The Task Force shall terminate either in August 1997 or upon the submission of a final report.

Dated: September 4, 1996.

Jack Ward Thomas,

Chief.

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DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project

AGENCIES: Forest Service, USDA; Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Revised notice of intent to prepare environmental impact statements.

SUMMARY: Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). The primary purpose for this revised notice of intent is to provide public notice of the updated completion schedule for the ICBEMP's environmental impact statements (EIS). The Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service will continue the interim management strategies pending completion of the ICBEMP EISs. Due to differences between Bureau of Land Management (Bureau of Land Management NEPA Handbook 1790–1) and Forest Services (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, at 18.1) NEPA policies, the Bureau of Land Management is preparing a supplemental environmental assessment for the continuation of the PACFISH (see below in Supplementary Information), while the Forest Service has provided information in this notice, in compliance with Forest Service policies, to address the continuation of the PACFISH interim direction.

Due to the complexity of an analysis of this scope, and the government shutdown in the first part of FY96, the timeframe for completing the environmental impact statements (EISs) has changed. The new schedule for release of the draft EISs is Fall 1996, for the public comment period; the public comment period will be 120 days. The adjusted schedule for the release of the final EISs and Records of Decision is Fall 1997.

In February, 1994, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service proposed to develop and adopt a coordinated ecosystem management strategy for national forests and public lands east of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington (59 FR 4680, February 1, 1994). The strategy later became known as the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project. The ICBEMP strategy will include direction which will protect and enhance aquatic ecosystems for anadromous fish and inland native trout and terrestrial ecosystems. It will also address the social and economic interactions with these biological variables. The purpose is to carry out President Clinton's mandate of July 1993 to develop a scientifically sound and ecosystem-based strategy for management of these lands. The selected alternative may result in amendment to the Forest Service Regional Guides and/or amendment or revision of applicable national forest land management plans and Bureau of Land Management resource management plans.

The original Notice of Intent for the ICBEMP effort was revised on May 23, 1994, to address changes in the scope of the area to be considered in the analysis and to establish a public meeting schedule (59 FR 26624). A third Federal Register notice was published on December 7, 1994, announcing the preparation of an EIS for the Upper Columbia River Basin (UCRB) (59 FR 63071). A fourth notice was published on August 7, 1994, changing the scope of the UCRB planning area. (60 FR 40153). On August 25, 1994, a fifth Federal Register notice was published revising the completion date for the Eastside EIS (60 FR 44298). The Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service will now produce two EISs, one for eastern Oregon and Washington (Eastside EIS) and one for Idaho, western Montana, and small portions of Nevada, Wyoming, and Utah (UCRB).

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Steve Mealey, Project Management Team, Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, 304 North 8th Street, Room 246, Boise, Idaho 83702, phone 208–334–1770. Gordon Haugen, Columbia River Basin Fish Coordinator (PACFISH), 333 SW First Street, Portland, Oregon 97208, phone 503–326–4929.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Summary of Public Involvement for the Long-Term Management Strategy

Formal scoping periods, under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), opened with publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to prepare an EIS and conduct planning activity for the Eastside Ecosystem Management Project on February 1, 1994 and for the Upper Columbia River Basin on December 7, 1994.

Public meetings, open houses, symposiums, briefings, workshops, Internet access, toll-free numbers, information centers, teleconferences, brochures and newsletters provide opportunities for the public to be involved. Over 350 public meetings and briefings were held throughout the project area from February 1994 through July 1996.

The teleconference scoping meeting for the UCRB was held simultaneously in 27 planned locations on January 28, 1995 via satellite. Local Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service staff were on hand to facilitate discussions, part of which was devoted to sharing and responding to comments and concerns from the 27 sites. The scoping meeting was also broadcast over three public access television stations. In addition, anyone with access to a satellite dish within the continental United States was able to view the program and respond via fax.

Many levels of government participated throughout the planning process including Federal and State agencies, Counties, Resource Advisory Councils, Province Advisory Committees, and Tribes. This has developed into effective partnerships and increased coordination and understanding between the groups.

Mailing lists for the EISs were compiled from Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service offices within the ICBEMP area and from the PACFISH mailing list. As other interested parties requested to be added to the mailing list the total number of persons on the list rose to 4,800.

Public involvement has been a vital and continuing aspect of the Eastside and UCRB planning process. NEPA requirements have been exceeded by involving people early and often, sharing information as it became available even if it was in draft form, and using non-traditional public involvement methods.

This type of public involvement will continue with the release of the draft EISs and through the Records of Decision. Teleconference, meetings, and workshops are planned as ways to continue to provide opportunities for the public to understand and shape the final management strategy.

The Notices of Intent for Eastside EIS and the UCRB EIS, and the Charter for the ICBEMP include objectives for the EISs and Scientific Assessment to develop the basis for management direction to modify and implement Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH).

A May 1995 mailer sent to the public by the Project, solicited comments on goals for the development of alternatives. There were seven primary goals including provisions for long-term direction that would replace PACFISH and the Inland Native Fish Strategy. Based on public responses and input from the ICBEMP Interdisciplinary Team, the seven goals were refined into five. Development of long-term aquatic conservation strategy became part of Goal 1, which is to sustain and where necessary restore the health of forest, rangeland, aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

In September 1995, a mailer outlining seven alternatives was sent to the public. Several of the alternatives under consideration would adopt PACFISH as a long-term strategy either as currently described, or with minor refinements.

