DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Plentybob Ecosystem Restoration Projects, Umatilla National Forest, Umatilla County, Oregon

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) on a proposed action to implement ecosystem restoration projects, designed to promote healthy watershed conditions within the Upper Umatilla River watershed. The project area is located on the Walla Walla Ranger District approximately 30 air miles southeast of Walla Walla, Washington.

Proposed project activities consist of hardwood planting in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas, hydrologic stability projects (road obliteration, road re-alignment and/or reconstruction), noxious weed treatments, wildlife enhancement projects, landscape prescribed fire and restoration of forest stand structure and composition using a variety of silvicultural treatments including commercial timber harvest. The proposed action is designed to reduce risk to ecosystem sustainability, prevent further degradation of forest health, reduce risks of catastrophic wildfire and provide some economic return to local economies.

The EIS will tier to the 1990 Land and Resource Management Plan FEIS for the Umatilla National Forest, which provides overall guidance for forest management of the area.

DATES: Written comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received on or before February 26, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments and suggestions to the Responsible Official, Thomas K. Reilly, District Ranger, Walla Walla Ranger District, 1415 West Rose Street, Walla Walla, Washington, 99362.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dennis Sedam, Project Team Leader, Walla Walla Ranger District, Phone: (509) 522–6050.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The decision area contains approximately 73,156 acres within the Umatilla National Forest in Umatilla County, Oregon. It is within the Meacham Creek and South Fork Umatilla River watersheds. Approximately 53,250 acres of the planning area is located in the Hellhole Roadless Area. The legal description of the decision area if as follows: All or part of Sections 1–3 Township 1 South, Range 37 East; Section 6 Township 1 South, Range 38 East; Sections 1–5, 8–12, 22–27 Township 1 North, Range 36 East; Sections 1–27, 30 and 34–36 Township 1 North, Range 37 East; Sections 1–5, 8–18, 19–36 Township 2 North, Range 36 East; Sections 4–10, 15–22, 26–35 Township 2 North, Range 37 East; Sections 22–28 and 32–36 Township 3 North, Range 36 East and Sections 16–22 and 28–33 Township 3 North, Range 37 East, W.M. surveyed.

Water quality improvement projects include stabilization of stream banks with planting of hardwoods on 192 acres. Proposed hydrologic stability projects include approximately 44.5 miles of road obliteration, 23.6 miles or road reconstruction and revegetation of cut and fill slopes. Road construction would include bank stabilization, surfacing and construction of drainage structures. 14,473 acres of prescribed burning for elk habitat are proposed to enhance wildlife habitat. A variety of silvicultural methods would treat approximately 4,103 acres within the area. This proposal also includes prescribed burning of approximately 3,000 acres within harvest units and approximately 15,500 acres outside of harvest units to reduce the potential for future wildfires, prepare sites for regeneration, enhance wildlife habitat, modify stand structure and composition and maintain forest health by bring fuel levels closer to their historic levels.

An estimated 38.0 million board feet of green and 10.0 million broad feet of dead timber would be commercially harvested in four timber sales over a period of three to five years. Proposed silvicultural treatments would include shelterwood, group selection and salvage harvest. None of the proposed timber harvest would take place within the Hellhole Roadless Area.

For all treatments, existing snags and large down wood would be left on site. Ponderosa pine and western larch would be the preferred species for leave trees. All trees greater than 21 inches DBH would be left in the ponderosa pine and subalphine fir biophysical groups (both are below their historic range of variability).

Several streams within the analysis area are not Oregon's 303(d) List of Water Quality Limited Waterbodies. The proposed action will include Best Management Practices and include components of a Water Quality Management Plan.

The proposed action will tier to the FEIS and Umatilla Forest Plans, as amended, which provides goals, objectives, standards and guidelines for activities and land allocations on the Forest. There are six designated Management Areas (MAs) found within the analysis area: A4 Viewshed 2, A9 Special Interest Area, C1 Dedicated Old Growth, C4 Wildlife Habitat, C5 Riparian (Fish and Wildlife) and C8 Grass-Tree Mosaic.

The Forest Service will consider a range of alternatives. One of these will be the ''no action'' alternative in which none of the proposed activities would be implemented. Additional alternatives will examine varying levels and locations for the proposed activities to achieve the proposal's purposes, as well as to respond to the issues and other resource values.

