

Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 64, No. 86

Wednesday, May 5, 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

Forest Service

Proposed Brownlee Timber Sale and Other Activities Within the Sheep Gulch Roadless Area, Payette National Forest, Washington County, Idaho

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The USDA Forest Service is proposing these activities for the Brownlee Subwatershed: harvest and regeneration of timber, changing the timing of grazing and combining the West Pine/Brownlee and Limestone Allotments, and prescribed fire to reduce fuels and enhance plant growth and mountain quail habitat.

The agency gives notice of the environment analysis and decision-making process so that interested and affected people know how they may anticipate and contribute to the final decision. The agency invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis and the issues to address.

DATES: Comments must be received by June 18, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to David Alexander, Forest Supervisor, Payette National Forest, P.O. Box 1026, McCall, Idaho 83638.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed action should be directed to Dautis Pearson, NEPA Coordinator, phone (208) 253-0134; or John Baglien, District Ranger, phone (208) 549-4201.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The USDA Forest Service is proposing projects within the 45,011 acre Brownlee Subwatershed. About 4-6 MMBF of timber from 600-800 acres will be harvested by thinning and regeneration methods, using tractor, skyline, and helicopter logging systems. About 300-400 acres will be regenerated. No road construction is planned for the timber

sale, which lies partially within the Sheep Gulch Roadless Area, Washington County, Idaho.

This proposal follows direction in the Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Proposals for the range allotments include changes in timing of grazing and combining the West Pine/Brownlee and Limestone Allotments. The number of days for grazing and the number of AUMs would remain the same for these allotments.

Fire management activities would focus on reduction of fuels following timber harvest and reintroduction of fire into the ecosystem. Piling with burning and underburning of logged areas would reduce existing and created fuels, preparing some of these areas for planting. Fire would be reintroduced into vegetation communities that burn frequently (every 10 to 50 years) under natural disturbance regimes. Prescribed fire activities would occur on a total of about 4,000 acres of open ponderosa pine stands, aspen communities, and grass/shrublands to enhance plant growth and diversity.

Preliminary issues identified are roadless area quality, forest health in stringer habitat, and the economic and resource effects of longer return intervals into the subwatershed.

Initial scoping began in October, 1997. The Forest Service is conducting preliminary analysis and will be seeking additional information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested or affected by the proposed projects. Additional input will help identify key issues and develop alternatives in preparation of the draft EIS.

The scoping process includes:

1. Identification of potential issues.
2. Identification of issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Elimination of insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental process.
4. Exploration of additional alternatives based on the issues identified during scoping.
5. Identification of potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

The Forest Service expects to file the draft EIS with the Environmental Protection Agency and have it available for public review by July 1, 1999. The comment period on the draft EIS will be

45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency'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 DEISs must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewer's positions and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Power Corp. v. NRDC* 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, courts may waive or dismiss environmental objections that could be raised at the DEIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement (FEIS). *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016 1022 (9th Cir. 1986), and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 45 day comment period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the FEIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues raised by the proposed action, comments should be as specific as possible. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

The Responsible Official is David F. Alexander, Forest Supervisor, Payette National Forest.

Dated: April 28, 1999.

Carol Feider,

Operations Branch Chief.

[FR Doc. 99-11239 Filed 5-4-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Economic Research Service

Notice of Intent To Seek Approval to Collect Information

AGENCY: Economic Research Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulations at 5 CFR 1320 (60 FR 44978, August 29, 1995), this notice announces the Economic Research Service's (ERS) intention to request approval for a new information collection, the New EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) User Survey, to analyze the demographic characteristics and experiences of new entrants to USDA's Food Stamp Program (FSP). These data will be used in the Evaluation of the Impact of EBT Customer Service Waivers on Recipients to determine the nature and frequency of any problems which may be caused when USDA grants to States waivers to regulations governing customer service in EBT systems for the FSP.

DATES: Written comments on this notice must be received by July 9, 1999, to be assured of consideration.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS: Requests for additional information should be directed to William Levedahl, Food Assistance, Poverty, and Well-Being Branch, Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1800 M St., NW, Washington, DC 20036-5801, 202-694-5431.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Evaluation of the Impact of EBT Customer Waivers on Recipients: New EBT User Survey.

