

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Forest Service****Sea Level Environmental Impact Statement**

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to provide timber for the Ketchikan Area Independent Timber Sale Program. The Record of Decision will disclose how the Forest Service has decided to provide harvest units, roads, and associated timber harvesting facilities. The proposed action is to harvest an estimated 60 million board feet (mmbf) of timber on an estimated 2,500 acres. A range of alternatives will be developed and include a no-action alternative. The proposed timber harvest is located within Tongass Forest Plan Management Area K35, VCU's 746, 753, 745.2, 755.2, 756, 757 and 759 on Revillagidedo (Revilla) Island, Alaska, on the Ketchikan Ranger District of the Ketchikan Area of the Tongass National Forest.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Comments concerning the scope of this project should be received by June 15, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Please send written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of this project to: District Ranger; Ketchikan Ranger District; Tongass National Forest, Ketchikan Area; Attn: Sea Level EIS, 3031 Tongass Avenue; Ketchikan, AK 99901.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposal and EIS should be directed to Bill Nightingale, District Planning Staff Officer or to Jimmy Deherrera, District Ranger, Ketchikan Ranger District, Tongass National Forest, 3031 Tongass Ave., Ketchikan, AK 99901, telephone (907) 225-2148.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**(1) Public Participation**

Public participation will be an integral component of the study process and will be especially important at several points during the analysis. The first is during the scoping process. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and individuals and organizations that may be interested in, or affected by, the proposed activities. The scoping process will include: (1) identification of potential issues; (2) identification of issues to be analyzed in depth; and, (3)

elimination of insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a previous environmental review. Public scoping meetings are scheduled in Alaska at Saxman, May 21, 1997, and Ketchikan, May 22, 1997. Written scoping comments are being solicited through a scoping package that will be sent to the project mailing list. For the Forest Service to best use the scoping input, comments should be received by June 15, 1997.

Tentative issues identified for analysis in the EIS include the potential effects of the project on the relationship of the project to: subsistence resources, old-growth ecosystem management and the maintenance of habitat for viable populations of wildlife and plant species, timber sale economics, timber supply, visual and recreational resources, anadromous fish habitat, potential road connections on Revilla Island, soil and water resources, cultural resources, Misty Fiords National Monument wilderness values, and others.

Based on results of scoping and the resource capabilities within the project area, alternatives including a "no action" alternative will be developed for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS). The Draft EIS is projected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in December 1997. Public comment on the Draft EIS will be solicited for a minimum of 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**. Subsistence hearings, as provided for in Section 8 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), are planned during this 45-day comment period. The Final EIS is anticipated by June 1998.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments during scoping and comments on the Draft EIS 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 EIS 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 1503.8 in addressing these points.

In addition, Federal court decisions have established that reviewers of Draft EIS statements 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 concerns. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the Final EIS. *City of Angoon v. Hodel, Harris*, (9th Circuit, 1986), and *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 EIS.

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. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 7 days.

Permits

Permits required for implementation include the following:

1. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 - Approval of the discharge of dredged or fill materials into waters of the United States under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act
 - Approval of the construction of structures or work in navigable waters of the United States under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899
2. Environmental Protection Agency
 - National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (402) Permit
 - Review Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan

3. State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources

—Tideland Permit and Lease or Easement

4. State of Alaska, Department of Environmental Conservation

—Solid Waste Disposal Permit
—Certification of Compliance with Alaska Water Quality Standards (401 Certification)

Responsible Official

Bradley E. Powell, Forest Supervisor, Ketchikan Area, Tongass National Forest, Federal Building, Ketchikan, Alaska 99901, is the responsible official. The responsible official will consider the comments, responses, disclosure of environmental consequences, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies in making the decision and stating the rationale in the Record of Decision.

Dated: May 1, 1997.

