

“(c) RIGHT TO APPEAL.—Not later than 45 days after the date of issuance of a decision of the Forest Service concerning actions referred to in subsection (a), a person who was involved in the public comment process under subsection (b) through submission of written or oral comments or by otherwise notifying the Forest Service of their interest in the proposed action may file an appeal.

“(d) DISPOSITION OF AN APPEAL.—

“(1) INFORMAL DISPOSITION.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subparagraph (B), a designated employee of the Forest Service shall offer to meet with each individual who files an appeal in accordance with subsection (c) and attempt to dispose of the appeal.

“(B) TIME AND LOCATION OF THE MEETING.—Each meeting in accordance with subparagraph (A) shall take place—

“(i) not later than 15 days after the closing date for filing an appeal; and

“(ii) at a location designated by the Chief of the Forest Service that is in the vicinity of the lands affected by the decision.

“(2) FORMAL REVIEW.—If the appeal is not disposed of in accordance with paragraph (1), an appeals review officer designated by the Chief of the Forest Service shall review the appeal and recommend in writing, to the official responsible for deciding the appeal, the appropriate disposition of the appeal. The official responsible for deciding the appeal shall then decide the appeal. The appeals review officer shall be a line officer at least at the level of the agency official who made the initial decision on the project or activity that is under appeal, who has not participated in the initial decision and will not be responsible for implementation of the initial decision after the appeal is decided.

“(3) TIME FOR DISPOSITION.—Disposition of appeals under this subsection shall be completed not later than 30 days after the closing date for filing of an appeal, provided that the Forest Service may extend the closing date by an additional 15 days.

“(4) If the Secretary fails to decide the appeal within the 45-day period, the decision on which the appeal is based shall be deemed to be a final agency action for the purpose of chapter 7 of title 5, United States Code.

“(e) STAY.—Unless the Chief of the Forest Service determines that an emergency situation exists with respect to a decision of the Forest Service, implementation of the decision shall be stayed during the period beginning on the date of the decision—

“(1) for 45 days, if an appeal is not filed, or

“(2) for an additional 15 days after the date of the disposition of an appeal under this section, if the agency action is deemed final under subsection (d)(4).”

§ 1613. Promulgation of regulations

The Secretary of Agriculture shall prescribe such regulations as he determines necessary and desirable to carry out the provisions of this subchapter.

(Pub. L. 93-378, §15, as added Pub. L. 94-588, §11, Oct. 22, 1976, 90 Stat. 2958.)

TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS

For transfer of certain enforcement functions of Secretary or other official in Department of Agriculture under this subchapter to Federal Inspector, Office of Federal Inspector for Alaska Natural Gas Transportation System, and subsequent transfer to Secretary of Energy, then to Federal Coordinator for Alaska Natural Gas Transportation Projects, see note set out under section 1601 of this title.

§ 1614. Severability

If any provision of this subchapter or the application thereof to any person or circumstances

is held invalid, the validity of the remainder of this subchapter and of the application of such provision to other persons and circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

(Pub. L. 93-378, §16, as added Pub. L. 94-588, §11, Oct. 22, 1976, 90 Stat. 2958.)

SUBCHAPTER II—RESEARCH

§ 1641. Findings and purpose

(a) Findings

Congress finds the following:

(1) Forests and rangeland, and the resources of forests and rangeland, are of strategic economic and ecological importance to the United States, and the Federal Government has an important and substantial role in ensuring the continued health, productivity, and sustainability of the forests and rangeland of the United States.

(2) Over 75 percent of the productive commercial forest land in the United States is privately owned, with some 60 percent owned by small nonindustrial private owners. These 10,000,000 nonindustrial private owners are critical to providing both commodity and non-commodity values to the citizens of the United States.

(3) The National Forest System manages only 17 percent of the commercial timberland of the United States, with over half of the standing softwoods inventory located on that land. Dramatic changes in Federal agency policy during the early 1990's have significantly curtailed the management of this vast timber resource, causing abrupt shifts in the supply of timber from public to private ownership. As a result of these shifts in supply, some 60 percent of total wood production in the United States is now coming from private forest land in the southern United States.

(4) At the same time that pressures are building for the removal of even more land from commercial production, the Federal Government is significantly reducing its commitment to productivity-related research regarding forests and rangeland, which is critically needed by the private sector for the sustained management of remaining available timber and forage resources for the benefit of all species.

(5) Uncertainty over the availability of the United States timber supply, increasing regulatory burdens, and the lack of Federal Government support for research is causing domestic wood and paper producers to move outside the United States to find reliable sources of wood supplies, which in turn results in a worsening of the United States trade balance, the loss of employment and infrastructure investments, and an increased risk of infestations of exotic pests and diseases from imported wood products.

(6) Wood and paper producers in the United States are being challenged not only by shifts in Federal Government policy, but also by international competition from tropical countries where growth rates of trees far exceed those in the United States. Wood production per acre will need to quadruple from 1996 lev-