sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans, including No. 10 size cans, by two percent. The drained weight criteria for the No. 300 can, a size pack which has been increasingly utilized in the industry, would also be added. This change would allow a more equitable marketing environment for domestic sweetpotato processors.

AMS received petitions from the Sweet Potato Council of the United States, and the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission and three processors requesting the revision of the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes.

The petitioners represent a significant part of the canned sweetpotato industry. The Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina sweetpotato industry provides over half of the sweetpotatoes produced domestically. [1]

The petitions indicate that the recommended drained weights for canned sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans, as shown in the U.S. Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes, are difficult to meet and put sweetpotato processors at an economic disadvantage in marketing these products.

The reasons given for this disparity are that the changes in the varietal types of sweetpotatoes and the growing conditions in the growing regions have changed significantly since the current Recommended Minimum Drained Weight Averages (RMDWA's) were first proposed 21 years ago. Prior to 1985, there were several varieties of sweetpotatoes utilized in canned sweetpotatoes. These varieties were Centennial, Jewel, Gold Rush, and others. Since 1989, the fresh sweetpotato market has predominantly switched to marketing the Beauregard variety because of its improved quality characteristics and yield potential. Surplus sweetpotatoes from the fresh market have traditionally supplied canning operations. Since 1989, processors have noted that the sweetpotatoes they have been using have lower total solids and lower densities than previously used varieties. As part of the industry petition to review the RMDWA's for canned sweetpotatoes, USDA requested that the sweetpotato industry submit data covering several seasons to provide evidence of this processing condition. Data was collected from plants located in Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina covering several processing seasons.

The petitioners stated that to meet the standard when packing certain newer varieties of sweetpotatoes (i.e. Beauregard), the cans must be over-filled. This condition may cause damage to the sweetpotatoes resulting in downgrading the product, and may have an adverse effect on the integrity of the can seam closure. If the seal's integrity is lost during processing, the product's wholesomeness is jeopardized.

The petitioners contend that a unilateral reduction in drained weight requirements in the grade standard is indicated due to the varietal characteristics of sweetpotatoes currently available for processing.

AMS has reviewed the petitions and data submitted, and has gathered information from government and industry sources. Initial findings do substantiate that there may be a disparity between the drained weights for canned sweetpotatoes processed before 1985 and those processed since the newer varieties have become predominant.

One study showed that in 1989, a producer maintained an average fill weight of 72.8 ounces. The resulting drained weights failed to meet the minimum of 73.0 ounces in only 31 percent of production. By 1995, the average fill weight had been raised to 77.2 ounces, a full 4.2 ounces over the minimum drained weight. Despite this increase, 55 percent of production failed to meet 73 ounces after processing. This overfill not only penalized the processor financially but also threatened product quality and wholesomeness.

AMS is continuing to gather drained weight information on the newer varieties of sweetpotatoes to ascertain an equitable recommended minimum drained weight of canned sweetpotatoes. As an interim measure while further studies are made, AMS proposes to lower the recommended drained weight for sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans, including No. 10 size cans, by two percent, and add the recommended drained weight criteria for the No. 300 can.

The No. 300 size can was not included in the last revision of the grades standard, but is being added because of the increased usage of this can size. The percentage water capacity, on which the recommended minimum drained weight averages are based, is calculated by dividing the RMDWA by the total water capacity of the container. The drained weight of the No. 300 can is based on the percentage water capacity available in the No. 303 can, which is very similar in size. As the canning industry has been replacing production of the No. 303 container size with the No. 300 can, it seems appropriate to include the RMDWA for No. 300 cans along with the other drained weight changes in the standard.

A 60-day comment period is provided for interested persons to comment on changes to the standards.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 1621–1627.

Dated: January 9, 1998.

Robert C. Keeney,

Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.

[FR Doc. 98–1054 Filed 1–14–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–02–P

[1] Source—USDA, NASS, ASB

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Authorizing BLM To Offer Oil and Gas Leases in Management Areas 21, 45, 71, 72; Bridger-Teton National Forest; Teton, Sublette and Fremont Counties, Wyoming

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA—Lead Agency; Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Cooperating Agency.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The Bridger-Teton National Forest will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to document the analysis and disclose the environmental impacts of the proposed authorization of the BLM to offer oil and gas leases in Management Areas 21, 45, 71, and 72.

