

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BURNS DISTRICT OFFICE

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL

CX Number: DOI-BLM-OR-B050-2013-0002-CX **Date:** 10/16/2012
File Code (Project/Serial Number):
Preparer: Travis Miller, Range Management Specialist **Applicant:** BLM
Title of Proposed Action: Slope Fire Emergency Stabilization Aerial Seeding

Description of Proposed Action and Project Design Elements (if applicable): The Slope Fire (Fire #G2L5) was a fire ignited by lightning on July 17, 2012 in the Burns District on the north end of the Steens Mountain (Vicinity Map – Slope Aerial Seeding). Juniper, shrubs, and native perennial grasses coupled with high temperatures, low humidity, and steep topography fueled a swift-moving, moderate to high intensity wildfire. The fire burned approximately 810 acres; with approximately 540 acres within the Stone House Wilderness Study Area (WSA) BLM lands and 270 acres of private lands burned (Map – Slope Aerial Seeding). The fire was contained on July 23, 2012. This plan will address the Burns BLM administered lands within the fire perimeter (540 acres). This fire was also within the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA), the Kiger Mustang Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), sage-grouse Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH)/Core Habitat, and the Burnt Flat Allotment #5604.

The Slope Fire burned across low sagebrush (*Artemisia arbuscula*), mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata ssp. vaseyana*), and juniper encroached plant communities with understories composed of various species of perennial grasses and forbs. Topography over the burned area is a steep mountainous slope starting at approximately 5000 feet in elevation and ending at 6000 feet in elevation. The ecological site is described as either a North Slopes (12-16 PZ) or Shallow North (12-16 PZ). The topography is characterized with steep 20% to 60% slopes that resulted in moderate to high fire intensity. The Slope Fire has been classified as "low susceptibility" to fire damage indicating that the soil within the burn has features that are at low risk for damage to occur. However, this fire occurred on steep terrain with a 20 – 60% slope, and 100% juniper kill with all needles and small branches consumed in both phase I and phase II juniper stands. This left a lot of white ash on the ground, which could have resulted in high mortality of native perennial grasses. There is a concern that natural recovery will not occur with these indicators and that accelerated soil erosion is probable. Therefore, soils within the burn site could be classified as "moderately susceptible" for damage to occur after the fire. The susceptibility to fire damage ratings represents the relative risk of creating a water repellent layer, volatilization of essential soil nutrients, destruction of soil biological activity, and vulnerability to water and wind erosion prior to reestablishing adequate watershed cover on the burned site.

The BLM proposes to aerial seed 500 acres in the area with Idaho fescue and Sherman big bluegrass, which are both natives (Map – Slope Aerial Seeding). The fire consumed 100% of the sagebrush, tree foliage, and tree litter mats in this area. The fire's intensity will have decreased the survival rate of perennial native grasses. Aerial seeding is proposed (versus other seeding methods) because topography prevents ground access for equipment such as drills, and it is against WSA policy to use equipment that could reduce the natural appearance of the landscape such as visible rows from drill seeding. The seeding rate selected includes: Idaho fescue 5 lbs./ac and Sherman big bluegrass 2 lbs./ac. The species were chosen to match the ecological site, prevent short-term soil loss, and compete with invasive annual grasses.

Legal Description (attach Location Map): See Attached maps

B. Conformance with Land Use Plan (LUP) (name):

Date Approved/Amended: The proposed action is conformance with the CMPA RMP, August 2005, and Three Rivers RMP, September 1992. Although they are not specifically provided for they are clearly consistent with the following RMP decisions:

Three Rivers RMP:

Soil Management 1.2: "Rehabilitate burned areas where erosion hazard is high and/or natural vegetation potential is low."

Vegetation 1: "Maintain, restore or enhance the diversity of plant communities and plant species in abundances and distributions, which prevent the loss of specific native plant community types or indigenous plant species within the RA."

Vegetation 1.6: "...prevent the invasion of noxious weeds into areas presently free of such weeds and to improve the ecological status of sites which have been invaded by weeds...."

CMPA RMP:

Rangelands: Goal #1- Maintain, restore or improve the integrity of desirable vegetation communities including perennial, native and desirable introduced plant species. Provide for their continued existence and normal function in nutrient, water and energy cycles. Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4, Page 30.

Noxious Weeds: Goal – Control the introduction and proliferation of noxious weeds and reduce the extent and density of established populations to acceptable levels. Objectives 1,2 and 3., Page 31.

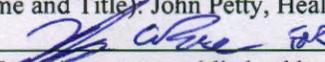
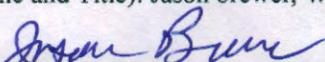
Wildland Fire Management: Goal 2 – Restore and maintain the integrity of ecosystems consistent with appropriate fire regimes and land uses; Objective 2. Assess burned areas for appropriate biological and physical rehabilitation activities.

