



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Medford District Office
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504
email address: Medford_Mail@blm.gov

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1792(ORMO60)

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Ashland Resource Area would like to thank you for your continued interest in the *Middle Applegate Watershed Pilot Projects*, designated by the Secretary of Interior to demonstrate the application of ecological restoration principles developed by Drs. Jerry Franklin and Norm Johnson (*Restoration of Federal Forests in the Pacific Northwest: Strategies and Management Implications, 2009*). The general goal of the Pilot is to illustrate how forests can be managed utilizing the principles of Franklin and Johnson to integrate ecological, economic, and conservation values as well as to promote resilience from fire, drought, and predicted climate change. The Pilot will also help to inform how this type of management may aid in sustaining regional workforce and wood products manufacturing capacity. In addition, the Pilot provides opportunities to work closely with our agency partners, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries, to best implement restoration actions while meeting the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.

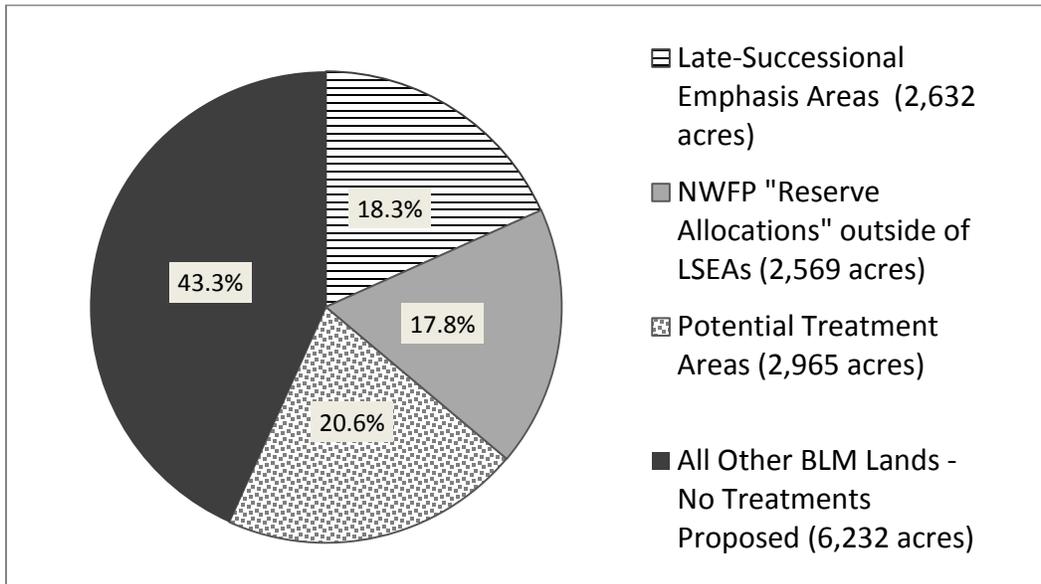
This Notice continues the formal scoping period under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the **Pilot Thompson Project**, the second phase of *Middle Applegate Watershed Pilot Projects*. Since the first scoping letter in September 2011, the BLM has been working to develop a more detailed proposal by identifying potential treatment areas and transportation needs. **While this work is still in progress, we are seeking your input to this preliminary proposal (see the *How to Comment* section below for the type of input that is most useful).**

The Pilot Thompson Project is located south of the town of Applegate, in the Thompson Creek and Ferris Gulch drainages of the Middle Applegate River Watershed (*Enclosure 1*).

The Public Land Survey System description for the proposed Pilot Thompson Projects is: T. 38 S., R. 4 W., in sections 20, 27-31, 33, and 34; T. 39 S., R. 4 W., in sections 3-9, 17-20, and 30; T. 39 S., R. 5 W., in sections 12, 13, and 25, Willamette Meridian, Jackson and Josephine Counties, Oregon.

The planning area consists of the approximately 23,000 acres, of which 14,398 acres are BLM-administered lands. The chart below shows the distribution of BLM-lands in the planning area (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Summary of BLM Lands in the Pilot Thompson Planning Area.



Late-Successional Emphasis Areas, or LSEAs, are large blocks (300-500 acres) of land identified during the planning process that would serve as areas of dense, closed-canopy contiguous forests within which no treatments would be proposed (see *Late-Successional Emphasis Areas* section for more information). The Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) “Reserve Allocations” capture lands set aside to protect the Northern Spotted Owl, Great Gray Owl, Siskiyou Salamander, and includes Riparian Reserves.

