

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

The Southern Region of the National Forest System and the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station, in cooperation with the other Federal agencies that are members of the Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere Cooperative (SAMAB, i.e., the Environmental Protection Agency, the Forest Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Geological Survey, the Department of Energy Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the Economic Development Administration, and the National Biological Survey) have begun conducting a Southern Appalachian Assessment (SAA). The Assessment will include the national forest lands of the George Washington, Jefferson, Nantahala-Pisgah, Cherokee, and Chattahoochee National Forests, and parts of the Sumter and Talladega National Forests. The Assessment will also include National Park Service lands in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Shenandoah National Park, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Assessment will facilitate an interagency ecological approach to management in the Southern Appalachian area by collecting and analyzing broad-scale biological, physical, social and economic data to serve as a foundation for more local natural resource management decisions. The Assessment will be organized around four "themes"—(1) Terrestrial (which includes the Health of Forest Ecosystems, and Plant and Animal Resources); (2) Aquatic Resources; (3) Air Quality and (4) the Human Dimension of Ecosystems (which includes Communities and Human Influences; Roadless Areas and Wilderness; Recreation, Wildlife and Fish Supply and Demand; and the Timber Economy of the Southern Appalachians).

Public comment on the SAA process began with a series of open town hall meetings held in Asheville, NC; Gainesville, GA; and Roanoke, VA in August 1994. In addition, interested members of the public were asked for further written comments to be received by September 15. As the Assessment progresses, continued public involvement will be facilitated through additional meetings and newsletters.

2. Beginning of the Forest Plan Revision Efforts for the National Forests in Alabama, the Chattahoochee-Oconee, the Cherokee, and the Sumter National Forests

This Notice announces that the National Forests in Alabama, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, the Cherokee National Forest, and the Sumter National Forest either have already started or are beginning efforts to revise their Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP). These Forests are each in the process of preparing their Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS), one of the first steps in the revision process. This step includes updating resource inventories, defining the current situation, estimating supply capabilities and resource demands, and determining the "Need for Change" (36 CFR 291.12(e)(5)).

3. Public Involvement in Developing the "Need for Change" in an AMS

Determining the concerns and expectations of National Forest constituents and getting public input on how well current forest plans are working, or not working, are critical elements of describing the "need to change" a forest plan. An integral part of determining the need for change is public involvement. Each of the National Forests described above either have already, or will soon contact their interested public to solicit their participation in this step of the forest plan revision process.

4. Relationship Between the AMS and a Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement

In the past, a "Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement" (NOI) was issued at the beginning of the forest planning process, including before the development of the AMS.

This time, we are first defining the current situation and an initial "need for change" in a Draft AMS, and then issuing a NOI prior to developing alternatives. This will allow us to incorporate a more definable "Proposed Action" and "Purpose and Need" into our NOIs, which will begin the formal NEPA process of preparing the Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) that will accompany the Revised Land and Resource Management Plans.

5. Relationship Between the Southern Appalachian Assessment and the Process for Revising the Southern Appalachian National Forests' LRMPs

The public has expressed concern that the Southern Appalachian Assessment

will "delay" revising National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans in the Southern Appalachians. However, the SAA is being conducted concurrently, and in support of, the forest plan revisions.

Many of the information needs for the Forest AMSs and for the SAA are the same. The Assessment will support the revision of the LRMPs by determining how the lands, resources, people and management of the National Forests interrelate within the larger context of the Southern Appalachian area. The SAA, however, will not be a "decision document" and it will not involve the NEPA process. As broad-scale issues are identified and addressed at the sub-regional level in the Assessment, the individual National Forest's role in resolving those broad-scale issues will become a part of the "need for change" at the Forest level.

6. Issuing the Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS

The National Forests identified above will issue their NOIs when enough information from the SAA is available for them to develop the "Need for Change" section of their Draft AMS. The Draft AMSs are scheduled to be completed between October 1995 and January 1996. Their NOIs are also scheduled to be issued during this same time period.

Each NOI will include a description of a preliminary "Proposed Action" and of some preliminary alternatives. Scoping to receive public comments on the preliminary proposed action and preliminary alternatives will begin following the publication of the NOIs. These public comments will be used to further refine the "Proposed Action" and the preliminary alternatives, to possibly identify additional alternatives, and to finalize the AMS and the "Need for Change".

7. Status of the Jefferson, George Washington, and Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests

The Jefferson National Forest, which is also currently working on its Revised LRMP, previously issued a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its Revised LRMP on June 28, 1993. A Revised NOI for the Forest will be issued between October 1995 and January 1996, to coincide with the NOIs issued for the other National Forests in the Southern Appalachians.

The George Washington National Forest completed its *Final Revised Forest Plan* on January 21, 1993, and the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests completed a significant amendment, *Amendment 5 to their Land and*