Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project Environmental Assessment—Medford District

Reader's Guide

BLM

Grants Pass Resource Area

May 2014

Dear Reader,

The summer of 2013 was a very busy time for the Medford District, particularly the Grants Pass Resource Area. July brought a large lightning storm that moved through southwest Oregon, igniting many fires. While most fires were contained within a few days, rugged terrain and extreme fire behavior caused several fires to resist containment. Fire activity continued for two months. The fires that had resisted containment were eventually declared controlled in September 2013.

The Douglas Fire Complex burned at low, moderate, and high severity levels on Medford and Roseburg District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. A total of 19,082 acres of BLM-administered land within the Medford District's Grants Pass Resource Area were contained within the fire perimeter. Of those acres, 1,669 have been identified to provide economic return, while simultaneously managing for multiple resource objectives.

This Reader's Guide will briefly describe the Medford District's post-fire recovery efforts. Inside this guide you will find an explanation of the Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery effort, background information on the fires, the purpose and need for the project, a description of the pre- and post-fire landscape, the treatment unit selection process, a description of the alternatives, and, finally, how you can help form the final decision. The Reader's Guide will provide insight into the environmental analysis process and explain why and how this project developed.

I hope this guide helps you to understand the Medford District's Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project and the Environmental Assessment. Additional project plans will be forthcoming for other areas of Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery for the Medford and Roseburg Districts.

Please contact our office if you have questions. Your input is an important part of the Grants Pass Resource Area's post-fire recovery effort.

Allen Bollschweiler
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area

Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery (EA, Chapter 1.6)

What is the Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery team?

The Southwestern Oregon Fire Recovery (SWOFR) team is an executive group of land managers and resource specialists on the Medford and Roseburg BLM Districts. This group was tasked with addressing issues resulting from the numerous fires in southwest Oregon, including the Douglas Fire Complex.

Several planning efforts are underway to tackle the post-fire recovery needs. The districts have hosted two public meetings and one stakeholder workshop. Six major issues were discussed at these events:

- Fire planning and future suppression needs
- Habitat for northern spotted owls and riparian species
- Riparian and watershed health
- Economic recovery, including salvage
- Road safety and hazard trees
- Reforestation

The following table explains how the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) applies to the Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project and how the SWOFR team effort has enhanced public involvement.

NEPA Process (Abbreviated)	Douglas Complex/SWOFR NEPA Process
Identify the Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action	Summer 2013 fires create the need to salvage burned timber for economic recovery, road safety, and fire planning.
Internal and External Scoping	Internal Scoping: An Interdisciplinary Team of resource specialists is created. Issues regarding post fire efforts are identified.
	External Scoping: A scoping letter is sent to 259 members of the public.
Public Scoping Meetings	Public Meetings: January 21, 2014: Glendale High School gymnasium January 23, 2014: Grants Pass Interagency Office
	Public Workshops/Outreach: January 30, 2014: Focused discussion opportunities March 27, 2014: Information Pamphlet; Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery Efforts
Release EA	Release Douglas Fire Complex EA: May 7, 2014
EA Public Outreach Period	EA Public Comment Period: May 7, 2014 to June 6, 2014 Public Meeting: Thursday, May 15, 2014 • Grants Pass Interagency Office • 5:45 to 8:00 p.m. Field Trip: Saturday, May 31, 2014

The following portion of the Reader's Guide addresses the Medford District's Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project environmental analysis.

Douglas Complex (EA, Preface page 1)

Background

Douglas Fire Complex, July 26, 2013
Photo by Martin Vetter, Oregon Department of Forestry

On the morning of July 26, 2013, a dry lightning storm ignited more than 100 fire starts in southwest Oregon. The Rabbit Mountain, Dad's Creek, and Farmer's Gulch Fires combined and are formally known as the Douglas Fire Complex. These fires burned in steep, rugged terrain near the communities of Riddle, Glendale, and Wolf Creek, Oregon.

Affected landscapes include mixed conifer stands of older age classes, young managed stands of conifers, and hardwood stands. The majority of the fire growth occurred within the first 72 hours following ignition.

The fires were contained on September 3, 2013 and totaled 48,671 acres of Bureau of Land Management (Medford and Roseburg Districts), State of Oregon, Josephine County, and private lands (see Figure 1).