Preliminary Issues: Tentatively, the preliminary issues identified are briefly described below:

1. Wildlife Habitat—What effects would timber harvest and prescribed burning have on big game and non-game habitat?
2. Ecosystem Sustatinability—How would the proposed activities affect ecosystem sustainability and forest health?
3. Air Quality—What effects would landscape prescribed burning have on air quality?
4. Water Quality/Riparian Habitat—How would water quality, flow, temperature, timing and riparian habitat conditions be affected by the proposed activities?
5. Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) Species—What effect would the proposed activities have on TES species and what opportunities exist to improve habitat?
6. Noxious Weeds—What effects would the proposed activities have on noxious weed populations?

This list will be verified, expanded or modified based on public scoping and interdisciplinary review of this proposal.

Public participation will be especially important at several points during the analysis, beginning with the scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7). Initial scoping began with the project listing in the 1998 Winter Edition of the Umatilla national Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions. 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 of the process and is encouraged to visit the 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 and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in, or affected by the proposal. This input will be used in

preparation of the Draft EIS. The scoping process includes:

1. Identifying potential issues.
2. Identifying major issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Considering additional alternatives based on themes which will be derived from issues recognized during scoping activities.
4. Identifying potential environmental effects of this project and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect and cumulative effects and connected actions).

The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available to the public for review by April 1999. At that time, the EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS in the **Federal Register.** The comment period on the Draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA publishes the Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register.** It is important that those interested in the management of the Umatilla National Forest participate at that time.

The Final EIS is scheduled to be completed by June, 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.

The Forest Service believes 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 Draft EIS's must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts the 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. 1335, 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 and respond to them in the final EIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns or 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 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).

The Forest Service is the lead agency. Thomas Reilly, District Ranger, is the Responsible Official. As the Responsible Official, he will decide which, if any, of the proposed projects will be implemented. He will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service Appeal Regulations (36 CFR part 215).

Dated: December 30, 1998.

Thomas K. Reilly,

District Ranger.

[FR Doc. 99–1072 Filed 1–15–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

California Coast Provincial Advisory Committee (PAC); Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Meeting.

SUMMARY: The California Coast Provincial Advisory Committee (PAC) will meet on January 27 and 28, 1999, at the Six Rivers National Forest Supervisor's Office in Eureka, CA. The meeting will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. The Forest Supervisor's Office is located at 1330 Bayshore Way in Eureka. Agenda items to be covered include: (1) Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) update; (2) Presentation on Survey and Manage requirements; (3) Presentation on the Blands Timber Sale on the Mendocino National Forest; (3) Subcommittee roles and direction; (4) Presentation on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Russian River watershed project planning; (5) Subcommittee reports and recommendations (Coho, PAC/SCERT); (6) Presentation on lawsuit of 13 plaintiffs vs. the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management concerning the implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan; (7) Joint 3 PAC meeting follow-up on priority action items identified at the May 28–29, 1998, PAC meeting; (8) Presentation on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license issued to the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) for the operation of the Potter Valley hydroelectric project; (9) Presentation and recommended comments to the REO Draft exemption criteria for certain salvage projects conducted with the Late Successional Reserves; (10) Selection of dates and locations for 1999 meetings; and (11) Open public comment. All California Coast Provincial Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public. Interested citizens are encouraged to attend.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions regarding this meeting to Daniel Chisholm, USDA, Forest Supervisor, Mendocino National Forest, 825 N. Humboldt Avenue, Willows, CA 95988, (530) 934–3316 or Phebe Brown, Province Coordinator, USDA, Mendocino National Forest, 825 N. Humboldt Avenue, Willows, CA 95988, (530) 934–3316.

Dated: January 8, 1999.

Daniel K. Chisholm,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99–1041 Filed 1–15–99; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Lake Tahoe Basin Federal Advisory Committee

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Lake Tahoe Basin Federal Advisory Committee will hold their first meeting on January 28, 1999, in South Lake Tahoe, California. This Committee, established by the Secretary of Agriculture on December 15, 1998, is chartered to provide advice to the Secretary on implementing the terms of the Federal Interagency Partnership on the Lake Tahoe Region and other matters raised by the Secretary.

DATES: The meeting will be held January 28, 1999, beginning at 9 a.m. and ending at 3 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Super 8 Motel, 3600 Lake Tahoe Boulevard, South Lake Tahoe, California.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Juan Palma or Sherry Hazelhurst, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Forest Service, 870 Emerald Bay Road, Suite 1, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150, (530) 573–2642.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Secretary of Agriculture established the Lake Tahoe Basin Advisory Committee to advise the Secretary and other partners of the Federal Interagency