Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management Environmental Assessment

EA # OR-105-07-04

Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management Decision Document

Bureau of Land Management
South River Field Office, Roseburg District Office

Decision:

It is my decision to authorize the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project, completing implementation of Alternative Two of the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (pp. 5-14).

Nine units totaling 205 acres will be treated. Units 1, 2 and 3 identified in the EA as 29-8-31A, 30-8-5B and 30-8-5A are in the General Forest Management Area and Connectivity/Diversity Block land use allocations. Units 4 through 9 identified as 30-8-9A and B, 30-8-15A, 30-8-27A and B, and 30-8-33A respectively, are in the Late-Successional Reserves land use allocation.

An additional two acres will be cut for road rights-of-way. The rights-of-way are principally located within the boundaries of the commercial thinning and density management units.

The Pass the Buck project will yield an estimated 1,997 thousand board feet of timber. Thinning of 79 acres in the General Forest Management Area and Connectivity/Diversity Block land use allocations will generate an estimated 679 thousand board feet chargeable to the Roseburg District annual allowable sale quantity. The remaining 1,318 thousand board feet derived from density management of 128 acres in Riparian Reserves and Late-Successional Reserves is not chargeable against the annual allowable sale quantity.

Access will be primarily provided by existing roads. These would be supplemented by the following: construction at the operator's option, of a 555-foot temporary spur in Unit 1; renovation and a 203-foot extension of a non-system road in Unit 6; construction of a 1,062-foot temporary spur in Unit 8, and construction of a 555-foot permanent road (30-8-5.3) in Unit 3. In addition, 7,026 feet of road will be renovated, consisting of: the first 1,000 feet of the Unit 6 spur; 4,576 feet of Road 29-8-31.2; and 1,450 feet of Road 30-8-34.0. The optional and temporary spurs will be decommissioned, as will the renovated portion of Road No. 30-8-34.0. Renovation of portions of Road 29-8-32.1 will include the installation of two additional cross-drain culverts.

Ground-based harvest will be with harvester/forwarder equipment operating on pre-designated trails, using existing skid trails to the greatest degree practical. Operations on these areas will be seasonally restricted to the dry season, typically between mid-May and mid-October, but may be extended under a provisional waiver if autumn weather conditions remain dry.

Cable-yarding equipment will be capable of maintaining a minimum of one-end log suspension to reduce soil compaction and displacement, and have a minimum of 100 feet of lateral-yarding capability to minimize the number of corridors and landings required. Where access is provided by unsurfaced roads not suited to all-weather use, cable yarding operations will also be restricted to the dry season.

Felling and yarding of timber, other than for clearing road rights-of-way, is seasonally restricted from April 15 to July 15 during the bark slip period.

Rationale for the Decision:

The Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA analyzed two alternatives in detail, Alternative One, the alternative of No Action (EA, p. 5), and Alternative Two, The Proposed Action (EA, pp. 5-14). This EA (pp. 14-16) also considered two additional alternatives not analyzed in detail, as one "Helicopter Yarding vs. Building or Reconstructing Roads" was not considered economically reasonable and viable, and the second "Reservation of the Largest Trees in Riparian Reserves and LSRs to Provide Down Wood and Snags" was essentially already addressed by the Proposed Action.

Alternative Two, as described in the EA will achieve the objectives for commercial thinning in the Matrix land use allocations, and density management in Riparian reserves and Late-Successional Reserves enumerated in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (pp. 3-4), whereas the alternative of No Action will not.

Survey and Manage

On July 25, 2007, the *Record of Decision to Remove the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines from Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plans Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* was signed by the Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior.

This decision amended resource management plans for western Oregon and eliminated the provisions of the Survey and Manage program set forth in the *Record of Decision for Amendments* (ROD) *to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl.* Consequently, for the aforementioned reasons the decision to eliminate Survey and Manage is effective on this project.

Public Comments

Comments on the completed EA were received from four organizations. These comments did not provide any new information or identify any relevant issues the BLM should have considered in the analysis. Some comments did not pertain to the project being analyzed.

A selection of comments on the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA was addressed in the Deep Six Density Management decision on February 25th, 2008 and the Burma Triangle Commercial Thinning decision on May 23rd, 2008. These may be found at http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/roseburg/plans/files/deepsixdr.pdf and http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/roseburg/plans/files/BurmaTriangleDR.pdf, respectively.

Port-Orford-cedar and Phytopthera lateralis

No Port-Orford-cedar is documented in any of the commercial thinning and density management units or along any of the designated haul roads. Although no mitigation is indicated, measures to reduce risk of introduction of Port-Orford-cedar root disease into the project area will be implemented. These will include: equipment washing; restricting road construction and renovation to the dry season; restricting hauling on unsurfaced roads to the dry season; and decommissioning and blocking unsurfaced roads upon completion of commercial thinning and density management operations.

