

and Scenic Views (1 percent) Management Areas. An estimated 2,500 acres burned at a moderate to high intensity with tree mortality of between 75 and 100 percent.

Timber salvage is needed to recover economic value and to provide funds to offset the costs of reforestation and restoration is an important emphasis of these management areas. Adjacent seed sources are no longer available in many areas, particularly within the interior areas of the fire. Based on shrub response within adjacent wildfires, interior areas with high tree mortality would require reforestation by planting ponderosa pine. Planting would establish a ponderosa pine forest that is desirable for long-term objectives such as hiding cover for big game and restoration of habitat for forest dependent species. Lowering fuel loadings to a level that reduces the likelihood of a high severity fire in regenerated stands would promote the long-term survival and growth of new conifers. A fire in heavy surface fuels could increase the duration of elevated temperatures during a fire event to levels capable of altering soil properties and affecting site productivity.

Proposed Action This action includes timber salvage and fuels reduction on approximately 2,030 acres. Fuels reduction would consist of whole tree removal. Salvage is only proposed in areas that experienced more than 75 percent mortality. An estimated 4 miles of temporary roads would be needed to remove the salvaged material. Ponderosa pine would be planted on 2,400 acres, including 2,030 acres of salvaged land.

Scoping. Public participation will be sought at several points during the analysis, including listing of this project in the winter 2003 and subsequent issues of the Central Oregon Schedule of Projects and on the Deschutes National Forest website. Agencies, organizations, tribes, and individuals who have indicated their interest would be contacted.

Issues and Alternatives. Preliminary issues identified include the potential effect of the proposed action on: soil productivity, snag and down wood habitat, and noxious weeds. A No Action alternative will be analyzed in the EIS. Other alternatives would result from the scoping process and refined issues.

Comment. Public comments about this proposal are requested in order to assist in identifying issues, determine how to best manage the resources, and to focus the analysis. Comments received to this notice, including names and addresses of those who comment,

will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decisions under 36 CFR parts 215 and 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within a specified number of days.

A draft EIS will be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review by April 2004. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date EPA publishes the Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**. The final EIS is scheduled to be available July 2004.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court ruling related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of a draft EIS must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions (*Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978)). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft EIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final EIS may be waived or dismissed by the courts (*City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980)). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 45-day comment period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the final EIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the draft EIS should be as

specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft statement. Comments may also address the adequacy of the draft EIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the statement. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions on the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to substantive comments received during the comment period for the draft EIS. The Forest Service is the lead agency and the responsible official is the Forest Supervisor, Deschutes National Forest. The responsible official will decide where, and whether or not to salvage timber, reduce fuels, and reforest the area. The responsible official will also decide how to mitigate impacts of these actions and will determine when and how monitoring of effects will take place. The 18 Fire Recovery Project decision and the reasons for the decision will be documented in the record of decision. That decision will be subject to Forest Service Appeal Regulations (36 CFR Part 215).

Dated: December 5, 2003.

Kevin Martin,

Deputy Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 03-30953 Filed 12-15-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service, USDA

Notice of Modoc County RAC Meetings

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the authorities in the Federal Advisory Committees Act (Public Law 92-463) and under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-393), the Modoc National Forest's Modoc County Resource Advisory Committee will meet Monday January 5, 2004 from 6 to 8 p.m. in Alturas, California. The meeting is open to the public.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Agenda topics for the meeting include approval of the November 3, 2003 minutes, quarterly review of projects approved, consideration of a modification to the Sugar Hill project, and election of new officers. The meeting will be held at Modoc National Forest Office, Conference Room, 800 West 12th St., Alturas, California on Monday, January 3, 2004 from 6 to 8 p.m. Time will be

set aside for public comments at the beginning of the meeting.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Forest Supervisor Stan Sylva, at (530) 233-8700; or Public Affairs Officer Nancy Gardner at (530) 233-8713.

