

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Deschutes National Forest
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Ochoco National Forest
3160 NE 3rd Street
Prineville, OR 97754

File Code: 1950-3

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Greetings:

Last fall, we presented a proposed action for the Invasive Plant Treatment Project for the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and Crooked River National Grassland. The proposal is to treat invasive species at 1,892 individual weed sites. The purpose of this letter is to update you on the status of the planning, and ask that you inform us of your interest in receiving the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) when it is completed.

During the time that has passed since the proposed action was announced, a team of interdisciplinary specialists have reviewed the public input and are developing alternatives to the proposed action. Concerns about the proposed action were focused primarily on how herbicides would affect people, water, fish and wildlife. We believe that most of the issues surrounding herbicide use can be resolved by ensuring good project design, following treatment standards, and ensuring compliance with label restrictions. Many of the comments also show that the public wants treatment of invasive species to be done quickly, efficiently, and effectively.

There are currently three alternatives the team will be analyzing in detail in the Environmental Impact Statement: Alternative 1 is No Action, Alternative 2 is the Proposed Action, and Alternative 3 is the Restricted Riparian Alternative. Our interdisciplinary team members are also working on project design features that are expected to greatly reduce the risk of some adverse effects and will likely eliminate some effects.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action: Within the 1892 individual weed sites (approx. 17,000 acres) this alternative will largely employ the recently approved herbicides, combined with manual, mechanical, biological, and cultural treatment methods.

Weed sites are grouped into 311 project area units that cover about 52,000 acres. A database has been populated which holds information on all of the project areas, such as invasive species present and preferred method of treatment, presence of sensitive species or water, soil type, and human use of the area.

The weeds inventory shows that the largest share of treatment areas are along roadsides. The data is complex, however, because there are often more than one invasive species present at a site, and the most effective treatment method for one species may not be the preferred method for another species.

An early-detection/rapid response strategy is included in both action alternatives. This type of strategy is intended to allow timely treatment of infestations that are discovered in the future through inventory and monitoring.

Alternative 3 - Restricted Riparian: This alternative was developed to respond to the issues around potential effects to water and aquatic species. The project areas are the same as described in the proposed action; treatments are proposed for 1,892 weed sites and across 311 project area units. The method of treatment within riparian reserves and riparian habitat conservation areas is modified. Herbicide application methods are restricted (no broadcast spraying for example) and the list of chemicals allowed in the riparian areas is limited.

Issues: The alternatives being considered in detail address the issues identified through scoping and through preliminary analysis conducted by the interdisciplinary team. The issues include:

- Human health, including general toxicity of chemicals, drinking water contamination, and worker safety;
- Treatment effectiveness
- Social and economic concerns, including cost efficiency, jobs associated with treatment methods, and effects of spread of invasive plants outside National Forest;
- Non-target plants and animals, including species of local interest; and
- Soil, water quality, and aquatic biota, including effects on water quality and aquatic biota.

Deschutes and Ochoco Plan Amendments: Amendments to the 1990 Deschutes and the 1989 Ochoco Forest Plans are proposed for several standards and guidelines that discourage or eliminate the use of herbicide treatments. The standards and guidelines will be amended (reworded) to allow for careful and targeted herbicide use to treat the invasive plants identified. The treatments will be based on the biology of the particular invasive plant species, site location, proximity to water, and size of infestation. Amendments are also proposed for standards and guidelines that refer to the 1989 Record of Decision for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation because that direction was vacated with the 2005 Record of Decision for Treating and Preventing Invasive Plants in the Pacific Northwest Region.

Maps

Because of the extent of the project area, maps are not included in this mailing, but are available on the internet at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/invasiveplant-eis/site-specific/DES/maps/>. If you do not have access to the internet, a CD-ROM with PDF copies of the maps, or paper copies of the maps can be sent to you upon request.

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

There will be an opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, sometime around June 2006. At that time, there may be opportunities for public tours of the project area. For your convenience, the document will be made available on the internet, and electronic copies will be available upon request.

We request your help in effectively sharing the DEIS, reducing expenses, and saving paper. If you wish to continue receiving information on this project, please fill out the form on the following page and return to the Forest Service before March 31st. If we do not receive a response, we will consider you no longer interested in the project and will remove your name from our mailing list. For more information, please contact the project team leader, Beth Peer, at (541)383-5572.

Thank you for your interest in managing the National Forest and Grasslands.

Sincerely,

/s/ Leslie A.C. Weldon
LESLIE A.C. WELDON
Forest Supervisor, Deschutes National Forest

/s/ Jeff Walter
JEFF WALTER
Forest Supervisor, Ochoco National Forest

Enclosure