

# Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### **Huckleberry Land Exchange With Weyerhaeuser Company, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Skagit, Snohomish, King, Lewis and Pierce Counties, Washington**

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

**SUMMARY:** The Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to exchange lands west of the Cascade Crest in the state of Washington. The exchange would result in the transfer of up to 7,200 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands for up to 33,000 acres of Weyerhaeuser lands in Snohomish, King, Pierce, Yakima, Skagit, and Kittitas Counties in the state of Washington. Transfer of these lands will result in consolidation of NFS land ownership in the Greenwater, Snoqualmie (I-90 corridor), and Skykomish River Basins.

The EIS will be consistent with the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (as amended in April 1994), which provides overall guidance of all land management activities on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

The Forest Service invites written comments and suggestions on the issues and management opportunities for the area being analyzed.

**DATES:** Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received in writing by July 31, 1995.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments to Dennis Bschor, Forest Supervisor, 21905 64th Avenue West, Mountlake Terrace, Washington 98043.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Jeff Osmundson, Washington Area Land Adjustment Team, Staff Appraiser, Phone: 206-744-3446.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Forest Service proposed action would consolidate landownership presently characterized by a "checkerboard" ownership pattern. Consolidation will enable the Forest Service to: implement more effective ecosystem based management; better protection of wetlands; attainment of long-term habitat needs by reducing fragmentation of forest cover; and reduce recreational conflict. Lands acquired in the exchange by the Forest Service will be managed in accord with the LRMP.

The proposed action will exchange lands that are offered to the Forest Service which include Weyerhaeuser lands that are: in the Greenwater River Basin east of Enumclaw; near the Norse Peak Wilderness Area; and next to the Clearwater River Wilderness Area east of Carbonado. Other Weyerhaeuser lands offered are: between the north and middle forks of the Snoqualmie River near the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area; in the McClellan Butte area near Snoqualmie Pass and south of U.S. Highway 2; and in the South Fork of the Skykomish River Basin near Index. Two smaller Weyerhaeuser parcels are located in south Skagit County and in Lewis County, in the North fork of the Stillaquamish drainage.

Weyerhaeuser will acquire NFS lands located generally to the west of the administrative boundary of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. The area is mostly north of the Greenwater River and the community of Greenwater.

The Mt-Baker-Snoqualmie LRMP (as amended) provides guidance for land exchanged within the potentially affected area through its goals, objectives, standards, guidelines and management area direction.

An environmental document will be produced which will display alternatives considered, including the proposed action, and an estimation of the effects of the alternatives. Based on the issues identified through scoping, all action alternatives will vary in the number of acres to exchange, the location of the acres to be exchanged, and the kind of mitigation measures.

The EIS will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the alternatives. Past, present, and projected activities on both private and National Forest System lands will

be considered. The EIS will disclose the analysis of site-specific mitigation.

Comments from the public will continue to be used to:

- Identify potential issues.
- Identify major issues to be analyzed in depth.
- Eliminate minor issues or those which have been covered by a previous environmental analysis, such as the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie LRMP.
- Identify alternatives to the proposed action.
- Identify potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect, and cumulative effects).
- Determine potential cooperating agencies and task assignments.

Issues identified as a result of internal and public scoping include: Access and travel management; threatened, endangered and sensitive plant and animal species; current condition of federal and nonfederal lands; and valuation procedures for Federal and nonfederal lands.

An initial scoping letter was mailed on June 14, 1994. The responses have been compiled and will be incorporated into the process. Public involvement meetings have been considered but are not scheduled at this time.

Consolidation of checkerboard ownership in the I-90 corridor into federal control would provide an opportunity for ecosystem management on a larger scale. It would also support the "Mountains-to-the-Sound" goals of a continuous greenway between the Cascade Mountains and Puget Sound.

The draft EIS is expected to be filed in November 1995. The comment period on the draft environmental impact statement will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice at this early stage of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of 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