Summary of BLM’s Preliminary Proposal

Vegetation Treatments

The BLM proposes to treat an estimated 2,965 acres of vegetation using various forest management methods in the Pilot Thompson Project Area (*Enclosure 1*). The vegetation treatments proposed use a variety of silvicultural techniques based on the existing and potential vegetation at each site. A group of silvicultural prescriptions have been developed that match the potential and existing characteristics of each site with the forest vegetation goals (see *Enclosure 2: Summary of Silvicultural Objectives and Prescriptions*). The treatments proposed are divided into two categories: commercial and non-commercial treatments. Commercial refers to treatment areas where the trees to be removed are of sufficient size to be sold as saw logs to produce dimensional lumber or plywood veneer. Non-commercial refers to treatment areas where conifer trees to be removed are smaller than eight inches diameter breast height (DBH). The following table summarizes the estimated number of acres identified for management by treatment type, prescription, and potential harvest system.

Table 1. Summary of Acres Identified for Treatment by Silvicultural Prescription

Silvicultural Prescriptions – Commercial Harvest	Est. Acres
Variable Density Thinning	1361
Density Management – Intermediate Treatment	349

Riparian Reserve Thinning	140
Total	1850
Timber Harvest Method	Est. Acres
Cable Yarding	1313
Tractor Yarding	77
Helicopter Yarding	309
Cable/Helicopter Yarding (depending on new road construction)	151
Total	1850
Non-commercial Prescriptions	Est. Acres
Understory Reduction	TBD
Density Management – Non-Plantation	942
Density Management – Plantation	173
Total	1115

Transportation System

The BLM, through a community, collaborative process (see *Review of the Transportation System* section), assessed the existing road system in the planning area for potential road management needs and opportunities to reduce current impacts. Potential road management needs identified include: road closures, road decommissioning, new road construction, opportunities for non-motorized trail designation, and rehabilitation of unsustainable and undesirable hill climbs created by off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.

To facilitate vehicle access to several potential commercial harvest units, the BLM would need to construct an estimated 1.4 miles of new road (temporary and permanent) (*Table 2*). An estimated 45 miles of existing roads would be used for unit access and timber haul. All roads for hauling would be brought up to BLM maintenance standards (i.e. road grading, rock surfacing, and water drainage improvements).

The BLM has identified approximately 7.7 miles of road to be decommissioned and an additional 1.8 miles of roads to be closed as part of this proposal (*Table 2*). The objectives of road closures and decommissioning are to reduce and protect watershed conditions, reduce total road maintenance costs, and to reduce impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, and botanical resources. Roads considered for decommissioning/obliteration are determined through an interdisciplinary process and are considered to be no longer needed for forest management, fire access, or private land access.

The collaborative transportation group identified several locations for a potential non-motorized trails system in the planning area. As part of the identification process, BLM’s recreation specialist spent time in the planning area inventorying the current recreation use and talking to local residents who recreate in the planning area. The BLM has not identified a need to create new trail routes, but has identified a need to manage the existing recreation use in order to restore and protect watershed conditions. Trails in the planning area have been identified for designation as non-motorized trails, potential rehabilitation, or possible removal (closure). Some roads proposed for decommissioning may be converted to a non-motorized trail. Trails located within riparian areas where resource damage is occurring may be re-routed, modified, or removed and the area rehabilitated. Routes that traverse hillsides and are identified as

unsustainable due to the existing or potential impacts from runoff and erosion may be removed and the area rehabilitated. Trails may also be designated for non-motorized use to protect cultural and other important resource values.

Table 2. Potential Road Treatments in the Pilot Thompson Planning Area.

Treatment	Est. Length (Miles)
New Road Construction	1.2
New Road Construction, Temporary Spurs	0.2
Fully Decommission/Obliteration	7.7
Road Closure (Gated or Barricaded)	1.8

Fully Decommissioned: Road surface will be ripped, culverts removed, water bars constructed where needed, native grass seed scattered and mulched with certified weed free straw.

Obliteration: Fill slope will be pulled up and placed against the cut bank. Efforts will be made to restore the slope of the hill to conditions prior to when the road was built. Native grass seed will be scattered and mulched with certified weed free straw.

Road Closure: Barricaded road closures are proposed when roads are no longer needed in the short-term but are likely needed for future forest management; gated road closures are used when intermittent access or access to private land are needed.

Potential Alternatives

Using the pool of potential treatment areas and road management options, the interdisciplinary (ID) team of specialists is working to develop alternatives that respond to various issues identified through preliminary scoping and internal review. Although other relevant issues will be addressed and analyzed in the forthcoming environmental assessment, the potential environmental effects associated with the construction of new roads continue to be a primary concern voiced by the public. To the contrary, potential timber purchasers have expressed concerns over the economic feasibility of relying on helicopter yarding rather than constructing new roads to provide access to potential treatment areas. The following alternative themes have been identified to date:

- (1) An alternative that considers new road construction to access units that would otherwise be accessed by helicopter.

