

Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 03-110-1]

Saltcedar; Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comments.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has prepared a draft environmental assessment relative to the control of saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.). The draft environmental assessment considers the effects of, and alternatives to, the release of a nonindigenous leaf beetle, *Diorhabda elongata*, into the environment to reduce the severity of saltcedar infestations in 14 western States. We are making the draft environmental assessment available to the public for review and comment.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before January 20, 2004.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by postal mail/commercial delivery or by e-mail. If you use postal mail/commercial delivery, please send four copies of your comment (an original and three copies) to: Docket No. 03-110-1, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3C71, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. Please state that your comment refers to Docket No. 03-110-1. If you use e-mail, address your comment to regulations@aphis.usda.gov. Your comment must be contained in the body of your message; do not send attached files. Please include your name and address in your message and "Docket No. 03-110-1" on the subject line.

You may read any comments that we receive on the environmental

assessment in our reading room. The reading room is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 690-2817 before coming.

APHIS documents published in the **Federal Register**, and related information, including the names of organizations and individuals who have commented on APHIS dockets, are available on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/rad/webrepor.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Robert Richard, Western Region Program Manager, PPQ, APHIS, 2150 Centre Avenue Building B, Fort Collins, CO 80526-8117; (970) 494-7565.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.), also known as tamarisk, is a dense, deciduous shrub or small tree, indigenous to Asia, with the potential to significantly affect native vegetation throughout much of the United States. Saltcedars have long tap roots that allow them to access deep water tables and interfere with natural aquatic systems. The saltcedar is an aggressive colonizer, disrupting native plant communities and degrading native wildlife habitat by replacing native plant species, monopolizing limited water sources, and increasing the frequency, intensity and effect of fires and floods.

A single mature saltcedar may produce hundreds of thousands of seeds between April and October. The seeds are then dispersed by wind and water throughout the growing season, germinating within 24 hours of moistening. Seedlings are tolerant of water, saline soils, and drought and may grow by as much as a foot a month.

Saltcedar was first introduced into the United States from Asia in the early 1800s. The plant has been used for windbreaks, as ornamentals, and for erosion control. By 1850, saltcedar had infested river systems and drainages in the southwest. By 1938, infestations were found from Florida to California and as far north as Idaho. Saltcedar continues to spread rapidly and currently infests water drainages and

areas throughout the United States, including the following western States: Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Nevada, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Utah, and Wyoming.

As a result of rising infestation levels, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has prepared a draft environmental assessment (EA) relative to the environmental release of the nonindigenous saltcedar leaf beetle (*Diorhabda elongata*) into the 14 western States listed above in order to reduce the severity and extent of saltcedar infestation in those areas.

The saltcedar leaf beetle is native to the Mediterranean region and central and middle Asia. All stages of saltcedar leaf beetle larvae feed on saltcedar foliage. As adults, the beetles continue to feed on saltcedar foliage. Saltcedar leaf beetles have been known to completely defoliate large areas of saltcedar. Release of this insect into the environment is expected to produce a gradual reduction in the size of saltcedar plants and in foliage cover and density of saltcedar stands.

APHIS' review and analysis of the proposed action and its alternatives are documented in detail in a draft EA entitled, "Proposed Program for Control of Saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.) in Fourteen States" (November 2003). We are making the draft EA available to the public for review and comment. We will consider all comments that we receive on or before the date listed under the heading **DATES** at the beginning of this notice.

The draft EA may be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/es/ppqdocs.html>. You may request paper copies of the draft EA by calling or writing to the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**. Please refer to the title of the draft EA when requesting copies. The draft EA is also available for review in our reading room (information on the location and hours of the reading room is listed under the heading **ADDRESSES** at the beginning of this notice).

The draft EA has been prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500-1508), (3)

USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 15th day of December 2003.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 03-31311 Filed 12-18-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-34-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Availability of Appealable Decisions

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice—Availability of appealable decisions; legal notice for availability for comment of decisions that may be appealable under 36 CFR part 215.

SUMMARY: Responsible Officials in the Southwestern Region will publish notices of availability for comment and notices of decisions that may be subject to administrative appeal under 36 CFR part 215. These notices will be published in the legal notice section of the newspapers listed in the Supplementary Information section of this notice. As provided in 36 CFR 215.5, 215.6, and 215.7, such notice shall constitute legal evidence that the agency has given timely and constructive notice for comment and notice of decisions that may be subject to administrative appeal. Newspaper publication of notices of decisions is in addition to direct notice to those who have requested notice in writing and to those known to be interested in or affected by a specific decision.