Wildlife

As illustrated in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (Figure B-1, Appendix B), project units in Sections 9, 15, 27 and 33 T. 29 S., R. 8 W., W.M. are overlapped by the Bear Naked, Boulder Creek and Wildcat Creek **northern spotted owl** home ranges. None of the units are within three quarters of a mile of the activity centers of the home ranges, so no disruption to known owl sites is expected.

As described in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 57), no effect t from noise disruption is expected, as thinning operations will occur outside of disruption threshold distances for known spotted owl sites or activity centers, or be seasonally restricted from March 1st to June 30th if within the disruption threshold of unsurveyed suitable spotted owl habitat. Portions of Units 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 that are within 65 yards of unsurveyed suitable nesting, roosting and foraging habitat, the threshold for disruption, will be subject to these seasonal restrictions. These restrictions may be waived as early as June 1 if surveys indicate that spotted owls are not present, not nesting, or failed in nesting. This will ensure that noise disruption will not cause spotted owls to abandon nests or fledge prematurely.

Density management is not expected to negatively affect individual spotted owls or reduce the ability of the affected home ranges to support spotted owls and would benefit the species in the long term, as described in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 58).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with a not likely to adversely affect determination pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Ref. # 1-15-05-I-0511).

With the exception of Unit 1, the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project is located entirely with spotted owl Critical Habitat Unit OR-62. As discussed in the EA (p. 57), effects to spotted owl Critical Habitat were analyzed through consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This analysis determined that habitat availability and connectivity in CHU OR-62 after the proposed commercial thinning and density management would continue to provide for the survival and recovery of spotted owls.

Suitable nesting habitat for the **marbled murrelet** is adjacent to Units 2 through 7 and Unit 9 of the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project, but it is not present within any of the units. Consequently, there will be no direct effect to murrelets through modification of suitable nesting habitat.

The Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project area is located in Marbled Murrelet Management Zone 2. As described in the EA (p. 25), pursuant to consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a seasonal restriction corridor was extended into Zone 2 along several major rivers and streams on the Roseburg District. Within the restriction corridor, operations within 100 yards of unsurveyed suitable murrelet habitat are subject to seasonal restriction from April 1st to August 5th, and Daily Operational Restrictions from August 6th to September 15th to avoid disruption during the nesting and rearing period.

Unit 1 is located within the restriction corridor, but there is no suitable habitat in proximity to the unit, and no seasonal restrictions or Daily Operating restrictions are required. Units 2 and 8 are located wholly outside of outside of the restriction corridor and are not subject to seasonal restriction. Unit 2 boundaries were modified so that the unit does not come within the 100 yard disruption threshold, and no suitable habitat is present within 100 yards of Unit 8. Consequently, no Daily Operating Restrictions are required. Suitable habitat is located within 100 yards of the west boundary of Unit 9, and a portion of the unit will be subject to Daily Operating Restrictions.

Units 4, 5, 6, and 7 are located within the restriction corridor. Portions of Units 4 and 5 are within 100 yards of suitable habitat and will be subject to both seasonal restriction and Daily Operating Restrictions. All of Units 6 and 7 are subject to both restrictions.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with a not likely to adversely affect determination pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Ref. # 1-15-05-I-0511).

As described in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 27) four Bureau Sensitive mollusk species are possible occupants of the watershed. These are the **Chace sideband snail** (*Monadenia chaceana*), **green sideband snail** (*Monadenia fidelis beryllica*), **Oregon shoulderband snail** (*Helminthoglypta hertlieni*), and **spotted taildropper** (*Prophasaon vannatae pardalis*).

Evaluations determined that rock-on-rock and talus habitat for the Oregon shoulderband and Chace sideband snails was only present in Unit 5. Habitat for green sideband snails and spotted taildroppers is present in all of the units. Protocol surveys were conducted, as indicated by habitat availability. All surveys were negative for these mollusk species.

Botany

The Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project units were surveyed for Special Status vascular plant, lichen and bryophyte species identified in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 36 and Appendix C). The results of these surveys were negative. Consequently, no effects to any Special Status vascular plants, lichens or bryophytes are expected.

As described in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 37), there are no known Special Status fungi species in the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project area that will be affected. As discussed in the EA, surveys for fungi are not considered practical, so the presence of Bureau Sensitive fungi is unknown. If present in the commercial thinning and density management units, loss of sites could result as a consequence of the removal of substrate and modification of microclimate.

Aquatic Habitat, Fish, and Essential Fish Habitat

As discussed in the EA (p. 31), a waterfall barrier approximately 0.8 miles downstream of the confluence of Twelvemile Creek with the Middle Fork Coquille River blocks passage by coho salmon. This point is in excess of five miles downstream from the nearest Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management unit.