Robert L. Vaught,

Acting Forest Supervisor.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Rock Mountain Region; Environmental Impact Statement for Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan; Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests; Gunnison, Hinsdale, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray, San Juan and San Miguel Counties, Colorado

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Robert Storch, Forest Supervisor of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests, 22550 Highway 50, Delta, Colorado 81416.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement on a proposal to revise the existing Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan. The existing travel plan was implemented in 1984 as directed by the 1983 Land and Resource Management Plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. The 1991 Amended Land and Resource Management Plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests identified a need to refine travel management on the Forest.

The purpose of revising the existing Uncompahgre National Forest plan is to

provide safe access to and through the National Forest to support resource management and to provide a variety of recreation opportunities for public users, while protecting the environment.

Reasons why the National Forest is proposing to revise the existing travel plan include: 1) There is a need to plan for the current as well as the future recreation demands which will be placed on the Forest. There has been an increase in the amount and a change in the type of public recreational travel on the Uncompahgre National Forest since 1984. 2) There is a need to provide transportation systems that provide recreational opportunities for many different users. Most transportation routes on the Uncompahgre National Forest developed as access for commodity uses, such as livestock grazing, timber harvesting and mining, and were not designed or located for recreational travel. 3) There is a need to restrict indiscriminate vehicle travel off of roads and trails. Currently much of the Uncompahgre National Forest has an open travel designation, which means off-route travel with motorized vehicles is allowed so long as resource damage does not occur. However, unplanned and unauthorized routes have developed through off-route use, and efforts to close routes or restrict travel to meet Forest Plan objectives have been ineffective as a result of the open travel. 4) There is a need to make travel management consistent between the four Ranger Districts on the Uncompahgre National Forest and the various Counties, especially concerning travel by off-highway vehicles (OHVs).

The decisions to be made in revising the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan include: 1) Determining which area-wide travel management option(s) will be applied to what specific areas. Options are: (a) open travel, off-route travel by motorized and mechanized vehicles is allowed. (b) restricted travel, travel by motorized and mechanized vehicles is allowed only on designated routes with the possible exception of snowmobile travel occurring on snow. (c) closed travel, travel by motorized and mechanized vehicles is not allowed. 2) Determining which Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) setting will be maintained in specific areas. 3) Determining the roads and trails that will comprise the transportation system for the Uncompahgre National Forest. 4) Determining the uses to be allowed on each specific road and trail. 5) Amending the Forest Plan to incorporate changes needed based on the four previous decisions.

The Forest Service held a series of 38 public meetings between April 1994 and June 1996 to discuss travel management issues and alternatives. Written comments from people unable to attend these meetings were also accepted. As a result, the following issues were identified; 1) Open road/trail density exceeds Forest Plan standards (as related to habitat effectiveness) in some areas. 2) Unauthorized routes are developing on National Forest System land. 3) Closing some and designating other routes will result in increased use and damage from concentrating use on the remaining open routes. 4) Riparian/aquatic habitats and other special resources need to be protected. 5) Wet season access needs to be managed to prevent damage to vegetation, soils and water quality. 6) There are conflicts between different types of recreational users. 7) Indiscriminate motorized travel during hunting season conflicts between different types of recreational users. 7) Indiscriminate motorized travel during hunting season conflicts with hunting experience and results in unauthorized route development. 8) Habitat capability is affected by travel. 9) Big game distribution is affected by travel. 10) There are conflicts with winter recreation and big game winter range. 11) There are conflicts with existing and proposed routes in important habitat. 12) Threatened, endangered and sensitive species and their habitat needs to be protected.

As a result of public input, five alternatives were developed and will be analyzed in the environmental impact statement. Alternatives vary in the emphasis placed on providing different recreational opportunities; ranging from providing more non-motorized settings, to providing more motorized settings, to no change (no action). Restricting travel by motorized and mechanized vehicles to routes designated for those types of use is common to the four action alternatives.

The decision to prepare an environmental impact statement is a result of preliminary analysis indicating that some of the effects to the human environment from revising the Travel Plan may be significant. All public comment received to date will be considered in this analysis. Parties who previously expressed interest have been informed individually by mail that this analysis is continuing. No additional public meetings are planned; however, the Forest Service will consider any new information that may be received as a result of this notice of intent. Written comment should be sent by May 15, 1997.