Comments and responses on all alternatives, including those alternatives which adopt PACFISH and INFISH for the long term, plus alternatives which refine those strategies, will be accepted through the comment period on the draft EISs.

Summary of Public Involvement for the Interim Strategies

Due to concerns over the possible effects to aquatic and terrestrial species and their habitats during the development of a long-term strategy, three sets of interim measures were put in place. *First* on August 18, 1993 the Forest Service Region Six adopted the Eastside Screens as interim direction in Oregon and Washington establishing riparian, ecosystem, and wildlife standards for timber sales. On May 24, 1994, this interim direction, with some modification, was continued through an environmental assessment. *Second,* on February 24, 1995, direction was adopted to assure protection of habitat for anadromous fish species within the Columbia River Basin and portions of California (PACFISH). *Third,* on July 28, 1995, INFISH was adopted by the Forest Service to protect habitats for native inland fish. PACFISH and INFISH direction supersede the direction contained in the Eastside Screens for riparian area and aquatic management. Eastside Screens for riparian areas were modified by PACFISH and INFISH for two primary reasons, first, the Eastside Screens only applied to timber management, whereas PACFISH and INFISH included other resource management considerations; second, the Eastside Screens were too restrictive in that they did not allow for silvicultural practices that may be needed to benefit riparian plant and animal communities.

As a general rule, all of the Eastside forests (eastern Oregon and Washington), not covered by the Northwest Forest Plan, are covered by either the PACFISH or the INFISH standards. However, some forests such as the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Oregon have a portion of the forest covered by the PACFISH, due to the presence of anadromous fish watersheds, and the remaining portion of the forest is covered by the INFISH.

PACFISH. Document Title: Decision Notice/Decision Record, Finding Of No Significant Impact for the Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California, February 24, 1995.

A Notice of Availability for the PACFISH environmental assessment and proposed finding of no significant impact was published in the Federal Register (March 25, 1994, 58 FR 14356), with a 45 day public comment period. This comment period was extended for two weeks, until May 23, 1994 (85 FR 23049). The Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service received over 500 written comments; of which over 90 percent were from within the geographic range of the proposed action.

EASTSIDE SCREENS. Document Title: Decision Notice for the Continuation of Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales, USDA Forest Service, Region 6, Colville, Deschutes, Fremont, Malheur, Ochoco, Okanogan, Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, and Winema National Forests in Oregon and Washington, May 20, 1994.

This Decision Notice identified that the Interim Direction of August 18, 1993, as modified in the Regional Forester's Plan Amendment #1, was continued pending completion of the Eastside Ecosystem Management Strategy, now known as the ICBEMP. The ecosystem management strategy will be displayed in the ICBEMP Eastside EIS. This interim direction applied to the design of timber sales in certain riparian areas (now replaced by the PACFISH and INFISH direction), and applies to late and old structural forest stands. On December 28, 1993, a Notice of opportunity to comment was published in every paper of record in Eastern Oregon and Washington. The Forest Service received 19 comment letters and one citizen petition, bearing about 150 signatures. These submissions included nearly 270 discrete comments, reflecting a variety of support for and criticisms of the interim direction.

INFISH. Document Title: Decision Notice and Finding Of No Significant Impact for the Inland Native Fish Strategy, USDA Forest Service, July 28, 1995.

In response to growing concerns over the status of inland native fish communities and their habitats throughout the inland west, the Forest Service, working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, developed an interim conservation strategy referred to as INFISH. The purpose of INFISH is to provide interim direction, similar to PACFISH, that applies to those areas not covered by PACFISH or the Northwest Forest Plan. This interim direction was developed to maintain management options for inland native fish habitat while the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service developed long-term management strategies. Another purpose of the interim direction was to take prudent measures to arrest the degradation, and begin the restoration, of riparian and aquatic ecosystems in watersheds where inland native fish habitat is present.

Initital outreach for the INFISH project was sent to over 5000 people, of which approximately 1700 desired to remain on the mailing list. A scoping period was established from March 14 to April 26, 1995. This was followed by mailing the environmental assessment and draft FONSI in June and several public hearings. Overall, 29 people testified, and 91 written comments were received.

Supplemental information for the Environmental Assessment (EA)

DOCUMENT TITLE: Implementation of Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH)

CONTINUATION OF PACFISH. When the Decision Notice/Decision Record for PACFISH was signed it was the intent of the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service that long-term direction would be provided by the ICBEMP within 18 months, and the effects analysis in the EA was based on this assumption. The Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service designed PACFISH as an interim measure to preserve options until the ICBEMP is put in place. Because the ICBEMP has taken longer than expected to develop, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service have decided to keep the PACFISH interim direction in place for the same extended period.