As described in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (pp. 62-63), the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project is not expected to have any effects on stream substrate and sediment. "No harvest" buffers at least 20 feet in width have been established on all streams. Equipment operations are prohibited within these buffers so that soils are not displaced or compacted. Non-compacted forest soils in the Pacific Northwest have very high infiltration capacities and are not effective in transporting sediment by rain splash or sheet erosion. Any potential sediment resulting from thinning operations will be intercepted by the vegetated "no-harvest" buffers and precipitate out rather than reach stream channels. These buffers will provide root strength sufficient to protect bank stability and prevent abnormal bank erosion that can contribute additional sediment to streams where it could become embedded in streambed gravels. No effects from sediment associated with road construction, renovation, use and decommissioning are expected either.

It is acknowledged in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 63) that thinning will remove trees within a half site-potential tree height of streams which could result in a short-term reduction in available wood. This smaller diameter wood does not persist for long due to higher decay rates, however, and is more easily flushed from the system than large pieces. Current down wood will be reserved to provide for the short term, while density management will accelerate growth of large diameter trees to provide a long-term source of large wood for in-stream habitat. The availability of pool habitat will be unaffected as no large wood will be removed from streams.

As described in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 64), access to spawning and rearing habitat will be unaffected because road construction will be located on or near ridge tops, and will not involve construction or replacement of crossings that may act as barriers to fish passage.

As discussed in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 653), direct effects to fish species from the harvest and hauling of timber could result from deposition of additional fine sediment and a temporary increase in turbidity. Density management is not expected to result in fine sediment reaching streams, however, because "no-harvest" buffers will filter out sediment from run-off. The effects of sediment generated by road related activities are expected to be so small as to not be measurable at the project scale.

For the aforementioned reasons it is not anticipated that the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project will have any adverse effect on Essential Fish Habitat.

Water Quality

While approximately 75 percent of the acres to be treated by the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project are in the Transient Snow Zone, no measurable change in stream flows is expected. This is because, as discussed in the EA (p.68), Post-treatment, average crown closure would exceed 30 percent and would, therefore, not be considered likely to have the potential to alter rates of snow capture or snow melt, or have the potential to increase peak flow risk.

The risk of new road construction influencing flows is also low. The 555 feet of new, permanent road is located outside of Riparian Reserves and will be disconnected from the drainage network so that it has no potential for affecting stream flows.

Effects on sediment are addressed with respect to both thinning operations, and timber hauling. As discussed in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (p. 70), "no harvest" buffers will prevent disturbance to stream channels and stream banks, and intercept surface run-off so that any sediment transported by overland flow will settle out before it reaches active waterways.

As described above, there will be no new road construction with connection to the existing drainage network. Since road segments must be connected directly to stream channels in order to deliver sediment-laden water, these roads will not affect stream sediment. This eliminates potential effects on stream flow as water discharged onto forested slopes will infiltrate into the soil rather than run off.

To reduce the potential for sediment delivery from road surfaces along the haul route, ditch lines will be left vegetated where possible to filter sediment from road runoff, and water bars or drain dips will be installed where indicated to further route water off road surfaces and onto the forest floor.

Variable width "no-harvest buffers" will conserve the vegetation that provides primary shade for stream channels. Consequently, stream shading will not be affected by density management and it is unlikely that stream temperatures will be affected in localized reaches, or cumulatively at the watershed scale.

Aquatic Conservation Strategy

Riparian Reserves have been designated on all perennial and intermittent streams in those portions of the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project allocated to the Matrix. Comparable management areas have been established on streams in the Late-Successional Reserves. Applicable management direction is being implemented. This includes: avoiding location of new roads and landings in riparian areas; minimizing disruption of natural hydrologic flow paths, including diversion of stream flow and interception of surface and subsurface flow; minimizing sediment delivery from roads; and maintaining fish passage at all road crossings.

The Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project is not located in a **Key Watershed**, so no additional management direction applies.

As addressed in the Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA (pp. 1, 18, 19, and Appendix D) recommendations and information from **Watershed Analysis** were considered and incorporated into the effects analysis. Additional information from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Aquatic Habitat Inventory surveys was used, in conjunction with site-specific evaluations, in describing aquatic conditions.

As stated in the EA (pp. 3-4), some of the primary objectives of this project are diversifying the species and structural composition and accelerating the growth of the retained trees in Riparian Reserves, and protecting and enhancing conditions of late-successional forest ecosystems in LSRs 259 and 261, which serve as habitat for late-successional and old-growth forest related species. Consequently, the project is considered a **Watershed Restoration** project, the only ACS component that is action-based, whereas the other objectives are location or process-based.

