raw material was produced under a HACCP-based system, or that intervention methods were used, and that the raw material does not pose a risk.

5. One commenter suggested that FSIS consider *E. coli* O157:H7 found on *any* meat as an adulterant.

No changes are being made to the guidance document as a result of this comment. However, FSIS regularly assesses the public health implications of this pathogen for products other than ground beef and will take this comment into consideration in connection with this process. To date, FSIS has only stated that *E. coli* O157:H7 is an adulterant in ground beef. The Agency is publishing in this issue of the **Federal Register** its policy on this matter.

6. A commenter stated that guidelines do not have the force of law, are not binding, and are only recommendations.

The Agency agrees. The guidance for beef grinders is intended to illustrate how grinders can avail themselves of opportunities to minimize food safety hazards associated with their products. The guidance may be used in conjunction with the Agency's draft generic HACCP model for raw ground meat and poultry products. The HACCP system of process control is mandatory now for large plants and will become mandatory in small and very small plants in January 1999 and January 2000, respectively.

7. A commenter suggested that lots or batches be limited to raw materials from a single slaughterhouse.

Limiting lots or batches of raw materials to a single slaughterhouse represents one means of controlling the quality and safety of the raw materials. However, demand will dictate whether a grinding plant can secure all the raw materials that it needs from a single slaughterhouse. The guidance recommends control of source materials by establishing purchase requirements and demanding appropriate records from the suppliers. It is up to individual plants to decide whether they want to get their source materials from one or several slaughterhouses.

8. One commenter suggested that FSIS should require identification of the farm of origin, slaughterhouse, and subsequent processors on the consumer package.

The guidance recommends that grinding plants require suppliers to maintain records that facilitate traceback to the farm or animal source. Furthermore, the guidance recommends that grinding plants develop and institute codes on retail-ready packages of ground beef to facilitate traceback and trace-forward. However, at this time, FSIS is not proposing to adopt these recommendations as requirements. FSIS believes that the guidance is adequate to assist processors of ground beef to minimize the risk of *E. coli* O157:H7.

9. A commenter stated that there is a higher probability of handling mistakes, such as temperature abuse, when there are numerous intermediate distributors compared to just one.

The Agency agrees with the point made in the comment; however, the current food production and distribution system is complex, often involving lengthy distances, multiple distribution points, and numerous handlers. For this reason, the guidance recommends that intermediate distributors, in addition to the ultimate retailer, be included in the recordkeeping to facilitate trace-forward in case there is a need to do so. The guidance also recommends the use of tamper-proof time-temperature indicators on boxes of finished products to disclose temperature abuse.

10. One commenter asked what FSIS can do, aside from education, to achieve the recommendation that grinders structure their operations to take into account the handling and preparation of meat by consumers after it leaves the store.

In addition to educating consumers by training and educational programs, FSIS requires that important consumer information be included on labels of meat and poultry products. Food labels inform consumers about whether the product is ready-to-eat or needs to be cooked, and about how to store the product. Non-ready-to-eat meat and poultry products are required to include safe handling instructions, which instruct consumers about handling, storing, and cooking the product. In addition, cooking instructions may be included on labels of non-ready-to-eat products.

11. A commenter stated that the guidance did not stress food handler education.

The Agency disagrees with this comment. The guidance recommends training and education of employees, *food handlers*, distributors, and consumers on the risks of foodborne illness associated with ground beef and suggests measures to prevent foodborne illness. In addition, the plant's Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures may include training and education of employees and food handlers. The Agency does agree, however, with the suggestion from the commenter that training food handlers in their native language will make the training more effective and meaningful. In response to this comment, FSIS revised the education section of the guidance by recommending that establishments provide training to food handlers and other employees in their native language, if necessary.

12. There was a suggestion from a commenter to spell out sanitation of the carrier in the subsection on transport of raw materials.

In the original guidance document, the subsection on transport of raw materials included examination of conditions of transport, such as temperature inside transport vehicles, and of meat itself, as well as duration of transport. In response to this comment, FSIS expanded the subsection on transport of raw materials to add sanitation of the carrier and details on the different conditions of transport, such as presence of cracks, debris, foreign material or off-odors, condition of the insulation and of the door seals.

Revised Guidance Document

In addition to the changes noted above in response to the comments and suggestions, the Agency has incorporated details on rework and product recall plans that were derived from the guidance material provided by the National Meat Association and the American Meat Institute. As a result, the section on the grinding process has been expanded, especially the subsection on lotting, rework, unprocessed raw material and outside trimmings. The shipping, handling and distribution section has also been expanded to include more details on transport, secondary distributors, inventory control and in-house recall plans.

FSIS intends to update the guidance regularly and to make it available through the FSIS web page. Recommendations for improving this guidance material are welcome at any time.

Done in Washington, DC on December 21, 1998.

