DATES: For the Forest Service to best use the scoping input, comments should be received by August 1, 1999; however, scoping comments will be accepted at any time. Comments received in response to the original Notice of Intent are also accepted.

ADDRESSES: Please send written comments to Petersburg Ranger District; Tongass National Forest, Attn: Threemile Timber Harvest EIS; PO Box 1328, Petersburg, AK., 99833.

INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposal and EIS should be directed to Everett Kissinger, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, PO Box 1328, Petersburg, AK, 99833, phone (907) 772–3841.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Public participation will be part of the planning 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, tribal, state, and local agencies, and from 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. Written scoping comments will be solicited through a scoping package sent to a project mailing list. For the Forest Service to best use the scoping input, comments should be received by August 1, 1999; however, scoping comments will be accepted at any time. Tentative issues identified for analysis in the EIS include subsistence, wildlife habitat, road development and access management, and timber sale economics and timber supply. Based on the results of scoping and the resource capabilities within the project area, alternatives including a no-action alternative will be developed for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS). The Draft EIS is projected to be filed with the Environmental Projection Agency (EPA) in January 2000. Subsistence hearings, as provided for in Title VIII, Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), may be conducted during the comment period on the Draft EIS if the analysis indicates a significant effect to subsistence uses. The Final EIS is anticipated by July, 2000.

The comment period on the Draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes a 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 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). Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon* v. *Hodel,* 803 F.2nd 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 environmental impact statement.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns of the proposed action, comments during scoping and comments on the draft environmental impact statement should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific areas with the project area are 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 Regulation for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and address 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. Requests should be aware that, under 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: Those required for implementation include the following:

1. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
—Approval of discharge of dredged or fill material into the 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 1989;
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)
5. State of Alaska, Division of Governmental Coordination
—Coastal Zone Consistency Determination concurrence

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Carol J. Jorgensen, Assistant Forest Supervisor, Stikine Area, Tongass National Forest, PO Box 309, Petersburg, AK 99833, 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: June 21, 1999.

Carol J. Jorgensen,

Assistant Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99–17477 Filed 7–8–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee Meeting; Notice

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee will meet on Tuesday, July 20, 1999, at the Port of Skamania County meeting room, located at 70 SE Cascade, Stevenson, Washington. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. and continue until 5 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to present: (1) The National Forest roads policy and how that affects the roads policy on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest; (2) the timber and recreation aspects of monitoring the Northwest Forest Plan; (3) restoration monitoring; (4) an update on the timber sale plan; (5) an update on survey and manage; and (6) a Public Open Forum. All Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public. Interested citizens are encouraged to attend. The ''open forum'' provides opportunity for the public to bring issues, concerns, and discussion topics to the Advisory Committee. The ''open forum'' is scheduled as part of agenda item (6) for this meeting. Interested speakers will need to register prior to the open forum period. The committee welcomes the public's written comments on committee business at any time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions regarding this meeting to Linda Turner, Public Affairs Specialist, at (360) 891–5195, or write Forest Headquarters Office, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, 10600 NE. 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA 98682.

Dated: July 2, 1999.

Peggy Kain,

Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99–17485 Filed 7–8–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Stewardship Contracting Pilot Projects

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service is implementing pilot projects to study whether alternate means of contracting on National Forest System lands can better accomplish program objectives. Section 347 of the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act authorizes the Forest Service to enter into twenty-eight ''stewardship end result contracting demonstration projects'' to pilot test an array of new authorities for giving national forest managers greater administrative flexibility to improve forest conditions and address the needs of local communities.

ADDRESSES: Questions about this notice may be sent to Cliff Hickman, via mail at USDA Forest Service, Forest Management, Mail Stop 1105, P.O. Box 96090, Washington, DC 20090–6090 or electronically to chickman/wo/@fs.fed.us. Electronic copies of Section 347 of the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act may be obtained via Internet at www.fs.fed.us/land/fm/stewardship/framework.html.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cliff Hickman, Forest Management Staff, (202) 205–1162, or chickman/wo@fs.fed.us.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Many forests within the National Forest System are currently experiencing conditions that jeopardize long-term ecosystem health and sustainability (such as, high fuel loadings, impaired watersheds, and habitat loss). The Forest Service seeks to respond to these problems in an efficient and cost-effective manner to maximize treated acreage without undue administrative delay. In addition to natural resource benefits, local economies may benefit as a result of the Forest Service using private contractors to implement needed ecosystem restoration, maintenance, or protection activities.

The Forest Service's current contracting authorities are limited in their ability to address the agency's changing forest management challenges because those laws were originally designed to sell and remove forest products of commercial value. To address many of today's most pressing forest health concerns (such as excessive fuel loadings), the agency needs to remove material of relatively little to no economic value. Except within very narrowly defined limits, the agency's current timber sale authorities preclude the federal government from requiring purchasers to perform land management services not directly associated with removing purchased timber. This often results in making multiple entries on the same site using multiple service contracts to implement desired treatments. The need for multiple entries and contracts increases the potential for environmental degradation and adds to the administrative costs.

Stewardship contracts are generally multiserve and multiyear procurements, are end result oriented, and generally authorize the exchange of goods for services. Given these attributes, stewardship contracts may greatly enhance the agency's ability to implement needed ecosystem restoration, maintenance, or protection activities.

Background

In Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993, the Forest Service was given limited authority to experiment with stewardship contracting. Language in the appropriations act for these 2 years provided that tests cold be conducted on five administrative units (the Idaho Panhandle National Forest in Region 1, the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests in Region 3, the Dixie National Forest in Region 4, and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit in Region 5) and also authorized the exchange of goods for services. Test units conducted such work as: site preparation, replanting, silviculture activities, recreation activities, wildlife habitat improvement, and other multiple-use enhancements. These projects were funded, in part, by the products sold from the test sites.

In its final report to Congress on the results of these tests, the agency concluded that: (1) in instances where the primary reason for manipulating vegetation was to create specific resource conditions, rather than to produce fiber, stewardship contracting could be an extremely useful management tool, and (2) certain issues needed to be resolved before stewardship contracting could be applied more broadly or on a permanent basis. Key concerns identified during the study included: the handling of payments to states, the competitive disadvantage small businesses may have due to inadequate resources (such as, skills, finances, equipment), and the difficulties inherent in trying to fund multiyear contracts out of a single year's appropriated funds.

In October of 1996, in recognition of the growing need to find better ways to manage vegetation, especially material that is of little or no commercial value, the Forest Service held a national scoping workshop on the subject of ''Improving Administrative Flexibility and Efficiency in the National Forest Timber Sale Program.'' At this meeting, a broad array of stakeholders discussed stewardship contracting and other potentially innovative ways of managing national forest vegetation within an ecosystem context. An outcome of the workshop was a new initiative with the following objectives:

- To find new ways to accomplish needed vegetation treatments more effectively and efficiently.
- To investigate how the Forest Service's existing authorities can be used more creatively to accomplish needed vegetation treatments.