(d) Vegetative treatment through timber harvest and/or prescribed burning of approximately 675 acres; verification and allocation of Forest Plan old growth; construction of approximately 0.7 miles of temporary road; obliteration of approximately 4.1 miles of existing road, along with other watershed improvement activities; mine reclamation; recreation site improvement; and access management.

(e) Vegetative treatment through timber harvest and/or prescribed burning of approximately 1338 acres; verification and allocation of Forest Plan old growth; construction of approximately 6.1 miles of temporary road; obliteration of approximately 4.1 miles of existing road, along with other watershed improvement activities; mine reclamation; recreation site improvement; and access management.

(f) Vegetative treatment through timber harvest and/or prescribed burning of approximately 1338 acres; verification and allocation of Forest Plan old growth; construction of approximately 8.6 miles of temporary road; obliteration of approximately 4.1 miles of existing road, along with other watershed improvement activities; mine reclamation; recreation site improvement; and access management.

Note that the acreages, the miles of temporary road construction and miles of road obliteration are approximate only and may change during the analysis.

Public participation will continue to be an important part of the project, commencing with the EIS initial scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7), which starts with publication of this notice and continues for the next 30 days. In addition, the public 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, and local agencies, the Nez Perce Tribe, and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action.

Comments from the public and other agencies will be used in preparation of the draft EIS. The scoping process will be used to:

1. Identify additional potential issues;
2. Identify additional major issues to be analyzed in depth;
3. Eliminate minor issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental analysis, such as the Nez Perce National Forest Plan EIS;
4. Identify additional alternatives to the proposed action;
5. Identify potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (*i.e.*, direct, indirect, and cumulative effects).

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, which is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and available for public review in March 2000. A 45-day comment period will follow publication of a Notice of Availability of the draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comments received will be analyzed and considered in preparation of a final EIS, which is expected to be filed in July 2000. A Record of Decision will be issued not less than 30 days after publication of a Notice of Availability of the final EIS in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes it is important at this early stage to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of draft EISs must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal in such a way 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, 513 (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 in order that substantive comments and objections are 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 should be as specific as possible. 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.

Bruce Bernhardt is the responsible official for this environmental impact statement.

Dated: November 29, 1999.

Bruce Bernhardt,

Forest Supervisor, Nez Perce National Forest.

[FR Doc. 99–32214 Filed 12–10–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Loon Mountain Ski Resort Development and Expansion Project

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) rather than a Supplement to the Loon Mountain Ski Area South Mountain Expansion Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to disclose the environmental effects of Loon Mountain Recreation Corporation's (LMRC) proposal to develop and expand recreational facilities at Loon Mountain Ski Resort. The Forest Service has decided that the environmental analysis should be documented and disclosed in an EIS rather than a Supplement to the FEIS based on changes to the original purpose and need for the Proposed Action since the FEIS was prepared. The project area is located on the Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest, Grafton County, New Hamsphire. The agency invites written comments concerning the Proposed Action as described in proposal letters submitted to the Forest Service on January 26, and May 14, 1998; and reaffirmed and clarified on December 2, 1999.

DATES: Written comments concerning the Proposed Action should be received on or before January 12, 2000. No public scoping meetings are planned at this time. The Draft EIS is scheduled to be completed by June 2000, and the final EIS is scheduled to be completed by November 2000. The Forest Service will seek comments on the Draft EIS for a period of at least 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection agency publishes the Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**. Public meeting dates and venues during the public comment public for the Draft EIS will be advertised in the media.

Resposible Official: Donna Hepp, Forest Supervisor, White Mountain National Forest, Federal Building, 719 Main Street, Laconia, New Hampshire, 03246 is the Responsible Official for the EIS.