DATES: Use of these newspapers for the purpose of publishing legal notices for comment and decisions that may be subject to appeal under 36 CFR part 215 shall begin December 19, 2003 and continue until further notice.

ADDRESSES: Southwestern Region, ATTN: Regional Appeals Coordinator, 333 Broadway SE, Albuquerque, NM 87102-3498.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christina Gonzalez, 505-842-3219.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Responsible Officials in the Southwestern Region will give legal notice of decisions that may be subject to appeal under 36 CFR part 215 in the following newspapers which are listed by Forest Service administrative unit. Where more than one newspaper is listed for any unit, the first newspaper

listed is the primary newspaper which shall be used to constitute legal evidence that the agency has given timely and constructive notice for comment and for decisions that may be subject to administrative appeal. As provided in 36 CFR 215.15, the time frame for appeal shall be based on the date of publication of a notice for decision in the primary newspaper.

Notice by Regional Forester of Availability for Comment and Decisions affecting New Mexico Forests: "Albuquerque Journal", published daily in Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, New Mexico, for comment and decisions affecting National Forest System Lands in the State of New Mexico and for any decisions of Region-wide impact.

Notice by Regional Forester of Availability for Comment and Decisions affecting Arizona Forests: "The Arizona Republic" published daily in Phoenix, Maricopa County, Arizona, for comment and decisions affecting National Forest System lands in the State of Arizona and for any decisions of Region-wide impact.

Notice by Regional Forester of Availability for Comment and Decisions affecting National Grasslands in New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas: Kiowa National Grassland in Colfax, Harding, Mora and Union Counties, New Mexico: "Union County Leader", published weekly on Wednesday in Clayton, Union County, New Mexico. Rita Blanca National Grassland in Cimarron County, Oklahoma: "Boise City News", published weekly on Wednesday in Boise City, Cimarron County, Oklahoma. Rita Blanca National Grassland in Dallam County, Texas: "The Dalhart Texan", published on Tuesday and Saturday in Dalhart, Dallam County, Texas. Black Kettle National Grassland in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma: "Cheyenne Star", published weekly on Thursday in Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, Oklahoma. Black Kettle National Grassland in Hemphill County, Texas: "The Canadian Record", published weekly on Thursday in Canadian, Hemphill County, Texas. McClellan Creek National Grassland in Gray County, Texas: "The Pampa News", published daily in Pampa, Gray County, Texas.

Arizona National Forests

Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

Notice by Forest Supervisor of Availability for Comment and Decisions: "The White Mountain Independent", published Tuesday and Friday in Show Low and Navajo County, Arizona.

Notice by District Ranger of Availability for Comment and Decisions: Alpine District: "The White Mountain Independent", published Tuesday and Friday in Show Low and Navajo County, Arizona. Black Mesa District: "The White Mountain Independent", published Tuesday and Friday in Show Low and Navajo County, Arizona. Clifton District: "Copper Era", published weekly on Wednesday in Clifton, Greenlee County, Arizona. Lakeside District: "The White Mountain Independent", published Tuesday and Friday in Show Low and Navajo County, Arizona. Springerville District: "The White Mountain Independent", published Tuesday and Friday in Show Low and Navajo County, Arizona.

Coconino National Forest

Notice by Forest Supervisor of Availability for Comment and Decisions: "Arizona Daily Sun", published daily, in Flagstaff, Coconino County, Arizona.

Notice by District Ranger of Availability for Comment and Decisions: Mogollon District: "Arizona Daily Sun", published daily, in Flagstaff, Coconino County, Arizona. Peaks District: "Arizona Daily Sun", published daily in Flagstaff, Coconino County, Arizona. Red Rock District: "Red Rock News", published Wednesday and Friday in Sedona, Coconino County, Arizona.

Coronado National Forest

Notice by Forest Supervisor of Availability for Comment and Decisions: "The Arizona Daily Star", published daily, in Tucson, Pima County, Arizona.

Notice by District Ranger of Availability for Comment and Decisions: Douglas District: "Daily Dispatch", published Tuesday-Saturday, and Sunday in Douglas, Cochise County, Arizona. Nogales District: "Nogales International", published on Tuesday and Friday in Nogales, Santa Cruz County, Arizona. Sierra Vista District: "Sierra Vista Herald", published Sunday-Friday, in Sierra Vista, Cochise County, Arizona. Safford District: "Eastern Arizona Courier", published weekly on Wednesday, in Safford, Graham County, Arizona. Santa Catalina District: "The Arizona Daily Star", published daily, in Tucson, Pima County, Arizona.

Kaibab National Forest

Notice by Forest Supervisor of Availability for Comment and Decisions: "Arizona Daily Sun",