In consideration of these facts, it is my conclusion that the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project is consistent with the intent and direction for the Aquatic Conservation Strategy set forth in the 1994 *Record of Decision for Amendments* (ROD) *to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl*, and the 1995 Roseburg District *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan.*

Cultural/Historical Resources

Pedestrian surveys were conducted consistent with Oregon BLM/SHPO Cultural Resource Protocol. No cultural resources were identified and the Pass the Buck Commercial Thinning and Density Management project will have no effect on cultural and historical resources.

Noxious Weeds

All logging equipment, excluding log trucks and crew transport, will be pressure washed or steam cleaned prior to mobilization in and out of the project area to minimize the risk of introducing soil from outside the project area that may be contaminated with noxious weed seed or other propagative materials. Any equipment removed during the life of the contract must be cleaned before being returned to the project area.

Monitoring:

Monitoring of the effects of the proposed action, if implemented, would be done in accordance with provisions contained in the ROD/RMP, Appendix I (p. 84, 190, 193, & 195-199), and would focus on the following resources: Riparian Reserves, Matrix, Late-Successional Reserves, Water and Soils; Wildlife Habitat; Fish Habitat; and Special Status Species Habitat.

Protest Procedures:

As outlined in 43 CFR § 5003 – Administrative Remedies at § 5003.3 (a), protests may be filed within 15 days of the publication date of the timber sale notice. Publication of such notice on August 19, 2008, in *The News-Review*, Roseburg, Oregon, constitutes the decision date from which such protests may be filed. Protests shall be filed with the authorized officer and contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision.

43 CFR 5003.3 subsection (b) states that: "Protests shall be filed with the authorized officer and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision." This precludes the acceptance of electronic mail or facsimile protests. Only written and signed hard copies of protests that are delivered to the Roseburg District Office will be accepted.

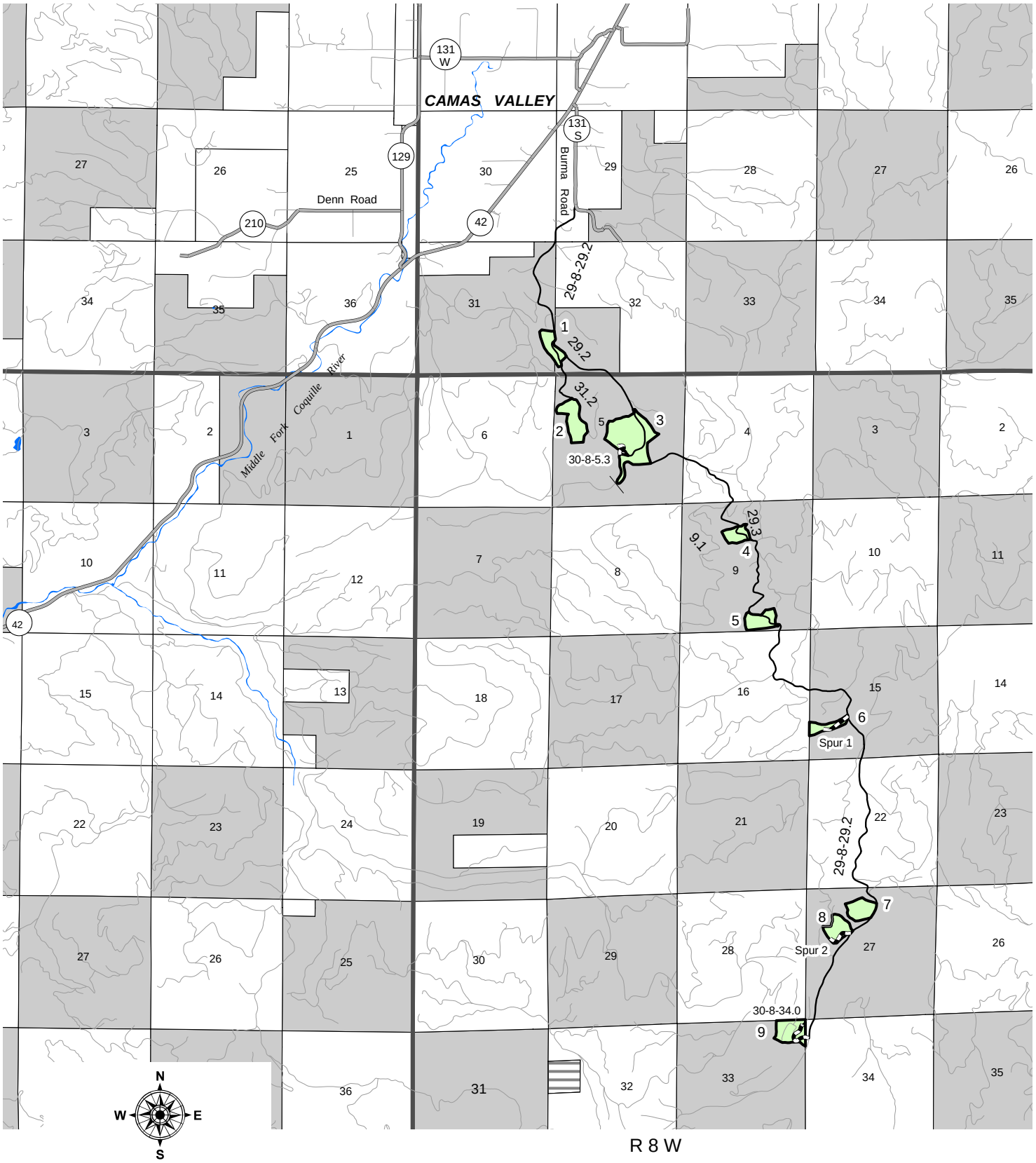
As set forth in 43 CFR 5003.3 subsection (c), protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the timber sale notice are not timely filed and shall not be considered.