This scheduling notice does not address in detail the other interim

measures, INFISH and Eastside Screens, because of important differences between these interim strategies and PACFISH. INFISH was implemented for an approximately 18 month period beginning in August 1995. (60 FR 33927, August 4, 1995). Accordingly, the revised schedule for the implementation of the ICBEMP does not extend INFISH appreciably beyond the approximate time-period originally anticipated. Meanwhile, the Decision Notice for the Eastside Screens expressly implemented the interim direction until the Eastside EIS is completed, May 20, 1994 Decision Notice (pg. 4).

In February 1995, the Director of the Bureau of Land Management, and the Chief of the Forest Service jointly approved the PACFISH aquatic conservation strategy which amended specific Forest Service land management plans in portions of California, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington states. This strategy is found in the above titled environmental assessment. This aquatic conservation strategy was applied to those federal lands supporting anadromous salmonids not included under the guidance of the Northwest Forest Plan. As stated in the Decision Notice/ Decision Record, for the Forest Service, the PACFISH forest plan and regional guide amendments remain in place until superseded by further plan amendment or revision which was projected to occur in September, 1996.

The purpose of the interim direction is to maintain management options for anadromous fish habitat while the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service developed long-term management strategies. Another purpose of the interim direction is to take prudent measures to arrest the degradation and begin the restoration of riparian and aquatic ecosystems in watersheds where anadromous fish habitat is present or easily could be reestablished (EA, pp. 6–8).

The responsible officials considered the ability of the selected alternative (alternative 4 of the EA) to meet the stated purpose and needs for the action (EA pp. 6–9); to comply with applicable laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies; and to respond to issues and public comments about the alternative strategies. A critical factor relevant to this decision was the ability of the selected alternative to respond to the issues identified in the EA (pp. 21–22); issues still relevant today.

The PACFISH standards and guidelines (EA Appendix C, Alternative 4) serve to provide adequate environmental safeguards for proposed and ongoing projects and activities that pose an unacceptable risk within riparian habitat conservation areas or that degrade riparian habitat conservation areas. There are no new types of ongoing projects or activities, not already addressed in the PACFISH EA, to consider. With respect to the Forest Service, the selected alternative did not constitute a significant amendment under current planning regulations for the following reasons: (1) Its application is for a limited time; (2) it resulted in only minor modifications to standards and guidelines in existing plans; (3) it did not modify the goals and objectives of existing plans; and (4) it did not alter long-term levels of goods and services projected in existing plans. For the several Bureau of Land Management Districts, Resource Areas or planning areas, the interim PACFISH strategy was found consistent with approved plans and did not require or constitute a plan amendment.

The Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service received a biological opinion, through the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Section 7 consultation process, from the National Marine Fisheries Service dated January 23, 1995, supporting implementation of the PACFISH strategy. The National Marine Fisheries Service, through its PACFISH biological opinion, found that the proposed action was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed Snake River salmon under its jurisdiction nor result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

The interim strategy provides direction to ensure land management actions will not lead to jeopardy of listed anadromous fish stocks, or limit options while long-term management strategies are being developed through geographically specific analyses conducted by the ICBEMP.

With respect to those National Forest System lands, covered by PACFISH in California, PACFISH will remain in place until replaced by long-term strategies on affected watersheds of the Lassen and Los Padres National Forests. As indicated in Appendix 1 of the PACFISH EA, this will be accomplished through (1) Minor adjustments of the Los Padres National Forest Plan/ Riparian Conservation Strategy, and (2) direction for managing anadromous fish-producing watersheds of the Lassen National Forest contained in the California Spotted Owl EIS.

With respect to the Bureau of Land Management's lands covered by PACFISH in California, an analysis was made comparing the interim management goals, standards and guidelines, to the Redding Resource Area's management plan. Bureau of Land Management is actively participating with the State, National Marine Fisheries Service and others in developing a Coastal Salmon Initiative, which will include conservation guidelines and protection measures. It is expected the Initiative will be ready for the National Marine Fisheries Service to use in preparing an ESA Section 4(d) rule in early 1997. The Resource Area's management plan goals meet or exceed those established by PACFISH. In the Carmel Creek watershed of the Hollister Resource Area, management of Bureau of Land Management lands is also consistent with PACFISH. The extremely small portion of public land anadromous salmonid streams in that Resource Area are in very good condition and no management changes were necessary. Public comments on the adequacy of current Bureau of Land Management management and long-term management needs for anadromous fisheries were solicited in two public forums held jointly with the Forest Service in 1995. No comments critical of either Resource Area's management direction were received.

With respect to Bureau of Land Management administered lands in Oregon and Washington, an analysis was made comparing the interim Pacfish management goals, standards and guidelines to the four approved Resource Management Plans for the Pacfish area in the Prineville, Vale and Spokane Districts. These plans included the Prineville Direct's Two Rivers and John Day Resource Management Plans, the Vale District's Baker Resource Management Plan and the Spokane District's Spokane Resource Management Plan. Bureau of Land Management staff in these areas are actively participating with the States of Oregon and Washington as well as the National Marine Fisheries Service whenever any new projects are proposed or existing use permits, leases or agreements are revised in areas with known or potential andromous fish habitat. Individual Bureau of Land Management or non-Bureau of Land Management proposed actions have been modified or deferred to allow review and approval by National Marine Fisheries Service under the ESA. The four Resource Management Plans management goals, objectives and management standards or standard operating procedures meet or exceed those established by Pacfish and/or were not inconsistent with Pacfish so that full implementation over the last 18 months did not require any Resource

Management Plan amendments. In many portions of the Pacfish area there are only very small portions of public lands adjacent to Pacfish streams and they are generally in good condition and no management changes were necessary. Public comments on the adequacy of current Bureau of Land Management management and comments on ongoing project environmental analyses indicate Pacfish and related concerns are being adequately addressed and resolved.

