

News Release

**USDA Forest Service
Washington, D.C.**



FS-0306

Contact: Joe Walsh (202) 205-1294

FOREST SERVICE PROPOSES SIMPLER PROCESS FOR SMALL, ENVIRONMENTALLY SAFE TIMBER SALES

WASHINGTON, Jan. 03, 2003 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service today proposed to simplify documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act for three new categories of small, environmentally safe timber sales. The proposed categories apply to management activities that do not significantly impact the environment such as salvaging dead and dying trees and removing insect infested or diseased trees to prevent larger infestations. The proposals were sent to the Federal Register today to be published for public review and comment.

The proposed categories would be applied to projects up to 250 acres in size and requiring only one-half mile or less of temporary roads. They would be used for removing trees posing a hazard to public safety and containing small insect and disease outbreaks. They would not be used in areas where there would be adverse effects on the following: threatened and endangered species or their designated critical habitat, wilderness areas, inventoried roadless areas, wetlands, and archeological or historic sites. Today's proposal complements proposals made last month for fuels reduction and post-fire restoration activities, but is more limited in scope.

“Categorical exclusions like those we are proposing will assist the agency in meeting its mission of caring for the land,” said Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth. “The proposed categories are about how we document our decisions regarding activities that are environmentally safe. Through these proposed categories, the agency hopes to reduce the bureaucratic red tape and save time, energy and money in preparing small, routine, projects that are supported by local communities.”

A 2001 review of 154 recent low impact forest management activities, such as those proposed here, showed no significant effect on the environment and therefore should not require lengthy documentation.

These proposed new categories would not be subject to administrative appeal because of their limited scope.

Comments on the proposed categories will be accepted for 60 days following the Federal Register publication. These comments will be considered before publishing the final categorical exclusions.

FACT SHEET

FOREST SERVICE PROPOSES SIMPLER PROCESS FOR SMALL, ENVIRONMENTALLY SAFE TIMBER SALES

This fact sheet discusses the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service proposal to simplify documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act for three new categories of small, environmentally safe timber sales. Categorical exclusions identify actions that do not have a significant effect on the human environment and, therefore, do not require preparation of an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement.

In 1998, a lawsuit was filed against the Forest Service arguing that the agency's categorical exclusions were improperly promulgated. The court found that the categorical exclusions were properly promulgated but found insufficient evidence to support the agency's decision to set the volume limits in the timber harvest categorical exclusion at 250,000 board feet of merchantable wood products for timber harvests and 1 million board feet of merchantable wood products for salvage. Accordingly, the court enjoined the agency from its further use.

Most timber harvest projects that were originally excluded under the agency's timber harvest categorical exclusion were subsequently reconsidered, analyzed, and documented in environmental assessments. However, field offices reported that the level of documentation and analysis required for these environmental assessments forced agency personnel to extend timeframes and expend tax dollars and undue energy to complete minor timber harvesting projects.

In 2001, the Forest Service began collecting data on timber harvests that would have qualified under the agency's former timber harvest categorical exclusion. The Forest Service reviewed a 154 small timber harvests records that for their environmental effects. The review indicated that none of the 154 projects had a significant effect on the human environment.

Based on this review and the agency's extensive experience with small timber harvest projects, the Forest Service proposes to add three new categorical exclusions to its Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook (FSH 1909.15). The first would allow harvest of live trees not to exceed 50 acres. The second would allow salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres. The third would allow removal of any trees necessary to control the spread of insects and disease on no more than 250 acres. None of the proposed categorical exclusions would allow more than one-half mile of temporary road construction. They would not be used in areas where there would be adverse effects on threatened and endangered species or their designated critical habitat, wilderness areas, inventoried roadless areas, wetlands, and archeological or historic sites.

	Harvest of live trees	Salvage	Sanitation
Activity	Low-impact silvicultural treatments involving harvest of live trees.	Harvest of dead/dying trees	Harvest of live, dead, or dying trees necessary to control insect and disease.
Size	Up to 50 acres	Up to 250 acres	
Temporary Roads	Up to one-half mile		
Incidentals	Allows incidental removal of trees for temporary roads, landings, and skid trails		
Documentation Required	Decision Memo, which includes a description of the decision to be implemented, location of the action, the category of actions under which the decision is being excluded from further documentation, a finding that no extraordinary circumstances exist, contacts made with individuals, agencies, and organizations, any findings required by other laws, the implementation date, a contact person for further information, and the responsible official's signature.		