Ralph Thomas
Field Manager
South River Field Office

8/18/08
Date

PASS THE BUCK

Commercial Thinning / Density Management



T29, 30S, R8W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR

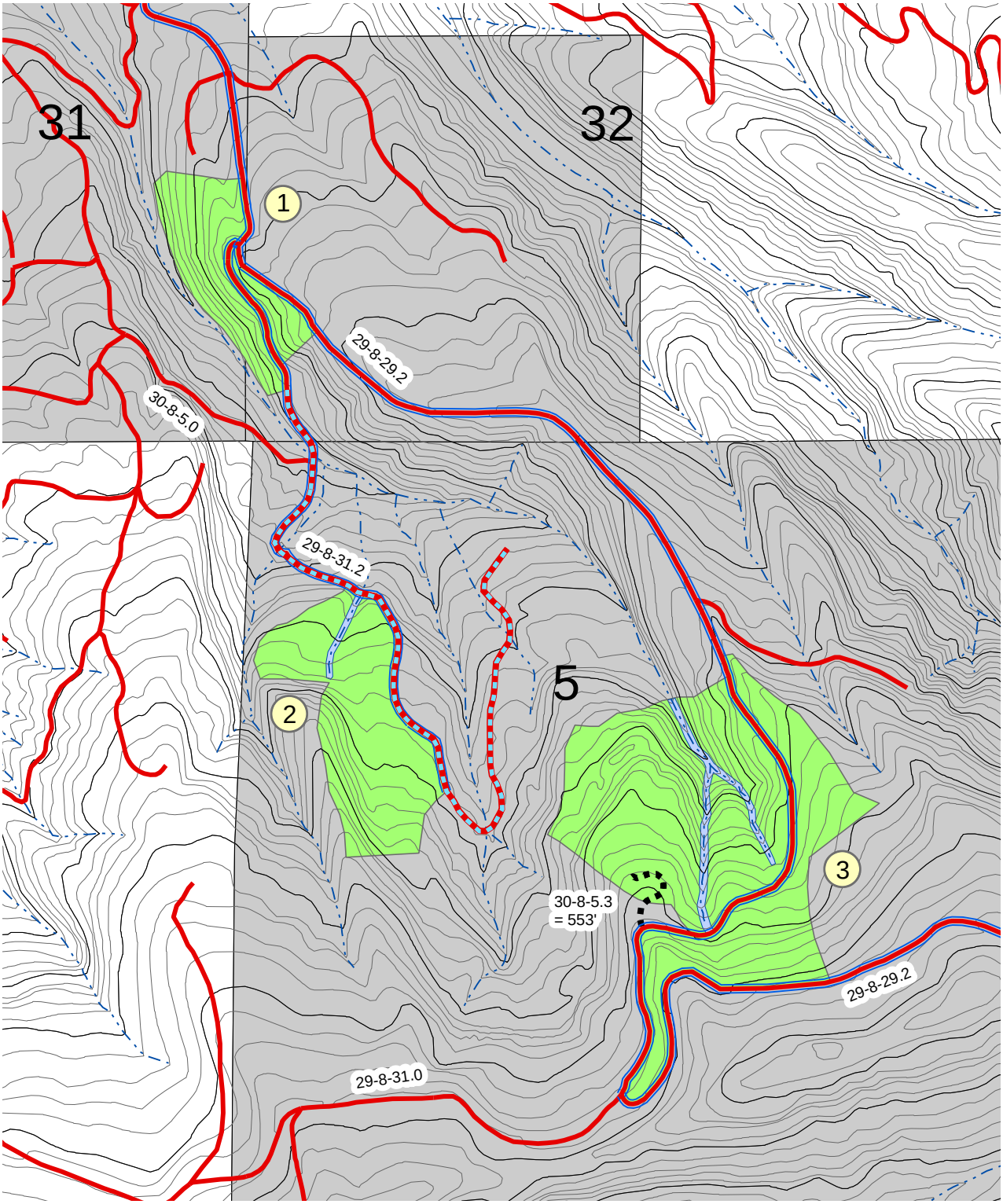
0 1 Miles

- Paved Highway
- Haul/Access Route with Segments
- Existing Road
- Construct or Renovate Road
- Thinning Area
- BLM (O&C) Land
- Non-BLM Land

