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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

East Face Ecosystem Management Project, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Beaverhead County, Montana

AGENCY: Forest Service, USD.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement to document the analysis and disclose the environmental impacts of a proposed action to manipulate forest, shrubland, and grassland vegetation on about 16,000 acres. This area lies in the southeast corner of the Pioneer Mountains, about 17 miles northwest of Dillon, Montana.

The proposed action would commercially thin about 1,659 acres of Douglas-fir forest, thin another 6,602 acres of Douglas-fir forest using prescribed fire, release about 628 acres of aspen/shrub communities, release about 1,688 acres of mountain mahogany, restore about 5,200 acres of shrub/grass habitat that has been lost to conifer succession, and release riparian shrub communities from overstory conifers on about 448 acres.

DATES: Initial comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing no later than October 15, 1999.

ADDRESSES: The responsible official is the Forest Supervisor, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725. Send written comments to the responsible official, Acting Forest Supervisor Lawrence A. Timchak.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ben Conard, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Dillon Ranger District, or phone: (406) 683-3900.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: About 80% of the Douglas-fir thinning would

be done using slashing and prescribed fire, and 20% using wood product removal and prescribed fire. Aspen restoration would be done by slashing or removing conifers, some stands would be burned after slashing. Mountain mahogany restoration would be done by slashing and piling, then burning the piles. Shrub/grass restoration would be done using slashing and prescribed fire. Riparian shrub communities would be released using harvest, felling and/or slashing. Some slash may be piled and burned. Low standard temporary roads may be built to reach some treatment areas.

The project area lies in that portion of the East Pioneer Mountains between Rock Creek and Black Mountain in Townships 3, 4, and 5 South, Range 10 West; Township 5 South, Range 11 West; and Township 6 South, Range 10 and 11 West. The scope of this proposal is limited to specific prescribed burning, timber harvest, and associated temporary road building, slashing, logging, or otherwise disposing of debris within the affected area.

Public participation is important to this analysis. Part of the goal of public involvement is to identify additional issues and to refine the general, tentative issues. A scoping notice describing the project was mailed to those who requested information on timber harvest and burning activities on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has been involved in the development of this proposal and will be consulted throughout the analysis and decision making process. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service will be consulted concerning effects to threatened and endangered species.

Preliminary issues identified by the Forest Service include effects to vegetation, wildlife habitats, and maintaining the existing character of inventoried roadless areas. Slashing and prescribed fire are proposed in Inventoried Roadless Areas 1-800D and 1-009. No road building is proposed in inventoried roadless area. The analysis will consider all reasonably foreseeable activities, including proposed actions on adjacent BLM lands.

People may visit with Forest Service officials at any time during the analysis and prior to the decision. Two periods are specifically designated for comments on the analysis: (1) During

the scoping process and (2) during the draft EIS period.

During the scoping process, the Forest Service is seeking additional information and comments from individuals or organization who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action, Federal, State and local agencies. The Forest Service invites written comments and suggestions on this action, particularly in terms of identification of issues and alternative development.

The draft EIS should be available for review in February 2000. The final EIS is scheduled for completion in July, 2000.

The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

It is very important those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 45 day comment period so 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 final environmental impact statement.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the draft environmental impact statement 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 draft environmental impact statement or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the 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 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

The responsible official will make the decision on this proposal after considering comments and responses, environmental consequences discussed in the final EIS, applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The decision and reasons for the decision will be documented in a Record of Decision.

Dated: September 7, 1999.

Jack de Golia,

Acting Forest Supervisor.

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