Under this alternative the ID team is working to identify potential road construction that could reduce the costs of treating some units by providing access for cable and tractor yarding systems instead of the more expensive helicopter yarding.

- (2) An alternative that would eliminate new road construction.

Under this alternative more units would require helicopter yarding due to no or limited road access. The analysis of these two alternatives would provide a comparison of the environmental effects of building road vs. not building road as well as providing a comparison of the differences in the cost for completing forest thinning.

How Did the BLM Develop the Proposed Action?

The BLM's silviculturist, wildlife biologist, road engineer, logging systems specialists, and fuels management specialists have spent many hours inventorying the planning area to develop a pool of potential treatment areas. This work included:

- (1) Identifying where Late-Successional Emphasis Areas (LSEAs) will be located;
- (2) Conducting a landscape review of vegetation condition for all acres in the planning area and identifying where restoration treatments are needed;
- (3) Conducting an initial review of the transportation system in the planning area; and
- (4) Consideration of public input from the previous scoping period (September 2011) and from recent public meetings and field trips (see *Collaboration and Public Involvement* section).

Late-Successional Emphasis Areas (LSEAs)

An important component of the Franklin and Johnson's "Dry Forest Restoration Principles" calls for the retention of denser forest patches needed to provide important habitat for many organisms, such as the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) and some of its prey species; these dense, multi-layer patches are best maintained by embedding them in a forest matrix that resists, rather than facilitates, the spread of insect epidemics and stand-replacement wildfire.

As part of the landscape planning process, the planning area was examined and evaluated in an effort to delineate a proportion of the landscape that would serve as areas of dense, closed-canopy contiguous forests, within which minimal to no treatments would be proposed. These areas, which are called Late-Successional Emphasis Areas (LSEAs) are designed to provide larger blocks (300-500 acres) of dense forest conditions where succession continues largely uninterrupted by active management, and provide fairly contiguous blocks of mature and late-successional habitat to support those species that rely on and are associated with these forest habitats, such as the NSO and the Pacific fisher.

The identification of the LSEAs required the planning team to delineate areas that 1) currently contain high concentrations of high quality mature and late-successional habitat and 2) select locations across the landscape where these habitats would be expected to persist longer than similar habitat situated in more fire-prone landscape positions. In order to determine the best locations for these LSEAs, several data layers were used to inform the delineation process; spotted owl survey records, existing conservation areas, habitat maps, fire probability, and the Relative Habitat Suitability (RHS) map (developed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service during preparation of the *Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl*, June 28, 2011).

Landscape Review of Vegetative Condition/ Restoration Needs Assessment

As part of the landscape planning process, current vegetation condition and stand description information (plant series/association, existing vegetation/physical characteristics (saplings, poles, mature, etc.), past treatment history review, and stand condition (structure, density, etc.) was updated.

A set of criteria for reviewing potential commercial and non-commercial treatments was established and includes: density, stand structure, species composition, landscape proximity (contiguous strategic treatment), and management history (recently thinned/economics).

The following sets of screens (areas to exclude from treatment) were developed to identify potential commercial and non-commercial treatment areas.

Screens for potential non-commercial treatments

- LSEA's
- Recently Thinned or Hazardous Fuels Treated Areas
- Fish Bearing Riparian Reserves

Screens for potential commercial treatments

- LSEA's
- Fish Bearing Riparian Reserves
- Low Productivity Sites/TPCC withdrawn lands
- Stands dominated by old trees (>150 years)
- Low density stands with poor economics
- Poor Access (>1/4 mile from existing roads)
- Conservation Allocations and Reserves (ex; Siskiyou Salamander, Northern Spotted Owl)

Review of the Transportation System

A multi-party transportation working group comprised of members from BLM, industry, local environmental organizations, our collaborative partners, and the Thompson Creek community, was established to increase the transparency in road management decisions for the Pilot and to seek community ownership in the transportation system by providing a collaborative opportunity to assess the transportation system needs in the Pilot Thompson Planning Area.

The transportation group has met on several occasions to collaboratively discuss the current transportation system needs for road decommissioning, obliteration, closures, construction, and reconstruction. All of the meeting notes are available on the Pilot website. Opportunities to more appropriately manage the road system and some trails were incorporated into the proposal described above.

Collaboration and Public Involvement

Collaboration has played a large role in the Pilot process. The Medford District has participated in long-term efforts with the Applegate Partnership and the Southern Oregon Small Diameter Collaborative to increase public support for forest projects that are socially acceptable, ecologically appropriate and economically viable. Those community groups, as well as other interested stakeholders, have had substantial participation in the Pilot process. Numerous public meetings, workshops and field trips have occurred as part of the planning process to inform interested stakeholders and the public about the Pilot, its goals, and its foundational principles.