6-24-2008

PASS THE BUCK

Commercial Thinning / Density Management



N
W E
S

0 1,000 Feet

Existing Road
Existing Road (Dry Season Only)
Haul Route
Construct and Rock
Streams
100' Contour
20' Contour
No Cut Area
Light Thinning Area
BLM (O&C Land)
Non-BLM Land

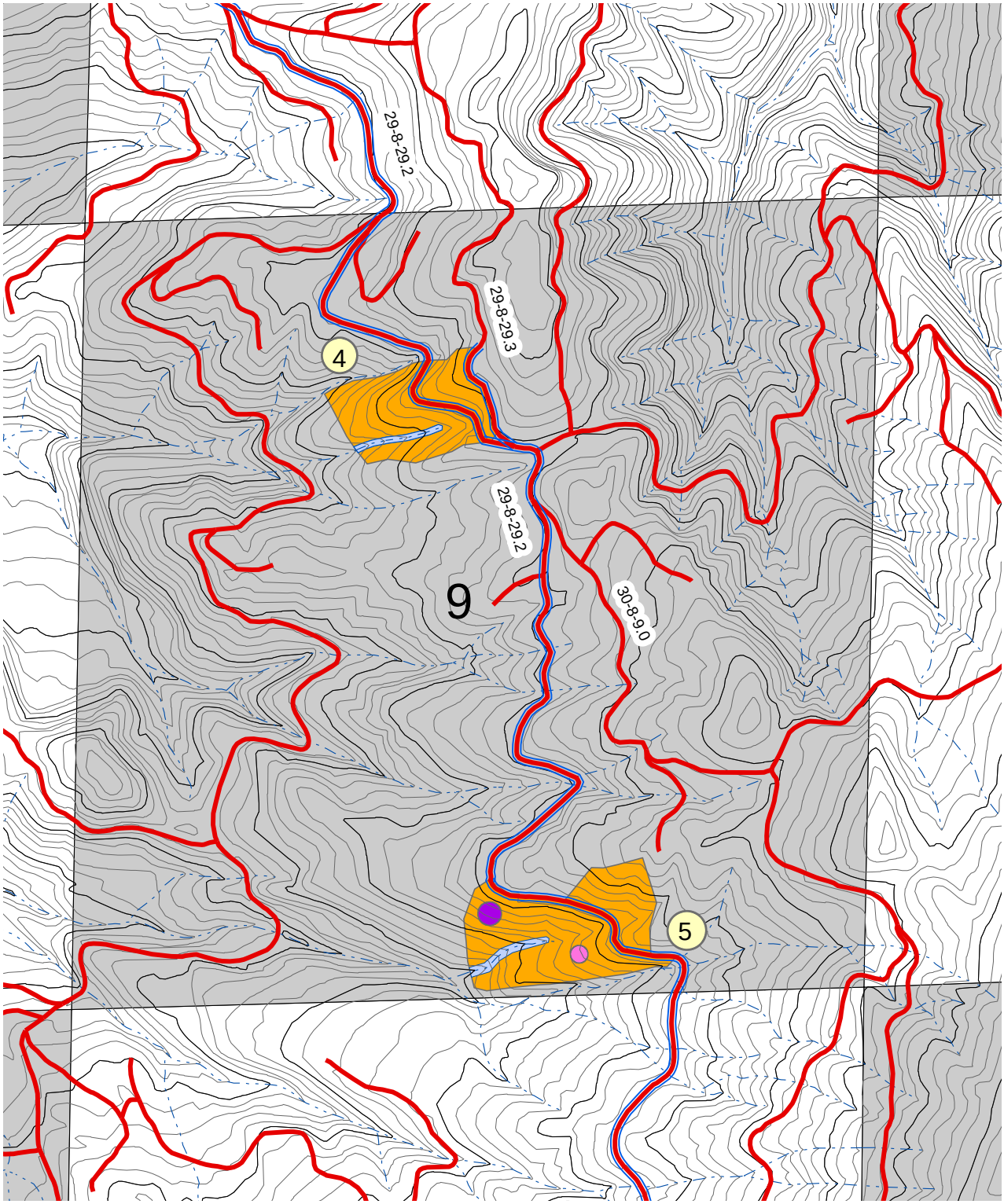
T29,30S, R8W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR.

