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 CEQ Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points). After the comment period ends on the draft environmental impact statement, the comments received will be analyzed and considered by the Forest Service in preparing the final environmental impact statement.

The final environmental impact statement is scheduled to be completed in October, 1999. In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to the comments received (40 CFR 1503.4). The responsible official will consider the comments, responses, environmental consequences discussed in the environmental impact statement, and applicable laws, regulations and policies in making a decision regarding this proposal. The responsible official will document the decision and reasons for the decision in a Record of Decision. That decision will be subject to appeal under 36 CFR part 215.

The responsible official is Leon Blashock, District Ranger, Allegheny National Forest, HC2 Box 130, Marienville, PA 16239.

Dated: February 2, 1999.

Leon Blashock,

District Ranger.

[FR Doc. 99–3447 Filed 2–11–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Trout Slope East Timber Project; Ashley National Forest, Uintah County, UT

AGENCY: Forest Service, DOA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The Ashley National Forest has proposed to harvest live and dead timber within the Trout Slope East area of the Vernal Ranger District. After completing an environmental assessment (EA), the Responsible Official, Forest Supervisor Bert Kulesza, has determined this proposal will be a major federal action which *may* affect the quality of the human environment, requiring the preparation of an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement).

The objectives of the project are to improve ecosystem function by improving forest structure and pattern characteristics. Treatments are proposed that will recover wood products, reduce fuel loads, salvage the dead tree component to prevent a likely future forest condition of blown down and jackstrawed timber, improve long term scenic quality along primary access routes and at popular recreation sites while protecting the integrity of the productive land base.

DATES: To be most useful, comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by March 15, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Written comments and questions should be sent to: Brad Exton, District Ranger, Vernal Ranger District, Ashley National Forest, 355 N. Vernal Avenue, Vernal, Utah 84078, or e-mail at bexton/r4__ashley@fs.fed.us.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Specific questions about the proposed project and analysis should be directed to Greg Clark, ID Team Leader, Vernal Ranger District, 355 N. Vernal Ave., Vernal, Utah, (435) 789–1181.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This proposal arose out of the Vernal Ranger District's Trout Slope Landscape Assessment (1996) which described the existing condition of an 80,000 acre area between East Park and Leidy Peak. The assessment suggested a desired condition for the area, and recommended resource management strategies to move the area toward the desired condition as a more area-specific complement to the broad direction of the Ashley National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1986).

The Trout Slope East analysis area is approximately 18,650 acres and lies between East Park and Oaks Park reservoirs and extends to the divide of this part of the eastern Uinta Mountains.

The project area begins about six miles from Highway 191 on the East Park Highway. There are over 38 miles of system roads and numerous miles of non-system roads which provide access into the area. Approximately 20 miles have been gated (five gates) to secure big game habitat and provide non-motorized recreation. Access would be provided by controlled access of gated road systems, opening some existing roads and by possible construction of temporary roads. After harvest, opened roads would be closed and temporary roads obliterated.

The proposed action was developed during the initial environmental analysis and documented in the Trout Slope East Timber EA released for public comment in spring, 1998. For continuity, this alternative will be carried through this analysis as the proposed action. However, based on the comments we received on the EA, we have developed two additional alternatives in order to respond to some of the issues raised. These are summarized briefly below.

Proposed Action (Alternative 1): Harvest from existing roads and construct short segments of temporary roads. This alternative would better access some treatment areas and reduce skidding distances.

- Dead-only salvage on approximately 2,600 acres for approximately 15 million board feet (MMBF) and overstory removal or clearcut 475 acres of leave strips for approximately 4 MMBF.
- Dead-only salvage on approximately 850 acres for 5 MMBF to improve the East Park Campground viewshed.
- Approximately 18 miles of temporary road would be constructed.
- Approximately 26 miles of existing roads would be opened to access all harvest units. In general, a minimal amount of work is needed to make these roads serviceable for hauling.
- A ford crossing would be replaced with a temporary bridge on a [West Fork] tributary of Little Brush Creek in the Round Park area.
- Timber stand improvement including precommercial thinning of overstocked sapling stands would occur within the project area. There are approximately 500 acres of sapling stands in the project area scheduled for surveys and possible thinning within the next five years. In addition, stands in this proposed action would be evaluated after treatment for further work in the remaining seedling/sapling understory.

