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Vegetation EIS Update
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BLM Plans Spring Publication of Draft Documents on Vegetation Treatment in Western United States

The BLM has been preparing a national Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to update and replace analyses contained in four existing EISs completed by the agency between 1986 and 1992 for 14 western states, and to analyze vegetation treatments in two additional western states and Alaska. This Programmatic EIS will provide a comprehensive National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document that can be used by BLM field-level staffs for local land-use planning.

A separate environmental report document will now accompany the Programmatic EIS. This issue of Vegetation EIS Update brings you the news of the last two years and plans for the future.

Focus of EIS Analysis Now on Use of Herbicides

The BLM originally planned to develop a single Programmatic EIS that would analyze the impacts of annual vegetation treatment on up to 6 million acres. A variety of methods, including prescribed fire, herbicides and biological control agents, and mechanical and manual extraction would be evaluated.

The BLM has now decided it will be more effective to prepare two documents to assess vegetation treatment activities on public lands:

1. a *Vegetation Treatment Using Herbicides Programmatic EIS* to address the BLM's use of herbicides, and

2. a *Vegetation Treatments Programmatic Environmental Report* to describe the environmental impacts of using non-herbicide treatment methods, including fire and mechanical, manual or biological controls.

In the Programmatic EIS, the BLM proposes to:

- Determine which herbicide active ingredients will be approved for use on public lands administered by the BLM in the western United States, including Alaska. In addition to the herbicides currently approved for use, additional active ingredients are being considered for use by the BLM to manage and control unwanted vegetation.

- Develop a state-of-the-science human risk assessment methodology in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries). This methodology will serve as the initial standard for assessing human health and ecological risk when evaluating future herbicides.

Risk Assessments

As part of the Programmatic EIS, the BLM evaluated the potential risks to humans, plants, fish and wildlife from several new herbicides that were not evaluated in the previous EISs, but that the BLM would now like to use to treat vegetation. These herbicides are diquat (trade name Reward), fluridone (Sonar), imazapic (Plateau), and a formulation of diflufenzopyr and dicamba (Overdrive). In addition, the BLM agreed to conduct a risk assessment for the use of sulfometuron methyl (Oust). Oust was evaluated in the earlier EISs, but the BLM determined that new information justified another analysis of this herbicide.

The BLM also agreed to develop protocols that would facilitate evaluation of risks from using other chemicals as they become available in the future.

A risk assessment team comprised of scientists from the BLM, the USF&WS, the NOAA Fisheries, the EPA and a consulting firm developed methodologies to ensure that the risk assessments reflected the current state of knowledge. The team identified aspects of the human and natural environment that must be considered when evaluating the effects of herbicides.

The BLM decided to conduct new environmental risk assessments for the previously approved ('old') herbicides bromacil, chlorsulfuron, diuron and tebuthiuron. In addition, the BLM decided to use environmental risk assessments recently developed for the USDA Forest Service (USFS) for nine other herbicides previously approved for use by the BLM. These are clopyralid, dicamba, glyphosate, hexazinone, imazapyr, metsulfuron methyl, picloram, triclopyr and 2,4-D. These environmental risk assessments to assess the risks to fish and wildlife from herbicide treatments conducted by the USFS were recently completed. The methods used to develop the environmental risk assessments and types of vegetative treatments conducted by the USFS are similar to those currently being used by the BLM. The BLM decided that little new information would be learned by conducting its own environmental risk assessments for these herbicides.

Alternatives in Programmatic EIS

Under NEPA requirements, the BLM must look at a reasonable range of alternatives, including the preferred and no action (maintain status quo) alternatives. During the scoping phase of the EIS development, the BLM received several alternative proposals, ranging from prohibiting the use of herbicides to allowing for use of additional herbicides.

Five alternative approaches to the use of herbicides to treat vegetation on public lands will be evaluated in the Programmatic EIS.

- ***No Action Alternative***
  - The BLM would continue its ongoing vegetation treatment programs in 14 western states based on analyses done in earlier EISs.
  - Approximately 300,000 acres would be treated annually using herbicides.
- ***Preferred Alternative***
  - The BLM could use four new herbicides, in addition to 14 of the 20 'old' herbicides used by the BLM (described previously) in 17 western states.
  - Approximately 950,000 acres would be treated annually using herbicides.

Purple Loostrife infests 400,000 acres of federal wetlands, marshes, pastures and riparian meadows in every state but Florida.

- *Alternative C*
  - The BLM could not use herbicides to treat vegetation.
- *Alternative D*
  - The BLM could not apply herbicides using fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters.
  - The BLM could use four new herbicides and 14 of the 20 'old' herbicides in 17 western states.
  - Approximately 540,000 acres could be treated annually using herbicides.
- *Alternative E*
  - The BLM could not use sulfonylurea and other acetolactate synthase-inhibiting herbicides—four 'old' herbicides (chlorsulfuron, imazapyr, metsulfuron methyl, and sulfometuron methyl) and one new herbicide (imazapic).
  - The BLM could use three of the new herbicides and 10 of the 'old' herbicides in 17 western states.
  - Approximately 470,000 acres could be treated annually using herbicides.

Under the Preferred Alternative and Alternatives D and E, the BLM could also use new herbicides developed in the future if:

- they are registered by the EPA for use on one or more land types (for example, rangeland or aquatic) managed by the BLM,
- they meet evaluation criteria to ensure the decision to use the active ingredient is supported by scientific evaluation and NEPA documentation, and
- the BLM determines that the benefits of use on BLM-managed public lands outweigh the risks to human health and the environment.

Programmatic Environmental Report

The Programmatic Environmental Report will disclose general impacts on the environment from non-herbicide treatment methods, including prescribed and natural fire, and mechanical, manual and biological control to treat hazardous fuels, invasive species and other unwanted or competing vegetation on about 6 million acres annually. The analyses contained in this Programmatic Environmental Report support the BLM's intent to continue to use, and increase the use of, a variety of fire and non-fire treatment methods to

- reduce hazardous fuels,
- control unwanted vegetation, and
- improve habitat and resource conditions.

This would occur primarily through the proactive use of prescribed fire, wildland fire for resource benefit, manual and mechanical methods, and biological controls that have been approved for use on public lands through previous EISs addressing vegetation control, in addition to the use of herbicides discussed in the Programmatic EIS.

The Programmatic Environmental Report will provide the BLM field offices with the management tools needed to:

- reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires on public lands and in the wildland-urban interface (areas where structures and other human development are in close proximity to public lands);
- slow the spread of invasive plant species, noxious weeds and other unwanted vegetation; and
- improve ecosystem health by restoring fire-adapted ecosystems.

Next Steps

BLM technical specialists are reviewing and revising sections of the Draft Programmatic EIS and Draft Programmatic Environmental Report. The BLM is currently assessing the effects of treating vegetation under the five alternatives to natural, cultural and social resources. The Draft Programmatic EIS and Draft Programmatic ER are scheduled for completion by May 2005. This date is contingent on completion of air quality and risk assessments and consultation with the USF&WS, the NOAA Fisheries, and the EPA.

For More Information on the Programmatic EIS

If you would like to receive more information, or be placed on the mailing list, contact Brian Amme, Project Manager, BLM, P.O. Box 12000, Reno, NV 89520-0006. He can also be reached by phone at (775) 861-6645, by fax at (775) 861-6712, or by email at brian_amme@blm.gov. Informational updates will be posted on the BLM website at http://www.blm.gov/weeds/VegEIS as they become available.

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The BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages more land—261 million surface acres—than any other Federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on the public lands.

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