During the previous scoping period in September 2011 we received 59 comments, of which 46 were identical form letters. A summary of the relevant issues identified in the comments received will be provided in the EA, as well as any additional comments we receive prior to the EA being published.

On October 25, 2011 the Applegate Partnership, the Southern Oregon Small Diameter Collaborative, the BLM co-hosted an open house/informational meeting in the Applegate to introduce the Middle Applegate Pilot to interested stakeholders.

On November 9, 2011 the Medford District and our partners jointly hosted a public field trip to potential treatment areas. The group visited several different stand types and discussed current stand conditions and how the stand might benefit from restoration treatments. About 20 people attended this event.

On February 22, 2012 the Medford District and our partners jointly hosted a public meeting in the Applegate to share information about and engage interested persons in the design and implementation of the project. BLM specialists presented information on how the proposal is being developed and what goes into the landscape assessment process used to identify areas for treatment and areas to be designated as LSEAs. About 35 people attended this event.

In February/March 2012, the BLM hosted several public field trips to view the Pilot Joe timber sale harvesting operations. The first phase of the Pilot, also known as the *Pilot Joe Demonstration Project*, was analyzed last year (*see the Pilot website for more info*). Lessons learned from the first phase have and will continue to be incorporated into the planning and project implementation of current and future pilot projects proposed under the *Middle Applegate Watershed Pilot Projects*.

In the coming weeks (April/May 2012), a host of small gatherings will take place in neighborhoods around the project area. The goal of these meetings is to engage our neighbors in conversations about BLM's proposal and answer any questions or provide clarity where needed in a small group setting. If you are interested in hosting a neighborhood meeting at your home, please contact Stephanie Kelleher (phone number listed below).

The Pilot website (<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/forestrypilot>) will continue to be the easiest and most rapid source of public information for documentation of the process, the projects and information about the Pilot, including updates for public meetings and field trips.

How to Comment

One of the goals of this Pilot is to have as open and transparent a process as possible. As indicated above, there already have been numerous public events where concerns, issues and comments have been voiced. If you wish to submit comments on the project, please be as specific as possible. If you would like to provide input on potential alternatives to our proposed action that could meet the objectives described above, or provide information on potential issues or concerns that the environmental analysis should address, please submit your written comments to Stephanie Kelleher, Pilot Thompson Project, Medford District BLM, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504 or via email at skellehe@blm.gov.

To be most effective in helping shape the analysis, your comments to this Notice should reach us by **May 7th, 2012**. However, your comments are appreciated throughout the development of this project as transparency, collaboration, and adaptive management are integral components. Therefore, BLM will continue to accept your comments at any time. There will be another opportunity for public comment when the EA is published for public review (projected for August 2012).

Before including your address, telephone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you are advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All comments will be posted to the Pilot's website at (<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/forestrypilot/pilot-projects.php>).

For more information, please contact Stephanie Kelleher at (541) 618-2205.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Gerritsma". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

John Gerritsma
Field Manager
Ashland Resource Area

Enclosures

Enclosure 1:

