



File Code: 1950-3

Date: February 11, 2009

Greetings,

The Northern Hills Ranger District of the Black Hills National Forest has completed analysis of proposed activities in the Telegraph project area, which is located in the northern Black Hills approximately 6 miles south of Lead, South Dakota, and immediately north of Rochford, South Dakota. The Telegraph project area encompasses 56,172 acres of National Forest System (NFS) land and 7,436 acres of interspersed private land for a total of 63,608 acres. Landmarks include Swede Gulch, Buskala Creek, North Fork of Rapid Creek, Crooks Tower, Custer Peak, Custer Crossing and Roubaix Lake. A copy of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and appendices is enclosed for your review.

The purpose of and need for action in the Telegraph project area is to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and insect events, enhance structural and vegetative diversity, and to contribute to local and regional economies by providing commercial timber harvest opportunities. The DEIS describes the effects of not taking any action (Alternative A) along with the effects of three action alternatives: a modified version of the proposed action (Alternative B) that was presented for scoping in March 2008 and two additional action alternatives (Alternatives C and D) that were developed with the aid of public comments. All three action alternatives would manage forest health in the project area through a combination of prescribed fire, pre-commercial thinning, and commercial timber harvest. Alternative C was developed to be responsive to significant issues raised by the public during the scoping period regarding the potential effects of the project on scenery, habitat for the American marten, opportunities for non-motorized and more primitive recreation experiences, the retention of forested stands in structural stage 5, and vegetative diversity within the project area. Alternative D was developed to be responsive to significant issues regarding the potential effects of the project on habitat for the American marten, scenery, the ability of the proposed action to limit the spread of existing mountain pine beetle infestations and the effect of the proposed action on opportunities for non-motorized and more primitive recreation experiences. After consideration of public comments on the DEIS, I will make the final decision on which course of action to implement.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides for a 45-day public comment period for a DEIS. Comments on the Telegraph DEIS must be in writing and postmarked or emailed no later than 45 days after the Notice of Availability is published in the Federal Register, which is expected to occur on February 20, 2009. Comments on the DEIS should be specific and address the adequacy of the document and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3). The Final EIS (FEIS) for this project is subject to the appeal process pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Only those who provide comment on the DEIS may participate in the appeal process.



I invite your comments on this project. Please submit comments and questions to:

Rhonda O’Byrne, District Ranger
Northern Hills Ranger District
2014 North Main Street
Spearfish, SD 57783

Telephone: (605) 642-4622
Fax: (605) 642-4156

You may also submit comments via electronic mail to: comments-rocky-mountain-black-hills-northern-hills@fs.fed.us; please indicate “Telegraph Draft EIS” in the subject line.

If you have any questions or need additional information please contact myself or Chris Stores at the Northern Hills Ranger District office at the above phone number or address. Thank you for your interest in management of the Black Hills National Forest.

Sincerely,

RHONDA O'BYRNE
District Ranger

Enclosure: Telegraph Draft Environmental Impact Statement