

review of the proposal so that it 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), and that environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement. *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). The reason for this is to ensure 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 final.

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 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

Dated: October 10, 1996.

Diane K. Henderson-Bramlette,  
Forest Supervisor.

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BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

### West Fork Potlatch EIS, Vegetation Management Analysis, Clearwater National Forest, Latch County, Idaho

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

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

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Clearwater National Forest, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to disclose effects of alternative decisions it may make to manage vegetation, restore watersheds, and analyze access management in the vicinity of the West Fork of Potlatch Creek. The area is located approximately 2 miles north of the town of Bovill, Idaho. The purpose of the project is to implement the Clearwater Forest Plan within the context of ecosystem management principles; improve forest stand composition and health by reducing crown competition; reestablish western white pine as a major component in the ecosystem; and provide timber from

suitable lands in response to human needs for wood products.

This project will tier to the *Clearwater National Forest Environmental Impact Statement Land and Resource Management Plan and Forest Plan* (1987), which provides overall guidance of land management activities on the Clearwater National Forest. Analysis will also be conducted in compliance with the Stipulations of Dismissal agreed to in the settlement of the lawsuit between the Forest Service and the Sierra Club, et al. (Signed September 13, 1993).

The agency invites written comments and suggestions on the issues and management opportunities for the area being analyzed.

**DATE:** Written comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received on or before December 5, 1996.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments to Carmine Lockwood, District Ranger, Palouse Ranger District, 1700 Highway 6, Potlatch, Idaho 83855.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Suzanne Lay, Team Leader, at the same address, (208) 875-1131.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The proposed action is designed to restore terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem health and to provide benefits to people within the capabilities of ecosystems. Vegetation treatments designed to reintroduce western white pine in the forest cover type will be analyzed. Regeneration and intermediate harvest treatments intended to improve the structure composition and function of the forest matrix will be analyzed, along with the use of prescribed fire and mechanical methods to treat fuel loadings. Intermediate treatments will be designed to improve forest health conditions by treating overstocked stressed sites while maintaining desirable serial species such as western white pine, ponderosa pine and western larch. These overstocked stands are highly susceptible to root rot pathogens, bark beetles, defoliators, and dwarf mistletoe. Restoration of the aquatic component will focus on eliminating sediment delivery sources to aquatic and riparian habitats, restoring stream channels, as well as improving the structural components in riparian areas by installing large woody debris where it is lacking. Other fish habitat improvement projects are also included in this analysis. This project area is in intermingled ownership. Much of the National Forest System land in the project area was acquired from Weyerhaeuser timber company in the 1930's after it had been logged.

The Clearwater National Forest Plan provides guidance to management activities within the potentially affected area through its goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management direction. The areas of proposed timber harvest and reforestation would occur only on suitable timber land, Management Areas E1, A4, A5 and M2. Below is a brief description of applicable management direction.

#### Management Area E1

**Timber Management—**Provide optimum sustained production of timber products in a cost effective manner while protecting soil and water quality (applies to approximately 15,900 acres on National Forest System land in the project area).

#### Management Area A4

**Visual Travel Corridor—**Maintain or enhance an aesthetically pleasing, natural appearing Forest setting surrounding designated roads, trails, and other areas considered important for recreational travel use (applies to approximately 2,900 acres of National Forest System land in the project area).

#### Management Area M2

**Riparian Areas—**Manage as areas of special consideration with distinctive values, and integrate with adjacent management areas to the extent that water and other riparian resources are protected (applies to approximately 2,500 acres of National Forest System land in the project area).

**PACFISH—**The *Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-Producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California* (PACFISH), an amendment to the Clearwater Forest Plan, provides additional guidance in anadromous drainages such as the Palouse River. This EIS will tier to the decisions and direction provided by the PACFISH EA and Decision Notice (2/95).

The West Fork Potlatch project area lies south of the divide between the Potlatch River drainage and the St. Maries River drainage. It is a roaded area with intermingled ownership in the panhandle of Idaho. The planning area consists of approximately 34,000 acres in located in T.41N., R.1W., T.41N., R.1E., and T.42N., R.1W., and T.42N., R.1E; Approximately 21,300 acres are on National Forest System land, and proposed actions are entirely on these lands. The decision to be made is what, if anything, should be done in the West Fork Potlatch project area to (1) maintain or enhance forest health and improve the structure and composition

in overstocked stressed stands, and (2) provide multiple benefits to people within the capabilities of ecosystems.

Public participation will be fully incorporated into preparation of the EIS. The first step is the scoping process, during which the Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies, the Nez Perce and Coeur D'Alene Tribes, and other individuals or groups who may be interested or affected by the proposed action. This information will be used in preparing the EIS. Interested individuals and organizations should contact the Palouse Ranger District and request to be placed on the project mailing list. Those doing so will receive future information related to this project and notification of public meetings. Scoping will include: inviting participation, determining the project's scope and potential issues, eliminating from detailed study those issues which are not significant, and determining potential cooperating agencies and task assignments. The public will also be invited to participate in developing alternatives, and identifying and/or reviewing the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and its alternatives.

