Possible effects on natural resources due to an increase in visitors to picnic area and trail; (3) Reconstruction of the historic CCC Rio Sabana Trail, which connects with the Tradewinds/El Toro Trial, may generate greater use than is allowed in the proposed Wilderness Management Area; (4) Security issues in the area in relation to 24-hour presence of Forest Service hosts of volunteers; (5) Potential hazards to Forest users caused by a nearby water impoundment and transmission facility, located on private land.

A draft environmental impact statement is expected to be available for public review, for 45 days, in *February 1999*.

It is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate at that time. Upon release of the draft environmental impact statement, projected for *February 1999* reviewers should 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, (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *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). 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.)

After the comments period on the draft environmental impact statement ends, the comments will be analyzed, considered, and responded to by the Forest Service in preparing the *final environmental impact statement.* The final environmental impact statement is scheduled to be completed by *May 1999.* The Responsible Official will consider the comments, responses, environmental consequences discussed in the final environmental impact statement, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies in making a decision. The Responsible Official will document the decision and rationale for the decision in a Record of Decision. The decision will be subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.

The Responsible Official is: Pablo Cruz, Forest Supervisor, Caribbean National Forest, P.O. Box 490, Palmer, Puerto Rico 00721.

Dated: December 18, 1998.

Pablo Cruz,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 98–34247 Filed 12–24–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Upper Pipe Creek Timber Sale and Associated Activities, Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln County, Montana

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service, will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to disclose the environmental effects of proposed timber harvest, road construction, prescribed burns, wastershed and fisheries habitat restoration, road restriction changes, noxious weed control, gravel pit expansion and recreational improvements in the upper and eastern portion of the Pipe Creek drainage. The upper and eastern portions of this drainage are located approximately 15 air miles north of Libby, Montana.

The proposed activities are being considered together because they represent either connected or cumulative actions as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.25). The purposes of the project are to: (1) Manage road access to balance wildlife and fisheries habitat protection, limit the spread of noxious weeds and provide for public access; (2) improve watershed health and fisheries habitat to provide for stable stream channels, productive habitat for aquatic species and water quality that meets or exceeds State of Montana water quality goals; (3) use prescribed fire to stimulate natural processes, prevent natural and activity fuel buildup, create habitat diversity for wildlife, reduce suppression costs and maintain ecosystems; (4) utilize timber harvest to increase the long-term productivity of forest stands suitable for timber production which are currently slowing in growth, over stocked and approaching an age where they are becoming more suspectable to mountain pine beetle infestation; (5) provide timber and other forest products to support local, regional and national needs; and (6) restore western white pine and other intolerant tree species to historic sites and/or conditions.

The EIS will tier to the Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and Final EIS of September, 1987, which provides overall guidance for forest management of the area.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be received on or before October 27, 1999.

ADDRESSES: The Responsible Official is the Kootenai National Forest, Forest Supervisor, 1101 U.S. Hwy 2 West, Libby, Montana 59923. Written comments and suggestions concerning this analysis may be sent to Lawrence A. Froberg, Libby District Ranger, 12557 U.S. Hwy 37, Libby, Montana 59923.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kirsten Kaiser, Project Coordinator, Libby Ranger District. Phone: (406) 293–7773.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The decision area contains approximately 21,000 acres within the Kootenai National Forest in Lincoln County, Montana. All of the proposed activities would occur on National Forest lands in the East Fork Pipe Creek drainage near Libby, Montana. The legal location of the decision area is as follows: T34N, R31W, Sections 14, 15, 21–28, 31–36; T33N, R31W, Sections 1–36; T33N, R30W, Sections 19 and 30; T33N R32W, Sections 24, 25, 36; T32N, R31W, Sections 3–36; T32N, R32W, Sections 1, 12–13, 25, 36; T31N, R32W, Sections, 1–3, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19–28, 34; Principal Montana Meridian.

All proposed activities are outside the boundaries of any inventoried roadless area or any areas considered for inclusion to the National Wilderness System as recommended by the Kootenai National Forest Plan or by any past or present legislative wilderness proposals.