Stanley G. Sylva,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 03-30993 Filed 12-15-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

RIN 0596-AB90

Forest Transportation System Analysis; Revisions to Road Management Policy

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of issuance of final agency directive.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service is issuing a final directive that incorporates direction previously issued in the Forest Service directive system as Interim Directive (ID) 7710-2001-3 and ID 7710-2001-1, with minor clarifications. This final directive provides internal administrative direction to guide Forest Service employees in the improvement of the analysis of and decisionmaking about the forest transportation system. The final directive is issued to the Forest Service Manual (FSM) Title 7700—Engineering, Chapter 7710—Transportation Atlas, Records, and Analysis, as Amendment 7700-2003-2.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The final directive is effective December 16, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The final directive, which includes a digest of the summary of changes and the revised directive text in its entirety, is available electronically via the World Wide Web/Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/fsm/7710>. Single paper copies of the directive also are available by contacting the USDA Forest Service, Engineering Staff (Mail Stop 1101), 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-1101.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Deborah Beighley or Nelson Hernandez, Engineering Staff, Forest Service, at (703) 605-4617 and (703) 605-4613, respectively.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

On January 12, 2001, the Forest Service concurrently adopted revised final regulations at 36 CFR part 212 (66 FR 3206) and revised agency directives in Forest Service Manual (FSM) Chapter 7700—Zero Code and Chapter 7710—

Transportation Atlas, Records, and Analysis (66 FR 3219) to guide transportation planning, analysis, and management, especially road management on National Forest System lands. These regulations and directives together comprise what is referred to as the Forest Service Road Management Strategy.

The final rule at 36 CFR part 212 directs the Responsible Official of each National Forest, Grassland, or other unit of the National Forest System to perform a comprehensive analysis of the road system within the unit and to document the overall forest transportation system in a transportation atlas.

The directive at FSM Chapter 7710 (Amendment 7700-2001-3) established standards for creation of the road atlas and for determining the scope and scale of roads analyses needed to inform road management decisions; that is, road construction, reconstruction, and decommissioning. Additionally, this revision of FSM Chapter 7710 included interim requirements that, rather than addressing the transportation atlas, record, or analysis, imposed a significant restriction on road construction or reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas and contiguous unroaded areas until a forest-scale roads analysis is completed and incorporated into the Forest plan.

Upon adoption of the road management final rule and directives in January 2001, the Department and the agency reviewed those documents to determine if there were impediments to implementation. These reviews led the agency to initiate several Interim Directives (IDs).

The first was ID 7710-2001-1, issued May 31, 2001 (66 FR 44590), which encouraged reliance on local expertise and authority over forest-level issues as much as possible. The next two IDs (7710-2001-2 and 2400-2001-3) issued July 27, 2001 (66 FR 44111), implemented the Chief's June 7, 2001, announcement to manage and protect inventoried roadless areas as an important component of the National Forest System and to reserve the authority to make decisions, except in specific circumstances, regarding road management activities and timber harvesting in those areas. In a letter to Regional Foresters dated June 12, 2001, the Deputy Chief for National Forest System, noting the Chief's June 7, announcement, asked Regional Foresters and Forest Supervisors to review the road management policy to identify any provisions that they believed should be revised.

Further review of the road management policy resulted in the

issuance of two new IDs (7710-2001-3 and 1920-2001-1) issued December 14, 2001 (66 FR 65796), which separated interim requirements related to road construction and reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas from the roads analysis direction in FSM Chapter 7710 and relocated the modified interim requirements to FSM Chapter 1920—Land and Resource Management Planning.

Over 72,000 responses in the form of letters, faxes, and e-mail messages were received on the three different **Federal Register** notices regarding the five IDs concerning the management of the forest transportation system analysis and roadless area protection. These comments came from private citizens, elected officials, and from groups and individuals representing businesses, private organizations, and Federal agencies. Responses consisted of over 9,500 original responses and over 62,500 form letters.

Public comment on the five IDs addressed a wide range of topics, many of which were directed at management of roadless areas and issues associated with the ID 1920-2001-1 to FSM Chapter 1920. Many people supported the IDs to FSM Chapter 7710, which provided for better inventory, analysis, and management of the Forest Service roads system, and separated direction for managing roads from direction on managing National Forest System land. Some respondents requested that the Forest Service revise the ID to FSM Chapter 7710 to clarify the definition of a road and the need for and content of a roads analysis.

This final directive to FSM 7710 represents the culmination of the agency's internal and public reviews of the practices concerning management of the forest transportation system. The agency has decided to incorporate the current ID direction into Amendment 7700-2003-2 to FSM 7710, with some minor clarifications. Comments regarding ID 1920-2001-1 to FSM Chapter 1920 on roadless area management will be addressed when the Amendment to that chapter is finalized.

Dated: December 8, 2003.

Dale N. Bosworth,
Chief.

[FR Doc. 03-30871 Filed 12-15-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-P