With respect to Bureau of Land Management administered lands in Idaho, an analysis was made comparing interim PACFISH management goals, standards and guidelines to the four approved Management Framework Plans and one Resource Management Plan (Resource Management Plan) in effect for the PACFISH areas in the Challis, Lemhi, and Cottonwood Resource Areas of the Upper Columbia-Salmon Clearwater District Management Framework Plan, Ellis-Pahsemeroi Management Framework Plan and Mackay Management Framework Plan; Lemhi Resource Area: Lemhi Resource Management Plan/EIS; and the Cottonwood Resource Area: Chief Joseph Management Framework Plan. Bureau of Land Management staffs in these areas actively participate with the State of Idaho, as well as the National Marine Fisheries Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service whenever any new actions are proposed or ongoing actions are revised in areas with designated critical salmon habitat. All Bureau of Land Management or applicant-proposed actions are reviewed for PACFISH compliance and either found to be in compliance or modified, mitigated or deferred. All actions carried forward that are not in compliance must be considered may effect for listed salmon and/or their designated critical habitats. These actions are evaluated by a team of Bureau of Land Management, National Marine Fisheries Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, and if appropriate, consulted with National Marine Fisheries Service under section 7 of the ESA. Existing Land Use Plan management goals, objectives and management actions comply with those established by the PACFISH or were consistent with PACFISH over the interim period. Public comments on the adequacy of interim period Bureau of Land Management management and comments on ongoing environmental analysis indicate the PACFISH and related concerns are being adequately addressed and resolved.

Public comments on the adequacy of interim period Bureau of Land Management and comments on ongoing environmental analysis indicate PACFISH and related concerns are being adequately addressed and resolved. Based upon the data the Bureau of Land Management has at this time, the Bureau of Land Management anticipates that it will make a decision to extend PACFISH, and will notify the public of its decision and its implementation strategy.

Analysis Process

The Forest Service has applied the criteria set out in the implementing regulations for the NEPA from the Federal Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 40 CFR 1502.9(c)(1) and the Forest Service Handbook at 1909.15 FSH 18.1 for determining the need to provide additional documentation of environmental impacts pursuant to NEPA. The question here is whether there are new circumstances or information that are significant or, in other words, would cause a substantial difference in the analysis of environmental effects documented in the EA for the PACFISH. Also considered was whether the interim direction is still adequate to meet the identified resource needs. The long-term continuation of PACFISH, or an aquatic conservation strategy which replaces it, is being considered in the ICBEMP.

In the case of PACFISH, this evaluation was initiated to determine if there have been any significant changed circumstances or significant new information over the past 18 months relevant to the estimation of effects described in the EA. This analysis focuses on the premise that PACFISH interim direction is intended to maintain management options in the near future and not preclude implementation of options which may be considered as part of the ICBEMP and its associated EISs while permitting certain management activities to continue.

For the analysis, the Forest Service addressed four questions (listed below), as well as the information stated in the PACFISH EA for the selected alternative (Alternative 4), and by comparing that information to information gathered over the past 18 months from the implementation of the PACFISH interim direction; this information included: (a) Inter-agency (Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Marine Fisheries Service, Fish and Wildlife Service) PACFISH Field Reviews, (Jan. 1996, Forest Service CRB files); (b) Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service Field implementation reports (April 15, 1996, Forest Service CRB files); and (c) Analysis of ICBEMP science team and economic data.

1. Are the circumstances, information, and/or the assumptions upon which the EA is based, still valid and germane? If not, are the changed circumstances, information, and/or the assumptions sufficiently minor as not to warrant a change in the interim programmatic direction in order to maintain options which may be considered as part of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project?

Environmental Assessment. The PACFISH strategy was developed in response to new information which documented broad declines in naturally reproducing anadromous fish, and widespread degradation of the habitat upon which these anadromous fish are dependent.

To protect quality anadromous fish habitats, arrest habitat degradation, and begin restoration of anadromous fish habitat, as well as respond to a wide array of new scientific information on the status of various other anadromous fish stocks and the condition of aquatic and riparian habitat, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service re-evaluated all management projects and activities in anadromous watersheds not covered by the Northwest Forest Plan. Such action was needed to ensure that management actions implemented before completion of the ICBEMP EISs would not have adverse environmental effects that would result in jeopardizing the continued existence of anadromous fish stocks or otherwise limit the range or number of reasonable alternatives evaluated in the geographically-specific environmental analyses. This interim strategy was designed to bridge the time gap between existing land management plans and the adoption of a long-term strategy.