Written Comments: Send written comments to Beth LeClair, Eastern Region Winter Sports Team Leader, US Forest Service, 99 Ranger Road, Rochester, Vermont, 05767; or E-mail to erwst/r9__gmfl@fs.fed.us.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jay Strand, Project Coordinator, US Forest Service, 99 Ranger Road, Rochester, Vermont, 05767; TTY phone (802) 767–4261; voice phone (802) 767–4261 ext. 522; FAX (802) 767–4777; or E-mail, jstrand/r9__gmfl@fs.fed.us.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Loon Mountain Recreation Corporation (LMRC) operates Loon Mountain Ski Resort, a portion of which is under a Special Use Permit (SUP) issued and administered by the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF). In 1986, LMRC submitted a proposal to develop and expand the existing ski area to meet the demand for additional skiing on the WMNF, and to meet the demand for more capacity at Loon Mountain Ski Area. The environmental effects of the proposal and five alternatives were disclosed and documented at the Loon Mountain Ski Area South Mountain Expansion Project FEIS which was completed in late 1992. The Record of Decision (ROD) was issued on March 1, 1993 and authorized the implementation of Alternative 6 to meet the stated purpose and need. The 1993 ROD was litigated and the subsequent court ruling found that parts of the analysis were inadequate. A May 5, 1997 Court Order invalidated the 1993 ROD and prohibited any further activities related to Alternative 6 pending the outcome of a new analysis and ROD that addresses the identified FEIS inadequacies. On January 26, 1998 and May 14, 1998, LMRC submitted proposal letters to modify Alternative 6 to reflect changed conditions. Based on the acceptance of LMRC's proposal, the Forest Service issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) dated August 4, 1998 to prepare a Supplement to the FEIS that would address the May 5, 1997 Court Order, update the analysis with new information, and disclose the environmental effects of the proposal as submitted by LMRC. On March 31, 1999 the Forest Service issued a public newsletter that modified the Proposed Action. The modifications included the addition of the construction and operation of a 16-inch snowmaking pipeline to provide instantaneous snowmaking capacity to the ski terrain within the existing SUP area. Although the Proposed Action has not changed since the August 1998 NOI and March 31, 1999 Newsletter, the Forest Service has decided that the environmental analysis should be documented and disclosed in an EIS rather than a Supplement to the FEIS. This decision is based on changes to the original purpose and need for the Proposed Action since the FEIS was prepared.

Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of LMRC's proposal is to ensure a continued high-quality winter recreation experience for existing and future skiers and snowboarders at Loon Mountain Ski Resort through the following means: (1) Improving the variety, diversity, and amount of terrain by adding new trails with different characteristics; (2) improving skier distribution and convenience by adding and upgrading lifts; (3) improving skier and snowboarder access and egress by developing a second portal; (4) increasing the quality and capacity of base-area and on-mountain facilities; (5) improving snow conditions by increasing the total and instantaneous snowmaking coverage; and (6) adding parking facilities. The need for the proposal is to: (1) To respond to a proposal by LMRC which has the potential for offering more effective recreation utilization of National Forest System lands; (2) address shortcomings in the existing design, operations, and facilities of Loon Mountain, respond to guest preferences to Loon Mountain Ski Resort, and stay abreast of evolving ski market trends; (3) fulfill the WMNF Forest Plan management goals and objectives for Management Area 7.1 and 9.2; (4) ensure that LMRC remains a viable operation so that high-quality public recreation opportunities continue to be offered over the long term at Loon Mountain Ski Resort; and (5) respond to court orders directing the Forest Service to address the inadequacies of the 1992 FEIS, and disclose the effects of the 16-inch pipeline.

Description of Proposed Action and Tentative Alternatives

The Proposed Action as resubmitted by LMRC in a letter dated December 2, 1999 and accepted by the Forest Service includes ten categories: (1) expansion of the SUP area by 581 acres for a total of 1,366 acres; (2) construction of six new ski trails and a free style jump (30.9 acres), widening of many existing ski trails (20.1 acres), reconfiguration of the Lower Speakeasy trail system within the existing SUP area, and construction of six new trails (73.2 acres) within the expanded SUP area; (3) construction of one new J-bar lift on private land, realignment of two existing lifts, and upgrade of all existing lifts within the existing SUP area, and the construction of two new chairlifts within the expanded SUP area; (4) expansion of existing buildings on private land and within the existing SUP area, and construction of a base area and lodge for the expanded SUP area on private land; (5) expansion of existing parking lots and construction of new parking facilities on private land; (6) provision to meet 100% of a 449.7 million gallon snowmaking water demand target in 85% of the years for complete coverage for 382.3 acres of ski terrain on both the existing and expanded SUP areas; (7) provision to continue water withdrawals within levels currently authorized from the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River (East Branch) and Boyle Brook for snowmaking needs, and elimination of snowmaking water withdrawals from Loon Pond once adequate snowmaking water storage facilities are in place and operational; (8) installation of a 16-inch diameter pipeline and associated facilities to serve the existing SUP area, installation of a 20-inch diameter pipeline and associated facilities to serve the expanded SUP area, and installation of pipelines and associated facilities from water storage ponds on private land to provide complete snowmaking coverage of the entire Loon Mountain ski terrain; (9) construction of multiple water storage ponds with a total capacity of 160 million gallons on private land for snowmaking water needs; and (10) increase the existing skier comfortable carrying capacity from 5,800 to 9,000.

