

File Code: 1950-3

Date: August 30, 2006

Dear Reviewers:

On behalf of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, I am pleased to announce the availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for our Invasive Plant Treatment Project. The purpose of the project is to control invasive plants in a cost-effective manner that complies with environmental standards. Target invasive species includes knapweed, hawkweed, knotweed, Canada thistle, hounds tongue, and reed canarygrass, to name a few. The DEIS discloses beneficial and adverse effects from herbicide, manual, mechanical and cultural invasive plant treatments and evaluates Project Design Criteria to minimize or eliminate risks to people and the environment. The project area is the entire Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the portion of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in Washington State. This letter serves as an executive summary of the DEIS and provides notice of the public comment period.

Invasive species were identified by the Chief of the Forest Service as one of the four threats to forest health (for more information see <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/four-threats>). Invasive plants are displacing native plants and degrading natural areas, and have the potential to destabilize streams and reduce the quality of fish and wildlife habitat. Approximately 3,830 acres are currently estimated to need treatment, including but not limited to knapweeds, hawkweeds, knotweeds, and reed canarygrass. The DEIS discloses beneficial and adverse effects from herbicide, manual, and mechanical invasive plant treatments, and evaluates Project Design Features to minimize or eliminate risks to people and the environment. The project would occur over the next 5 to 15 years (until invasive plant objectives are met or until changed conditions or new information warrants the need for a new decision). The DEIS is tiered to a broader scale analysis (the Pacific Northwest Region Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Invasive Plant Program, USDA 2005a, hereby referred to as the R6 2005 FEIS).

This DEIS includes detailed consideration of three alternatives. No Action (also referred to as Alternative A) would implement treatments according to existing plans; no new invasive plant treatments would be approved. The Proposed Action (also referred to as Alternative B) would apply an initial prescription, along with re-treatment in subsequent years, until the site was restored with desirable vegetation. Herbicide treatments would be part of the initial prescription for most sites, but the use of herbicides would be expected to decline in subsequent entries as populations became small enough to treat manually or mechanically. Alternative C would resolve concerns related to herbicide use by eliminating herbicide application on about two-thirds of the National Forest system lands. Under Alternative C, only very limited herbicide use would be permitted within Riparian Reserves and near roadside ditches. Alternative C would minimize herbicide impacts, but would increase treatment costs and decrease treatment effectiveness.



Page 2

You are invited to comment on the DEIS, which is available on our website or by contacting Carol Chandler at 360-891-5106. Comments are due within 45 days from the date the Notice of Availability is published in the Federal Register (<http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/index.html>). Publishing date is scheduled for September 8, 2006. Comments should be specific and address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3). Comments will be accepted hand delivered or mailed to the Gifford Pinchot National Forest Headquarters (see address above), or through e-mail (comments-pacificnorthwest-giffordpinchot@fs.fed.us). Please address comments to INVASIVE PLANTS.

All written and electronic comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review and may be published as part of the Final EIS. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review, or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comments. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations and businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments are accepted.

You may also be aware of our “sister” project on the Mount Hood National Forest and the Oregon Portion of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (comment period closed in July). We decided to separate the projects on the National Scenic Area because applicable Forest management direction and state laws and policies differ on either side of the river. Each DEIS is written to stand on its own.

Thank you for your interest in the management of our National Forest lands. Please contact Carol A Chandler, Invasive Plant Program Manager for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest at 10600 N.E. 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA 98682, 541-360-5100 or visit the Forest website <http://www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/04projects/pinchotprojects/> to review a copy of the DEIS or for more information.

Sincerely,

/s/ Daniel T. Harkenrider

DANIEL T. HARKENRIDER
Area Manager