

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

Payette National Forest, Krassel and McCall Ranger Districts, Idaho; and Boise National Forest, Cascade Ranger District, Idaho; South Fork Salmon River Subbasin Noxious Weed Management

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The USDA Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for management of noxious and invasive weeds in the South Fork Salmon River (SFSR) Subbasin. The analysis area of approximately 788,660 acres includes headwater streams to the Salmon River and includes portions of the Boise National Forest (BNF) and Payette National Forest (PNF) in central Idaho. The subbasin is immediately adjacent to and upstream of the Frank Church River of No Return (FC-RONR) Wilderness. The purpose of the proposed project is to identify and treat noxious and invasive weeds using a variety of methods including herbicide application by hand and aerial spraying. The need is to minimize the impacts of noxious and invasive weeds. The EIS will disclose the environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives. The Forest Service now invites comments on the scope of the analysis and the issues to address.

DATES: Comments must be received by January 19th, 2004. The Draft EIS is expected in October 2004, and the Final EIS is expected in April 2005.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to: District Ranger, Krassel Ranger District, P.O. Box 1026, McCall, Idaho 83638.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ana Egnew, Krassel Ranger District, P.O. Box 1026, McCall, Idaho 83638 or phone (208) 634-0600.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed project is to:

- Prioritize weed species and treatment areas;
- Identify and treat weed infestations using a variety of methods including herbicide application by hand and aerial spraying;
- Prevent or limit the introduction and establishment of noxious and invasive weed species; and
- Maintain native plant communities and watershed function.

The SFSR Subbasin is an ecologically important, relatively pristine area where the spread of noxious and invasive weeds could result in unacceptable consequences on fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and other resources.

Proposed Action

The overall management objective of the proposed action is to maximize the treatment of noxious and invasive weeds throughout the SFSR Subbasin. The proposed action would prioritize noxious and invasive weed species and treatment areas within the Subbasin based on the following goals:

1. Treat all known sites less than 5 acres in size with the goal of eradication.
2. Reduce all established areas of noxious and invasive weeds greater than 5 acres in size by 50 percent.

Treatment would begin by determining the minimum tool necessary to achieve management objectives (see below). Treatment methods would include removal by hand pulling and shovel, herbicide treatment by hand, herbicide treatment with truck mounted equipment, aerial application of herbicides, and biological control. Limits would be placed on the type, amount, and location of herbicide use. Noxious and invasive weed management would also include education and preventive measures such as area closures and weed-free hay requirements and inspections. Weeds would be treated on a maximum area of 3,000 acres each year in the SFSR Subbasin. The distribution of treatment acres between ground application, aerial application, and mechanical treatment, and biological control would likely vary on a yearly basis; however, it is expected that ground application would dominate.

The minimum tool approach means that managers would use the minimum necessary weed treatment method(s) to accomplish management objectives.

The minimum tool approach would be implemented on a site-specific basis. A number of steps would be followed to determine and implement the most appropriate site-specific treatment method including:

- Detection of the weed;
- Prioritization of weed treatment at a particular site;
- Determination if sensitive environmental receptors are present;
- Consideration of potential for adverse effects;
- Determination of the treatment methods, including minimum tool method;
- Selection of appropriate treatment method for the weed; and
- Treatment followed by restoration and monitoring, as necessary.

Possible Alternatives

A "No Action" alternative is required under NEPA regulations and also serves as a baseline for comparison of other alternatives. The No Action Alternative would be no chemical treatment, because no environmental analysis has ever been completed for noxious weed treatment in the SFSR Subbasin. Another alternative to be considered would include the same noxious weed treatment methods that are used on the remainder of the Payette National Forest.

Scoping Process

The Forest Service is seeking comments from individuals, organizations, Tribal governments, and federal, state, and local agencies interested in or affected by this project. Public participation will be solicited through news releases, scoping meetings and requests for written comments. The first formal opportunity to comment is to respond to this notice of intent, which initiates the scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7). Scoping includes: (1) Identifying potential issues, (2) identifying significant issues, (3) exploring alternatives, and (4) identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

Preliminary Issues

The Forest Service has identified the following nine potential issues. Public