6-18-2008

PASS THE BUCK

Commercial Thinning / Density Management



N
W E
S

0 1,000 Feet

Existing Road
Haul Route
Streams
100' Contours
20' Contours
BLM (O&C Land)
Non-BLM Land
Moderate Thinning Area
No Cut Area

Openings

0.25 ac.
0.5 ac.

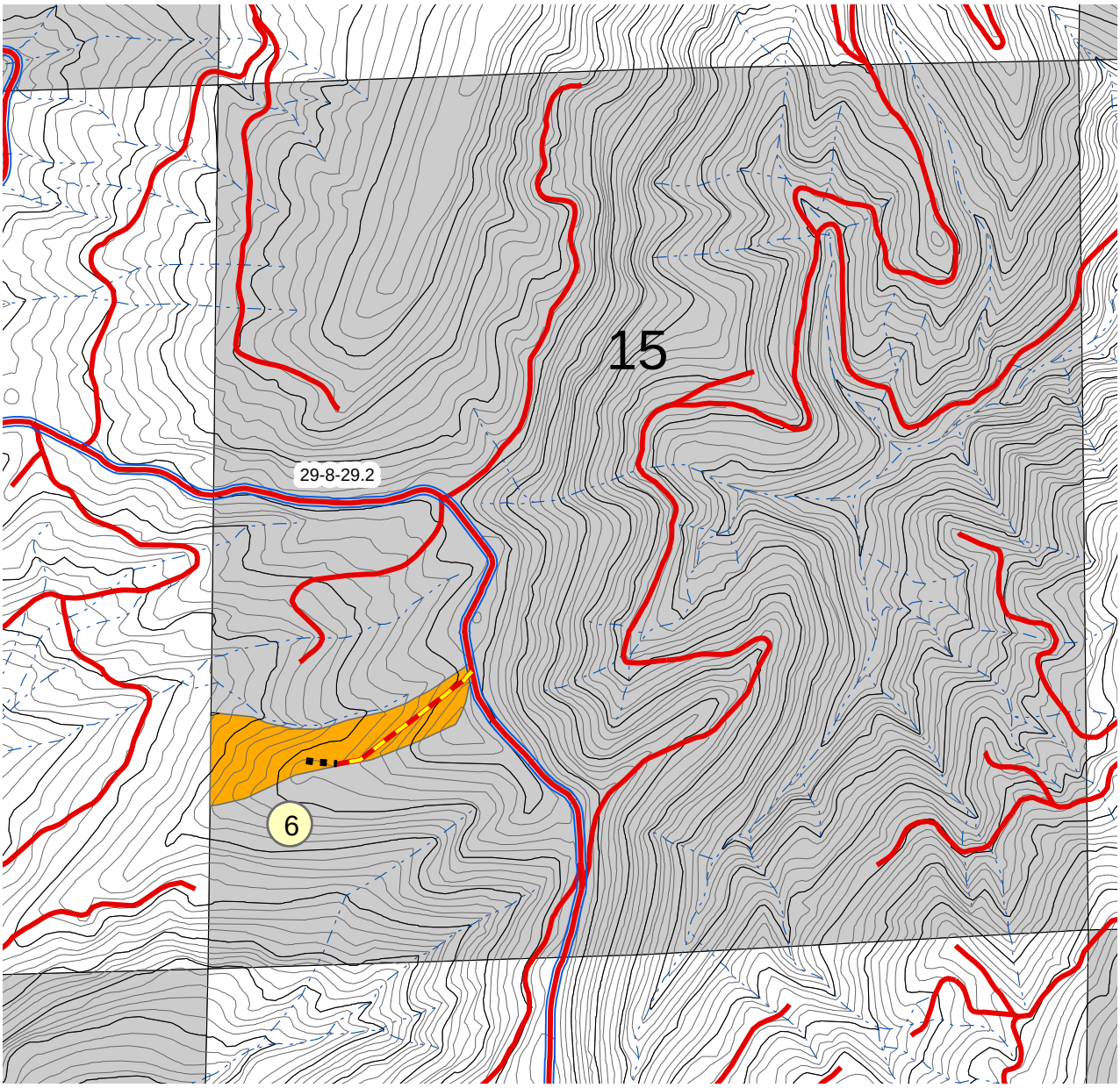
T30S, R8W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR.