The 1990 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan identified all of Management Areas 21, 45, 71, and 72 as available for oil and gas leasing. The Forest Plan did not make the leasing decision for site specific lands. Therefore, because the Forest Plan made no site-specific decisions, the Forest Plan did not make an irreversible commitment of resources. The next step in the leasing process is to complete a site specific analysis of the Management Areas. The oil and gas leasing analysis is tiered to the oil and gas analysis contained within the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement and analyzes resource issues at a smaller scale and incorporates any new resource information. The purpose of offering Management Areas 21, 45, 71, and 72 is to provide opportunities for exploration and development of leasable minerals. A specific objective of the 1990 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan is to ''Provide leasable, locatable, and salable mineral exploration and development opportunities'' (see Goal and objective 1.1 (d) page 113 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and

Resource Management Plan). Additionally, the Federal government's policy for minerals resource management is expressed in the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970. The Act directs the Forest Service to ''foster and encourage private enterprise in the development of economically sound and stable industries and in the orderly and economic development of domestic resources* * *''

DATES: Written comments concerning the scope of the analysis described in this Notice should be received by March 2, 1998, to ensure timely consideration. Comments previously submitted in response to the scoping for the proposed Environmental Assessment dealing with leasing Management Areas 45, 21, 71, and 72 will be included in this analysis. These previous comments do not need to be resubmitted. Scoping meetings are planned for February 10, 1998 in Jackson, Wyoming at 7:00 pm in the Teton County Library and February 12, 1998 in Pinedale, Wyoming at 7:00 pm in the Sublette County Library.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Rick Anderson, Project Coordinator, Bridger-Teton National Forest, P.O. Box 1888, Jackson, WY 83001. E-Mail comments may be sent to: eis/r4__b-t@fs.fed.us

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions concerning the proposed action and EIS should be directed to Rick Anderson at (307) 739–5558, or through writing or electronic mail to the addresses listed above.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: When the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan was approved in 1990 it identified at a programmatic level the lands available for oil and gas leasing. The next step in the leasing process is for the Forest Service to perform a site specific leasing analysis tiered to the Forest Plan. The purpose of this analysis is to implement the authority granted to the Forest Service by the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987 and the implementing regulations (36 CFR 228 E), and to make the leasing decision for the specific lands for which interest in leasing has been expressed.

Conducting this analysis and making the necessary determinations will include the following steps or determinations:

(a) Verify that the leasing of these lands is consistent with the Forest Plan.

(b) Determine that the leasing has been adequately addressed in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document.

(c) Determine if further analysis is needed resulting from new circumstances or new information.

(d) Determine which specific lands and under what conditions the Forest Service will consent to authorize the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to offer for lease.

Conducting an environmental analysis on a proposed leasing action is triggered when the BLM receives an Expression of Interest in leasing a specific area. The Expression of Interest means an entity has identified a block of land that it wants to be offered for leasing. In cases where no site-specific analysis has been completed, this action requires the Forest Service to complete an analysis of the area to determine which of the nominated lands it will consent to be leased and to identify under what conditions the oil and gas activities will be permitted. The Bridger-Teton National Forest will analyze the entire Management Areas where the nominated lands are located.

To satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a proposed action must be identified by the Forest Service. A proposed action is not necessarily what will occur on the ground. It is a starting point for identification of issues and alternatives.

The Forest Service proposes to authorize the BLM to offer oil and gas leases in four areas of the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

The first area, Management Area 21, also known as the Hoback Basin Area contains approximately 72,400 acres of National Forest System lands and is located about 25 miles southeast of Jackson surrounding the community of Bondurant, WY, in Sublette County. The second area, Management Area 45, also known as the Moccasin Basin Area contains approximately 58,000 acres of National Forest System land and is located about 30 miles northeast of Jackson, WY, in Teton County. The third area, Management Area 71, also known as the Union Pass Area contains approximately 87,000 acres of National Forest System land and is located about 40 miles north of Pinedale, WY, in Fremont, Sublette and Teton Counties. The fourth area, Management Area 72, also known as the Upper Green River Area contains approximately 152,500 acres of National Forest System land and is located about 30 miles north of Pinedale, WY, in Sublette and Teton Counties.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan estimates reasonable foreseeable developments for each of the Management Areas of the Forest. The estimate for Management Area 21 indicates that ''In the event of a discovery, gas with some oil or condensate would most likely be encountered, and field development would involve up to 5 wells. Wells would be drilled on 640 acre spacing.'' (FEIS p. 244) It is estimated that there would be two exploratory wells in this area. The estimation for Management Area 45 is stated as, ''the potential for the occurrence of oil and gas in this MA is high. Any discoveries will probably be gas with some oil or condensate. Spacing would be 640 acres with about 10 wells.'' (FEIS p. 197) Two of the 10 wells are expected to be exploratory wells. The estimate for MA 71 is stated as: ''The potential for the occurrence of hydrocarbons is rated high. Cretaceous through Paleozoic rocks are believed to be present along with good structural possibilities. If discovery is made, wells would be spaced on 640 acres with up to 10 wells drilled.'' (FEIS p. 198). The estimate for MA 72 is: ''The MA is rated as high for the occurrence of hydrocarbons * * * Less activity is expected here than on other MAs but it is estimated that some activity will occur. Gas would most likely be encountered in a discovery with some associated oil or condensate. Well spacing would be 640 acres. In the event that a discovery is made up to 5 wells may be drilled.'' (FEIS p. 224)

