

Forest Service to wait for bill on timber sales

PORTLAND (AP) — The U.S. Forest Service won't start preparing timber for sale under the new spotted owl compromise until a signed bill is in hand, a spokeswoman said Monday.

"We are not doing anything until we have the bill," said Sherry Wagner, spokeswoman for the Forest Service's Northwest regional headquarters. "Things have changed a lot, so we don't know if they'll change again."

However, U.S. Bureau of Land Management timber planners expected to get to work Tuesday, as soon as they receive a copy of the deal worked out last week between environmentalists and the timber industry.

"The minute we get that language, we are going to sit down and analyze what needs to be done," said BLM spokesman Chuck Hoyt.

Wagner said she didn't know when the Forest Service would have final details to work with, but one date she had heard was Oct. 15.

"We have been over 100 versions of this amendment," Wagner said. "We are just in the position now where we've given input to congressional staff. When they are through with their process, we'll start moving on ours."

"We've been asked by the chief (of the Forest Service)

not to talk about specifics on any of this till we have a final bill in hand just because things could change. We don't want to influence the political process."

On Friday, congressional conferees announced they had reached agreement on a plan to preserve enough virgin forest as habitat for the northern spotted owl while still allowing enough logging to sustain the Northwest's timber industry.

Efforts to make the deal go back to June, when Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., called together representatives of government, environmentalists and the timber industry to try to find a short-term compromise that would get valuable timber out from under court injunctions imposed in spotted owl lawsuits.

Hoyt said 750 million board feet of that already was sold in fiscal 1989 and the remaining 1.15 billion board feet would have to pass review from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is charged with preserving critical habitat for the spotted owl.

"We are optimistic we can put up the full 1 billion 150 million this fiscal year," Hoyt said. "Anybody who thinks there's going to be a lot of timber on the market immediately, I wouldn't anticipate that."

Critic questions Hanford decision

RICHLAND, Wash. (AP) — The U.S. Department of Energy will not conduct an environmental impact statement on the conversion of a closed Hanford nuclear reactor into a test site for a space reactor program, officials told The Associated Press on Monday.

That decision was attacked by a nuclear energy critic who contended it showed the agency was sticking to past environmental practices.

"It calls into question (Energy Secretary James) Watkins' rhetoric about changing the culture of DOE in this whole history of reactor problems ...," said Dan Hirsch, president of the 2,000-member Los Angeles-based Committee to Bridge the Gap, which opposes nuclear space probes.

Hirsch said the decision means the public will have little chance to review and comment on the testing for the SP-100 space reactor program.

The proposed 2.5 megawatt uranium space reactor is designed to provide electrical power for military and civilian space missions. That would likely include some power for the Star Wars missile defense system, although the federal government says no specific mission for the reactor has been identified yet.

Critics of space reactors have complained that accidents during launch or operations could spew radioactivity into the atmosphere.

The federal decision on no EIS was revealed Saturday during a Congressional hearing in Richland on the proposed production of plutonium-238, a space power source, Hirsch said.

A spokesman for the Energy Department in Washington, D.C., said the agency conducted a study earlier this year and determined there would be no significant environmental impact from the ground testing of the space reactor.

Because of that, the agency issued a Finding of No Significant Impact and decided an environmental impact statement was not required, said spokesman Dan Butler.

Although that decision was printed in the Federal Register last Wednesday, a public announcement was still being drafted, Butler said in a telephone interview.

"We're putting out a press release later this

week," Butler said.

Butler also said the public had 45 days to make comments on the proposed reactor test site earlier this year, after DOE filed an intent to perform an environmental assessment.

He said 24 people commented, and also that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services determined there were adequate protections for human health.

The SP-100 is to be built by General Electric in California and tested in a building that will be modified on the 560-square mile Hanford nuclear reservation in South Central Washington.

The containment dome of a decommissioned plutonium test reactor will be converted so that it can replicate space conditions for the SP-100, said Tom Bauman, a DOE spokesman in Richland.

After the testing the reactor and related hardware will be buried on the Hanford site, according to the Federal Register.

The testing program is expected to provide only about 100 jobs and only operate for about two years at the site, according to the Energy Department.

Watkins has announced he intends to reform department practices for what he called DOE's past failure to protect the environment and public health from nuclear weapons production.

Hirsch contends those reforms should include adherence to the National Environmental Policy Act, which he said would require a full environmental impact statement for modifying the building and performing the tests.

But the Energy Department, in the Federal Register, said it determined that ground-testing a small prototype of the space reactor "was not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment."

"Therefore, neither public scoping meetings nor an EIS is required," the agency said.

But when a specific SP-100 mission is proposed, the environmental impacts of the proposed activity would have to be evaluated by NASA or the Defense Department as part of the launch approval process, the department said.

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Love, J

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ΔZ

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