Public meetings will continue to be held in the Potlatch, Idaho, area in the fall and winter of 1996 and 1997. Field trips are also to be held. The exact dates and locations of these meetings will be published in local newspapers at least two weeks in advance.

**Proposed Action: Timber Harvest:** Approximately 4600 acres of National Forest System lands are proposed for harvest. At this time, we anticipate that the primary proposed treatments will be commercial thinnings (approximately 3500 acres), with some regeneration harvests and overstory removals (1100 acres).

**Purpose and Need:** To conduct vegetation management activities that will maintain or enhance forest health. Active forest management is needed to ensure ecosystem diversity, integrity, and ability to provide goods and services for people on a sustainable basis. The intermediate treatments and regeneration harvests are proposed to improve the structure and composition in overstocked stressed stands. Active management is needed to reduce susceptibility to root pathogens, bark beetles, defoliators, and dwarf mistletoe.

Timber harvest is needed to make progress toward reestablishing western white pine on this landscape. Intermediate treatments would be used to favor existing white pine that is relatively disease free, and planting of

genetically improved disease resistant seedlings would be utilized within regeneration harvest units.

**Proposed Action: Road Construction and Access:** Approximately 27 miles of proposed road construction is an integral part of the proposed action. Key design features as minimizing road densities, and use of advanced technology in logging systems would help reduce the impacts of these roads over the 34,000 acre project area.

The Forest Service is proposing to develop a comprehensive access management plan for the project area. We intend to seek public input on the development of that plan and give consideration to the needs of various forest users as part of the plan. While the details of the plan have yet to be worked out, it is anticipated that access restrictions would be necessary to achieve resource objectives such as wildlife habitat security and watershed protection.

**Purpose and Need:** Although this area is thoroughly "roaded" with old railroad beds, these lines are in an unsuitable place for using again for timber haul. Management area direction from the Clearwater National Forest Plan for the majority of the project area (75% of the National Forest System Land) calls for optimum sustained production of wood products.

In order to manage for a sustainable production of wood products in the West Fork Potlatch project area a substantial amount of road construction is necessary to provide access. Many of the proposed treatments are intermediate in type (meaning future entries into this area are probable). Therefore, a permanent system of roads is needed.

**Proposed Action: Aquatic Restoration—**Relocating portions of the West Fork of the Potlatch River to its original channel; planting riparian areas in Porcupine, Head, and Nat Brown Creeks, (totaling two miles of riparian habitat improvement in the Upper Potlatch, and 1.5 miles in the Potlatch face drainages); dredging in the Potlatch River, Nat Brown and Head Creeks; and installing large woody debris in over 10 miles of streams. Restoration of stream channel meandering is proposed for several tributaries of the West Fork of Potlatch River. The winter/spring of 1996 resulted in four landslides in the Potlatch watershed. While restoration began in 1996 (seeding, mulching, adding debris storage, and falling trees); part of this proposal is to continue the rehabilitation work. Additional woody debris and some dredging would probably be required. Road reconstruction is also proposed,

surfacing approximately 10 miles of existing road with the objective of correcting existing sediment sources.

**Purpose and Need:** The proposed actions for aquatic ecosystems have the following purposes; (1) improve aquatic health by adding structural diversity, (2) improve aquatic health by providing cover for salmonids, (3) provide additional quality pools, (4) remove sediment from the system to accelerate natural recovery rates, (5) reduce sediment sources to restore a more "natural" sediment system, (6) provide a source of future woody debris to ensure long term stability, (7) provide a source of future shading to reduce summer stream temperatures, and (8) encourage streams to adjust their form to be more stable and efficient. This will reduce stream energy, channel erosion, and to some extent, the flashy nature of the basin.

**Proposed Action: Recreation—**A nine mile loop trail is proposed for construction in Upper Feather Creek for non-motorized recreation use. Improvement of dispersed campsites along Feather, West Fork Potlatch, Cougar and Moose Creek roads is also proposed.

**Purpose and Need:** Currently there are over 85 miles of trails on the Palouse District which are open to motorized vehicles and approximately 4 miles which are non-motorized trails. The proposal for a non-motorized trail will help meet some of the current demand for non-motorized recreation opportunities. The improvement of dispersed camping sites is proposed to help keep roadside camping spots available and prevent rutting and mud from accumulating in these areas.

**Proposed Action: Wildlife—**Approximately 2200 acres are proposed for old growth/replacement old growth habitat with this project. Some areas adjacent to roads may need to be posted to prevent woodcutting.

