

proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

#### Use of Comments

All comments received in response to this notice, including name and address when provided, will be summarized and included in the request for Office of Management and Budget approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Dated: April 5, 1999.

**Robert Lewis, Jr.,**

*Acting Associate Chief.*

[FR Doc. 99-9044 Filed 4-9-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### Oil and Gas Leasing; Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, White Pine and Nye Counties, Nevada

**AGENCY:** USDA Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

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

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the purposes of leasing National Forest System lands in the White Pine, Grant and Quinn Mountain Ranges (White Pine and Nye Counties, Nevada) for hydrocarbon exploration, development and production. This EIS will be prepared by the Forest Service in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, the Nevada Division of Minerals, and Nevada Division of Wildlife.

**DATES:** Written comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received by May 10, 1999 to ensure timely consideration.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments to: Monica J. Schwalbach, Assistant Forest Supervisor, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, P.O. Box 539, Ely, NV 89301.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** Direct questions about the project and the preparation of the EIS to Jim Winfrey, Project Team Leader, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, P.O. Box 539, Ely, NV 89301. Telephone 775-3031.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Several proponents have requested portions of

the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest be made available under the Bureau of Land Management's Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale. The Forest Service must complete an environmental analysis to determine if the lands are suitable for leasing and to identify the necessary conditions of approval prior to authorizing the BLM to offer these lands.

The proposal would affect approximately 553,135 acres of National Forest System lands. Preliminary internal scoping had identified several issues which will be addressed in the analysis process. The following list of issues is not intended to be all inclusive. Issues identified by the members of the interdisciplinary team are: (1) Threatened, endangered and sensitive species and other species of concern including Bonneville cutthroat trout, mountain plover, sage grouse, bats, bighorn sheep, elk, and mule deer; (2) grazing; (3) surface and groundwater and cumulative effects to watershed; (4) heritage resources; (5) grazing; (6) noxious weeds; (7) roadless areas; (8) recreation opportunities; (9) visual, noise and air quality; (10) economic and social impacts; and (11) safety. These issues, and others identified during the scoping process will be used to develop alternatives to the proposed action. In addition, the No Action alternative will be considered in the analysis.

Public participation is important during the EIS scoping process. As part of the scoping process, the Forest Service is seeking information and comments from Federal, State, County and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed actions. This input will be used in preparation of the draft EIS and final EIS.

Several government agencies will be invited to participate in this project as cooperating or participating agencies. These agencies include, but are not limited to, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, Nevada Division of Wildlife, and Nevada Division of Minerals.

The Forest Service is the lead agency for this project and Monica J. Schwalbach, Assistant Forest Supervisor is the responsible official. She will make the decision to determine which lands are suitable for leasing and any stipulations which should be included in a lease agreement. Applicable laws, Forest Service regulations and the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management

Plan (1986) will be taken into account throughout the analysis.

The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and be available for review in October, 1999. At that time, EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the Draft EIS will be at least 45 days from the date the EPA's Notice of Availability appears 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 environmental review process. First, reviewers of the draft EIS 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. 519, 553 (1978)*. Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement 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 close of the 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 them and respond to them in the final EIS. To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft EIS. Comments may also address the adequacy of the draft EIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated or discussed in the statement. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

**Monica J. Schwalbach,**

*Assistant Forest Supervisor.*

[FR Doc 99-8960 Filed 4-9-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-11-M