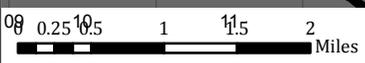
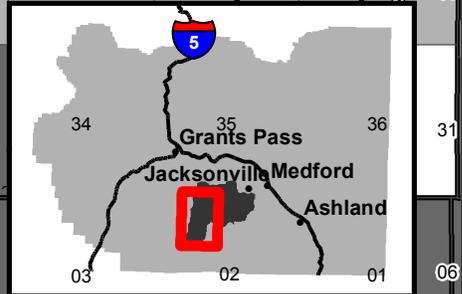
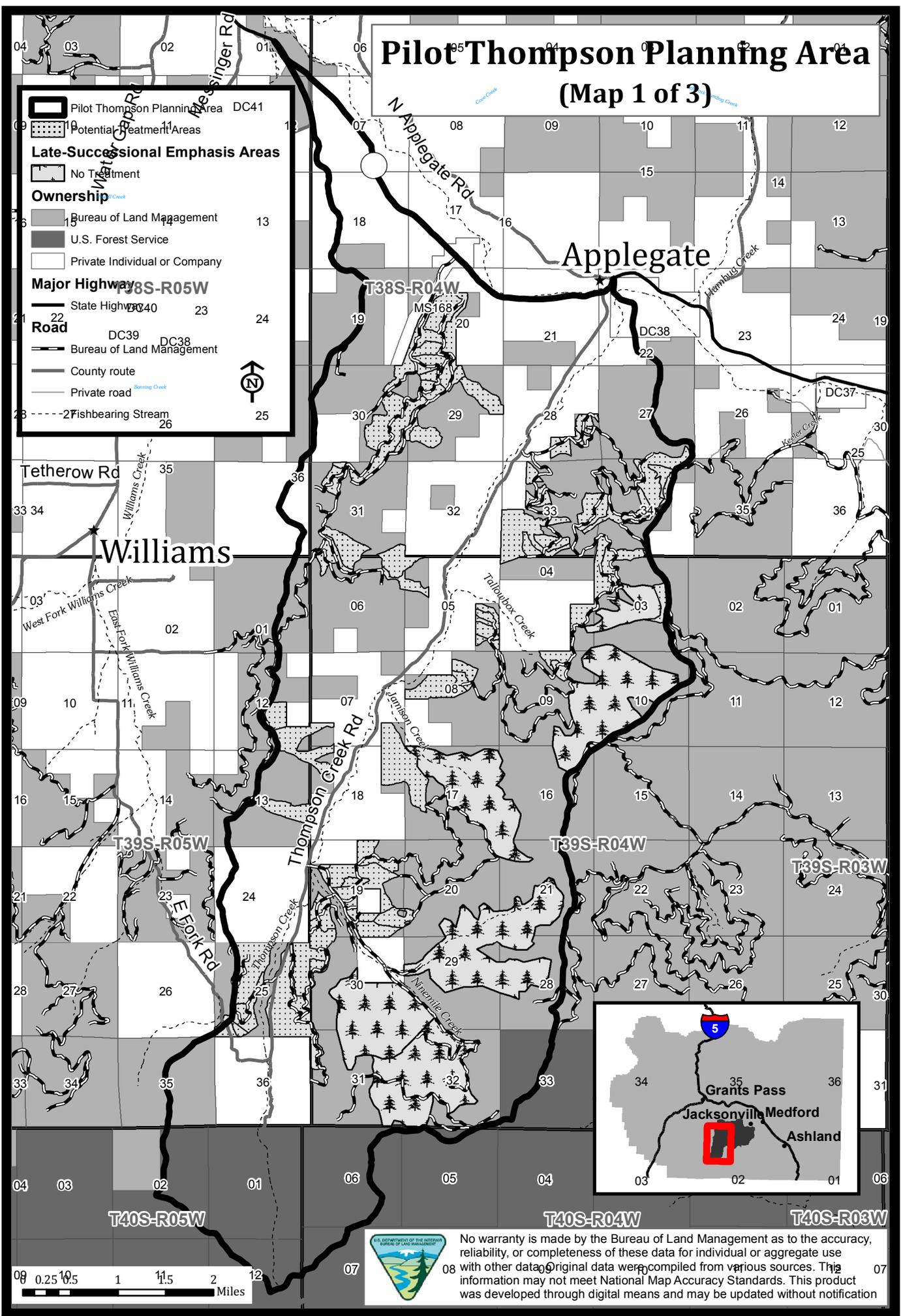
Maps of the Pilot Thompson Project – Preliminary Proposal



Pilot Thompson Planning Area (Map 1 of 3)

