



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
GRANTS PASS INTERAGENCY OFFICE  
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GRANTS PASS, OREGON 97526

## FUEL HAZARD REDUCTION ON THE GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA DECISION RECORD NEPA# DOI-BLM-OR-M000-2009-0045-EA

### I. INTRODUCTION

The West Williams Private Roads Fuels Reduction Project will be implemented under the Fuel Hazard Reduction Project (FHRP) on the Grants Pass Resource Area Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-OR-M000-2009-0009-EA. The primary objective identified for lands in the project area is to reduce the intensity of future wildfires and to create strategic areas for fire suppression activities. Additionally, the Programmatic FHRP is intended to streamline the NEPA analysis to more efficiently address high fuel hazards, respond to public requests, and implement treatments on private lands under the Wyden Amendment authority (EA p.3). The Programmatic FHRP and this project meet the objectives and direction of the Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP).

Under the FHRP, individual projects will each have a decision record (DR) and be tiered the Environmental Assessment. This is the first of such decision records under this project. Additional DRs under this EA will be signed for a period of up to five years from signing of this DR.

### II. BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) initiated the Programmatic Fuel Hazard Reduction Project in the Grants Pass Resource Area (GPRA) in December 2008 under the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (1995 RMP). A scoping letter was sent to approximately 90 landowners, federal, state, and county agencies, and to tribal and private organizations, and individuals that requested information concerning projects of this type. Planning for the West Williams Private Road Fuels Reduction project began in October, 2009. See section IV, Public Involvement for further details. The purpose of the project is to reduce forest fuels to provide protection of life and residential property from wildland fire and to reduce the potential risk to adjacent federal lands from fire originating on private lands. The goal of this project is to provide evacuation routes for residents and safe access for fire suppression apparatus along roads and driveways and in areas strategic to the protection of rural residences. This project will complement the Deer Willy Hazardous Fuels Project by treating on neighboring private

property. Past fire exclusion on these lands has resulted in the increased fuel hazard (high hazard).

The Programmatic FHRP EA was available for public review from July 30 through September 1, 2010. It incorporated analysis of the proposed actions; addressed issues raised in public scoping comments, and referenced new information.

Based on public input, recommendations from the planning team, and careful consideration of the objectives of the laws, regulations, and planning documents and NEPA analysis governing these lands, the following constitutes my decision.

### **III. DECISION and RATIONALE**

Alternative 1, the No-Action Alternative, is rejected because it does not meet the resource management objectives identified in the Medford District Resource Management Plan or the objectives for resources detailed in the EA (EA pp. 4-5). The No-Action Alternative would not address or alter many of the existing resource conditions and trends that are of major concern relative to healthy forest conditions and resource protection. The No-Action alternative would perpetuate or promote undesirable resource conditions, and these conditions would not be improved or mitigated. High fire hazard conditions would continue and increase.

*Decision:* It is my decision to implement Alternative 2 for the Programmatic FHRP. The proposed action is to manually (e.g. handtools, chainsaws) treat the forest fuels on approximately 51 acres of private land within the Williams Watershed (see Map). Work would be limited to 100 feet above and 100 feet below the road edge. Small trees and brush less than 12 inches DBH would be thinned, and trees would be limbed to reduce ladder fuels. Residual hardwood and conifer trees would be spaced approximately 14 feet to 30 feet apart. Slash would be hand piled, covered and burned, lopped and scattered, or removed from the treatment areas. Removal would be as authorized by the landowner and would be cabled from an existing road (EA p. 10). The intensity and nature of the treatments could vary based on individual landowner preference but would be consistent with the project design features outlined in the EA (EA pp. 11-18). There would be no road maintenance associated with this project. Slash from one inch to six inches in diameter would be piled or removed. No vegetation would be cut within 50 feet of streams.

*Rationale:* Several decades of fire exclusion in the West Williams area has resulted in dense, overcrowded stands of trees and brush. The Deer Willy Hazardous Fuels Project has developed an evacuation route from Williams to the Illinois Valley on BLM lands, and the route also goes through private lands. To ensure safe passage for private citizens and firefighters, landowners in strategic locations have been contacted for their participation. The project is designed to reduce flame length and fire intensity as a wildfire nears the roads in treated areas. The reduced fire behavior conditions would produce safer access and egress routes. Private landowners who wish to participate have been asked to join in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Work will be completed under the authority of the Wyden Amendment.

