



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White River
National
Forest

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Dear Interested Parties:

This letter is to inform you about and request your comments on the proposal for the Management of Undesirable Plant Species on the White River National Forest. The White River National Forest is proposing to develop and implement an adaptive Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy, in order to control and reduce invasive non-native plants/noxious weeds across the White River National Forest including weed control in wilderness. The White River is the lead Forest for management of the Maroon Bells, Flattops and Holy Cross Wildernesses, and will include the portions of those wildernesses on the adjacent Forests in this proposal. An IPM strategy would use various combinations of control techniques including biological (insects, pathogens), chemical (herbicides), cultural (grazing, seeding, fertilizing), and mechanical (mowing, tilling, grubbing, pulling) treatments to manage noxious weeds. This proposal will NOT consider aerial spraying of herbicides.

This proposed action would use adaptive management strategies to incorporate the location and treatment of new infestations and new weed species found through monitoring of noxious weeds, and will use adaptive management strategies to address new chemicals and technology in the future. An adaptive management approach will be more effective in achieving desired results where: 1) species prove resistant to a particular treatment; 2) new chemicals and technology come on the scene; or 3) new infestations or weed species are found. The key is to provide managers with a variety of techniques and flexibility in treating noxious weeds now and into the future.

The establishment and spread of noxious weeds has been occurring since the first explorers and settlers set foot on America's soil. Since that time noxious and invasive weeds have become critical land management concerns, because escalating infestations are displacing native plant communities, lowering land values, and reducing crop and forage production across the country. It is estimated that 2,000 noxious and invasive weed species are established in the United States, thus making all ecosystems (forest, rangeland, riparian, wetlands, etc.) vulnerable to invasion. All land managers are faced with developing new management plans to prevent, control, and manage these noxious species.



It is estimated that there are 88,000 acres on the White River National Forest infested with noxious weeds. There are 17-18,000 acres that have been inventoried with over 1,000 acres of weeds being inventoried and treated each year. These infestations can be found in riparian areas, meadows, and along recreation trails, streams, and roadsides. Many of the noxious weed species found on the Forest are very aggressive and are crowding out the native vegetation creating monocultures. Without repeated treatment and monitoring of these species entire landscapes are easily invaded. Currently biological, chemical, and mechanical techniques have been used in conjunction with each other to control the spread of noxious weeds. Continual monitoring and treatment will need to be done in the future if control and eradication are ever to occur.

The decision to be made is one of the following: whether to implement the project on National Forest lands as described in the proposed action, to modify the proposed location or design of the project, to use some other combination of activities to meet the purpose and need for action, or to defer any action at this time.

Our team of resource specialists, called an Interdisciplinary Team (IDTeam), is in the process of conducting an environmental analysis in order to identify resource concerns and estimate potential impacts of this proposal. The IDTeam has identified a number of relevant concerns and will design the project to address or resolve them. These concerns as well as possible resolutions include:

- Herbicide use may affect the health and safety of the public during and immediately after application. *Properly following the herbicide label and posting signs in public areas will reduce or eliminate the potential for any human health effects.*
- Herbicides may move through permeable soils and into water systems. *Mapping and avoiding permeable soils with shallow water tables and prescribing buffer strips along water courses will reduce herbicide movement in soils.*
- Herbicide use may result in aquatic toxicity to boreal toad/leopard frog eggs and larvae. *Surveying for the presence of and avoiding known boreal toad/leopard frog locations will prevent impacts to those species.*
- Herbicide use may impact non-target species, including sensitive plants and forbs. *Following label directions, using plant-specific methods (wicking), using plant-specific herbicides, and spraying when the wind is calm are ways to avoid impacting non-target species.*
- Using any kind of vegetation manipulation in wilderness may affect its “untrammeled” character. *Controlling noxious weeds in wilderness will improve its naturalness.*
- Any type of treatment may impact culturally important plants. *Identifying culturally important plants in the field and avoiding those areas will prevent impacts from any type of treatment.*
- Ground disturbing treatments may affect cultural resources. *Identifying important cultural resources in the field and avoiding them will prevent impacts from any type of treatment.*
- Mechanical treatments as well as ATV use for herbicide application may disturb brewer’s sparrow/sage grouse nesting. *Avoiding using mechanical equipment during nesting season in brewer’s sparrow/sage grouse habitat will reduce effects on those species.*

- Goats or domestic sheep used as a grazing treatment may transfer diseases to bighorn sheep. *Avoiding using sheep or goats in known bighorn sheep habitat may reduce the likelihood of transmitting diseases.*

It is anticipated that the IDTeam will complete the analysis using an environmental assessment (EA) and may have a decision by September 2006. To make a fully informed decision, I need to know your issues and concerns with this proposal and how they may be addressed. Please respond by January 3, 2006, so that our planning efforts can proceed in a timely manner. Please address your comments to Maribeth Gustafson, White River Forest Supervisor, c/o Peech Keller, P.O. Box 620, Silverthorne, Colorado 80498 or send an email to comments-rocky-mountain-white-river-eastzone@fs.fed.us. Please include: (1) your name, address, telephone number, organization represented, if any; (2) name of the proposal on which the comment is being submitted; and (3) specific facts and supporting reasons for your concerns.

I want to emphasize that this will not be your only opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. The EA will be made available for a 30-day comment period, with public notification in the Glenwood Springs Post Independent. Copies of the EA will be mailed to those people who have submitted comments to this letter and to those who request a copy. To remain on the mailing list to receive notice of the EA, please return the following attached request form. Persons not responding to this mailing will not receive further information regarding this particular project.

If you need any further information about the project you may call Peech Keller at 970-468-5400 or Kelly Phillips at 970-625-2371. Thank you for your interest in the management of your public lands.

Sincerely,

/s/ Catherine Kahlow (for)
MARIBETH GUSTAFSON
Forest Supervisor

cc:

Enclosure

PK/pk