The development scenarios are based on an assumption that each exploratory well will have an average total disturbance of 15 acres—11 of which will be stabilized in about three years for a producer. Dry and abandoned wells will have no facilities and all acreage will be stabilized (FEIS p. 192)

Prior to deciding to analyze the proposed action using an Environmental Impact Statement, scoping was conducted to identify issues to be analyzed through an Environmental Assessment. This previous scoping identified many issues which will be considered in the Environmental Impact Statement. The many issues received relate to the general categories listed below:

- Economic Impacts.
- Social Impacts.
- Effects on community and regional infrastructure.
- Effects on Air quality.
- Effects on Wilderness Areas, roadless areas, and other special management areas.
- Effects on wildlife.
- Effects on vegetation.
- Effects on water quality and fisheries.
- Effects on the character of the area.

• Effects on quality of life for residents and visitor experience issues.

• Effects on National Forest recreation opportunities.

• Effects on Paleontologic Resources.

• The cumulative effects of the proposed oil and gas activities combined with the impacts of other actions on a wide spectrum of ecological and human environment areas of concern.

• Broadscale effects on the region including the neighboring National Parks.

• Adequacy of the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement oil and gas leasing scenarios for site-specific analysis and decision making.

The previously submitted specific issues relating to the above general categories will be considered in this Environmental Impact Statement. Other potential issues may be identified during the current scoping period.

The Forest Service is seeking information and comments from Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as individuals and organizations who may be interested in, or affected by, the proposed action. The Forest Service invites written comments and suggestions on the issues related to the proposal and the area being analyzed.

Information received will be used in preparation of the draft EIS and final EIS. For the most effective use, comments should be submitted to the Forest Service by March 2, 1998.

The Responsible Official is Thomas Puchlerz, Acting Forest Supervisor, Bidger-Teton National Forest, Jackson, WY. The decision to be made is whether or not to authorize the BLM to offer specific lands for lease, subject to the Forest Service ensuring that correct stipulations are attached to the leases issued by the BLM (36CFR228.102(e)). The draft EIS is expected to be available for public review in January 1999, with a final EIS estimated to be completed in July 1999. 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.**

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 EIS'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 draft EIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final EIS 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 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.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, 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 EIS. Comments may also address the adequacy of the draft EIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the draft EIS. 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 40 1503.3 in addressing these points.

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 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 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 confidentially should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only 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 10 days.

Dated: January 19, 1998.

Michael Schrotz,

Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor, Brider-Teton National Forest, USDA Forest Service.

[FR Doc. 98–748 Filed 1–14–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration

Pilot Program for Barge Inspection Services

AGENCY: Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA).

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: GIPSA is announcing its plan to conduct a pilot program allowing more than one official agency to provide barge inspection services within a single geographic area.

EFFECTIVE DATE: March 1, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Neil E. Porter, Director, Compliance Division, STOP 3604, (Room 1647–S), 1400 Independence Ave. S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250–3604.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Neil E. Porter, telephone 202–720–8262.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Sections 7(f) and 7A of the United States Grain Standards Act, as amended, (Act) were amended by the U.S. Grain Standards Act Amendments of 1993 (Public Law 103–156) on November 24, 1993, to authorize GIPSA's Administrator to conduct pilot programs. These pilot programs would allow more than one official agency to provide official services within a single geographic area without undermining the declared policy of the Act. The purpose of pilot programs is to evaluate the impact of allowing more than one official agency to provide official services within a single geographic area.

GIPSA considered several possible pilot programs as announced in the March 14, 1994, **Federal Register** (59 FR 11759) and the March 10, 1995, **Federal Register** (60 FR 13113). In the September 27, 1995, **Federal Register** (60 FR 49828) GIPSA announced two pilot programs, ''Timely Service'' and ''Open Season,'' starting on November 1, 1995, and ending on October 31, 1996. These two pilot programs were extended to October 31, 1999, as announced in the October 3, 1996, **Federal Register** (61 FR 51674).

The March 14, 1994, **Federal Register** invited comments on a possible pilot program for barges on selected rivers or portions of rivers as defined by GIPSA.