The Forest Service proposes to harvest approximately 3.0 MMBF (million board feet) or approximately 7,300 CCF (hundred cubic feet of timber through application of a variety of harvest methods on approximately 400 acres of forest land. All activities would occur on suitable timberlands. An estimated 0.3 miles of temporary road and 2.2 miles of permanent road construction would be needed to access timber harvest areas. An estimated 30 miles of road reconstruction/maintenance would also be needed to improve existing road conditions. Approximately 20 miles of road would be restored by various methods which

include culvert removal, partial recontouring, ripping and seeding. These activities would result in most roads being undrivable. Restoration methods would be based on site specific conditions and would be designed to improve watershed and fisheries habitat conditions and reduce overall density to improve big game security. The proposal also includes prescribed burning on approximately 250 acres to decrease ground fuels, increase browse species, return fire to the landscape and aid in site preparation for natural and artificial regeneration. Prescribed burning would occur in association with timber harvest and in areas without timber harvest. Proposed harvest treatments in this proposal are as follows and may include Forest Plan amendments:

Clearcut with reserves. This prescription involves areas where lodgepole pine would be the primary species removed. It would result in a regeneration harvest with reserve trees (primarily western larch, Douglas fir, subalpine fir) concentrated in patches/islands and scattered where stand conditions exist. Treatment of these areas would include thinning for a feathering effect. This prescription would thin from within the reserve (patch/island) portion of the stand, into the untreated portion of the stand. Size and shape of treatment areas would be designed to maintain watershed and wildlife values. The proposal includes treating large areas to mimic historic fire patterns, resulting in two openings up to 150 acres in size. Approval by the Regional Forester for exceeding the 40 acre limitation for regeneration harvest would be required prior to the signing of the Record of Decision. This treatment is proposed on approximately 310 acres.

Rust resistant white pine would be planted in units where site conditions would support this species. It is desirable to return white pine to the ecosystem as disease (white pine blister rust) has significantly decreased the availability of this species in the Upper Pipe Creek area and throughout it's range.

Roadside salvage and individual tree removal. These prescriptions would result in the removal of individual dead and dying trees along open roads and roads to be opened for management activities while providing for an appropriate level of woody debris and cavity habitat. After treatment the given area would resemble a stocked stand with small openings where dead and downed trees were removed. This treatment is proposed on approximately 30 acres.

Salvage. This prescription would result in the removal of dead and down conifer species. Live tree species would be retained with the exception of a minor amount that may be harvested to facilitate yarding activity, access or due to safety concerns. Harvest would result in the uneven distribution of green and some standing dead trees. This treatment is proposed on approximately 10 acres.

Special product removal. This prescription would result in the removal of trees less than 6 inches in diameter (trees normally considered too small for commercial products). These trees would be removed for utilization as post and poles or other specialized uses. After treatment the given area may resemble a thinning or stands with small openings. This treatment is proposed on approximately 30 acres.

Other resource projects proposed are as follows:

Pipe Creek road improvements. Winter maintenance of this road (Forest Road 68) is a concern expressed by the public and IDT. Opportunities to improve portions of the Pipe Creek road to increase public safety are part of the proposal and include clearing/thinning right-of-ways and road reconstruction. Activities would be in compliance with INFISH.

Log structure placement. Large woody debris is lacking in portions of Deception Creek (tributary to East Fork of Pipe Creek). Log structures in designated portions of the stream (T34N, R32W, Sections 22, 26, 27, 36) would be added to help improve stream stabilization, catch and store sediment and create habitat features (i.e. pools).

Recreation uses. Access for hunters with physical disabilities is an important program on the district. This proposal includes designating the Michael's Draw area which includes all of the 4756 road system, as an area accessible to hunters with physical disabilities. Michaels' Draw is located in lower Pipe Creek and is currently closed year long to motorized vehicles and over the snow vehicles.

We also propose to allow the Kootenai Cross Ski Club to construct a ski shelter on Flatiron Mountain. The shelter would be for skiers only and use would be limited to the December 1st to April 1st period. All materials and labor would be provided by the Kootenai Cross Country Ski Club.

Wildlife enhancement. Proposed road restoration (approximately 20 miles) would improve habitat effectiveness and security as roads would not be drivable following restoration activities. Cavity habitat would be improved where it is limited by past management activities through tree inoculation (inoculation kills the tree, resulting in habitat for cavity nesting species).

Noxious weeds. Weed control work may include use of herbicides, biological agents, mechanical pulling and road management. Infestations including isolated weed populations would be mapped and recorded. The intensity of control work would be based on likelihood of successful eradication or containment, risk of spread to non-infested areas and available funding. All work would be closely coordinated with Lincoln County weed control personnel and implemented in accordance with the MOU (memorandum of understanding) between the Kootenai National Forest and Lincoln County.

Firewood gathering. Firewood gathering opportunities for the public on restricted roads, roads to be opened for logging activities and/or on roads to be restored would be considered.