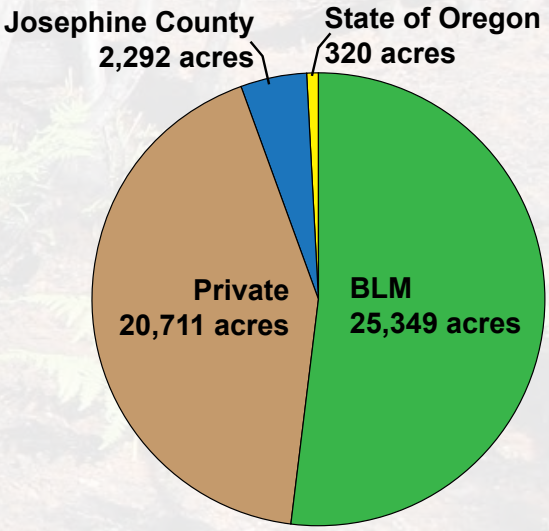


Figure 1. Douglas Fire Complex Land Status

Purpose and Need for the Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project (EA, Chapter 1)

This project has two purposes:

- salvaging for economic recovery within the Medford District on the Matrix land use allocation (LUA) and
- road safety and fire planning.

Salvage for Economic Recovery

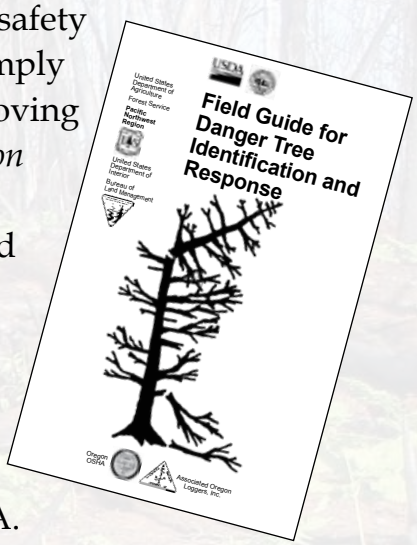
The Douglas Fire Complex burned approximately 5,000 acres at moderate to high severity in the Matrix LUA and associated Riparian Reserves within the Grants Pass Resource Area (GPRA). Of those acres, 1,669 in the Matrix LUA have been identified to provide for economic return, while simultaneously managing for multiple resource objectives. This acreage excludes Riparian Reserves in the Medford District Recovery Project. Salvage of dead or dying trees on up to 1,669 acres would allow the GPRA to retrieve some economic value from these trees while retaining the levels of coarse wood and standing snags needed to meet the Medford District's Resource Management Plan (RMP) standards and guidelines.

The BLM is required to manage Matrix Lands in a manner that provides for a sustainable supply of timber as directed by the Oregon & California Revested Lands Act. The existing condition of the burned landscape has resulted in dead and dying trees that are no longer on a trajectory for sustained yield. There is a need to remove the dead and dying trees and provide for a site that can support sustainable forest management in addition to conserving habitat elements as defined by the RMP.

Mortality and damage by the fire has resulted in timber with reduced lumber quality and merchantable value. Timely salvage is critical in order to capture remaining merchantable timber values before further deterioration occurs.

Road Safety and Fire Planning

Effects of the fire to BLM-managed land have resulted in varying types of hazards such as danger trees. There is a need for the BLM to address safety hazards and future wildland fire potential. The BLM will comply with Federal and state requirements for identifying and removing danger trees. The 2008 *Field Guide for Danger Trees Identification and Response* by Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Oregon OSHA), US Forest Service, BLM, and Associated Oregon Loggers gives guidance on Danger tree identification. Burned trees have compromised the safety of roads used by the BLM, other agencies, private land owners, forest workers, and the general public. This safety concern has been raised by state and county governments, private landowners, industrial timber companies, and Oregon OSHA.



The fire created conditions of increased fuel loading, as well as the potential for reburn in some areas. There is a need to reduce fuel loading, eliminate safety hazards, and provide access to manage future wildfires. The BLM will comply with Federal and state OSHA regulations for providing safe employment conditions, as well as safe travel conditions for the public, contractors, and adjacent landowners with reciprocal rights to transport timber on BLM roads.

Pre- and Post-Fire Conditions

Pre-fire Vegetation Condition (EA, Chapter 3.1)

The Douglas Fire Complex is located in the mixed evergreen zone of vegetation and is generally characterized by an upper layer of conifers and a lower layer of hardwoods. Forest management and fire (and lack thereof) have greatly affected historical vegetation patterns. Prior to European settlement, the area was characterized by more frequent, low intensity fires, resulting from both lightning and Native American ignitions. Active fire exclusion has allowed the area to grow into dense forests.