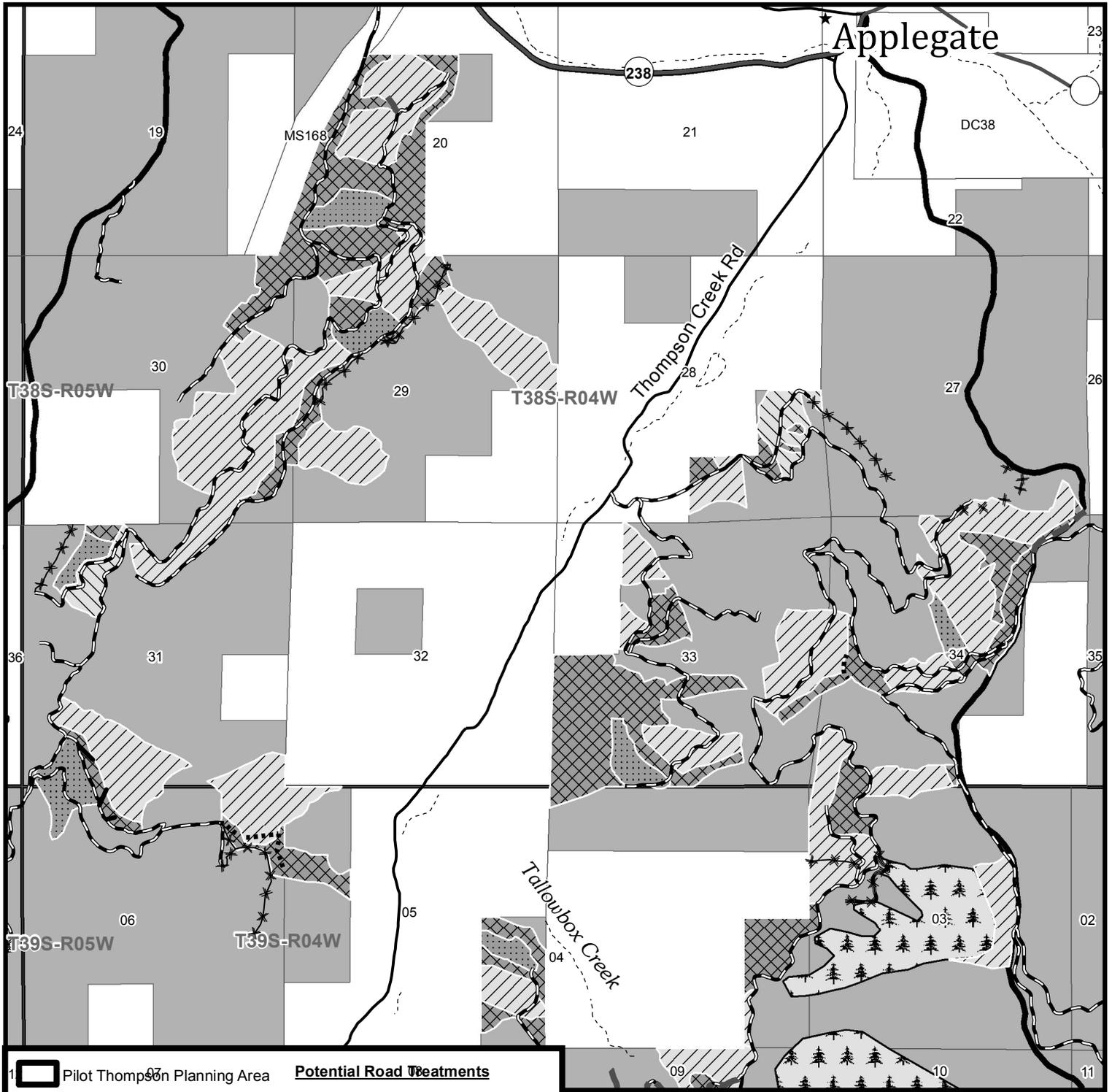
Legend

- Pilot Thompson Planning Area DC41
- Potential Treatment Areas
- Late-Successional Emphasis Areas**
 - No Treatment
- Ownership**
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - U.S. Forest Service
 - Private Individual or Company
- Major Highway**
 - State Highway
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - County route
 - Private road
- Road**
 - DC39
 - DC38
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - County route
 - Private road
- Fishbearing Stream



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 were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.

Pilot Thompson Project - Preliminary Proposal (2 of 3)



