milk and milk products and through direct contact with an infected aborted fetus or calf, afterbirth, or other reproductive tract discharges.

Brucellosis is considered one of the most serious diseases of livestock. While its hallmark symptom is abortion, brucellosis can also result in decreased milk production, weight loss in animals, infertility, and lameness. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has worked for years to eliminate this disease from the United States.

The only known reservoir of *Brucella abortus* in the United States occurs in wild, free-ranging populations of bison and elk in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA), which comprises areas of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. The significance of wildlife in the GYA as a reservoir of brucellosis and potential source of infection for cattle in the GYA has been widely recognized. Additionally, free-ranging bison herds in the GYA are a natural resource of great importance.

To address the issue of brucellosis in the GYA, the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service, the State of Montana, and their cooperators (including the U.S. Department of Agriculture) developed an Interagency Bison Management Plan for the bison herd in Yellowstone National Park (YNP). One of the disease management requirements of the plan is for eligible bison to be vaccinated against brucellosis. The Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL) has requested APHIS's assistance with the vaccination against brucellosis of wild, free-ranging bison calves and non-pregnant yearlings that leave YNP and migrate onto State, private, or other Federal lands.

On December 5, 2003, we published in the **Federal Register** (68 FR 68020–68021, Docket No. 03–112–1) a notice in which we announced the availability, for public review and comment, of an environmental assessment (EA) examining the potential environmental effects of APHIS's involvement in the vaccination described above. Additionally, we announced the availability of a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) in which we set forth our determination that subcutaneous vaccination of free-ranging bison of the GYA with Strain RB51 vaccine would not significantly impact human health or the environment.

In the notice of availability, we solicited comments on the EA and FONSI for 30 days ending on January 5, 2004. On January 14, 2004, we published a notice in the **Federal Register** (69 FR 2110, Docket No. 03–112–2) in which we reopened the comment period and extended it until January 20, 2004. We received a total of 143 comments by January 20, 2004.

The commenters addressed a wide range of issues, including:

- Whether the EA met the procedural requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Some commenters expressed the view that APHIS's release of a FONSI before the public had a chance to comment on the EA constituted a violation of NEPA. Others questioned whether the EA contained all of the elements required of an EA under NEPA.
- Which alternative presented in the EA should be adopted
- Whether bison are affected by brucellosis and whether there have been any reported cases of free-ranging bison transmitting the disease to cattle.
- The natural role of brucellosis in the environment.
- Issues regarding the potential impacts of vaccination on bison and nontarget species, including the efficacy and safety of the Strain RB51 vaccine, the potential for stress-related maladies in bison because of vaccination, and potential erosion of the wild nature of the YNP bison herd due to handling during the vaccination process.
- Whether the EA addressed the concerns of Native Americans.
- Requests that APHIS conduct an economic analysis to assess the costs and benefits of a vaccination program and the potential effects on the local economy.

We have reviewed and considered all issues raised by the commenters. Based on that review, we are confirming our determination that APHIS' assistance with the vaccination will not significantly impact human health or the environment. We are also making available to the public our discussion of all issues raised by the commenters in a document titled ''Analysis of Comments Received on Subcutaneous Vaccination of Wild, Free-Ranging Bison in the Greater Yellowstone Area, Environmental Assessment/FONSI.'' Instructions for viewing that document, the EA, and the FONSI are included under the heading **ADDRESSES** at the beginning of this notice.

Done in Washington, DC, this 26th day of March 2004.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 04–7309 Filed 3–31–04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

McSutten Decision Area; Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln County, MT

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

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

SUMMARY: The USDA–Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to disclose the environmental effects of timber harvest, prescribed burning, and road management in the McSutten Decision Area (Decisions Area) on the Rexford Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest. The Decision Area is located approximately 12 miles southwest of Eureka, Montana.

DATES: Written comments and suggestions should be postmarked or received within 30 days following publication of this notice.

ADDRESSES: Written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis should be sent to Glen M. McNitt, District Ranger, Rexford Ranger District, 1299 U.S. Highway 93 N, Eureka, MT 59917.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Contact Chris Fox, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Rexford Ranger District. Phone: (406) 296–7155.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Decision Area contains approximately 62,200 acres of land within the Kootenai National Forest. Proposed activities within the Decision Area include all or portions of the following areas: T32–35N, R27–29W, PMM, Lincoln County, Montana.

All proposed activities are outside the boundaries of any roadless area or any areas considered for inclusion to the National Wilderness System as recommended by the Kootenai National Forest Plan or by any past or present legislative wilderness proposals.