Post-fire Existing Condition (EA, Chapter 3.1)

The fire burned a total of 48,671 acres with a mixed severity; therefore, the burn pattern and intensity caused varying impacts to forest vegetation. The cooler draw bottoms experienced relatively less burn severity than upper slope areas throughout the fire complex. Of the fire area, 22% of the land area sustained more than 75% canopy cover mortality, while 77% sustained 0 to 25% canopy cover mortality.

Mixed burn severity

Insects (EA, Chapter 3.1)

Fire damage in established forest stands invites secondary disturbance agents. Fire-injured trees are at greater risk of damage or mortality from bark beetles or borers because these trees lack the ability or have a reduced ability to produce defensive compounds to resist attack.

Insect damage

Snags and Coarse Woody Debris (EA, Chapter 3.1)

The wildfire created an abundance of snags across the Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project Area that provide cavity nesting habitat for a variety of wildlife. Snags also provide a large accumulation of fuel for secondary fires in the future. Moreover, snags pose a safety hazard to humans.

Coarse woody debris provides habitat for wildlife, invertebrate, microbial, and fungal species, as well as important ecological functions such as moisture retention, soil stabilization, and nutrient recycling. The amount and decay class of woody debris reflects the stage of stand development. In a natural cycle, two stages (stand initiation and old growth) typically have the greatest amounts of coarse woody debris.

Coarse Woody Debris
The portion of a tree that has fallen or been cut and left in the woods.

Medford District Salvage Unit Selection Process
(EA, Chapter 1.8 and Preface page 1)

Salvage harvest is proposed on the Medford District within areas that sustained moderate to high burn severity. Treatment areas were developed using a combination of post-fire aerial photo analysis, soil and vegetation burn severity models, and ground reconnaissance. The BLM consulted the Southwest Oregon Forest Insect and Disease Service Center (SWOFIDSC) to assist in identifying trees with a high probability of mortality. The SWOFIDSC guidelines are based on published research and professional judgment of local forest entomologists. These guidelines are directly incorporated into the silvicultural prescription for this project.

The analysis began by defining when a tree would be considered alive or dead. Alternatives 2 and 3 propose the harvest and removal of fire-killed or fire-injured trees. For the purpose of this analysis, a **fire-killed tree** is defined as a tree with a 75% chance of mortality, with brown needles, or the crown is black with no needles. A **fire-injured tree** may retain some green needles and the crown may not be entirely scorched. Fire-injured trees have incurred cambium damage, bark char, and potentially girdled or partly girdled by fire.

Unit Selection Process, continued

Salvage harvest would **not** occur in the following areas:

- Riparian Reserves
- Late-Successional Reserves
- 100-acre known northern spotted owl activity centers
- High habitat suitability areas within northern spotted owl Critical Habitat
- 0.5-mile core areas of northern spotted owl sites occupied by pairs
- Timber Productivity Capability Classification (TPCC) Nonsuitable Woodland areas
- Low Economic viability areas (e.g., small diameter, low volume per acre)

The following table describes the summary process for determining treatment acres within the Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project.

Assessment Category	Acres Removed from Treatment	Total Acres
Total Douglas Fire Complex Acres		48,671
Total Medford BLM in the Douglas Fire Complex		19,082
Total Matrix, Connectivity/Diversity Block (Medford District)		19,069
Low severity burn	14,286	
Initial field reconnaissance (high and moderate burn severity)		4,783
TPCC withdrawn and Low volume	774	
Northern spotted owl high priority 0.5-mile core	1,115	
100-acre known spotted owl activity centers	346	
Riparian Reserves	879	
Net Matrix available for treatment		**1,669**

Alternatives (EA, Chapter 2)

This section describes and compares the alternatives within the EA. Alternative 1 is the no action alternative and serves as the baseline to compare the effects of actions within Alternatives 2 and 3. Alternatives 2 and 3 are proposed to meet the Purpose and Need of the project within the multiple use objectives and resource protection measures established by the Northwest Forest Plan and the Medford District RMP.