The EIS analysis will include the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. Tentative alternatives may include: (1) Pre-1993 conditions with the 16-inch pipeline and snowmaking water storage facilities only; (2) Existing condition (includes trails and infrastructure constructed and in use within the existing SUP area since 1993); (3) Development within the existing SUP area only; and (4) various options for target water demand needs and water storage facilities and requirements. Additional alternatives that meet the purpose and need of the Proposed Action may be developed to address issues based on public comments received in response to this NOI.

Tentative Issues

Tentative issues that have been identified from public and agency comments to the Supplemental EIS Proposed Action include: (1) Skier comfortable carrying capacity is too high; (2) snowmaking water demand target is too high; (3) consider the Main Stem of the Pemigewasset River as a

snowmaking water source; (4) February median flow should be the minimum for water withdrawals from the East Branch, and a minimum flow for water withdrawals should be set for Boyle Brook; (5) a full range of water storage options should be considered for snowmaking needs; (6) visual impacts; (7) impacts to private residences at the base of Loon Mountain from parking facilities and associated traffic; (8) not enough opportunity for glade and tree skiing; (9) include cross-over trails between South Mountain and the existing ski area; (10) maintain natural snow only ski trails; (11) the purpose and need for the Proposed Action is questionable; (12) wetland impacts from water storage pond construction; (13) impacts to various resources (*i.e.,* soils, water quality, wildlife and aquatic habitat, threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants and animals, and cultural sites); and (14) socioeconomic impacts to the local community (*i.e.,* dependent businesses, traffic congestion, and infrastructure demands).

Decision To Be Made

The site-specific environmental analysis provided by the EIS will assist the Responsible Official in determining whether the Proposed Action, or an alternative to the Proposed Action, best meets the purpose and need of the Proposed Action while addressing public concerns and issues. In preparing the EIS, the Forest Service will consider the Proposed Action against a range of feasible and practicable alternatives including the No Action Alternative. The Responsible Official will consider the comments, responses, and environmental consequences discussed in the Final EIS, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies when making a decision regarding this proposal. The Responsible Official will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. The decision will be subject to appeal under 36 CFR 217 and 36 CFR 251.

Public Participation

Public participation will be incorporated into the preparation of the EIS under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act. The Forest Service solicited comments for 42 days after the August 4, 1998 Notice of Intent, 37 days after the March 31, 1999 Newsletter, and accepted comments at three public meetings. Information and written comments received from the public and agencies during the August 1998 and March 31, 1999 Newsletter scoping periods for the Supplement to the FEIS will be considered as part of the analysis for the EIS, and will be used in preparation of the Draft EIS and Final EIS. Written comments responding to this NOI should be submitted to the Forest Service within 30 days from the date of publication of this NOI in the **Federal Register**. Please note that comments in response to this NOI and in response to the Draft EIS will be regarded as public information including names and addresses.

The Forest Service believes at this early stage it is important to give reviewers notice of 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 EIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the FEIS may be waived or dismissed by the Courts [*City of Angoon* v. *Hodel,* 803 F2d 1015, 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 they can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the Final EIS.

Cooperating and Participating Agencies

The State of New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency were cooperating agencies in preparing the Supplement to the FEIS and will continue to be cooperating agencies in preparing the new EIS. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will continue as a participating agency. The New Hampshire Department of Transportation, New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development, and the Towns of Lincoln and Woodstock, New Hampshire will continue to assist in the analysis process.

Potential Permits

Potential permits required to implement the Proposed Action may include the following: (1) Special Use Permit from the Forest Service; (2) Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; (3) National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit and Stormwater Permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and (4) Significant Alteration of Terrain Permit, Section 401 Permit, Dam Permit, and Stormwater Permit from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. Any additional permits needed from Local, State, and Federal agencies will be identified during the analysis process. In addition, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and any assistance and cooperation from other agencies will be conducted as needed.

Dated: December 7, 1999.

Anne Archie,

Acting Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99–32155 Filed 12–10–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Information Collection Activity; Comment Request

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35, as amended), the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) invites comments on this information collection for which RUS intends to request approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by February 11, 2000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Program Development & Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., STOP 1522, Room 4034 South Building, Washington, DC 20250–1522. Telephone: (202) 720–0736. FAX: (202) 720–4120.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Distance Learning and Telemedicine Loan and Grant Program.

OMB Control Number: 0572–0096.

Type of Request: Reinstatement with change of a previously approved information collection.

Abstract: The Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Loan and Grant program provides loans and grants for advanced telecommunications services to improve rural areas' access to educational and medical services. The