Type of Request: Approval to collect information on new Food Stamp Program (FSP) entrants in EBT states.

Abstract: The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is responsible for conducting studies and evaluations of the Nation's food assistance programs that are administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is the largest domestic food-assistance program in the United States. Traditionally, food stamp recipients have received their monthly benefits as paper coupons to be redeemed for food at authorized retail food stores. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 requires that, by October 1, 2002, all States deliver food stamp benefits using an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system. Approximately 37 States now have some type of operational EBT system.

An EBT system provides an alternative to paper food stamp coupons for issuing and redeeming FSP benefits.

EBT is a point-of-sale (POS) terminal network system that uses plastic magnetic encoded cards much like bank debit cards. Recipients are trained in the use of the card and utilize a personal identification number (PIN) for each transaction. To access their food stamp benefits, recipients run their EBT cards through an electronic reader at the checkout counter and enter their PIN on a keypad. The amount of the purchase is deducted from the recipient's account.

EBT systems routinely provide client services through customer service centers supported by EBT vendors. The centers maintain toll-free telephone hotlines for clients to call for various reasons, e.g., to determine account balances, to report lost or stolen cards, or to activate EBT cards they receive through the mail. Clients having problems with the system in general are instructed to call the service centers for assistance.

The regulations governing the implementation and operation of EBT systems include several customer service standards (7 CFR 274.12). As EBT has developed and expanded, FNS has allowed States to try alternative service policies via waivers. The principal waivers employed by States include: training recipients by mail rather than through in-person training with hands-on practice with EBT equipment; assignment of the initial PIN by the EBT vendor rather than PIN selection by the recipient; and permitting up to five days for card replacement rather than two days. Twenty-four States have been granted one or more of the above three EBT customer service waivers.

To promote and support the efficient and cost-effective operation of EBT systems, ERS is conducting a study with the following objectives: (1) to characterize client service problems associated with EBT customer service waivers and identify how clients respond to these problems; and (2) to estimate the occurrence of client service problems associated with EBT customer service waivers. Special attention will be paid to the nature and frequency of problems encountered by vulnerable recipients, especially the elderly and the disabled, as defined by FSP regulations.

ERS, working with Abt Associates Inc., who will collect information about the nature and frequency of client service problems from three main sources in each of five States, including three States that have implemented all three customer service waivers and two States that have not implemented any of the three waivers. The first information source is vendor- or system-generated

monthly reports which summarize activity levels within the system, including the number of EBT card replacements and calls to customer service hotlines. The second source is EBT system transaction logs, which record all system activity including benefit postings to recipient accounts, purchases, attempted purchases rejected due to incorrect PIN entry, and EBT card PIN locks (when multiple entries of an incorrect PIN temporarily disable the card). The third source, for which OMB clearance will be needed, is the New EBT User Survey, a telephone survey of food stamp recipients in each of the five participating States. The survey will be administered to a random sample of recipients who are new to the FSP and EBT system use because new clients are likely to be most affected by waivers to hands-on training and PIN-selection regulations. The survey sample will be stratified by State and by whether the head of the FSP assistance unit is considered vulnerable (i.e., elderly or disabled). The participating States with waivers are Alabama, Florida and Minnesota; the participating non-waiver States are Louisiana and Pennsylvania. These States were purposively selected and recruited to participate because their approaches to customer service and experiences with EBT implementation were expected by FNS to be especially informative. This selection method is appropriate because of the need for State cooperation and because the study is intended to explore the possibility that the waivers have significant impacts on recipients, not to provide definitive, nationally-representative impact estimates.

The survey will collect information about: client demographics; respondent use of an authorized representative or others to shop with the EBT card, and why; how each respondent received his or her EBT card, including time and other resources spent obtaining the card; how the respondent learned to use his or her EBT card; whether the respondent encountered any problems remembering the PIN or using the card to shop; whether the respondent ever requested a replacement EBT card and, if so, the process and time involved in obtaining the new card; and the respondent's general satisfaction with the EBT system and customer service. Responses of food stamp recipients from the three waiver States will be compared to responses of food stamp recipients from the two non-waiver States to determine whether there are any systematic differences in the problems encountered and EBT experiences of recipients in waiver and

non-waiver states. Similarly, responses of vulnerable respondents will be compared to those of non-vulnerable respondents to see the extent to which the elderly and/or disabled may have greater problems with use of EBT, and whether the introduction of customer service waivers imposes any special hardships on the elderly and disabled.