**Purpose and Need:** Old growth habitat is a vital component of the vegetative diversity of the Clearwater Forest. Old growth habitat is vital to the perpetuation of old growth dependent species of wildlife (Clearwater Forest Plan, Appendix H-1).

**Proposed Action: Grazing—**In the Purdue Creek Allotment a reduction in animal numbers of ten percent is proposed. Reductions in cattle numbers are needed to promote the recovery of riparian areas and continue the current trend of watershed improvement. Riparian fencing and hardened cattle crossings have been shown to restore riparian vegetation and prevent streambank trampling.

*Purpose and Need:* In order to promote the recovery of riparian areas and continue the current trend of watershed improvement the grazing reductions are proposed. The riparian fencing and hardened cattle crossings should help improve/restore riparian vegetation and prevent streambank trampling.

#### Preliminary Issues

##### *White Pine Blister Rust*

Blister rust is a major cause in the decline of western white pine in the West Fork Potlatch project area. This is an exotic pathogen introduced in the early 1900's which has caused a 60 percent decline in western white pine since 1952 (O'Laughlin et al. 1993). As a consequence, forest stands within the planning area are now dominated by tree species which are less resistant to insects, disease, and wildfire (primarily Douglas-fir and grand fir).

##### *Insects and Disease*

Forest stands within the project area are generally composed of a diverse species mix of trees which are growing well; but, in many cases are becoming overcrowded. Many of the seral disease resistant larch, western white pine, and ponderosa pine, are being crowded by grand fir, Douglas-fir and other more shade tolerant less disease resistant species. The loss of white pine to blister rust, and the increased presence of susceptible species is inconsistent with historic (pre-european) settlement patterns.

##### *Forest Habitat*

Old growth and mature forest structure is an important component for many wildlife species. Timber harvest has the potential to change the amount and distribution of mature forest structure.

##### *Watershed and Fish Habitat Conditions*

Management activities (especially those in the earlier part of the century), in the Potlatch River subbasin have delivered large quantities of sediment without allowing for recovery thus altering the natural function of the stream system. Additional activities without allowing for recovery could compound these effects and have adverse effects on channel stability and designated beneficial uses. Management practices that cause fine sediment production to exceed the processing and transporting capability of streams, or that alter the natural timing of sediment transport, would have the greatest potential to impair stream integrity and salmonid populations, and therefore beneficial uses.

#### Effects Analysis

The direct, indirect, cumulative, short-term, and long-term, aspects of impacts on national forest lands and resources, and those of connected or related effects off-site, will be fully disclosed.

Preliminary alternatives in addition to the proposed action have not been identified. The issues discussed previously, and those provided in public comment, will drive the formulation of alternatives. Minimizing the number of alternatives by incorporating key design features common to all alternatives will help address many concerns while streamlining the environmental analysis.

The Forest Service predicts the Draft EIS will be filed in January of 1997 and the Final EIS in April of 1997. We will seek comments on the Draft EIS for a period of 45 days after its publication. Comments will then be summarized and responded to in the Final EIS.

To assist us in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action or the effects disclosure, 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 EIS. Comments may also address the adequacy of the DEIS 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 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.)

We believe 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 DEIS's must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it 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 that are not raised until after completion of the final EIS may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Argoon v. Hodel*, 803 F2d 1016, 1022 (9th Circuit 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 Final EIS.

As Forest Supervisor, I am the Responsible Official for this project. My address is Clearwater National Forest, 12730 U.S. Highway 12, Orofino, ID 83544 (208-476-4541).

Dated: October 9, 1996.

Douglas E. Gochmour,  
*Acting Forest Supervisor.*

[FR Doc. 96-26852 Filed 10-18-96; 8:45 am]

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#### **Summit Fire Recovery, Malheur National Forest, Grant County, Oregon**

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

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

**SUMMARY:** The Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to salvage harvest and reforest burned timber stands, construct and reconstruct roads, and apply herbicides to manage unwanted vegetation. The proposed project will be in compliance with the 1990 Malheur National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended, which provides the overall guidance for management of this area. The proposed project is within the Summit Fire area which lies within the Middle Fork John Day Watershed on the Long Creek Ranger District and will occur in fiscal year 1997. The Malheur National Forest invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis. The agency will give notice of the full environmental analysis and decision making process on the proposal so interested and affected people may participate and contribute in the final decision.

**DATES:** Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by November 20, 1996.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments and suggestions concerning the management of this area to John L. Shoberg, District Ranger, P.O. Box 849, John Day, Oregon 97845.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Questions about the proposed project and scope of analysis should be directed to: Resource Planner, Robert Hammond; P.O. Box 849; John Day, Oregon 97845; phone 541-575-3000.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The proposed action includes: salvage harvesting fire killed or dying timber; constructing and reconstructing roads; reforestation; and application of herbicides.