

Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 68, No. 22

Monday, February 3, 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

Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Emigrant Wilderness Dams on the Stanislaus National Forest, Tuolumne County, CA

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 proposal to reconstruct, operate, and maintain 12 dams, to allow 6 dams to deteriorate naturally, and to restore 50–100 feet of the channel downstream from unit #7 on Long Lake in the Emigrant Wilderness on National Forest land in the county of Tuolumne.

The Stanislaus National Forest issued an EIS, ROD, and Forest Plan Amendment for the Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction on April 8, 1998. Because of subsequent administrative appeals, the Regional Forester later issued an appeal review decision. The “Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction” (April 2002) presents the current Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction, based on the original Forest Plan Amendment as modified through the appeal review process. In order to implement the Stanislaus National Forest Plan, specifically the Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction, there is a need to complete site-specific analyses and to determine if and how the 18 dams should be maintained or not maintained.

DATES: Submit comments on or before March 5, 2003.

The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review during the fall of 2003. At that time, 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**. The Final EIS is scheduled to be completed in the winter of 2004.

ADDRESSES: Address all comments concerning this notice to the Stanislaus National Forest, ATTN: Emigrant Dams, 19777 Greenley Road, Sonora, CA 95370. E-mail comments may be sent to jmaschi@fs.fed.us.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John Maschi, Forest Planner, Stanislaus National Forest, (209) 532–3671 ext. 317.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The information presented in this notice is included to help the reviewer determine if they are interested in or potentially affected by the proposed action.

Background

Congress designated the 113,000 acre Emigrant Wilderness on January 3, 1975. Its borders include Yosemite National Park on the south, the Toiyabe National Forest on the east, and State Highway 108 on the north. The Emigrant Wilderness is an elongated area that trends northeast about 25 miles in length and up to 15 miles in width. Watersheds drain to the Stanislaus and Tuolumne rivers. The Wilderness is entirely within Tuolumne County.

Eighteen water control structures (dams) existed in the Emigrant Wilderness before its designation in 1975. Most of the dams were constructed in the 1920's and 1930's to develop a resident fishery. Prior to fish stocking by cattlemen during the 1890's, these high elevation lakes were naturally fishless. The original intent of most of the dams was to enhance downstream flows for fish habitat, not necessarily to promote lake fisheries. The remaining Emigrant Wilderness dams were built as late as 1951. The dams are composed mostly of rock and mortar (with the exception of one earth-filled dam). Because of the age and theme of some dams, seven are now eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Stanislaus National Forest issued an EIS, ROD, and Forest Plan Amendment for the Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction on

April 8, 1998. Because of subsequent administrative appeals, the Regional Forester later issued an appeal review decision. The “Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction” (April 2002) presents the current Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction, based on the original Forest Plan Amendment as modified through the appeal review process.

In order to implement the Stanislaus National Forest Plan, specifically the Emigrant Wilderness Management Direction, there is a need to complete site-specific analyses and to determine if and how 18 dams should be maintained or not maintained.

Proposed Action

The Stanislaus National Forest proposes to reconstruct, operate, and maintain 12 dams in the Emigrant Wilderness. In addition, the Forest proposes to restore 50–100 feet of the channel downstream of Unit #7 on Long Lake. The Forest also proposes not to maintain six dams. These dams would be allowed to deteriorate naturally in order to restore natural processes. Attachment 1 provides a listing of the dams to be maintained and not maintained.

Reconstruction and standard maintenance would be completed using minimum tool and pack-it-in/pack-it-out philosophy and use native materials from the immediate vicinity (if available). No mechanized or motorized equipment would be used, materials would be packed in using livestock, and hand labor would be used for maintenance and reconstruction needs. Any temporary access routes to project sites would be designed by the Forest Service and decommissioned immediately following completion of the work. All activities would be conducted according to existing Forest Service law, regulation, policy, and direction (e.g. group size limits and campfire restrictions).

Standard maintenance of the 12 dams would also include, but not be limited to, log removal if the integrity of the structure were threatened, mortar replacement on the upstream face of the structure, and minor rock replacement.

Because no special funding is expected for this project, implementation would depend upon obtaining funds other than normal Forest Service appropriated dollars. Maintenance and reconstruction would