Response. Information obtained, to date, through the ICBEMP science reports verifies that the circumstances, information, and assumptions documented in the PACFISH EA are still valid and germane. The ICBEMP information also supports the need, on a broad-scale, for the continuation of interim direction to address the serious condition of anadromous fish within the Columbia River Basin. While the ICBEMP broad-scale information is not specific enough for analysis at the local level (i.e. site-specific project or watershed level) it does provide a basis for analysis of the interim PACFISH direction. This information (documents in publication) indicates the continuation of the PACFISH interim direction would continue to meet the original purpose and need of protecting critical habitats and maintaining options

during development of a long-term management strategy. In addition, all field units have completed an evaluation of ongoing activities.

Discussions with the ICBEMP Aquatic Science Team affirmed that PACFISH is still a technically sound fish habitat conservation strategy from which to operate until the ICBEMP decision-making process is concluded.

2. Is the methodology and analytical approach used in the EA still reasonable?

The PACFISH interim direction was developed for short-term use at the site-specific project level. Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service personnel have reviewed the methodology and analytical approaches used in the analysis for the PACFISH EA, and have determined that they are still valid and appropriate. These same methodologies and analytical approaches would be used again if needed.

3. Are the environmental effects which actually occurred essentially the same as those identified in the EA? If there have been unanticipated effects, are the unanticipated effects sufficiently minor as to warrant neither reopening the NEPA process nor changes in the interim programmatic direction?

Environmental Assessment. Environmental consequences were evaluated for the physical, biological, and human environments. Analyses of environmental consequences were based on estimates of the effects of predicted changes in federal actions as a result of implementation.The following rationale, summarized from the nine assumptions used by the PACFISH Interdisciplinary Team, described on pages 37–38 of the EA, was used for determining the effects.

—The mitigation measures may result in the delay or modification of projects and activities. New project decisions will be preceded, as appropriate, by site-specific NEPA analysis.

—The affected environment is the present environment. Analyses in the EA considered trends and changes associated primarily with ongoing and proposed timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and recreation uses during the interim period.

—Environmental effects were based solely on the implementation of direction within the geographic scope of PACFISH. Management direction applied only to lands within anadromous watersheds that are administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service.

—The effects of implementing the PACFISH direction were considered only for the interim period. Because recovery processes within riparian and aquatic habitats are gradual, short-term adjustments in management practices would not result in dramatic habitat improvement during the interim period.

—The effect of modifications in management practices were analyzed based on the size, number, and distribution of riparian habitat conservation areas; as well as in the breadth of standards and guidelines, the scope of projects and activities covered, and the degree to which watershed analysis would be conducted.

—Projects and activities within the range of listed anadromous fish, and for which ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service has been completed were considered to be in compliance with any interim direction alternative.

Modifications resulting from PACFISH were predicted to account for reductions in recreation visitor days, timber harvest, and permitted grazing within certain streamside areas. Where grazing and timber harvest have caused impacts, adoption of alternative 4 would provide improved soil stability, additional stream shading, and continuing supplies of large woody debris to affected streams. Where grazing has contributed to unstable stream banks, loss of vegetative cover and shade, and increased sedimentation, the trend of such habitat degradation would be reversed.

Protection measures prescribed for timber, road management, minerals management, recreation, and grazing related activities, as well as other activities, would be applied throughout the area of the proposed action. Where such measures are applied, risks to riparian and aquatic resources would be reduced. Where site-specific analysis or watershed analysis indicate other protection measures are necessary they would still be designed to achieve riparian management objectives.

The potential cumulative effects of the PACFISH interim direction were limited by the nature of the interim direction itself. No ground-disturbing actions were authorized, funded, or carried-out by the PACFISH decision. The interim programmatic nature of PACFISH does not constitute any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. Such commitment of resources can only be made through long-term permanent amendments to land management plans, or through site-specific project decisions. In the programmatic environmental assessment for PACFISH, the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service merely considered the impacts of various interim strategies for protecting anadromous fish habitat. The intended effect of the interim direction was to maintain the environmental status quo while long-term management strategies are being developed.

The standards and guidelines presented in PACFISH were intended to limit or mitigate the effects of human activity on anadromous fish habitat on Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service administered lands. The interim direction is not the sole or final direction for anadromous fish habitat protection for Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service administered lands. Cumulative effects are also being assessed through specific project and activity analysis efforts. At the programmatic level of this interim direction, detailed analysis of specific cumulative effects was not possible. Such analysis would require speculation as to the scope, character, and environmental consequences of future project and activity decisions.

Response. The implementation monitoring summaries from each of the administrative units were received in January of 1996. These summaries identified the following: (1) That approximately 1200 projects were either completed, planned or in the process of being completed; (2) that PACFISH default riparian habitat conservations areas (EA at Appendix C, pp. C–6 and C–7) were applied to over 600 of these projects; (3) that riparian habitat conservations areas were either modified through watershed analysis or site specific analysis on the remaining projects; and (4) that watershed analysis was conducted for less than 10 percent of the projects and effectiveness monitoring was either conducted or planned on approximately 300 projects.

Implementation monitoring to date has not identified management actions that would lead to noncompliance with PACFISH direction. The direct and indirect effects of implementing the PACFISH interim direction have been essentially the same as those described in the PACFISH EA, and therefore, are assumed to continue as previously projected. Projects which could reasonably be deferred or re-designed to avoid or mitigate impacts were treated accordingly.

