

Background

Old World climbing fern, *Lygodium microphyllum*, is a climbing fern that has a large native range that extends through much of the Old World tropics. It has become established in central and southern peninsular Florida, where it grows in a number of wetland and mesic (having a moderate supply of moisture) habitats including hammocks, cypress swamps, flatwoods, bayheads, and disturbed sites.

The climbing fern is a highly invasive, exotic weed that climbs over plants, including tall trees, to form massive walls of vegetation. It also forms thick mats on the ground that smother native plants. New infestations can arise great distances from existing populations because the weed produces millions of spores that are spread by wind and other physical carriers. A single spore is capable of starting a new infestation. In addition, dense strands of Old World climbing fern present a major fire hazard.

In Florida, the potential distribution of this weed includes all habitats from Lake Okeechobee south. It also has the potential to invade the Gulf Coast of Mexico and southern Texas.

The Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has received a permit application for the release of a nonindigenous gall mite, *Floracarus perrepae* (Knihinicki & Boczek) (Acariformes: Eriophyidae), for the biological control (biocontrol) of Old World climbing fern in Florida. The purpose of the proposed release is to reduce the severity of infestations of *L. microphyllum* in Florida.

The proposed biocontrol agent, *F. perrepae*, is a gall mite in the insect family Eriophyidae and is native to Australia and tropical Asia. The adult mites feed on young leaflets of the target weed, *L. microphyllum*, inducing the leaf margins to curl into galls. Female mites lay an average 60 eggs inside a gall. The eggs hatch in 5 days and immature mites feed on the specialized tissue within the gall, requiring 4 days to become adults. Galled leaflets are often infected by secondary ambient pathogens and have reduced life spans. Plants infested with the mite have slower rates of growth than uninfested plants.

The mite is also host specific. Host specificity tests conducted in Australia indicate that *F. perrepae* is specific to only two *Lygodium* species (the target weed *L. microphyllum* and the Australian fern *Lygodium reticulatum*).

Therefore, APHIS is considering issuing a permit for the release of *F.*

perrepae into the continental United States in order to reduce the severity and extent of Old World climbing fern infestation. APHIS' review and analysis of the proposed action and its alternatives are documented in detail in an environmental assessment (EA) entitled, "Field Release of *Floracarus perrepae* Knihinicki & Boczek (Acariformes: Eriophyidae), a Mite for Biological Control of Old World Climbing Fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*), in the Continental United States" (March 2006). We are making the EA available to the public for review and comment. We will consider all comments that we receive on or before the date listed under the heading **DATES** at the beginning of this notice.

The EA may be viewed on the Regulations.gov Web site or in our reading room (see **ADDRESSES** above for instructions for accessing Regulations.gov and information on the location and hours of the reading room). You may request paper copies of the EA by calling or writing to the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**. Please refer to the title of the environmental assessment when requesting copies.

The EA has been prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 17th day of May 2006.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Housing Service

Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Farm Service Agency

Notice of Request for Extension of a Currently Approved Information Collection

AGENCIES: Rural Housing Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Proposed collection; comments requested.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces the intention of USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Rural Development, henceforth collectively known as Rural Development, or individually as Housing and Community Programs, Business and Cooperative Programs, Utility Programs, to request an extension for a currently approved information collection in support of compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable environmental requirements.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by July 24, 2006 to be assured of consideration.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donna Meyer, Senior Environmental Protection Specialist, Program Support Staff, Housing and Community Facilities Programs, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Stop 0761, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250-0761, Telephone (202) 720-9619, e-mail: donna.meyer@wdc.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: 7 CFR 1940 Subpart G, "Environmental Program."

OMB Number: 0575-0094.

Expiration Date of Approval: November 30, 2006.

Type of Request: Extension of a currently approved information collection.

Abstract: The information collection under OMB Number 0575-0094 enables the Agencies to effectively administer the policies, methods, and responsibilities for compliance with the NEPA and other applicable environmental laws, executive orders, and regulations.

The NEPA requires Federal agencies to consider the potential environmental impacts of proposed major Federal actions on the quality of the human environment during agency planning and decision-making processes. For Rural Development and FSA to comply, it is necessary that they have information on the types of environmental resources on site or in the vicinity of an Applicant's proposed project that could be impacted by Rural Development or FSA's Federal action. The Applicant is the logical source for providing this information. In fact, the vast majority of Federal Agencies that assist non-Federal Applicants in sponsoring projects require their Applicants to submit such

environmental data to allow the agency to make an informed decision.