#### **IV. BLM STRATEGIC PLAN**

The Decision will implement a range of activities that will promote a number of the goals of the BLM's Strategic Plan for FY2003-2008:

*Resource Protection-Goals 1 & 3: Protect Cultural and Natural Heritage Resources;  
Improve Health of Watersheds and Landscapes (Restore Fire Adapted Ecosystems)*

This project will protect cultural resources by reducing fire hazard, and during implementation, through project design features.

*Resource Use-Goal 4: Manage or Influence Resources to Enhance Public Benefit,  
Promote Responsible Use, and Ensure Optimal Value*

This decision will provide biomass utilization and special forest products on up to approximately 51 acres. Small sales and stewardship contracting provide opportunities for innovative methods to utilize woody material and encourages developing markets.

*Serving Communities-Goal 1: Protect Lives, Resources, and Property*

Implementation of Alternative 2 will reduce fuel loadings and stand densities, moving them closer to historical levels and normal ranges. All areas to be thinned include fuel hazard reduction to protect resources, homes and property. Fire behavior and suppression difficulties experienced in recent fires in southwest Oregon (e.g., the 500,000 acre Biscuit fire) clearly demonstrate that fuel hazard needs to be addressed to reduce threats to public health, safety and property.

#### **National Fire Plan**

The National Fire Plan, a culmination of various reports, (e.g., Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment, Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health), budget requests, Congressional direction, and resulting strategies, plans, projects, and other activities have set the stage and provided direction for an increased application and management of prescribed fire and other fuel treatments on federally-managed lands. This is further reinforced by the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy along with its accompanying 2001 review and update.

Much of the project area has high risk fire regimes and is classified as fire condition classes two and three under the Department of the Interior's "Cohesive Strategy." The fire regimes in these fire condition classes have been moderately to significantly altered from their historical range of fire frequency. To restore them to their historical fire regimes, these lands require some level of restoration through mechanical and prescribed fire treatments (Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health, DOI, March 2001 Draft). The West Williams Private Road Project includes a range of

management actions directed at this restoration and at reducing the high wildfire risk on federal lands.

## **V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, consultation was completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The West Williams Private Roads Fuels Reduction Project will result in no effect to Southern Oregon/Northern California (SO/NC) coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and coho critical habitat (CCH) under the Endangered Species Act and no adverse effect to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. A minimum of 50 feet no treatment buffer will maintain water temperatures and prevent sediment from reaching streams. Riparian treatments outside the no treatment buffer will expedite development of large trees, increasing future LWD recruitment potential. With a no effect determination to coho, CCH, and EFH, informal or formal consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service is not necessary.

The project is outside of the range of federally endangered *Lomatium cookii*. The project is in the range of federally endangered *Fritillaria gentneri*, none were found.

The project will not adversely impact cultural or historical sites. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was informed of the BLM's finding in accordance with 36 CFR 800.5(b).

The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz and the Grande Ronde were notified of this project during scoping and the EA's public comment period. Josephine County Commissioners and the Josephine County forestry department were also contacted.

## **VI. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public scoping for the West Williams Private Roads Fuels Reduction Project was initiated in October 2009. BLM attempted contact with eighteen potential landowners and succeeded in contacting sixteen. Eleven landowners are willing to participate in the project. In addition one letter was received in favor of the project.

Most of the comments were supportive of the Fuels Reduction Project on the Grants Pass Resource Area. Comments were also in support of providing evacuation routes in the project area.

The public comment period for review of the EA was initiated on July 30, 2010 for a 30 day comment period. Comments were received from Brian Tenbusch representing the American Forest Resource Council; Richard Nawa representing The Siskiyou Project; and from Joseph Vaile representing the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center. Public comments and associated BLM responses are summarized in Appendix A.

## VII. CONCLUSION

### A. Plan Consistency

Based on the information in the Fuel Hazard Reduction Project on the Grants Pass Resource Area Environmental Assessment; administrative record; and from the letters and comments received from the public about the project, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the:

- Final EIS and ROD for the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1995)
- Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994)
- ROD for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (1994)
- Final SEIS for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2000), and the ROD and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2001)
- Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998)
- ROD for Management of Port-Orford Cedar in Southwest Oregon (2004)

The Fuel Hazard Reduction Project is consistent with the 2001 Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines.

On December 17, 2009, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington issued an order in *Conservation Northwest, et al. v. Rey, et al.*, No. 08-1067 (W.D. Wash.) (Coughenour, J.), granting Plaintiffs' motion for partial summary judgment and finding a variety of NEPA violations in the BLM and USFS 2007 Record of Decision eliminating the Survey and Manage mitigation measure.

