219 Subpart B). The administrative review process provides an individual or entity an opportunity for an independent Forest Service review and resolution of issues before the final approval of a plan, plan amendment or plan revision.

ADDRESSES: Written comments or questions concerning this notice should be addressed to Rio Grande National Forest, Attn.: Plan Revision, 1803 W. Hwy 160, Monte Vista, CO 81144, or by email to: *comments-rocky-mountain-rio-grande@fs.fed.us* (subject heading titled *Forest Plan Revision*).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Amy Waring, Forest Planner, (719) 852–6215. Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1–800–877–8339 between 5 a.m. and 5 p.m., Pacific Time, Monday through Friday. More information on the planning process can also be found on the Rio Grande National Forest Web site at *http://www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 requires that every National Forest System (NFS) unit develop a land management plan. On April 9, 2012, the Forest Service finalized its land management planning rule (2012 Planning Rule), which provides broad programmatic direction to National Forests and National Grasslands for developing and implementing their land management plans. Forest plans describe the strategic direction for management of forest resources for fifteen to twenty years, and are adaptive and amendable as conditions change over time.

Under the 2012 Planning Rule, the assessment of ecological, social, and economic trends and conditions is the first stage of the planning process. The second stage is a development and decision process guided, in part, by the NEPA and includes the preparation of a draft environmental impact statement and revised Forest Plan for public review and comment, and the preparation of the final environmental impact statement and revised Forest Plan. The third stage of the process is monitoring and feedback, which is ongoing over the life of the revised forest plans.

With this notice, the agency invites other governments, non-governmental parties, and the public to contribute to the development of the assessment report. The assessment will rapidly evaluate the sustainability of existing ecological, economic, and social conditions and trends within the context of the broader landscape. It will help inform the planning process through the use of Best Available Scientific Information, while also taking into account other forms of knowledge, such as local information, national perspectives, and native knowledge. Lastly, the assessment will help identify the need to change the existing 1996 plan.

Collaboration as part of the assessment phase supports the development of relationships of key stakeholders throughout the plan revision process, and is an essential step to understanding current conditions, available data, and feedback needed to support a strategic, efficient planning process. As public meetings, other opportunities for public engagement, and public review and comment opportunities are identified to assist with the development of the forest plan revision, public announcements will be made, notifications will be posted on the Forest's Web site at *http://www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande,* and information will be sent out to the Forest's mailing list. If anyone is interested in being on the Forest's mailing list to receive these notifications, please contact Amy Waring, Forest Planner, at the mailing address identified above, by sending an email to: *comments-rocky-mountain-rio-grande@fs.fed.us* (subject heading titled *Forest Plan Revision*).

Responsible Official: The responsible official for the revision of the land management plan for the Rio Grande National Forest is Dan Dallas, Forest Supervisor, Rio Grande National Forest, 1803 W. Hwy 160, Monte Vista, CO 81144.

Dated: December 17, 2014.

Dan S. Dallas,

Forest Supervisor, Rio Grande National Forest.

[FR Doc. 2014–30189 Filed 12–23–14; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

King Fire Restoration Project, Eldorado National Forest, Placer and El Dorado Counties, California

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The Eldorado National Forest proposes to restore portions of the King Fire of 2014. The proposed action includes hazard tree removal, fuel reduction, salvage logging, reforestation, road improvements, watershed improvements, and research.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received by January 23, 2015. The draft environmental impact statement is expected March 2015 and the final environmental impact statement is expected June 2015.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to 100 Forni Road, Placerville, CA 95667, Attention: King Fire Restoration Project. Comments may also be sent via email to *comments-pacificsouthwest-eldorado@fs.fed.us,* or via facsimile to 530–621–5297.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Patricia Ferrell, Team Leader, Eldorado National Forest, 100 Forni Road, Placerville, CA 95667, phone 530–642–5146 or email to *pferrell@fs.fed.us.* A scoping package, maps and other information are online at: *http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=45952.*

Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1–800–877–8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

General Background

The King Fire started September 13, 2104 and burned approximately 97,000 acres on the Eldorado National Forest and on private timberlands. The project area for this analysis is the approximately 63,000 acre portion of the King Fire on Eldorado National Forest lands within the Georgetown, Pacific, and Placerville Ranger Districts administrative boundary. The project area includes all or portions of 30 watersheds. The large high severity portions of this fire resulted in adverse effects to forest resources such as soil, riparian areas, and wildlife habitat, and killed thousands of trees that contribute to hazardous conditions for people and extremely high fuel loading over time.

Purpose and Need for Action

The underlying need(s) for this proposal include: Reduce the risk from falling dead, dying, and defective trees to the safety of forest visitors and workers, and of damaging private property, structures, and cultural resources; reduce accumulation of fuel over the long term in strategic fire management areas for the purpose of improving the ability to manage and control future fires; maintain the ecological integrity of post fire habitat while restoring diverse conifer forests and laying the foundation for resiliency

into the future; expeditiously recover timber killed by the fire commensurate with available markets, for the purpose of generating funds to offset the cost of restoration activities and contribute to societal needs for wood products; take advantage of research opportunities to increase knowledge regarding the effects of large fires on the environment, how to reduce the risk of future fires, and how to restore resilient forests after fires; reduce existing and potential sources of soil movement and sedimentation to streams, and reduce large woody fuel accumulation in sensitive areas where a future fire is likely to have detrimental effects on soil, water, and cultural resources.

Proposed Action

In developing the proposed action, consideration was given to areas that burned with high severity outside the natural range of variation; exclusion of hardwood/shrub/grassland areas that would continue to persist without treatment; maximizing the probability of California spotted owl persistence within and adjacent to the King Fire, maintaining habitat suitable for fire obligate wildlife including the black-backed woodpecker, promoting a mosaic of post-fire vegetation important for species associated with early seral habitats, and minimizing impacts to the threatened Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog and California red-legged frog; conifer seed dispersal and the need to plant trees in areas unlikely to naturally regenerate; identification of wildland urban interface defense zones where the focus is on protecting life and property; strategic fuel management zones to contain wildfire and facilitate prescribed fire; and generally eliminate steep slopes from the proposed action where treatments would be prohibitively expensive, and where treatment was not needed to meet other objectives of the project.

Areas identified for treatment are: approximately 1,200 acres in the wildland urban interface (WUI) defense zone where increasing fuel loads pose a hazard to community fire protection; approximately 7,300 acres within the fire management zone which are strategic areas identified to establish a safe and effective place for future fire suppression; approximately 5,600 acres in the forest resiliency area where reestablishment of conifer forests are desired, ecologically sustainable, and can be managed to have a high probability of surviving subsequent wildfire; other specific areas where treatment would occur for research and watershed improvement; and roads needing hazard tree removal (approximately 429 miles), repair, closure, and/or decommissioning.

Within Strategic Fuels Management Zones, WUI Defense Zones, and Forest Resiliency Areas, remove dead conifer trees using in excess of soil cover needs and wildlife snag retention levels needs. In the Forest Resiliency Areas, snags will generally be retained in two to five acre patches covering 15 to 20 percent of a treatment area and incorporating the largest snags available. No standing snags will be retained in WUI Defense Zones, and four large snags per acre up to 12sq. ft./acre basal area in a grouped configuration will be retained in Strategic Fire Management Zones. Trees to be removed have brown foliage or no foliage remaining as viewed from the ground. Mortality monitoring for tree removal may be conducted up to 4 years following the fire.

Within Hazard Areas, remove hazard trees along Forest Service system roads open to the public and roads needed for access to treatment areas, along private residential property, adjacent to structures, and in specific cultural resource sites identified by the archeologist. Hazard trees to be removed are dead and dying trees that have potential to reach the road or property and live trees that are sufficiently damaged or defective to pose a risk of falling within the next 5 years.