Gravel pit expansion. We propose to expand two existing gravel pits (the Upper Pipe Creek Pit and the South Fork of Big Creek Pit) located in T32N, R31W, Section 34 and in T34N, R30W, Section 31. Expansion of both pits would include the harvest/removal of timber on approximately 20 acres. Expansion would not occur in 1 year, rather it would occur over a 10 year period. Active and reclaimed portions of the pits would cover approximately 10 acres (20 acres for both pits); however, only 2 to 3 acres of the pits (4 to 6 acres for both pits) would be active at any given time. Pit restoration would be concurrent with resource extraction (i.e. after resource is removed, restoration would occur). Restoration and mitigation would occur including seeding of disturbed areas and noxious weed control. Materials extracted from these pits would be used for road construction and reconstruction/maintenance in the Pipestone area for the proposed project and for ongoing and future road maintenance.

Range of Alternatives: The Forest Service will consider a range of alternatives. One would be a ''no action'' alternative in which none of the proposed activities would be implemented. Additional alternatives may be considered to achieve the project's purpose and need and to response to specific resource issues.

Preliminary Issues: Tentatively, several issues of concern have been identified. These issues are briefly described below.

Road Access and Restoration: Specific roads would be restores to improve watershed and fisheries habitat conditions. Restored roads would not be

drivable following reactivities; however, snowmobile use may continue to occur on these roads until they are reclaimed by development of trees and shrubs. Some individuals are concerned that public access is already overly restricted. Most of the roads proposed for restoration are currently closed year long to motor vehicles except open to snow vehicles from 12/1 to 4/30. What effect would restoration effects have on public access to recreational areas?

Grizzly Bear: A portion of the project area is in grizzly bear habitat. Specifically, road restoration and timber harvest is proposed within the Cabinet/Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Area. What effect would proposed activities have on the threatened grizzly bear?

Water Quality and Fisheries Habitat: Water quality and fisheries habitat is expected to be improved with the implementation of proposed activities (road restoration, log placement). Some individuals have expressed concerns regarding project effects (potential short term sediment reaching Pipe Creek) to water quality and bull trout recovery as Pipe Creek is a bull trout priority watershed. What effects would the proposed actions have on water quality and bull trout habitat?

Noxious Weeds: Knapweed and other noxious weed species are present along many roads within the project area. Some individuals are concerned about the spread of noxious weeds and the effects to native vegetation.

Timber Supply and Economics: Some individuals are concerned that the Forest Service is not placing enough emphasis on providing forest products to the local communities. How will the proposed activities affect timber supplies and produce economic benefits to local communities?

Public Involvement and Scoping

In March of 1997, preliminary efforts were made to involve the public in looking at opportunities for management and restoration of the larger Pipestone area. Public involvement has included several informational letters, public notices in local and regional newspapers and two field trips.

Taking into account the comments received and information gathered during preliminary analysis, it was decided to prepare an EIS for the Upper Pipe Creek timber sale and associated activities. Comments received prior to this notice will be included in the documentation for the EIS.

This environmental analysis and decision making process will enable additional interested and affected people to participate and contribute to the final decision. The public is encouraged to take part in the process and is encouraged to visit with Forest Service officials at any time during the analysis and prior to the decision. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, Tribes, local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. This input will be used in preparation of the draft and final EIS. The scoping process will assist in:

—Identifying potential issues.
—Identifying issues to be analyzed in depth.
—Identifying alternatives to the proposed action.
—Considering additional alternatives which will be derived from issues recognized during scoping activities.

Estimated Dates for Filing

While public participation in this analysis is welcome at any time, comments received within 30 days of the publication of this notice will be especially useful in the preparation of the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by March, 1999. At that time, EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS in the **Federal Register.** The comment period on the Draft EIS will be a minimum of 45 days from the date the EPA publishes the Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Final EIS is scheduled to be completed by June of 1999. In the Final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed in the Draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making a decision regarding the proposal.

Reviewers Obligations

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 draft environmental impact 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 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 or dismissed by the courts. *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 objectives are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider and respond to them in the Final EIS.

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 discussed. 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.

Responsible Official

The Kootenai National Forest, Forest Supervisor, 1101 U.S. Hwy 2 West, Kootenai National Forest, Libby, Montana 59923, is the Responsible Official. The Responsible Official will decide which, if any, of the proposed projects will be implemented. This decision will be document reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service Appeal Regulations.

Dated: December 18, 1998.

Mark L. Romey,

Acting Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest.

[FR Doc. 98–34191 Filed 12–24–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Oregon Coast Provincial Advisory Committee Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Oregon Coast Provincial Advisory Committee (PAC) will meet on January 28, 1999, at the Siuslaw National Forest, 4077 Research Way, Corvallis, OR. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. and continue until 3:30 p.m. Agenda items to be covered include: (1) 15 percent late-successional rule, (2)