Done in Washington, DC, this 12th day of March 1999.

**Bobby R. Acord,**

*Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.*

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BILLING CODE 3410-34-P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 99-011-1]

#### Availability of a Draft Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

**AGENCY:** Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** We are advising the public that a draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact have been prepared by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service relative to the proposed release into the environment of nonindigenous leaf beetles for use as biological control agents to suppress saltcedar, a major weed pest of water courses and riparian habitats.

**DATES:** We invite you to comment. We will consider all comments that we receive by April 19, 1999.

**ADDRESSES:** Please send an original and three copies of your comments to Docket No. 99-011-1, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, suite 3C03, 4700 River Road Unit 133, Riverdale, MD 20737-1236. Please state that your comments refer to Docket No. 99-011-1. A copy of the draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact, and any comments we receive on them, may be inspected at USDA, room 1141, South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. Persons wishing to inspect those documents are requested to call ahead on (202) 690-2817 to facilitate entry into the reading room.

Interested persons may obtain a copy of the draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact by writing to the address listed below under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Dr. Ronald D. Hennessey, Entomologist, Biotechnology and Biological Analysis, PPQ, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 133, Riverdale, MD 20737-1236, (301) 734-7839; or e-mail: ronald.d.hennessey@usda.gov. For copies of the draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact, write to Dr. Ronald D. Hennessey at the same address. Please refer to the title of the draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact when ordering copies.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has received an application from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, for a permit to release nonindigenous leaf beetles, *Diorhabda elongata* Brulle (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae), for biological control of deciduous saltcedar, *Tamarix ?ramosissima* Ledeb. and *T. parviflora* DC. (Tamaricaceae). Saltcedar is an introduced weed that grows as a tree or shrub in dense stands along waterways. The purpose of the proposed release is to reduce the severity of infestations of the weed.

Saltcedar is a major weed pest of water courses and riparian habitats within the United States. In 1998, saltcedar infested areas approached, if not exceeded, 1.0 million acres. Along many water courses, saltcedar now constitutes more than half of the vegetation. Saltcedar is less desirable than native vegetation because dense stands of the weed interfere with camping, hiking, and picnicking; dense infestations extract up to 5 feet of water annually; rodent density, bird density, and bird species diversity are lower in riparian saltcedar infestations than in riparian communities of native plants; saltcedar has poor value as a forage plant for livestock; and saltcedar causes flooding, either by blocking channels directly or by increasing the deposition of silt.

The applicant is proposing to release *D. elongata* initially at 12 sites in 7 States: California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. During the first year, the beetles will be released into field cages for study. In the second year, if all goes well in the first year, cages will be removed to allow beetles to move from one part of the site to another. Eventually, if all goes well, beetles will be released at many sites to promote rapid control of saltcedar.

To provide the public with documentation of APHIS' review and analysis of the environmental impact and plant pest risk associated with releasing *D. elongata* into the environment, we have prepared a draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact entitled, "Field Release of a Nonindigenous Leaf Beetle, *Diorhabda elongata* (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae), for Biological Control of Deciduous Saltcedar, *Tamarix ?ramosissima* and *T. parviflora* (Tamaricaceae)" (January 1999).

The draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact have been prepared in accordance with: (1) the National Environmental Policy

Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provision of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1509), (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1b), and (4) APHIS= NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 11th day of March 1999.

**Craig A. Reed,**

*Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.*

[FR Doc. 99–6595 Filed 3–17–99; 8:45am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### **Environmental Impact Statement Preparation for the Goose Pond Project, Allegheny National Forest, McKean County, PA**

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

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

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, notice is hereby given that the Forest Service, Allegheny National Forest will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to disclose the environmental consequences of the proposed Goose Pond Project.

The purpose of this project is to salvage mortality and to move from the Existing Condition towards the Desired Future Condition (DFC) as detailed in the Allegheny National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The Forest Plan allocate land to management for both wood production (Management Area 3.0); and scenic quality (Management Area 6.1). The Goose Pond project is located within management areas, 3.0 and 6.1.

In order to move towards the DFC, the early successional age class (0–20 year age) needs to increase; healthy forested stands capable of producing high quality, high value sawtimber need to be maintained; and understories dominated by fern, grass or undesirable woody vegetation need to develop seedling vegetation. Project proposals include timber harvesting as a means for making desired changes to forest vegetation and satisfying the demonstrated public need for wood products. Our proposed action to meet the purpose and need includes 194 acres of regeneration harvests to bring the onset of a new forest; herbicide, fertilizer, fencing, mechanical site

preparation, and planting to ensure seedling establishment and growth in understories, 549 acres of thinning in immature stands to reduce the competition for light and nutrients, thereby improving the health and vigor of residual trees; and 232 acres of salvage thinning to salvage dead and dying trees. Associated with these silvicultural activities includes approximately 3.4 miles of new road construction (1.8 miles are existing non-system roads), 5.9 miles of road restoration, 2.6 miles of road betterment, expansion of 4 stone pits, and development of 3 additional stone pits to provide an adequate long-term transportation system. Wildlife habitat improvement measures in the form of planting 20 acres of trees and shrubs, 3 acres of grasses, underplanting 60 acres of conifer cover, constructing a 1 acre permanent wildlife opening, pruning of 5 acres of apple trees, 1.0 mile of fish habitat improvements, and placement of 8 nest boxes to supplement the existing conditions.

After completion of the analysis, the responsible official will select an alternative that maximizes net public benefits for the Goose Pond Project area.

**DATES:** The public is asked to provide comments, suggestions, and recommendations for achieving the purpose and need for the Goose Pond Project. The public comment period will be for 30 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes this notice of availability in the **Federal Register**. Comments and suggestions should be submitted in writing and postmarked by April 20, 1999 to ensure timely consideration. To assist in commenting, a scoping letter providing more detailed information on the project proposal has been prepared and is available to interested parties.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Submit written comments and suggestions concerning the proposed action to: "Goose Pond Project",

attention Edward L. Hale—ID Team Leader, Marienville Ranger District, HC2 Box 130, Marienville, PA 16239. For further information, contact Edward L. Hale at (814) 927–6628.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The issue of uneven-aged management often arises during the scoping process for projects such as this. We will therefore include at least one alternative to the Proposed Action which will evaluate the effects of applying uneven-aged management techniques. Issues which are generated through the scoping process may generate additional alternatives.

Comments considered beyond the scope of this project and which will *not*

be evaluated include whether or not commercial timber harvest should occur on National Forest System lands; the validity of the science of silviculture and forest management; and whether or not to allow the use of herbicides on the Allegheny National Forest on a programmatic level.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. In a recent legal opinion, the Forest Service's Office of General Council (OGC) has determined that names and addresses of people who respond to a Forest Service solicitation are not protected by the Privacy Act and can be released to the public. The Forest Service routinely gives notice of and requests comments on proposed land and resource management actions accompanied by environmental documents, as well as on proposed rules and policies. Comments received in response to such solicitations, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for such inspection, upon request. Any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIC) permits such confidentiality. The opinion states that such confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets.

The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and to be available for public review during June of 1999. At that time, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will publish in the **Federal Register** a notice of availability of the draft environmental impact statement. The comment period on the draft will be 45 days from the date the EPA notice appears in the **Federal Register**.

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 draft environmental impact statements must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposals 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). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the final