Alternative 1, No Action

Under the No Action alternative, no salvage of dead and dying trees would occur. Road safety and fire planning actions would not occur. The economic value of the burned timber of merchantable value would not be recovered. No roads or landings would be constructed to facilitate logging operations. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 proposes the harvest and removal of fire-injured or fire-killed trees. The salvage harvest would occur on 1,669 acres within the Matrix LUA. Along 14 miles of roads, potential failure zones identified by the OSHA *Field Guide for Danger Tree Identification and Response* equate to 556 acres that are included in the total acres of 1,669. Salvage harvest is proposed within areas that sustained moderate to high burn severity. Treatment areas were developed using a combination of post-fire aerial photo analysis, soil and vegetation burn severity models, and ground reconnaissance.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 was developed in response to watershed resource concerns. Alternative 3 proposes more helicopter operations and less road construction to accomplish logging activities, while still meeting the purpose and need of the project.

The table below lists specific actions proposed in Alternatives 2 and 3.

Proposed Activities within the Matrix LUA		Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Harvest Summary	Road safety and fire planning units within economic recovery harvest units	556 acres	556 acres
	Economic recovery harvest units	1,113 acres	1,113 acres
	Total Harvest	**1,669** acres	**1,669** acres
Operations Summary	Ground-Based Yarding	307 acres	264 acres
	Cable/Skyline Yarding	1,105 acres	924 acres
	Helicopter Yarding	257 acres	481 acres
Road Construction Summary	Temporary Routes	6.59 miles	3.23 miles
	Permanent Road	0.32 miles	0.32 miles
	Maintenance	180.2 miles	180.2 miles

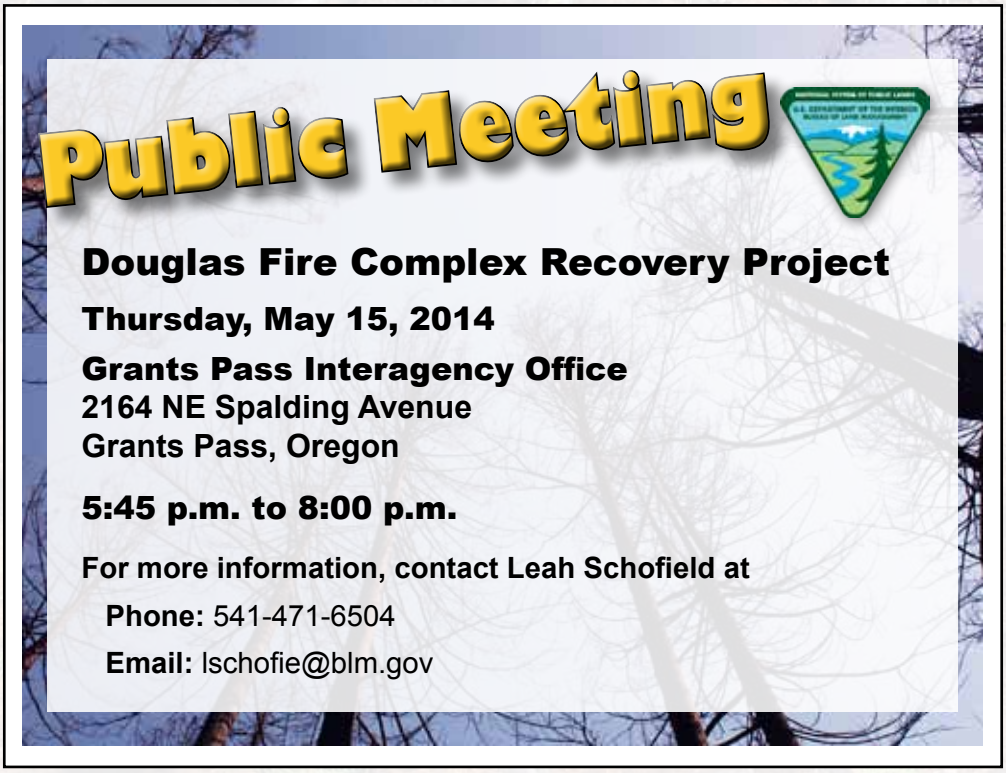
Public Involvement (EA, Section 1.6)

The Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project is one of several post-fire projects located in southwest Oregon following the summer of 2013 wildfire season. The SWOFR team, consisting of Medford and Roseburg BLM management, has actively engaged interested public and stakeholders following the aftermath of the fires.

EA 30-day Public Comment Period

A legal notice, published in the Grants Pass Daily Courier and Roseburg News Review on May 7, 2014, establishes the beginning of the 30-day comment period for the EA. The GPRA is requesting comments on the EA to be submitted by June 6, 2014 for consideration during the decision-making process.

