



File Code: 1950-1

Date: July 9, 2004

Greetings:

The Monongahela National Forest is conducting a 30-day comment period on the Desert Branch Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with 36 CFR 215. A copy of the EA is available on our website at www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf, or you may call or write my office at the letterhead address. This letter is to inform you of the proposal and to invite you to participate by providing any comments or information that you have concerning the proposal.

An EA for this project was previously prepared in May of 2002. Since then, a new alternative, Alternative 6, has been added, and some changes in the discussion of effects have been made, partly as a result of comments and concerns from public input.

The Desert Branch Project Area consists of about 3,000 acres of National Forest System lands and is located just east of Richwood, West Virginia, in Nicholas and Greenbrier Counties. The area is bounded by WV Route 39/55 and North Fork of Cherry River on the north, the Richwood corporate boundary on the west, and the National Forest boundary on the south. The action alternatives involve timber harvest using conventional and helicopter skidding, new road construction, and creation of wildlife openings. A comparison of alternatives for the Desert Branch Area is attached from pages 41-42 of the EA. It provides an overview of the alternatives and some of their effects. A location map is also enclosed.

Activities in the action alternatives are in compliance with the Forest Plan and help to achieve management objectives and desired conditions described within the plan. Alternative 5 is the No action alternative. The purpose of the project is to move toward the Desired Future Condition (DFC) for the Desert Branch area as determined by the Forest Plan, with respect to the following conditions:

1. Age class distribution,
2. Mature habitat,
3. Opening habitat,
4. Hard mast production and maintenance of a continuous mast supply,
5. Use of normal forest management activities to achieve vegetative diversity and provide a mix of forest products,
6. Use of the best timber harvest operation method for slopes over 40%,
7. Ensuring that management conforms to standards that enhance and maintain a visually sensitive landscape,
8. Providing access needed for vegetation management activities.

Clyde Thompson, Forest Supervisor of the Monongahela National Forest, is the Responsible Official for this project. He is considering selecting Alternative 6 for implementation, but will be considering your comments before making a final decision.



This comment period ends 30 days following the date of publication of legal notice in the official newspaper of record, the *Inter-Mountain*. **Only those who submit timely and substantive comments during this comment period will be accepted as appellants**, so we ask that comments be as specific as possible in order to be considered. **There will be no further public comment period.** To be eligible for appeal, each individual or representative from an organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request. The decision will be mailed to those who have commented on this project, and to others who request the decision.

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following:

1. Name and address.
2. Title of the proposed action.
3. Specific substantive comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that I should consider in reaching a decision.
4. Signature, or other verification of identity upon request.

Please mail comments to the responsible official, Clyde N. Thompson, Forest Supervisor, Monongahela National Forest, at 200 Sycamore Street, Elkins, West Virginia, 26241. Send electronic comments to r9_monongahela_nepa@fs.fed.us, or faxed comments to (304) 637-0582. Hand deliver comments between the office hours of 8:00 am to 4:45 pm, Monday through Friday, at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Elkins, West Virginia. Acceptable formats for electronic comments are: text or HTML e-mail, Adobe® Portable Document Format (PDF) and Microsoft Office formats.

You may obtain additional information from Jane Bard, the team leader for this project, at (304) 846-2695 during the same office hours. We appreciate your interest in Monongahela National Forest management.

Sincerely,

/s/ Douglas F. Oliver

DOUGLAS F. OLIVER
District Ranger