

NEWS RELEASE

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office
1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho, 83709
<http://www.fws.gov/idaho>

Department of Commerce, NOAA
National Marine Fisheries Service, Idaho State Habitat Office
10095 W. Emerald Street, Boise, Idaho, 83704-8901
<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Regional-Office/Habitat-Conservation/Idaho-State-Branch>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 17, 2009

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PUBLIC INPUT REQUESTED **FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT** *Proposed Idaho Forestry Program Component of* *Snake River Basin Adjudication Settlement Information Needed*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service (Services) announced today they will conduct public scoping to gather information to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the implementation of the Idaho Forestry Program, a component of the Snake River Basin Adjudication Agreement (SRBA).

A series of public scoping meetings will offer the public an opportunity under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to provide information that will assist the Services in developing the EIS by identifying important issues and alternatives related to the proposed action.

The scoping will also allow the public to respond to a request from the State of Idaho to enter into a Cooperative Agreement (Agreement) under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act with the Services as part of a settlement agreement resulting from the Snake River Basin Adjudication (SRBA).

Comments will be accepted until April 3, 2009.

“Written and verbal comments from interested parties are welcome to ensure that the full range of issues related to the environmental and social effects of implementing the Idaho

Forestry Program under the Agreement are identified,” said David Mabe, Idaho State Habitat Director for the National Marine Fisheries Service in Boise.

Jeff Foss, State Supervisor of the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service’s Idaho Office in Boise, added, “The scoping meetings are essential to the public process. Both agencies encourage public participation, as your information will help us prepare an EIS that adequately addresses important issues.”

Under the proposed 30-year Agreement, the State of Idaho would implement the Idaho Forestry Program with measures that would provide conservation benefits for listed fish species in the Salmon River Basin and Clearwater River Basin. The Services would authorize incidental take of listed species caused by forest management activities to the extent that they are consistent with the ESA.

The Snake River Water Rights Act of 2004 directs the heads of Federal agencies to execute and perform all actions necessary to carry out the terms of the SRBA settlement agreement, which are set forth in a document entitled “Mediator’s Term Sheet.” The Term Sheet includes a provision for the negotiation of a Cooperative Agreement under Section 6 of the ESA to address forest management activities on State lands, with voluntary enrollment on private lands, in the Salmon and Clearwater River basins.

The proposed Agreement would implement a conservation program for salmon, steelhead, and bull trout as part of the Idaho Forestry Program. Under the proposed Agreement, the State of Idaho is seeking incidental take coverage for five listed fish species: Snake River sockeye salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*), Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), Snake River fall Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), Snake River steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). Snake River sockeye salmon is currently listed as endangered under the ESA, while the other four fish species are listed as threatened under the ESA.

The EIS will identify potentially significant direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on land use, air quality, water quality, water resources, socioeconomic, and other environmental issues that could occur with implementation of the proposed action and alternatives. The Services estimate that the draft EIS will be available for public review in early 2010.

The dates and locations for the public scoping workshops are:

1. February 23, 2009, 7-9 pm - Riggins, Idaho
Best Western Hotel, 1010 S. Hwy 95, Riggins, ID 83549
2. February 24, 2009, 7-9 pm - Grangeville, Idaho
Nez Perce National Forest, Supervisor’s Office, 104 Airport Rd., Grangeville, ID 83530
3. February 25, 2009, 7-9 pm - Orofino, Idaho
Clearwater National Forest Office, Supervisor’s Office, 12730 Highway 12, Orofino, ID 83544

4. February 26, 2009, 7-9 pm - Lewiston, Idaho
Idaho Department of Fish and Game Office, 3316 16th St, Lewiston, ID 83501

5. March 3, 2009, 7-9 pm - Salmon, Idaho
U.S. Forest Service Public Lands Center, (Hwy 93 S), 1206 S. Challis St., Salmon, ID
83647

The Agreement, Term Sheet, and the Idaho Forestry Program can be viewed at
http://www.idl.Idaho.gov/eis/eis_index.html.

A link to these documents will also be located at <http://www.fws.gov/idaho>.

All comments and materials received, including names and addresses, will become part of the administrative record and may be released to the public. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the offices listed in the ADDRESSES section of the Federal Register.

The Services request that public comments be specific, including information regarding: direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that implementation of the proposed Idaho Forestry Program or other alternatives could have on listed species and their habitats; possible alternatives; potential adaptive management and/or monitoring provisions; funding issues; existing environmental conditions in the project area; other plans or projects that might be relevant to this proposed project; acreage that should be covered; specific species that should or should not be covered; specific landforms that should or should not be included in the analyses; and minimization and mitigation concepts.

All comments concerning the preparation of the EIS and the NEPA process should be addressed to: Jeri Wood, USFWS, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Suite 368, Boise, Idaho 83709, facsimile (208) 378-5262, or Ken Troyer, NMFS, 10095 W. Emerald Street, Boise, Idaho 83704, facsimile (208) 378-5699. Comments may be submitted by e-mail to the following address: IdahoForestry@noaa.gov. Include the document identifier: **Idaho Forestry Program** in the subject line of the e-mail.

Written comments should be received on or before April 3, 2009.

For more information, please contact Jeri Wood, USFWS, telephone (208) 378-5289; or Ken Troyer, NMFS, telephone (208) 378-5692.

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American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. www.noaa.gov.