Thomas J. Billy,

Administrator.

[FR Doc. 99–359 Filed 1–15–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–DM–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Supplement to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Mt. Ashland Ski Area, Rogue River National Forest, Jackson County, Oregon

ACTION: Notice of intent to supplement a final environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service will prepare a supplement to the final environmental impact statement (SEIS) for the Mt. Ashland Ski Area (MASA) on the Rogue River National Forest. The final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) for the MASA were released in July 1991. This decision established a programmatic Master Plan for future ski area expansion. In March, 1998, the Mt. Ashland Association (MAA) submitted a proposal to the Forest Service (based, on the Master Plan) to implement a variety of ski area facility improvements within the MASA. The Association leases the operation from the City of Ashland, holder of a Forest Service Special Use Permit for the MASA. As identified in

the 1991 final EIS and ROD, the primary purpose for implementing the proposed improvements is to enhance the economic viability of the MASA. The primary need is for additional intermediate and low intermediate skiing terrain, with an overall goal to provide a high quality recreation experience.

The Forest Service gives notice of the full supplemental analysis and decision-making process so that interested and affected peoples are made aware as to how they may participate and contribute to this supplemental analysis and decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of this supplemental analysis should be received by February 19, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comment sot Linda Duffy, District Ranger, Ashland Ranger District, Rogue River National Forest, 645 Washington Street, Ashland, Oregon, 97520.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Linda Duffy or Steve Johnson, Ashland Ranger District, Rogue River National Forest, 645 Washington Street, Ashland, Oregon, 97520, Telephone (541) 482–3333; FAX (541) 858–2402; email address is sjohnson/r6pnw__rogueriver@fs.fed.us.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Scoping for these proposed improvements was initiated on March 18, 1998. The intent at that time was to process a site-specific project proposal, tiering to the programmatic Master Plan, with an environmental assessment (EA) and Decision Notice. Preparation of an EA would have fulfilled the direction within this ROD to complete site-specific environmental analysis prior to project implementation approved conceptually in the final EIS and ROD. Since last March, numerous letters from groups and individuals were received. Four public field trips to the project area and two public meetings were held in regards to the ski area proposal. There were also numerous discussions with Forest Service interdisciplinary resource specialists. This dialogue, both internal and external, has led the Responsible Official to decide to prepare a Supplement to the final EIS. The decision to now proceed with an SEIS will include analysis and disclosure of several proposed actions: consideration of new information or changed circumstances associated with the programmatic decision on the ''Master Plan'' made in 1991; a Forest Plan Amendment to adjust the management allocation boundary from the 1990 Rogue River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan to that associated with the 1991 Record of Decision for the MASA; as well as a site specific project analysis based on a current proposal to develop a portion of the Master Plan. The Supplement to the 1991 FEIS will focus on those aspects that are now changed or different or are in need of an update or correction, in relation to the selected alternative as documented in the 1991 ROD.

The MAA site-specific proposal includes: construction for a new chairlift and associated ski runs within the western portion of the Special Use Permit area; an additional skier service building; a surface lift providing novice skier access to the proposed runs; additional parking areas; maintenance access via primitive roads; and necessary supporting infrastructure items such as sewer, water and power lines. All proposed projects are within the existing Special Use Permit area boundary. The legal location description for all actions is T.40 S., R. 1 E., in sections 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, and 22, W.M., Jackson County, Oregon.

The Supplement will not re-open the decision for expansion based on the Master Plan that has already been made. The significant issues and alternatives associated with this analysis process are expected to primarily be associated with the current site-specific project proposal to expand and develop a portion of this Master Plan. Preliminary issues include: water quality within a domestic supply watershed; maintenance of habitat for an anadromous fishery; protection of wetland habitats and rare plant and animal species; aesthetics and social considerations; and the economic feasibility associated with the operation and expansion of a commercial ski area. Preliminary alternatives include options to avoid or reduce impacts to wetland areas and alternative locations for parking and other proposed ski area facilities.

The supplement will be prepared and circulated in the same manner as the draft and final EIS (40 CFR 1502.9). Comments received on the draft supplemental EIS will be considered in the preparation of the final supplement. The draft SEIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by may 1999. The comment period on the draft SEIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA 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 the draft 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 SEIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final SEIS 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 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 SEIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the draft SEIS 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 SEIS 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.

At the end of the comment period on the draft SEIS, comments will be analyzed and considered by the Forest Service in preparing the final SEIS. The final supplement is scheduled to be completed by August 1999.

The Responsible Official will consider the comments, responses, environmental consequences discussed in the final SEIS, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The Responsible Official will document the decision in a Record of Decision. The Forest Service decision will be subject to Forest Service appeal regulations at 36 CFR part 215.

Dated: January 8, 1999.

James T. Gladen,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99–1071 Filed 1–15–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M