Fish and Wildlife: Goal – Provide diverse, structured, resilient, and connected habitat on a landscape level to support viable and sustainable populations of wildlife....; Objective 1. Maintain, restore, or improve habitat.

BLM Categorical Exclusion Reference (516 DM, Chapter 11): I. Emergency Stabilization

DOI Categorical Exclusion Reference (516 DM 2, Appendix 1):

Screening for Exceptions: The following extraordinary circumstances (516 DM 2, Appendix 2) may apply to individual actions within the categorical exceptions. The indicated specialist recommends the proposed action does *not*:

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES DOCUMENTATION	
2.1	Have significant impacts on public health or safety.
Specialist (Print Name and Title): John Petty, Health and Safety Specialist	
Signature and Date:  10/25/2012	
Rationale: No significant impact on public health or safety.	
2.2	Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); flood plains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.
<u>Migratory Birds</u>	
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Jason Brewer, Wildlife Specialist	
Signature and Date:  10/25/2012	
Rationale: There would be no effects to migratory birds from this action since most migratory birds that use this area for breeding, nesting and fledging will be gone when the seeding is completed. Any individuals remaining in the area may be displaced from or avoid the area during the seeding process; however, effects would be temporary and not last much longer than the period required to complete the seeding. Birds would likely return to the area once project activity ceases or shortly (few hours) thereafter. Over the longer term (few years), migratory birds may benefit from the active management proposed because native vegetation should	

recover more quickly than if left to recover under natural conditions (not seeding).

Historic and Cultural Resources

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Scott Thomas, District Archaeologist

Signature and Date: *Scott Thomas* 10/29/12

Rationale: No cultural or historic resources would be affected by this proposed project.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern/Research Natural Areas

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Caryn Meinicke, NRS-Botany

Signature and Date: *Caryn Meinicke* 10.26.12

Rationale: There are no botanical ACEC/RNAs within the proposed project area. The Kiger Mustang ACEC is in the proposed seeding area. However, it will not disrupt long term wild horse distribution in the seeding area.

Water Resources/Flood Plains

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Lisa Grant or Lindsay Davies, Fisheries Biologist

Signature and Date: *Lisa Grant* 10-25-12

Rationale: Water Resources/Flood Plains within the proposed project area would not be affected.

Soils, Biological Soil Crust, Prime Farmlands

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Caryn Meinicke, NRS-Botany

Signature and Date: *Caryn Meinicke* 10.26.12

Rationale: Impacts to the soils and BSCs will be negligible. The long term benefits resulting from reseeding will offset any short term soil loss and BSC disturbance. There are no prime farmlands within the proposed project area.

Recreation/ Visual Resources

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Eric Haakenson, Recreation Specialist

Signature and Date: *Eric Haakenson* 10-29-12

Rationale: Visual Resource: The VRM Class for this project area is VRM 1 and the intention is to preserve the existing character of the landscape and since the proposed project is an aerial seeding with a native seed mix the VRM 1 Class would be met.

There would be no effects to the recreation resource due to the proposed action.

Wilderness/Wild and Scenic River Resources

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Tom Wilcox, Wilderness Specialist

Signature and Date: *Tom Wilcox* 10.29.2012

Rationale: There is no wilderness, WSR or Lands with Wilderness Characteristics within the proposed project area. The project is within the Upper Stonehouse WSA, however since the proposed action is an aerial seeding with native seed there would be no effects to the wilderness characteristics to the WSA.

2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2) (E)].

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Rhonda Karges, Environmental Specialist

Signature and Date: *David C. Swisher (Acting)* 10-29-12

Rationale: There are no known highly controversial environmental effects or unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources. The BLM routinely seeds areas burned by wildfire to reduce soil erosion and invasion by annual grasses such as cheatgrass. Other wildfire rehabilitation Environment Assessments have shown no significant environmental effects.

2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Rhonda Karges, Environmental Specialist

Signature and Date: *David C. Swisher (Acting)* 10-29-12

Rationale: There are no known highly uncertain or potentially significant environmental effects or unique or unknown environmental risks associated with implementation. The BLM routinely seeds areas burned by wildfire to reduce soil erosion and invasion by annual grasses such as cheatgrass. Other wildfire rehabilitation Environment Assessments have shown no significant environmental effects.