Judge Coughenour deferred issuing a remedy in his December 17, 2009 order until further proceedings, and did not enjoin the BLM from proceeding with projects. The project may proceed even if the District Court sets aside or otherwise enjoins use of the 2007 Survey and Manage Record of Decision. This is because the project meets the provisions of the last valid Record of Decision, specifically the 2001 Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (not including subsequent Annual Species Reviews).

The ACS Consistency Review (EA pp. 100-101, ACS consistency review February 2006 – located in project record) found that the project is in compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy as originally developed under the Northwest Forest Plan.

This decision is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act; the Native American Religious Freedom Act; other cultural resource management laws and regulations; Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice; and Executive Order 13212 regarding potential adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution. The project will not adversely impact any sites of cultural or historical significance. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was informed of the BLM's finding in accordance with 36 CFR 800.5(b).

This document complies with the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) and the Department of the Interior's regulations on the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (43 CFR Part 46) as well as the BLM specific NEPA requirements in the Departmental Manual (516 DM 11).

### VIII. ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

This decision is a wildfire management decision under 43 CFR 5003.1, and is effective upon publication of a notice in the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Administrative remedies are available to those who believe that they will be adversely affected by this Decision. Administrative recourse is available in accordance with BLM regulations and must follow the procedures and requirements described in 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulation 43 CFR § 5003.2 (a&c), the effective date of this decision, as it pertains to actions which are not part of an advertised timber sale, will be the date of publication of the notice of decision in the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the Grants Pass Daily Courier publication date will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

Any contest of this decision should state specifically which part of the decision is being protested and cite the applicable CFR regulations.

  
Abbie Jossie  
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area  
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

9-23-10  
Date

## APPENDIX A. PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY AND RESPONSE

### Comment and Response Summary

1. *Comment:* What is the prioritization process regarding this fuels reduction project?

*Response:*

- a. Treated areas would occur in fire regimes 1 and 3, and condition classes 2 and 3.
- b. The project would focus on treating ground fuels and ladder fuels, removing small material that is the most fire prone while leaving a diversity of species and size categories.
- c. Mechanical fuel reduction such as thinning would be combined with prescribed burning as research demonstrates that thinning alone (without subsequent treatment of activity fuels and maintenance treatments) actually increases fire hazard in both the short- and long-term.
- d. The project is 100 feet above and 100 feet below private roads acting as a continuation of the Deer Willy hazardous fuels reduction project.
- e. The project area is entirely in the wildland urban interface of Williams Oregon.

2. *Comment:* There is concern about the impacts of yarding biomass.

*Response:* There would be limited biomass extraction in the project and would be limited to firewood and small diameter material on private lands. Biomass is a byproduct of fuel hazard reduction treatments, not an objective in itself.

3. *Comment:* Ensure that yarding biomass will not interfere with achieving aquatic conservation objectives.

*Response:* The project will incorporate a 50 foot no-treatment buffer from streams.

4. *Comment:* Do not burn plastic in burn piles.

*Response:* As stated on page 25 of the Grants Pass Resource Area FHRP Environmental Assessment, "The use of polyethylene plastic sheeting would follow guidance from DEQ and Oregon Department of Forestry Smoke Management Plan. OAR 629-048-0210 (a) Only polyethylene may be used. All other plastics are prohibited; (b) the size of each polyethylene cover must not exceed 100 square feet."

5. *Comment:* Retain bird habitat

*Response:* Thinning is limited to 100 feet above and below roads which reduces habitat impact on a landscape level. In treatment units exceeding 10 acres, 10-20% of the unit would remain untreated (EA p. 11). Cutting would be accomplished between October and May, minimizing effects on nesting birds.

6. *Comment:* OHVs are a problem and could be exacerbated by the project.

*Response:* The project is on private land adjacent to residences. The proximity to homes would regulate illegal OHV use.

7. *Comment:* Retain leave patches and encourage variable thinning instead of even spacing.

*Response:* Buffers would remain along all streams. Variable thinning is prescribed with spacing ranging from 14 feet to 45 feet (14 to 30 feet in this decision). No-treatment areas are prescribed for treatment units exceeding 10 acres ((EA p. 11).

8. *Comment:* Hardwoods over 8 inches DBH should be retained.

*Response:* In general, most hardwoods above 6 inches would be retained (EA p. 10).

9. *Comment:* Do not cut any white oak, maple, dogwood, willow, elderberry, yew, alder, or cottonwood.

*Response:* Some white oaks would be cut, but maples, dogwood, willows, elderberry, yew, alder, and cottonwood are not targeted in the project.

10. *Comment:* Limit burn piles to minimum diameters and fuels in the burn piles to less than three inches in diameter.