This information is needed to assist FNS as it makes decisions in the future regarding the granting of customer service waivers. No existing data source can provide all of the information needed to complete the evaluation. Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) will be used to minimize respondent burden and interviewer error in the New EBT User Survey. Existing FSP databases from the five States will be used to construct the survey sample frame and to obtain demographic data on recipients affected by the waivers. The survey questionnaire will be kept as simple and respondent-friendly as possible. Responses are voluntary and confidential. Survey data will be combined with other data for statistical purposes and reported only in aggregate or statistical form.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this data collection is estimated to average 20 minutes per response, including time for listening to instructions and responding to questionnaire items. There is no need for respondents to gather data to respond to the questionnaire items.

Respondents: Persons in five selected EBT States who apply for food stamp benefits for the first time in November 1999, and who use their EBT card for shopping.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 1,400.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 467 hours.

Copies of the information to be collected can be obtained from William Levedahl, Food Assistance, Poverty and Well-Being Branch, Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1800 M St., NW, Washington, DC 20036-5801, 202-694-5431.

Comments: Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Department, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; (d) ways to minimize the

burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, such as through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to William Levedahl, Food Assistance, Poverty and Well-Being Branch, Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1800 M St., NW, Washington, DC 20036-5801, 202-694-5431. All responses to this notice will be considered and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Dated: April 21, 1999.

Betsey Kuhn,

Director, Food and Rural Economic Division.

[FR Doc. 99-11231 Filed 5-4-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-18-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Service Agency

Notice of Eligibility Criteria for Preferred Lenders

AGENCY: Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Eligibility Criteria.

SUMMARY: This notice revises the volume requirements necessary for lenders to be eligible for the Farm Service Agency's Preferred Lender Program (PLP).

EFFECTIVE DATE: May 5, 1999.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Galen VanVleet, Senior Loan Officer, Farm Service Agency, Farm Loan Programs Loan Making Division, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, STOP 0522, Washington, DC 20250-0522, telephone (202) 720-1638; email GalenVanVleet@wdc.fsa.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Programs Affected

10.406 Farm Operating Loans

10.407 Farm Ownership Loans

Background

The PLP provides qualifying lenders additional authorities and streamlined procedures under the Agency's guaranteed farm loan program. To qualify for PLP status, lenders must meet the eligibility criteria of 7 CFR 762.106(b) and (c). Paragraph (c)(3) of this section requires lenders to have closed a minimum number of Agency guaranteed farm loans. With this notice, the Agency is setting the minimum number of loans a lender must have

closed in the past 5 years to qualify for PLP status at 20. This is a reduction from the current 30 loans in the past 3 years established by the Notice of Eligibility Criteria published in the **Federal Register** on February 12, 1999 (64 FR 7404).

Signed at Washington, DC, on April 28, 1999.

Keith Kelly,

Administrator,

Farm Service Agency.

[FR Doc. 99-11228 Filed 5-4-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-05-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Southwestern Region; Authorization of Livestock Grazing Activities on the Sacramento Grazing Allotment, Sacramento Ranger District, Lincoln National Forest, Otero County, NM

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement on a proposal to authorize livestock grazing activities on the Sacramento Grazing Allotment. The project area encompasses over 111,000 acres of National Forest lands on the Sacramento Ranger District of the Lincoln National Forest. The Sacramento Grazing Allotment comprises approximately 25% of the range district. The project has generated controversy on three main points; effects to threatened and endangered animal and plant species, concern for degraded riparian areas, and forage competition between wildlife and livestock.

DATES: The agency invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis. In addition, the agency will give notice for the full environmental analysis once it nears completion so that interested and affected people may participate and contribute to a final decision.

Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by June 15, 1999.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement should be available for public comment in July, 1999. After considering the comments received on the proposed action, the analysis document will be modified to include any changes that result. Once updated, the Final Environmental Impact Statement should be available to the public in September 1999.