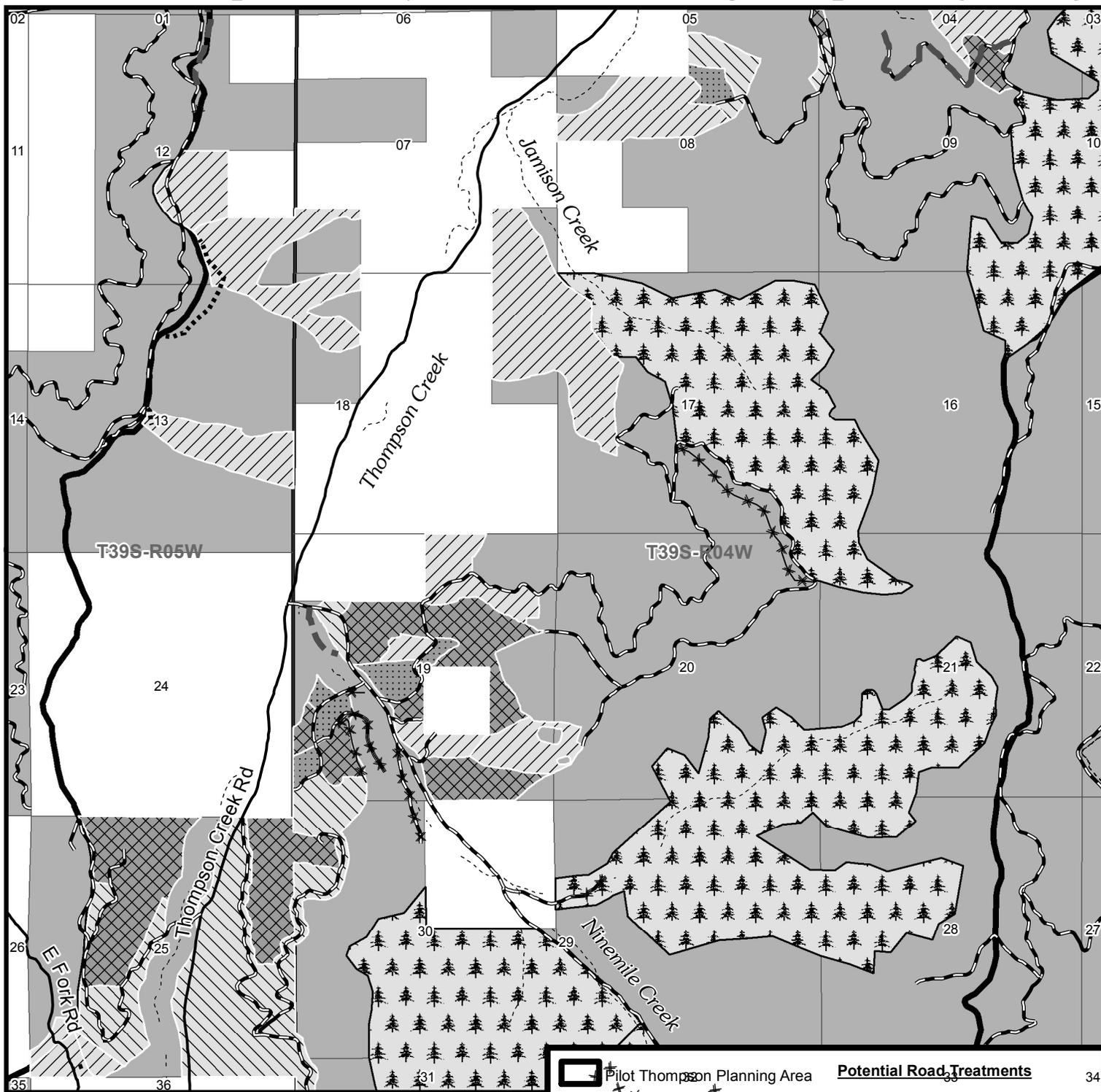
	Pilot Thompson Planning Area	Potential Road Treatments
Potential Treatment Areas		
Prescription		
	Variable Density Thinning (VDT)	
	DM-Intermediate Treatment	
	DM-Plantation	Major Highway
	DM-Non Plantation	
Late-Successional Emphasis Areas		Road
	No Treatment	
Ownership		
	Bureau of Land Management	
	U.S. Forest Service	
	Private Individual or Company	

April 2012



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 were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.

Pilot Thompson Project - Preliminary Proposal (3 of 3)



April 2012



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 were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification

Pilot Thompson Planning Area	Potential Road Treatments
Potential Treatment Areas	Proposed New Road
Prescription	New Construction, Short Spur
Variable Density Thinning (VDT)	Fully Decommission/Obliterate
DM-Intermediate Treatment	Road Closure
DM-Plantation	Major Highway
DM-Non Plantation	State Highway
Late-Successional Emphasis Areas	Road
No Treatment	Bureau of Land Management
Ownership	County route
Bureau of Land Management	Private road
U.S. Forest Service	Fishbearing Stream
Private Individual or Company	

Enclosure 2: Summary of Silvicultural Objectives and Prescriptions

The vegetation treatments proposed, use a variety of silvicultural techniques based on the existing and potential vegetation at each site. A group of silvicultural prescriptions have been developed that match the potential and existing characteristics of each site with the forest vegetation goals. These prescriptions take into account changes in the potential vegetation based on factors such as aspect, slope, available moisture and soil type. The prescriptions guide which trees are to be left and which trees are to be cut.

Overall Objectives

All of the prescriptions are designed to achieve the following over-arching objectives:

- Increase resistance/resilience of forest stands and landscape to wildfire, drought, insects, etc. by reducing stand densities, ladder fuels, and shifting tree species diversity.
- Restore more characteristic structure and composition by reducing stand densities and enhancing tree diversity, including retention of hardwoods and desirable understory species.
- Accelerate development of structural complexity such as larger tree structures and decadence.
- Contribute to development of spatial heterogeneity within stands (e.g. fine-scale structural mosaic).
- Reduce risk of wildfire reaching areas where late-successional forest conditions are emphasized.

Silvicultural Prescriptions

Variable Density Thinning

This prescription is used to accomplish dry forest restoration goals in stands >80 years old that have reached a mid-seral condition. Variable-density thinning is designed to move the current condition of crowded and/or uniform forest stands to site conditions that are more open and spatially heterogeneous (clumpy) in nature. Stands would be thinned to a target density level based on site conditions or plant community. This management approach encourages the creation of spatial heterogeneity and structural mosaics characteristic of historic dry forest stands. Stand level features that are desired include a diversity of age class and species within the forest canopy. Variable-density thinning for this project will combine thinning with gaps (small openings) and skips (untreated patches) to replicate historical patterns commonly found in mixed species and mixed-age stands. The thinned matrix or the area between skips and gaps will be thinned proportionally or from below.