The proposed timber management actions are based on the following:

The timber resource in this area is primarily even-aged lodgepole pine with small pockets of uneven-aged mixtures of lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, Douglas-fir, subalpine fir and aspen. The lodgepole pine stands are comprised of about 70% to 90% dead trees due to a mountain pine beetle epidemic in the late 1970s to early 1980s. Currently, the landscape looks gray with stands or strips of timber containing dead trees surrounding 10 to 40 acre seedling or sapling stands (regenerated clearcuts).

The project area was selected from the Trout Slope Assessment area by using existing stand level data, areas with existing roads and areas with primarily dead lodgepole pine. Environmental conditions considered were sensitive soils, geologic hazard zones, riparian

zones, timber stand patch size and arrangement in relation to wildlife use, slopes suitable for tractor logging, level and type of recreation use, forest cover type and vegetative structure stage. The existing condition based on the calculated vegetative structure stage (VSS) by site was compared to a possible desired future condition from the Trout Slope Landscape Assessment.

Strips of (mostly dead) trees left between some of the previously harvested areas are too narrow to function as forest cover habitat for certain wildlife species. In many of these same stands the amount of dead trees is so great that the current stand structure stage will not continue to exist much longer. Overstory removal of the dead and diseased trees in these strips would create a mosaic of larger stands of seedling to sapling sized trees. These stands as they grow would, in the long term, provide interior forest habitat for certain wildlife species.

In other locations where past harvest hasn't occurred, only dead trees would be removed, leaving a less dense but more green appearing forest and lower fuel loads.

Maintenance of the remaining live green stands, especially those with a mature component, is needed to provide forest cover in a landscape primarily consisting of seedling/sapling stands and dead trees until young stands grow to function as live mature forest. In selected live stands, removal of individual live and dead trees is expected to improve stand vigor and longevity.

Two other action alternatives have been developed thus far based on resource issues (documented in the previously mentioned EA), in response to public comment on the EA and in consideration of the pending development of a new Forest Service roads policy. These alternatives defer some harvest activity and drop some treatment areas included in the proposed action. One of these alternatives emphasizes harvest from the existing road system only, using longer skidding distances and alternate skidding patterns to access treatment areas.

Public Involvement

Comments received and issues which were raised during the development of the Trout Slope East EA will be carried forward and considered in this EIS. Additional comments are encouraged. Public participation is especially important at several points during the analysis, particularly during initial scoping and review of the draft EIS. Individuals, organizations, federal, state, and local agencies who are interested in or affected by the decision are invited to participate in the scoping process. This information will be used in the preparation of the draft EIS.

Formal scoping begins upon publication of this notice and will include mailing of information to known interested parties.

The second major opportunity for public input is the draft EIS. The draft EIS is expected to be filed with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and to be available for public review in April of 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's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register**. It is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate at that time. To be the most helpful, comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible and may address the adequacy of the statement or the merits of the alternatives discussed (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 believes it is important to give reviewers notice at this early stage of several federal court decisions 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, 533 (1978). Second, environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement. *City of Angoon* v. *Hodel*, (9th Circuit, 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.

After the comment period ends on the draft EIS, the comments will be analyzed and considered by the Forest Service in preparing the final EIS.

Dated: February 1, 1999.

Bert Kulesza,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99–3322 Filed 2–11–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Proposed Middle Little Salmon Watershed Projects, Payette National Forest, Idaho

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the proposed Middle Little Salmon Watershed Projects, New Meadows Ranger District, Payette National Forest, Idaho. The proposed action would harvest timber, obliterate roads to reduce sediment, close other roads to reduce wildlife vulnerability, control noxious weeds, and adjust a Forest Service-private land boundary fence. A range of alternatives, including the no action alternative, will be developed as appropriate to address issues.

The agency invites comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis to be included in the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). In addition, the agency gives notice of the full environmental analysis and decision making process that is beginning on the proposal so that interested and affected people know how they may participate and contribute to the final decision.

DATES: Comments on the scope of the analysis must be received by February 13, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis to Doug Havlina, Middle Little Salmon, Watershed Projects Team Leader, New Meadows Ranger District, Payette National Forest, PO Box J, New Meadows, Idaho 83654.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed action should be directed to Doug Havlina, phone (208) 347–0300.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Payette National Forest Plan (1988) provides forest-wide direction for management of the resources of the Payette National Forest, including timber. The environmental impact statement for the Forest Plan (1988) analyzed a range of alternatives for management of the Middle Little Salmon and Mud Creek watersheds. The