The programmatic cumulative effects are consistent with, or less than, those estimated in the EA. The cumulative effects of interim PACFISH direction were reviewed and considered in relation to projects, reasonably

foreseeable policies of other agencies, and possible effects of long-term management. The short term nature of PACFISH makes it difficult to determine measurable changes in cumulative effects. However, the cumulative effects of project level implementation of PACFISH standards and guidelines have resulted in benefits to fish habitat, a condition expected to remain with continuation of PACFISH. Activities anticipated during continuation of PACFISH are similar to those which have occurred during implementation and are not expected to have different effects.

The following provides additional analysis based on recent information about environmental consequences.

Watershed Resources. The EA, page 45, states although improvements to watersheds and water resources would be noticeable at a few sites, measurable improvement in habitat condition during the interim period would not likely to substantial because recovery processes are gradual. As discussed above, implementation monitoring of projects shows that there is good compliance with the PACFISH management direction. As stated in the EA, basin-wide effectiveness monitoring has not been conducted for a sufficient time to show marked improvement. Given the long timeframes required for improvement, the projected environmental consequences for the physical environment are not expected to change through the continuation of the PACFISH direction.

Non-Forested Vegetation. The EA projected most effects to be caused by grazing with some localized areas affected by recreation. The EA stated that application of the proposed management direction would improve ecological conditions but for upland areas this might take 5–10 years before it is measurable, although recovery within riparian areas may be faster. Range allotments identified as posing an unacceptable risk have been subjected to PACFISH management direction. Initial implementation monitoring results show that riparian conditions are improving but that it will take more time to show definitive results on a broad scale for PACFISH. The continuation of PACFISH would not change the effects to the range management program from that described in the PACFISH EA.

Forested Vegetation. Forested vegetation changes slowly except when catastrophic fire, insect or disease events cause rapid change. This was discussed on pages 50–51 of the EA. For the preferred alternative, the EA anticipated harvesting would not generally be allowed within the riparian habitat conservation areas except as allowed for in TM–1 standard which provided for salvage after catastrophic events. The EA disclosed that this would result in higher risks for tree mortality but the inherent risk would not change over such a short timeframe.

During the time period since the approval of the PACFISH EA there have been numerous salvage sale projects. While these projects did not require PACFISH standards and guidelines be applied, Forests were directed to apply management prescriptions that would not cause adverse effect on anadromous fish habitat. An interagency review has been conducted, the results of which will be useful for determining effects to the environmental baseline. These projects have been designed and conducted either using the default PACFISH direction or under direction developed with site specific analysis and Section 7 consultation procedures in drainages with listed stocks. As projected, the completed sales did not salvage as much material as might have occurred prior to PACFISH, though the PACFISH interim direction does allow for salvage after appropriate analysis has been completed. The original projection that the inherent risk would not change is still correct and is applicable to the continuation of the PACFISH direction.

Fishery Resources. The EA projected that because alternative 4 would broaden the application of management direction by including new standards and guidelines to all proposed projects and activities, and some ongoing projects and activities within riparian habitat conservation areas or that degrade riparian habitat conservation areas, and because large riparian habitat conservation areas would be established in all key watersheds, increased protection of riparian and aquatic habitat would occur. Although there would be no permanent cessation of activities in riparian habitat conservation areas, some actions would be modified or deferred during the interim period, resulting in a reduction of adverse effects on riparian and aquatic habitats within riparian habitat conservation areas.

The application of the interim management direction has provided the protection anticipated. Effects on fisheries populations and habitat improvement will take a prolonged time of monitoring to show measurable results. This also applies for the continuation of PACFISH.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species/Wildlife Resources. Since the signing of the PACFISH EA, steelhead trout populations in the Snake River Basin and the upper Columbia River Basin have been proposed for federal listing under the ESA (61 FR 41541, August 9, 1996). Steelhead trout populations in the middle Columbia River Basin were not included as proposed species, but will be monitored for possible inclusion. This species of anadromous fish is located throughout the PACFISH area. Steelhead trout were addressed by the EA as one of the anadromous fish PACFISH was designed to benefit. The EA projected that effects on threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and wildlife resources from implementing more constraining standards and guidelines would be minor but mostly positive. Results from the inter-agency field reviews and field implementation reports show this to be true. A similar trend is expected for the continuation of PACFISH.

Social. The EA projected that the social effects of the preferred alternative would be relatively small for small isolated communities (EA, page 60). This has been confirmed by the social analysis developed for the ICBEMP effort. The effects on cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, Indian tribes, and social effects are as predicted by the EA and are projected to be similar for the continuation of PACFISH direction.

Economic. The focus of the economic effects discussion in the EA was to identify the additional or incremental effects that might be expected as a result of interim direction. Because of ESA requirements and the presence of listed anadromous fish stocks, both Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service field units in the Snake River Basin generally were already operating under more stringent management requirements than were called for under current plans. These units had already experienced reductions in many activities and output levels as a result of consultation and other ESA provisions. Estimated effects of implementing alternative 4 were reductions in timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and recreation visitor day use.