Density Management – Intermediate Treatment

This prescription is used to accomplish dry forest restoration goals in young to mid-seral stands (40-80 years old) with high stem densities that are experiencing intense competition from conifer and hardwoods. These stands are heterogeneous in stand structure, while others are less patchy with high densities in the mid and lower tree layers. Treatment consists of cutting trees and shrubs (generally less than 20 inches diameter for conifer and less than 12 inches diameter for hardwoods) with chainsaws and disposing excess material by burning or biomass removal. Density management

of these stands would remove fuel accumulations in patches while thinning lower and middle tree layers to accelerate development of a mature multi-layered stand structure. Treatment of activity fuels following completion of thinning activity is an essential component of this prescription. Skips (+/-15% of the treatment area) or untreated areas would be maintained to provide dense/shaded forest patches as habitat, hiding cover, and visual barriers; and ecologically significant patches, such as seeps, rock outcrops, and hardwood groves.

Riparian Reserve Thinning

This prescription is used to implement active management within specified riparian reserves consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives, while meeting site specific restoration needs desired for dry forest stands. Treatments would be limited to non-perennial streams and based on local stand/vegetation conditions would be designed to benefit aquatic systems and be consistent with long term ACS objectives. Vegetation treatments would be limited to thinning and fuels reduction in young to mid-seral stands to control stand density and acquire desired vegetation characteristics. Treatment consists of cutting conifers, non-riparian hardwoods, and shrubs. Stands would be thinned to a canopy cover range of 50-60 percent. Thinning these areas would remove fuel accumulations in patches while thinning lower and middle tree layers to accelerate development of a mature multi-layered stand structure. Vegetation would be treated in designated riparian reserves outside of a no treatment buffer. Designated no treatment buffers would be established for each proposed treatment to protect soil productivity, habitat for riparian-dependent species, and the role of streams in the distribution of large wood to downstream fish-bearing waters. Riparian reserves widths would conform to the interim widths prescribed in the Northwest Forest Plan (pg. C-30).

Understory Reduction

This prescription is used to accomplish fuels reduction of understory vegetation in stands that receive commercial treatment. These areas would be treated using manual techniques (cutting with saws) to achieve desired tree densities. It consists of cutting small trees and shrubs (generally less than 8 inches diameter for conifer and less than 12 inches for hardwood) with chainsaws and disposing of the material by hand-piling and burning or use of a lop and scatter method in lighter fuels. The objective is to maintain a multi-layered mix of conifer, hardwood and shrub species appropriate to the plant series. Conifer, hardwood, and shrub spacing widths and retention will vary depending on site conditions and plant community.

Density Management – Non Plantation (Natural Stands)

This prescription is used to accomplish dry forest restoration goals in conifer forests, hardwood woodlands, and shrublands. It consists of cutting small trees and shrubs (generally less than 8 inches diameter for conifer and less than 12 inches for hardwood) with chainsaws and disposing of the material by hand-piling and burning or use of a lop and scatter method in lighter fuels. This prescription is also used in dry forest stands >40 years old with high stand densities that are experiencing intense competition from conifer and hardwoods. These stands are heterogeneous in stand structure, while others are less patchy with high densities in the mid and lower tree layers. This prescription would remove fuel accumulations in patches while thinning lower and middle tree layers to accelerate development of a mature multi-layered stand structure. Thinning would benefit species of shade intolerance and provide adequate growing space for large hardwoods and conifers alike. Conifer, hardwood, and shrub spacing widths and retention will vary depending on site conditions and plant community.

Density Management –Plantation

This prescription is used to accomplish dry forest restoration goals in conifer plantations. It consists of cutting small trees and shrubs (generally less than 8 inches diameter for conifer and 12 inches for hardwood) with chainsaws and disposing of the material by hand-piling and burning or use of a lop and scatter method in lighter fuels. Homogeneous Douglas-fir stands 15-40 years old that are experiencing intense competition from shrubs and hardwoods and need to be managed to reduce stand densities, promote species diversity, and maintain vigorous crowns. Densities in these younger seral stands are highly homogenous in stand structure, while others are more patchy with high densities in the mid and lower tree layers. Density management of these stands would retain the most vigorous large trees in patches while thinning around drought tolerant and fire resilient species to accelerate development of a multi-layered structure. Conifer, hardwood, and shrub spacing widths and retention will vary depending on site conditions and plant community.