Methods include mechanical or other ground based logging on approximately 11,800 acres, skyline or helicopter logging on approximately 700 acres, hand treatments on approximately 700 acres, and mastication or machine piling on approximately 100 acres.

In areas identified above, the maximum desired surface fuel loading is 6–10 tons per acre of material <3″ diameter. In areas described above where additional treatment is needed to reduce fuel loading to the desired level or provide additional soil cover, tops, limbs, and unmerchantable boles of harvested trees, and small dead trees that are not removed using the logging methods described, would be treated by one or more of the following methods: cutting and scattering to within 18 inches of the ground, cutting and left in place, hand piling, mastication or chipping with a track mounted masticator or chipper; and/or cutting trees and piling using tractors or rubber tired machinery with brush rakes or grapples. Piles would be burned.

Within portions of watersheds determined to be at high risk of soil erosion and sedimentation which could negatively impact watershed resources, treatments include: Increasing groundcover using onsite or imported material (*e.g.* mastication, lop and scatter, mulching), obliteration of existing disturbances, and removal of excess woody material.

Planting of seedlings would occur on approximately 14,000 acres of conifer forest types where a forested community is the desired condition, but where natural regeneration of a desired species composition and density are not expected to occur within the next several decades, and where stands can reasonably be effectively and efficiently managed into the future. Planting strategies would be designed to maintain ecological integrity while balancing future climate projections, economics, long-term management feasibility, and desired conditions. Except in the limited circumstances where site preparation to treat residual fuels is not needed, salvage logging would be completed before planting takes place. At the time of planting, the planted seedlings would be released from competing vegetation by hand scraping a radius of 2 to 5 feet around the seedlings depending on competing vegetation and follow-up treatment planned. Follow-up manual and herbicide release of seedlings from competing vegetation would occur where competing vegetation is expected to reduce seedling survival or growth below an acceptable level. Proposed research projects are to study the effect of varying salvage and re-planting intensities on the fuel complex and native/non-native species abundance over time; study forest resilience after high-severity wildfire: the effect of snag density and distribution on the retention of forest ecosystem functions; and additional projects to be determined.

Responsible Official

Forest Supervisor, Eldorado National Forest.

Nature of Decision To Be Made

The decision to be made is whether to adopt and implement the proposed action, an alternative to the proposed action, or take no action to restore the King Fire area.

Scoping Process

This notice of intent initiates the scoping process, which guides the development of the environmental impact statement. A scoping open house will be held January 13, 2015 in Placerville, CA. Comments specific to the location, methods, and actions proposed are the most helpful.

It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such manner that they are useful to the agency's preparation of the

environmental impact statement. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns and contentions.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered, however.

Dated: December 18, 2014.

Laurence Crabtree,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 2014–30158 Filed 12–23–14; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Intermountain Region, Payette National Forest, Council Ranger District, Idaho, Middle Fork Weiser River Landscape Restoration Project