In general the economic impacts are more modest than forecasted in 1994. The continuing low prices for timber and beef have resulted in lesser impacts from the PACFISH decision for those industries than stated in the PACFISH EA; the low prices for timber and beef affected the outputs of all forests. For various reasons, timber harvest fell slightly between 1994 and 1995 by an average of 9 percent. The major difference in total impacts is the lack of recreation impacts observed over the past 2 years. The original economic analysis (late 1994 and early 1995)

assumed seasonal or permanent closures of both developed and dispersed sites in areas affected by the PACFISH strategy. Such closures did not occur, although some National Forests closed roads and implicitly limited access. Another difference is that some of the projected range impacts have not occurred. The original analysis assumed that as allotment management plans were completed, there would be a drop in the number of animal unit months. The completion of allotment management plans has been a slow process with few changes to numbers of animal unit months, although there have been changes to season of use and grazing patterns. The costs of various programs have increased for the Forest Service. A sample from the majority of National Forests involved in PACFISH suggest cost increases on the order of 12, 8, and 4 percent for administration of the timber, range, and recreation programs respectively.

The ICBEMP information indicates that the assumptions used for the economic effects determinations in the PACFISH EA are still correct. The estimates for effects for cut and sold timber volumes, and the estimated effects to the livestock grazing program are within those projected in the PACFISH EA. These effects would remain the same under the continuation of PACFISH.

4. Is the range of alternatives for interim direction still reasonable for meeting the purpose and need (i.e., changes in information, circumstances, and or assumptions do not lead to issues that would warrant development of an alternative not already considered in the EA but which would meet the purpose and need)?

Although the range of alternatives in the ICBEMP DEISs are greater and more diverse than the PACFISH EA alternative range, the former documents are intended to consider long-term strategies which could involve major changes in federal land use allocations and management direction. In contrast, the PACFISH EA and associated decisions were intended to consider a more limited range of interim actions that could be readily implemented while preserving future management options. The long-term management strategy would clearly consider actions which would be major federal actions (as defined by the CEQ guidelines for implementing NEPA), while the PACFISH EA provides more modest interim actions designed to preserve options with minimal effects on the other federal land uses and resource allocations during the time needed to complete the ICBEMP decision-making process. The range of PACFISH EA alternatives are still reasonable and appropriate for continuing interim policies, standards, and guidelines.

Endangered Species Act Consultation

On August 29, 1996, the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service re-initiated consultation, under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, with the National Marine Fisheries Service per the terms of the January 23, 1995, Biological Opinion for PACFISH. The Biological Opinion states at page 33, consultation shall be re-initiated in the event that consultation on the geographically-specific EISs in eastern Oregon, Washington, and Idaho is not completed by 18 months from the effective date of the [record of decision] for PACFISH.

Conclusion

The Forest Service reviewed the interagency information from the area covered by PACFISH, and information from field reviews indicating that it is still a technically sound fish habitat conservation strategy from which to operate until the ICBEMP decision-making process is completed. Through this review the Forest Service concluded that: (1) the data and/or assumptions upon which the EA was based are still valid and germane; (2) the methodology and analytical approach used in the EA are still reasonable; (3) the effects experienced are within those identified in the EA, and reasonably foreseeable future effects are consistent with those estimated in the EA, and are not significant; and (4) the range of alternatives in the EA is still reasonable.

The available evidence indicates that the direction provided by PACFISH is sufficient to provide resource protection until long-term direction is in place, that the analysis contained in the EA is still valid, and that the factors leading to a finding of no significant impact are still correct and appropriate. Consequently, the PACFISH interim direction will continue until implementation of the ICBEMP decisions.

NEPA Findings. Under the Forest Service Handbook, 1909.15 at 18.1, the Forest Service may conduct interdisciplinary reviews and consideration of new information in the context of the overall program or project to determine whether or not the new information warrants reopening the NEPA process. The analysis, documented above, fulfills that review and consideration. The analysis indicates there is not significant new information or changed conditions that would warrant reopening the NEPA decision-making process for PACFISH. The range of alternatives, estimation of effects, and the finding of no significant impact are still valid. The science used to develop the PACFISH strategy is still valid.

PACFISH & NFMA Significance. The PACFISH Decision Notice contains a finding that the PACFISH amendments were not NFMA significant amendments (36 CFR 219.(10)(f); Decision Notice, pp 8–11). The Decision Notice reviewed the significance factors and concluded:

Timing: Because PACFISH will be in place only until the current analysis of a longer-term strategy is completed they do not constitute significant amendments of the Regional Guides and forest plans.

Location and Size: The area in the planning unit affected by the interim standards and guidelines is not so large in size as to mandate a significant amendment.

Goals, Objectives, Outputs: PACFISH does not significantly alter the long-term relationships between levels of goods and services projected by the forest plans. Any short term temporary reductions in outputs do not foreclose opportunities to achieve such outputs in later years.

Management Proscriptions: The desired future conditions and long-term levels of goods and services projected in current plans would not be substantially changed by the interim strategy.

Other Factors: Other factors include the ability of the Forest Service to adapt to changing conditions and protect anadromous salmonid species for a short period of time until a longer-term strategy can be analyzed and adopted.