A public meeting is scheduled for May 15, 2014 at the Grants Pass Interagency Office from 5:45 pm to 8:00 pm. The purpose of the meeting is to provide an opportunity for the public to obtain information about this project. In addition, the Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery team will be there to provide information on post-fire recovery projects on BLM-managed lands in southwest Oregon.



A field trip is scheduled for May 31, 2014. The purpose of this field trip is to provide an on-the-ground project review for the public and address comments or concerns specific to the Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project.

Questions, Comments, Information? Contact Us!

For more information on the joint Medford and Roseburg District's post-fire recovery efforts, check out the Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery project Web site at http://www.blm.gov/or/fire/recovery.php.

For Douglas Fire Complex Recovery Project information, check out the Medford District's Web site at http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/plans/index.php.

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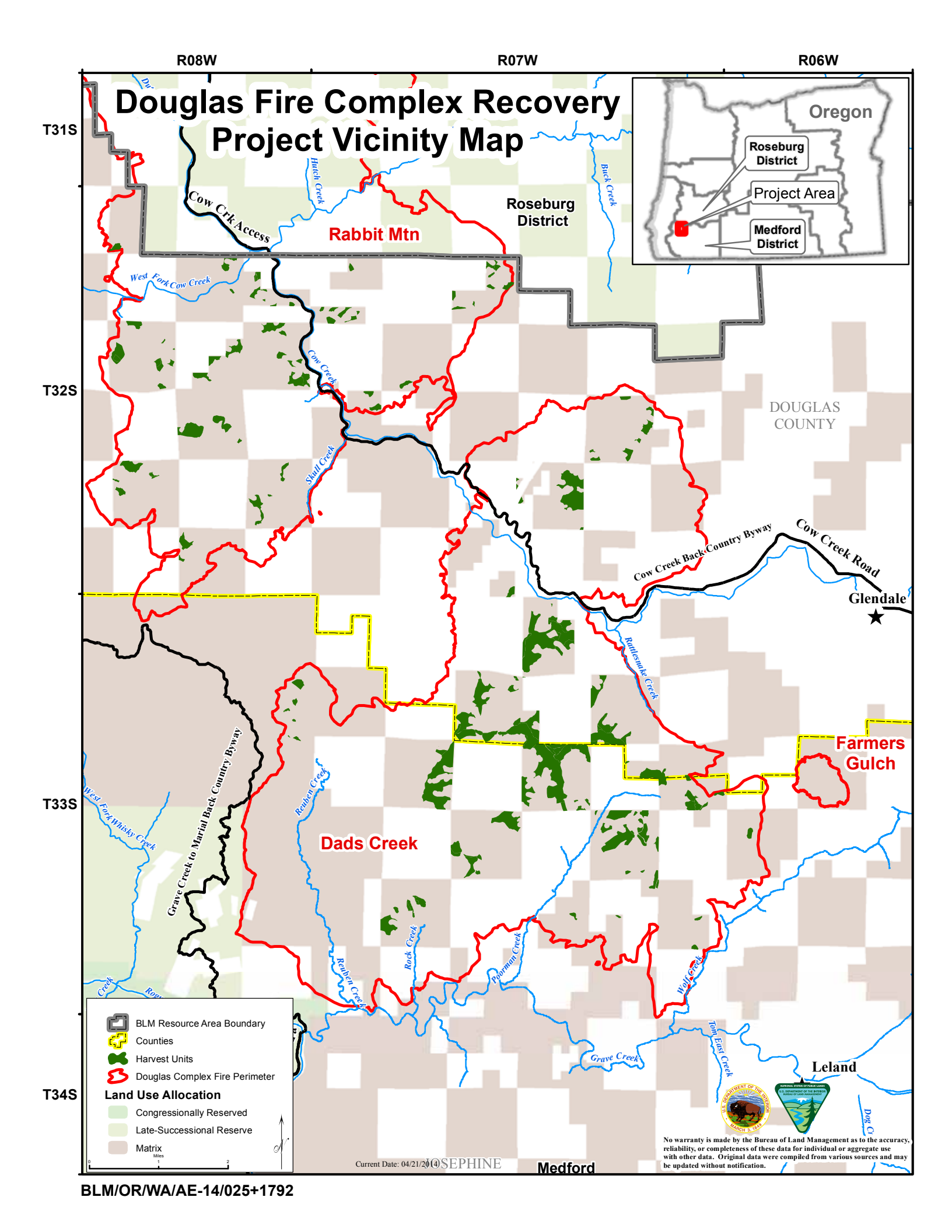

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