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The Council Ranger District of the Payette National Forest will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Middle Fork Weiser River Landscape Restoration Project. The Middle Fork Weiser River Landscape Restoration Project area is located approximately six miles southeast of Council, Idaho, primarily in the Middle Fork Weiser River watershed. It comprises approximately 50,000 acres and is within the boundaries of the Council Ranger District of the Payette National Forest, in Adams County Idaho. The project is designed to move vegetation toward desired conditions, improve wildlife habitat, reduce forest fuels, improve watershed conditions through a variety of activities including commercial and non-commercial vegetation management and road system modifications and maintenance; improve recreation infrastructure and opportunities; and improve firefighter and public safety by establishing fuelbreaks.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received by January 23, 2015. The draft environmental impact statement is expected August, 2015 and the final environmental impact statement is expected February 2016.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Keith Lannom, Forest Supervisor, 500 N. Mission Street, Building 2, McCall, Idaho 83638. Comments may also be sent via email to *comments-intermtn-payette@fs.fed.us,* or via facsimile to 208–634–0744.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen Penny, Project Team Leader, 208–253–0164, *spenny@fs.fed.us.* Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1–800–877–8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose is to: (1) Move vegetation toward the desired conditions (*e.g.,* canopy closure in large tree class, species composition, and size class distribution) defined in the Forest Plan and consistent with the current science for restoration of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, grand fir, subalpine fir and lodgepole habitat types, with an emphasis on: (a) Improving habitat for specific wildlife species of concern, such as the species dependent on dry coniferous forests, while maintaining habitat for federally-listed and sensitive species; (b) Maintaining and promoting large tree forest structure, early seral species composition (for example aspen, western larch, ponderosa pine, and Douglas-fir) and forest resiliency to fire, insects and disease and climate change; (c) Reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildland fire, with an emphasis on restoring and maintaining desirable plant community attributes including fuel levels, fire regimes, and other ecological processes; and (d) Maintaining and promoting large trees where retention is consistent with the above objectives. (2) Maintaining and promoting legacy ponderosa pine and western larch and legacy-like Douglas fir; (3) Restore heterogeneous fine and landscape scale mosaic patterns by establishing varying patch sizes consistent with spatial patterns that promote forest resilience to disturbance; (4) Within dry non-forested habitats, maintain and promote native grasses and restore desired conditions for age and canopy class structure on sagebrush and bitterbrush; (5) Decrease the conifer encroachment into aspen and non-forested habitats; (6) In order of priority, move the Granite Creek subwatershed from a Watershed Condition Framework (WCF) rating of Class 3 (Impaired) to a Class 2 (Functioning at Risk), and move Mica Creek, Jungle Creek, and Little Fall Creek subwatersheds within the Project area toward the desired condition for soil, water, riparian, and aquatic resources; (7) Manage recreation use in the Project with an emphasis on hardening primary dispersed recreation areas, improving existing trails and providing new trail opportunities including an OHV loop and a non-motorized trail; (8) Contribute to the economic vitality of the communities adjacent to the Payette National Forest; and (9) Improve firefighter and public safety by establishing strategically placed defensible fuelbreaks within the Project area.

The need for the Project is based on the difference between the existing and desired conditions. These differences include: (1) Loss of habitat for Family 1 wildlife species, such as the white-headed woodpecker, compared to historical conditions; (2) Fewer large tree size classes than desired in the drier forest types (Potential Vegetation Groups 2, and 5), and higher canopy cover; (3) Fewer early seral tree species (*i.e.* aspen, ponderosa pine and western larch) than desired; (4) Increased stand and landscape homogeneity of size classes, species diversity, tree distributions and canopy closure; (5) Increased high canopy closer in the large size classes in some vegetation types; (6) Increased conifer encroachment into aspen and non-forested habitats; (7) Fewer fire resistant tree species (*i.e.,* ponderosa pine and Western larch) and higher densities of non-fire resistant tree species; (8) Higher surface fuel loading in those areas that have missed one or more fire return intervals; (9) Less than desired watershed function and integrity, including increased sedimentation, hydrologic risk from flooding, disturbance in RCAs (mainly road-related), habitat fragmentation, lack of large woody debris in some streams, and lack of coarse woody debris in areas of past timber harvest; and (10) Trail and recreation facilities that do not meet current design and accessibility standards.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action includes: Up to 13,002 acres of commercial harvests (a combination of Free Thin, Free Thin–Patch Cut-Selection Harvest, Aspen Restoration, and Mature Plantation Harvest). Combined commercial and non-commercial vegetation treatments include up to 5,280 acres of Meadow Restoration and 1,267 acres of Restoration of Low Density Timber Stands. Non-commercial treatments include thinning up to 4,309 acres. These acreages include treatments designed for and within Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs) and total approximately 3,428 acres. Prescribed