Furthermore, the situation with regard to the NFMA significance of the PACFISH amendments remains largely the same. *First,* the original analysis contemplated that PACFISH would remain in place until the EISs were completed to provide protection for anadromous salmonid species. The only difference is that the interim direction is being continued while the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service complete the EISs for the long-term strategy and consider and respond to public comments on the draft proposals. *Second,* the area potentially impacted remains the same. *Third,* the potential impact of the amendments upon levels of goods and services and desired future conditions projected in the forest plans also remains unchanged. The original analysis contemplated that short term changes from estimated levels of possible outputs of goods and services would not foreclose opportunities to achieve such outputs in later years. This is still true. Likewise, the desired future

conditions projected in the forest plans would not be substantially changed by continuation of PACFISH until the EISs area completed. *Finally,* we note that the certain salmon and other ESA listed species remain imperiled. PACFISH was undertaken to ensure the Bureau of Land and Forest Service would do no harm to the salmon while continuing to manage the national forests for multiple use resources. This objective remains unchanged. Thus, the situation with regard to the NFMA significance remains largely the same as it was at the time of the original analysis and decision.

PACFISH amended Regional Guides and forest plans to provide interim protection for anadromous salmonid species pending the completion of a EISs for longer-term direction. As an interim measure PACFISH will continue to ensure that the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service do not foreclose multiple use management options while the longer-term strategy is being developed. The significance of these measures to sustain multiple use management were thoroughly analyzed in the original PACFISH EA and Decision Notice/Decision Record. The continuation of PACFISH as direction intended to remain in place pending completion of the longer-term strategy does not alter the conclusions reached in the original analysis of NFMA significance.

Dated: September 4, 1996.

Robert W. Williams,

Regional Forester.

Dated: September 5, 1996.

Elaine Y. Zielinski,

State Director.

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Rocky Mountain Region; Environmental Impact Statement for Sheep Flats Diversity Unit Timber Sales, Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, Mesa County, Colorado

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Revison of a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: The responsible official for this environmental impact statement is Mr. Robert Storch, Forest Supervisor of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests, 2250 Highway 50, Delta, Colorado 81416.

SUMMARY: The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement about four (4) proposed timber sales: Valley View, Sheep Flats, Grove Creek, and Leon. These sales are located in the Sheep Flats Diversity Unit on the Grand Mesa National Forest, Collbran Ranger District.

DATES: Publication of Draft EIS: November 1996; Final EIS: August 1997.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to Pam Bode, Team Leader, USDA Forest Service, 216 North Colorado Street, Gunnison, CO, 81230. Contact Pam Bode also for further information. Phone: 970–641–0471. FAX: 970–641–1928.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Forest Supervisor will use this Environmental Impact Statement to decide how to manage the timber resource within the Sheep Flats Diversity Unit. The Forest Service is proposing to harvest four timber sales on this National Forest system land. Even-aged and uneven-aged silvicultural systems are being planned in Engelmann spruce, sub-alpine fir, and aspen stands. These sales are scheduled to be offered within a five to ten year period after this analysis.

Initial scoping of interested parties identified three preliminary issues. These are: (1) Constructing roads and harvesting timber within an area that was identified as the Salt Creek Roadless Area during the 1979 RARE II process, (2) harvesting old growth timber, and (3) cumulative impacts on ecosystems from logging operations in and around the sale areas.

Five alternatives will be studied in this analysis. Alternative 1 is no action. Alternatives 2 and 4 harvest suitable timber but do not enter the Salt Creek Roadless Area. Alternative 2 creates a balance of structural stages and accommodates wildlife travel corridors. Alternative 4 maximizes the amount of wood fiber removed. Alternatives 3 and 5 harvest suitable timber throughout the Diversity Unit, including within the Salt Creek Roadless Area. Alternative 3 creates a balance of structural stages and accommodates wildlife travel corridors. Alternative 5 maximizes the amount of wood fiber removed. The proposed action is Alternative 3.

Alternative	Acres planned for harvest		Volume in board feet	Number of sales
	Total acres	RARE II acres		
1	0	0	0	0
2	707	0	2,456,000	1
3	2,666	1959	11,505,000	4
4	914	0	3,387,000	1
5	3,647	2733	15,630,000	4

This notice is a renotification of the Forest Service's intent to study these timber sales within the Sheep Flats Diversity Unit. A previous notice of intent was published in the Federal Register Volume 57, #31, on 2/14/92. A previous notice of availability of the draft EIS was published in Volume 59, #5, on 1/7/94. This notice provides new dates for completions of the revised draft and the final Environmental Impact Statements. The alternatives that are being studied have changed substantially from the previous document.

Since this is a renotification, news releases have already been issued and a public meeting has already taken place in March, 1992. Field tours to the proposed area have already been conducted with concerned parties. Additional news releases have been issued explaining the new timeline for this analysis. Parties that expressed interest previously have been informed individually by mail that this analysis is continuing. No additional public meetings are planned, however, the Forest Service is willing to consider any party's request for additional field tours or public meetings.

The comment period on the draft environmental impact statement will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the Federal Register.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the