Purpose and Need: The purpose and need for the project is: (1) Reduce fuel accumulations to decrease the likelihood that fires would become large stand-replacing wildfires; (2) restore characteristic vegetation patterns (patch sizes and stand structure) on the landscape; (3) increase habitat for wildlife species that utilize early vegetative stages and maintain huckleberry fields over time to provide foraging opportunities for wildlife and provide for social needs; (4) provide a transportation system that increases security for big game, reduces impacts to aquatic resources, improves riparian wildlife habitat, and insures economical and safe access; and (5) respond to the

social and economic needs of the public.

Proposed Activities: The Forest Service proposes to use regeneration harvest (clearcut and seedtree prescriptions) on approximately 3,376 acres, and commercial thinning on approximately 3,299 acres.

The proposed action would result in 40 openings over 40 acres, ranging from 41 to 175 acres. A 60-day public review period, and approval by the Regional Forester for exceeding the 40-acre limitation for regeneration harvest, would be required prior to the signing of the Record of Decision. This 60-day period is initiated with this notice of intent.

The proposed action includes approximately 6,675 acres of underburning following timber harvest, and approximately 1,033 acres of prescribed burning without timber harvest.

The proposed action also includes maintenance activities on portions of approximately 193 miles of road to meet Best Management Practices; decommissioning approximately six miles of roads currently restricted year-long to motor vehicles; placing approximately five miles of roads, which are currently restricted year-long to motor vehicles, in storage; and reconstructing approximately one mile of existing road.

Forest Plan Amendments: The proposed action includes a project-specific Forest Plan amendment necessary to meet the project's objectives:

An amendment to allow harvest in 41 units adjacent to existing openings in Management Area (MA) 12 (Big Game Summer Range). The amendment would be needed to suspend Wildlife and Fish Standard #7 and Timber Standard #2 for this area. These standards state that movement corridors and adjacent hiding cover be retained. The resulting opening sizes more closely correlate to natural disturbance patterns. Snags and down woody material would be left to provide wildlife habitat and maintain soil productivity.

A second amendment to allow the open road density in MA 12 (Big Game Summer Range) to be managed at greater than 0.75 miles/square mile during project implementation may be required. The amendment would be necessary to suspend Facilities Standard #3, which states that open road density should be maintained at 0.75 miles/square mile.

Range of Alternatives: The Forest Service will consider a range of alternatives. One of these will be the ''no action'' alternative, in which none of the proposed activities will be implemented. Additional alternatives will be considered to achieve the project's purpose and need for action, and to respond to specific resource issues and public concerns.

Public Involvement and Scoping: In January 2004, efforts were made to involve the public in considering management opportunities within the Decision Area. A scoping package was mailed for public review on January 30, 2004. An open house was held on February 18, 2004. Comments received prior to this notice will be included in the documentation for the EIS.

Estimated Dates for Filing: While public participation in this analysis is welcome at any time, comments received within 30 days of the publication of this notice will be especially useful in the preparation of the Draft EIS (DEIS). The DEIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to be available for public review by June 2004. At that time EPA will publish a Notice of Availability (NOA) of the DEIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the DEIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA publishes the NOA in the **Federal Register**. It is very important that those interested in the management of this area participate at that time.

The final EIS (FEIS) is scheduled to be completed by August 2004. In the FEIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed in the DEIS, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making a decision regarding the proposal.

Reviewer's Obligations: The Forest Service believes it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of DEIS' must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp.* v. *NRDC,* 435 U.S.C 519, 553 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon* v. *Hodel,* 803, F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc.* v. *Harris,* 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this Proposed Action participate by the class DEIS 45 day comment period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider and respond to them in the FEIS.

To be most helpful, comments on the DEIS should be as specific as possible, and may address the adequacy of the statement or the merit of the alternatives discussed. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1503.3) for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Responsible Official: As the Forest Supervisor of the Kootenai National Forest, 1101 U.S. Highway 2 West, Libby, MT 59923, I am the Responsible Official. As the Responsible Official, I will decide if the proposed project will be implemented. I will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. I have delegated the responsibility for preparing the DEIS and FEIS to Glen M. McNitt, District Ranger, Rexford Ranger District.

Dated: March 23, 2004.

Bob Castaneda,

Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest.

[FR Doc. 04–7362 Filed 3–31–04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–71–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Notice of Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee Meeting

AGENCY: USDA, Forest Service.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the authorities in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Pub. L. 92–463) and under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (Pub. L. 106–383), the Boise and Payette National Forests' Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee will meet for a business meeting.

DATES: Wednesday, April 21, 2004, beginning at 10:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Idaho Counties Risk Management Program (ICRMP) building, 3100 South Vista Ave., Boise, Idaho.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Randy Swick, Designated Federal Officer, at (208) 634–0401 or electronically at *rswick@fs.fed.us.*

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Agenda topics include review and approval of project proposals, and an open public forum. The meeting is open to the public.