*Response:* Handpiles are typically five feet high by five feet wide. Size of materials in piles will generally be  $\leq$  6 inches dbh (EA p. 11).

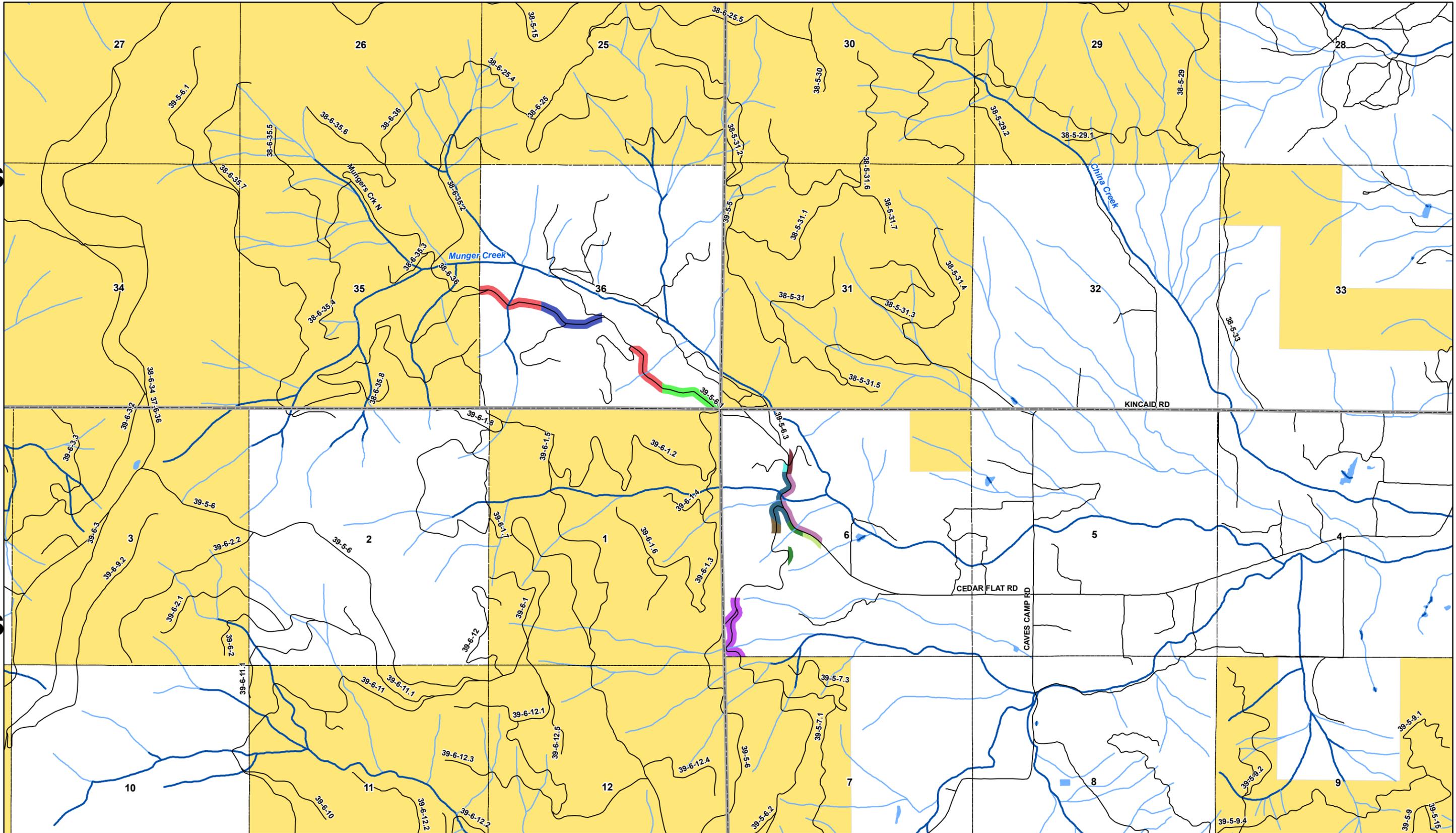
# West Williams Roadside Project

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R5W

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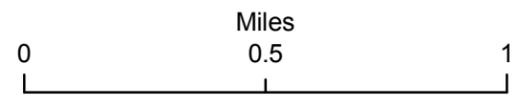
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**Legend**

BEAUSOLEIL	HOWARD	LOMBARDI	ROETHER	Bureau of Land Management
GAINS	JOSEPHINE COUNTY	PORTER	TERRANOVA	Private
HART	LAIHO	RESTER		



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