

Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 68, No. 118

Thursday, June 19, 2003

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Rangeland Allotment Management Planning on the Pine Ridge Geographic Area Nebraska National Forest, Pine Ridge Ranger District

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) to update rangeland management planning on thirty-four (34) livestock grazing allotments, which will result in the development of new Allotment Management Plans (AMPs). The allotments are within the Pine Ridge Geographic Area as defined by the Nebraska National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 2001 Revision (Forest Plan). Proposed management actions would be implemented beginning in the year 2004. The agency gives notice of the full environmental analysis and decisionmaking process that will occur on the proposal so interested and affected people may become aware of how they may participate in the process and contribute to the final decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received within 30 days after publication in the **FEDERAL REGISTER**. The draft environmental impact statement is expected August 2003 and the final environmental impact statement is expected October 2003.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to the District Ranger, Pine Ridge Ranger District, Nebraska National Forest, 1240 W. 16th Street, Chadron, Nebraska 69337. For further information, mail correspondence to Jeff Abegglen, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Nebraska National Forest, Pine Ridge Ranger District, 1240 W. 16th Street.

Chadron, Nebraska 69337. Phone 308–432–4475.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose and Need for Action

Two primary influences help to shape the need for this project.

The Rescission Act of 1995, (Pub. L. 104–19, section 504) directed the Forest Service to complete NEPA analysis on all grazing allotments. This analysis will comply with that direction.

The Forest Plan (2001 revision) established goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines for resource management on the Nebraska National Forest and Associated Units. The Nebraska National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) identifies livestock grazing as an appropriate multiple use under certain conditions described as standards and guidelines. Term grazing permits currently authorize cattle grazing on all 34 allotments within the Pine Ridge Geographic Area (PRGA).

The Forest Service will compare the existing conditions on the 34 allotments in the project area with the desired conditions relative to the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines contained within the Forest Plan. This comparison will identify any differences between the existing and desired conditions, and establish the need for the project.

The purpose of the project is to address the established need by determining whether to continue to permit livestock grazing on all, or part, of the 34 allotments in the project area, and under what conditions, if grazing is to be continued.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to continue to permit livestock grazing on all 34 allotments within the PRGA, while meeting Forest Plan direction which provides for a wide range of values and uses. The proposed action is designed to continue the improving trends in vegetation, watershed conditions, and in ecological sustainability relative to livestock grazing within the PRGA. The proposal generates the need to develop new AMPs which incorporate results from scientific research, analysis and documentation, and meet Forest Plan direction. Collectively these 34 allotments contain approximately 52,878 acres of National Forest System

(NFS) lands and private lands with the allotments. Private lands within the allotment are those acres that are managed in the same manner as the Federal acres. However, the private landowner can fence these areas separate from NFS lands as he chooses, and exclude them from Federal management. The revised AMPs will be prepared for individual allotments and implemented in the 2004 grazing season and beyond.

The Forest Plan identified lands within the PRGA as containing lands which are capable and suitable for grazing by domestic livestock.

The Forest Plan also provided specific management direction across the PRGA. Within the area encompassed by these 34 allotments, management areas (MA) include MA1.1—Wilderness: Soldier Creek, MA 1.31—Backcountry Recreation Non-motorized, MA 1.31a—Backcountry Recreation Non-motorized (Pine Ridge NRA), MA 2.1—Special Interest Areas, MA 3.51 Bighorn sheep, MA 5.12—General Forest and Rangelands: Range Vegetation Emphasis, and MA 7.1—Residential/Forest Intermix.

Important riparian areas occur in 19 allotments. Some allotments contain riparian exclosures for riparian and wildlife habitat protection. The term “riparian” refers to land bordering a stream, lake, spring or seep whose waters provide soil moisture in excess of what is locally available, and generally implies a particular type of habitat with physical characteristics by an over story of trees or other large woody plants with a complex under story of woody and/or herbaceous species.

The PRGA provides habitat for many wildlife species (game and non-game) including two management indicator species (MIS) and their habitats. These MIS species are the sharp-tailed grouse and the pygmy nuthatch.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), will be completed on all proposed activities.

An interdisciplinary team has been selected to do the environmental analysis, as well as prepare and accomplish scoping and public involvement activities.

Preliminary issues

Preliminary issues include: