

in areas not proposed for salvage, and repair of damaged hiking trails would be accomplished if adequate funds are available.

Due to the high level of tree mortality in proposed harvest units, most harvested area would retain green tree numbers similar to clearcut with reserves or seed-tree silvicultural methods. Although the numbers would be similar, the green tree retention would not be evenly distributed but would be in islands, stringers or groups where they exist. Only those live trees which must be cut to facilitate logging fire-killed trees would be harvested. In addition to the live trees that would be retained, a minimum of 3–5 high quality, large diameter snags per acre would be retained in all harvested areas if available. Timber harvest would be done by skyline, cable, or winter tractor, and designed to result in minimal ground disturbance, risk of erosion, and compaction.

The Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan provides overall management objectives in individual delineated management areas (MA's). The decision area contains three MA's: 12, 13, and 18. Briefly described, MA 12 is managed to maintain or enhance the summer-ranger habitat effectiveness for big-game species and produce a programmed yield of timber. MA 13 is managed to provide the special habitat necessary for old growth dependent wildlife. MA 18 is managed to protect existing vegetation as establishing coniferous regeneration is determined to be difficult. Timber salvage and fuels reduction is proposed in MA 12 and MA 18.

Preliminary Issues: Several preliminary issues of concern have been identified by the Forest Service. These issues are briefly described below:

- **Water quality**—Streams in the decision area have been impacted by past management and the Little Wolf Fire. How would the proposed action affect water yield, sediment production, stream stability, and recovery from past impacts?

- **Timber Supply**—An estimated 16 million board feet of timber on National Forest System lands was killed in the Little Wolf Fire. Much of this fire-killed timber will quickly lose its commercial value due to rapid deterioration. To what extent does the proposed action recover the commercial value of fire-killed timber to help meet local and national needs?

- **Grey Wolf**—The decision area lies within grey wolf habitat. How would the proposal maintain and enhance grey

wolf habitat, and contribute to recovery efforts?

- **Old Growth**—An estimated 240 acres of designated old growth was destroyed by intense, stand replacing wildfire. What options are available to manage for suitable levels of old growth habitat in the decision area?

- **Fisheries**—Little Wolf contains fisheries habitat and resident fish populations, including Eastern Brook trout, Rainbow trout, Redside Shiner and an undetermined species of sculpin. How would the proposed action affect fisheries habitat and populations?

Forest Plan Amendment: The Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan has specific management direction for the Little Wolf decision area. The Little Wolf proposed action is designed to maintain or improve resource conditions and move towards achieving desired ecological conditions, and is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. Prior to making a NEPA decision, a thorough examination of all standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan would be completed and, if necessary, plan exceptions or amendments would be addressed in the EIS.

Decisions To Be Made: The Kootenai National Forest Supervisor will decide the following:

Should dead and imminently dead trees within fire areas be harvested and if so how and where,

What amount, type, and distribution of watershed restoration projects, including road restoration, would be implemented, what burned areas need to be replanted, what areas need fuel reduction treatment, how and where will replacement old growth be designated, what road access restrictions would be implemented to provide security for big game and the grey wolf, and if Forest Plan exception or amendments are necessary to proceed with the Proposed Action within the decision area.

Public Involvement and Scoping: An open house will be scheduled in March to provide an opportunity for the public to review the proposed action. Consultation with appropriate State and Federal agencies has been initiated. Preliminary effects analysis indicated that the wildfires may significantly affect the quality of the human environment, and fire recovery activities have the potential to both intensify and reduce effects. These potential effects prompted the decision to prepare an EIS for the Little Wolf Fire Recovery.

This environmental analysis and decision making process will enable additional interested and affected

people to participate and contribute to the final decision. Public participation will be requested at several points during the analysis. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, local agencies, and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed projects. This input will be used in preparation of the draft and final EIS.

The scoping process will include:

- Identifying potential issues.
- Identifying major issues to be analyzed in depth.
- Exploring additional alternatives which will be derived from issues recognized during scoping activities.
- Identifying potential environmental effects of this project and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).

The analysis will consider a range of alternatives, including the proposed action, no action, and other reasonable action alternatives.

Estimated Dates for Filing: The draft Little Wolf Fire Recovery EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by June, 1995. At that time EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA publishes the Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**.

The final EIS is scheduled to be completed by September, 1995. In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed in the draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making a decision regarding the proposal.

Reviewer's Obligations: The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of draft environmental impact statements 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 environmental impact statement stage 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).