6-24-2008

PASS THE BUCK

Commercial Thinning / Density Management



0 1,000 Feet

N
W E
S

T30S, R8W

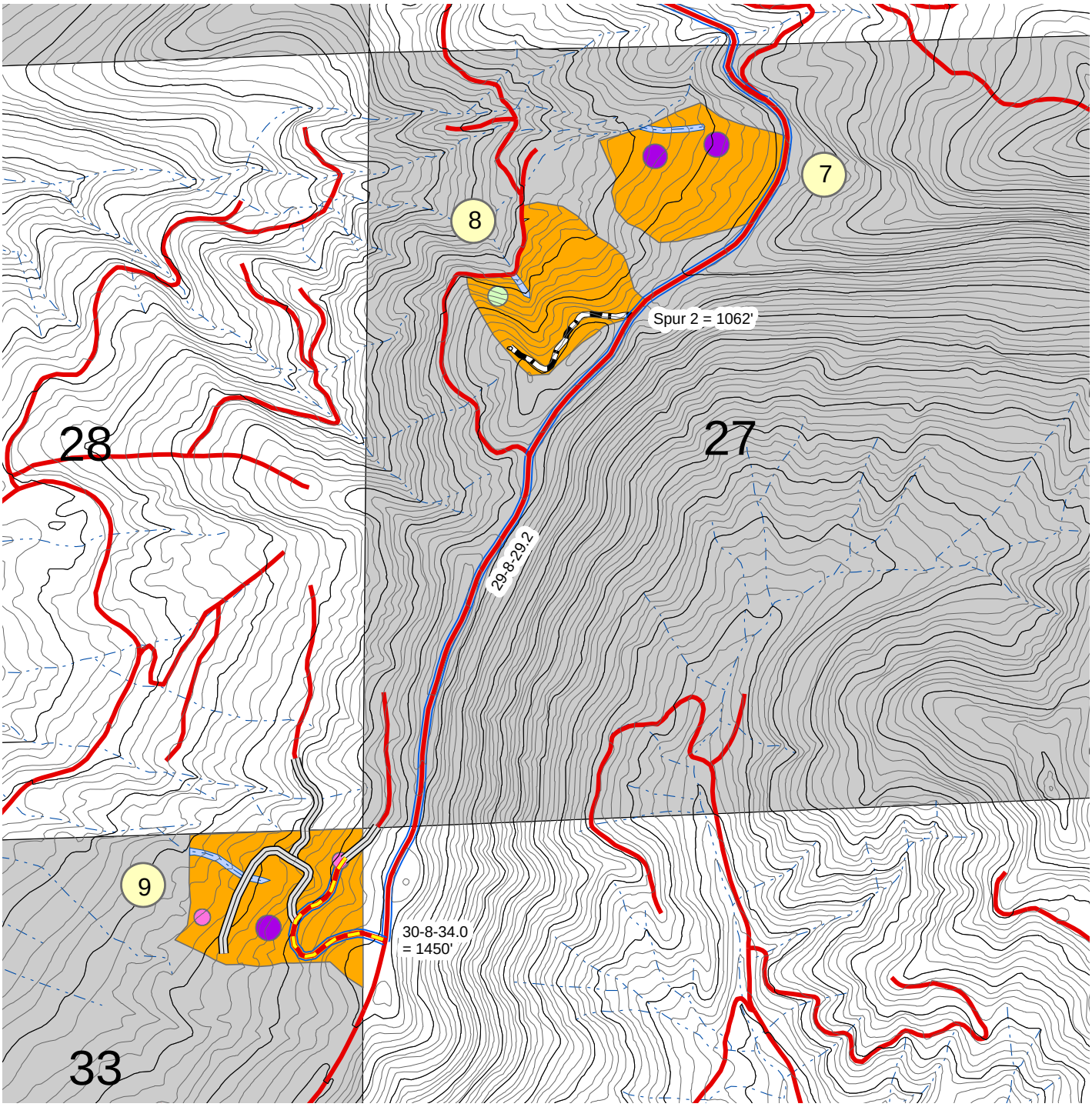
Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR.

- Existing Road
- Haul Route
- Construct and Decommission Dirt Spur
- Renovate and Decommission Dirt Spur
- Stream
- 100' Contours
- 20' Contours
- Moderate Thinning Area
- BLM (O&C Land)
- Non-BLM Land

6-24-2008

PASS THE BUCK

Commercial Thinning / Density Management



N
W E
S

0 1,000 Feet

T30S, R8W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR.

- Existing Road
- Haul Route
- Renovate and Decommission
- Construct and Decommission Dirt Spur
- Undrivable Road
- 100 ft. Contours
- 20 ft. Contours
- Streams
- No Cut Area
- Moderate Thinning Area
- BLM (O&C Land)
- Non-BLM Land

Openings

- 0.25 ac.
- 0.33 ac.
- 0.5 ac.

6-24-2008