Both Rural Development and FSA provide forms and/or other guidance to assist in the collection and submission of necessary information. The information is usually submitted via U.S. Postal Service or hand delivery to the appropriate Agency office.

The information is used by the Agency official who is processing the application for financial assistance or request for approval. Having environmental information on the Applicant's proposed project and the construction and operation activities enables the Agency official to determine the magnitude of any potential environmental impacts and to take such impacts into consideration during planning and decision-making as required by NEPA. The analysis of potential environmental impacts of an Applicant's proposed project and Rural Development or FSA's decision is a full disclosure process, and therefore, can involve public information meetings and public notification.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 4.3 hours per response.

Respondents: Individuals, non-Federal agency governments, farmers, ranchers, business owners, for-profit or non-profit institutions, and organizations.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 6,308.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 1.

Estimated Number of Responses: 6,328.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 27,399 hours.*

(* Note: This estimate is not exact due to rounding).

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Renita Bolden, Regulations and Paperwork Management Branch, at (202) 692-0035.

Comments

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agencies, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of Agencies' estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate

automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments may be sent to Renita Bolden, Regulations and Paperwork Management Branch, Support Services Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, STOP 0742, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250-0742. All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Dated: May 9, 2006.

Russell T. Davis,

Administrator, Rural Housing Service.

Dated: May 5, 2006.

Jackie J. Gleason,

Acting Administrator, Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

Dated: May 12, 2006.

Teresa C. Lasseter,

Administrator, Farm Service Agency.

[FR Doc. 06-4744 Filed 5-22-06; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Black Hills National Forest, Mystic Ranger District, South Dakota, Mitchell Project

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement on a proposal to use multiple vegetation treatments focused on creating a landscape condition more adapted to fire and that reduces potential for high severity wildfire near at-risk communities and in the wildland-urban interface. The proposal is being planned for the 25,200 acre Mitchell Project Area that includes about 18,300 acres of National Forest System land and about 6,900 acres of interspersed private land. The project area generally extends from west of Hill City, South Dakota to Keystone, South Dakota (just north of Mount Rushmore National Memorial). This project will be conducted as an authorized project under Section 102 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). Actions proposed for the Mitchell Project Area include the following:

- Restoring natural fuel breaks by removing conifers from hardwood stands such as aspen, bur oak, birch and by expanding and/or creating meadows (est. 1,400 acres).

- Reducing the amount of existing and created forest fuels by use of various treatment methods (e.g., chipping, burning); creating fuel breaks (est. 40 miles); and prescribed burning (est. 9,000 acres).

- Thinning the ponderosa pine forest by using commercial timber harvest to thin commercial size trees and other methods to thin smaller trees of non-commercial size (est. 9,400 acres).

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis would be most useful if received by 30-days following the date of this notice. The draft environmental impact statement is expected to be available for public review by October 2006 and the final environmental impact statement is expected to be completed by March 2007.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Robert J. Thompson, District Ranger, Black Hills National Forest, Mystic Ranger District, Mitchell Project Area, 803 Soo San Drive, Rapid City, South Dakota 57702. Telephone Number: (605) 343-1567. E-mail: comments-rocky-mountain-black-hills-mystic@fs.fed.us with "Mitchell" as the subject.

Electronic comments must be readable in Word, Rich Text or pdf formats.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Phillip Grumstrup, Project Coordinator, Black Hills National Forest, Mystic Ranger District, at above address, phone (605) 343-1567.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The actions proposed are in direct response to management direction provided by the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The site specific actions are designed, based on Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, to move existing resource conditions in the Mitchell Project Area toward meeting Forest Plan Goals and Objectives. Located within the project area are: The cities of Keystone and Hill City, U.S. Highway 16 and 385 corridors, U.S. Highway 16A, access to Keystone and the Mount Rushmore National Memorial, and interspersed private lands surrounded by National Forest System lands. Anticipated issues include: Protection of local communities, private and public lands, infrastructure and access from severe wildfire; associated fire and fuels hazard reduction needs in the wildland-urban interface; support and opposition to forest thinning using commercial timber harvest; impacts of vegetation treatment and multiple forest uses on wildlife habitat. The range of alternatives analyzed in the EIS is expected to be consistent with sec. 104 of the HFRA.