2.5	Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Rhonda Karges, Environmental Specialist	
Signature and Date: <i>David C. Swisher (acting) 10-29-12</i>	
Rationale: Implementation would not establish precedence for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental risks. The BLM routinely seeds areas burned by wildfire to reduce soil erosion and invasion by annual grasses such as cheatgrass. Other wildfire rehabilitation Environment Assessments have shown no significant environmental effects.	
2.6	Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Rhonda Karges, Environmental Specialist	
Signature and Date: <i>David C. Swisher (acting) 10-29-12</i>	
Rationale: Implementation would not have any known direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant effects. The BLM routinely seeds areas burned by wildfire to reduce soil erosion and invasion by annual grasses such as cheatgrass. Other wildfire rehabilitation Environment Assessments have shown no significant environmental effects.	
2.7	Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Scott Thomas, District Archaeologist	
Signature and Date: <i>Scott Thomas 10/29/12</i>	
Rationale: No National Register eligible or listed historic properties would be affected by this project.	
2.8	Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.
<u>Endangered or Threatened Species-Fauna</u>	
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Jason Brewer, Wildlife Biologist	
Signature and Date: <i>Jason Brewer 10/25/12</i>	
Rationale: - There are no known federally listed Endangered or Threatened species, species proposed to be listed, or designated Critical Habitat in this project area. Therefore there would be no effects to TEPS species or any critical habitat.	
<u>Endangered or Threatened Species-Aquatic</u>	
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Lisa Grant or Lindsay Davies, Fisheries Biologist	
Signature and Date: <i>Lisa Grant 10-25-12</i>	
Rationale: There are no Aquatic Threatened or Endangered or special status species or critical habitat in the project area.	
<u>Endangered or Threatened Species-Flora</u>	
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Caryn Meinicke, NRS-Botany	
Signature and Date: <i>Caryn Meinicke 10-26-12</i>	
Rationale: There are no documented T&E or special status species or critical habitat within the project area.	
2.9	Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Rhonda Karges, Environmental Specialist	
Signature and Date: <i>David C. Swisher (acting) 10-29-12</i>	
Rationale: Implementation would not violate any known law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.	
2.10	Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).
Specialist (Print Name and Title): Rhonda Karges, Environmental Specialist	
Signature and Date: <i>David C. Swisher (acting) 10-29-12</i>	

Rationale: Implementation would not have a disproportionately high or adverse effect on low income or minority populations as such populations do not exist within the project area.

2.11 Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Scott Thomas, District Archaeologist

Signature and Date: *Scott Thomas 10-29-12*

Rationale: Access to and integrity of Indian sacred sites would not be affected by this project.

2.12 Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or nonnative invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Lesley Richman, Weed Specialist

Signature and Date: *Lesley Richman 10/25/12*

Rationale: Noxious weeds are known to near this area. Treatments are on-going. The area burned in the fire will be monitored for noxious weeds for at least 2 years. Any weeds found will be treated using the most appropriate methods.

Additional review (As determined by the Authorized Officer):

RMP conformance and CX review confirmation:

Specialist (Print Name and Title): Rhonda Karges, Environmental Specialist

Signature: *David C. Swick (acting)* Date: *10-29-12*

Management Determination: Based upon review of this proposal, I have determined the Proposed Action is in conformance with the LUP, qualifies as a categorical exclusion and does not require further NEPA analysis.

Authorized Officer (Print Name and Title):

Richard Ray
Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

10/29/12
Date

David C. Swick (acting)
Andrews Resource Area Field Manager

10-29-12
Date

Authority

Authority for this decision is found under 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4190.1 (a), "...when BLM determines that vegetation, soil, or other resources on the public lands are ... at immediate risk of erosion or other damage due to wildlife, BLM may make a rangeland wildfire management decision effective immediately or on a date established in the decision. The effective date is date of authorized officer's signature. Wildfire management includes but is not limited to: ... (2) Projects to stabilize and rehabilitate lands affected by wildfire."

Appeal Procedures

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and Form 1842-1. If an appeal is filed, your notice of appeal should be received by the Burns District Office, 28910 Highway 20 West, Hines, Oregon 97738, within 30 days of receipt of the decision but no later than December 1, 2011. The appellant has the burden of showing the decision appealed is in error.

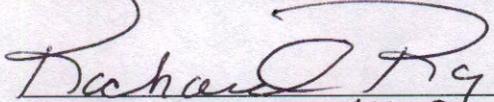
A copy of the appeal, statement of reasons, and all other supporting documents should also be sent to the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Northwest Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 805 SW Broadway, Portland, Oregon 97205. If the notice of appeal did not include a statement of reasons for the appeal, it must be sent to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, 801 North Quincy Street, Arlington, Virginia 22203. It is suggested appeals be sent certified mail, return receipt requested.

Request for Stay

Should you wish to file a motion for stay pending the outcome of an appeal of this decision, you must show sufficient justification based on the following standards under 43 CFR 4.21:

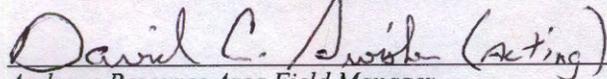
- The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
- The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
- The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted.
- Whether or not the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the motion for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer.



Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

10/29/12
Date

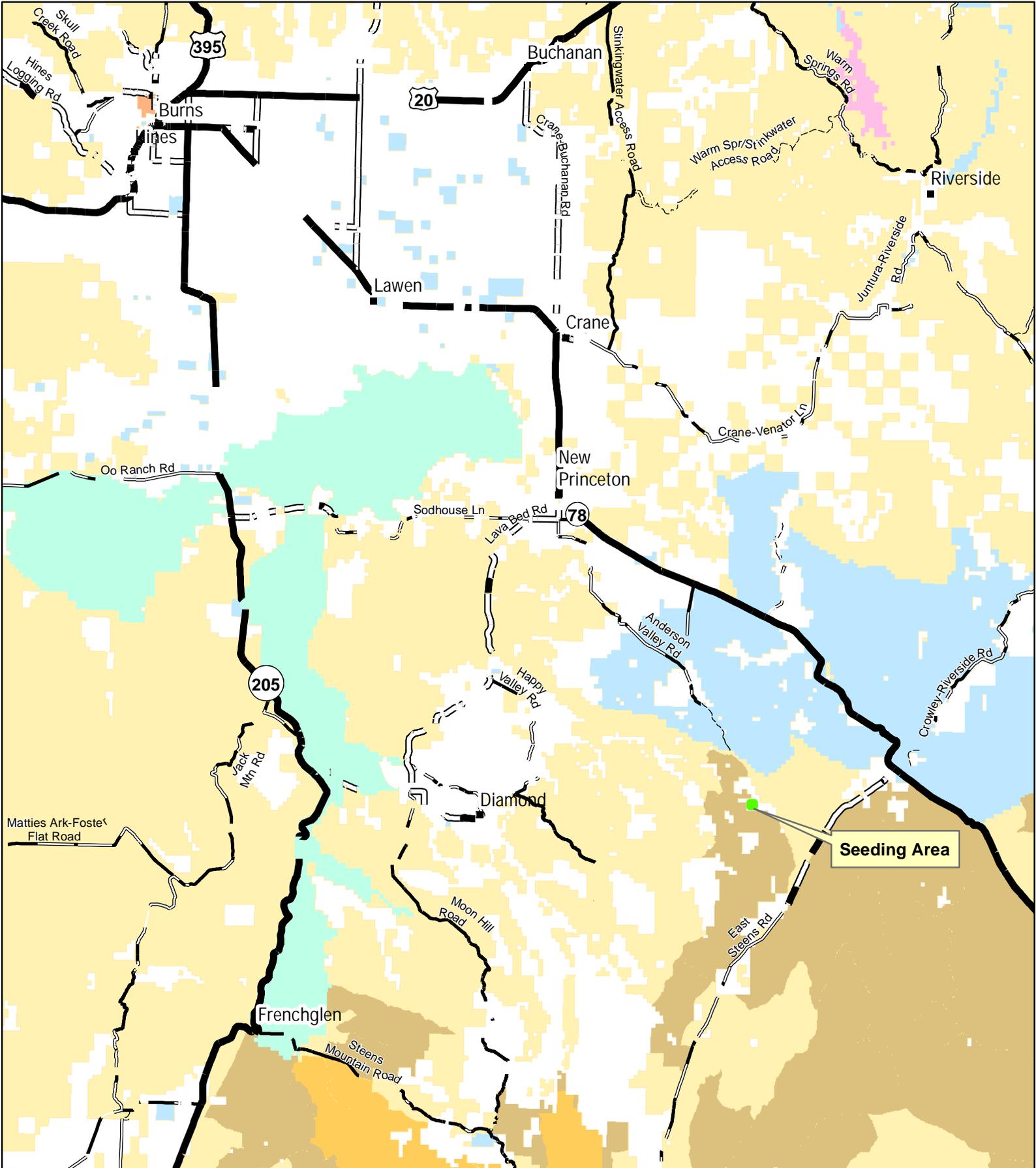


Andrews Resource Area Field Manager

10-29-12
Date

VICINITY MAP

Slope Aerial Seeding



10 Miles



US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management
Burns District, Oregon

Note: No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources and may be updated without notification.
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|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Seeding Area | State | BLM Wilderness Study Area | Paved Road |
| Bureau of Land Management | Bureau of Indian Affairs | Steens Mtn Wilderness | Non-Paved Improved Road |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Other Federal | Private/Unknown | Natural/Unknown Road Surface |
| | | | Highways |

SLOPE AERIAL SEEDING

Legend

-  Seeding Area
-  Non-Paved Improved Road
-  Natural/Unknown Road Surface
- Land Status**
-  Bureau of Land Management
-  State
-  Private/Unknown
-  BLM Wilderness Study Area



US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management
Burns District, Oregon



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10/15/2012 sfenton

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