

Categorical Exclusion Documentation

A. Background

BLM Office: Prineville Field Office

NEPA Log #: DOI-BLM-OR-P060-2008-254

Project/Lease/Serial/Case File #:

Proposed Action Title/Type: Juniper Thinning

Location: The Prineville Lake Acres Juniper Thinning and Fuels Reduction Project is located twelve miles south of Prineville in Crook County, Oregon. The project area encompasses approximately 8,650 acres south of the Upper Davis Loop Road and north of the Prineville Reservoir. The project area includes both Prineville Lake Acres Subdivision #1 and #2. The legal description is T16S, R17E, portions of sections 7, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 30; T16S, R16E, portions of Sections 13, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28.

Description of the Proposed Action:

The project would mechanically thin a total of 1,000 acres within the 8,650 acre gross project area (see attached project map for a representation of unit design). Follow-up mechanical brush cutting may occur in areas of concentrated brush/slash close to roads and property lines. Mechanical thinning would occur within approximately 16 units of 40-100 acres each, dispersed throughout the project area. Treated units would be mixed within intervening untreated areas to create a variable open shrub-steppe, juniper savannah, and juniper woodland landscape pattern. The resulting post-treatment proportion of open shrub-steppe/savannah community types would be intermixed with the denser juniper woodland types at an approximate ratio of 3:1. To further reduce hazardous fuels, bolewood from cut trees of 4 inches to 18 inches in diameter may be removed for firewood, furniture wood, hobbywood, and post/pole/rail use. Branches, tops less than 4 inches in diameter and other materials left would be mechanically cut and scattered, or burned in hand-piles.

The proposed action is within an area designated as VRM 4 in the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan. The action to the extent possible will be designed to provide some screening near private land to mimic a natural appearing landscape. Juniper trees greater than 18 inches diameter breast height (DBH) or with old growth characteristics will be retained for visual quality. Snags will also be retained.

The existence of wilderness character outside Wilderness areas and Wilderness Study Areas is often an issue raised in project analysis. Due to the location of units adjacent to a subdivision, the area lacks opportunity for solitude or opportunity for primitive recreation activities. Only units 6, 7 and 8 are associated with large blocks of public land, and these are influenced by the location of highway 27 one-half mile to the west, and a subdivision on the east. BLM has determined that no wilderness values exist in the area affected by the proposal. Impacts to wilderness character will, therefore, not be further evaluated.

Thinning slash and brush reduction would be designed to limit wildfire flame length to 2 feet or less during 90th percentile summertime conditions. Crown fire initiation and spread should be a rare event following treatment. Post-treatment surface fuels would measure less than 5 tons per

acre of 0-4 inch material. Areas of dense shrub and activity fuels would be reduced to a height no greater than 9 to 12 inches within 300 feet of roads and property lines.

The project would take approximately 5-10 years to complete. A mixture of Contracted/Force account mechanical thinning would occur on one or three units per year in the fall/winter/spring season. Wood gathering would occur in the late spring/summer/early fall season.

Tree cutting would occur with chainsaw or small mechanical shear. Firewood and other wood products would be gathered with chainsaw and pick-up trucks.

Vehicles accessing the project area would stay on existing roads, reducing the potential of picking up and dispersing noxious weeds or seed. Actual implementation of project work would occur by staff using foot travel to cover/traverse the area.

If any cultural resources, endangered or threatened species are discovered during implementation of the project, appropriate action (dropping a unit, mitigating for nesting periods etc.) will be taken.

Permittee does not graze the north pasture which includes most of the project. For the south pasture (units 12, 17, 16, 19) units are narrow and located along private land. The resting determination may be adjusted later by the ID team per district policy. District policy is complete rest for the first year through the second growing season, unless adjusted by the interdisciplinary team assigned by the project.

Broadcast prescribed burning would not be considered at this time due to the presence of annual weeds, old-growth juniper, and proximity of homes. Some minor jackpot or hand-pile burning in lieu of mechanical slash treatment could be used adjacent to private property. Burning will be excluded if green-tinged paintbrush is found to be present.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: **Upper Deschutes Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan**
Date approved (ROD): **September 2005**

The proposed action is in conformance with the above plan because it is specifically provided for in the following land use plan decisions:

“Objective FF-4: In the Wildland urban interface, live and dead vegetation will be managed so that a wildland fire would burn with fire behavior where firefighters can be safe and successful in suppression efforts under hot, dry summer weather conditions. Treatments will be designed for human safety while still considering recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat and corridors, visual quality, air and water quality, and public access.” (page 62 Upper Deschutes Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan)

“Allocations/Allowable Uses: 1. Hazardous fuels reduction objectives may be met through a combination of fuels treatments including thinning, mowing, pruning, piling, burning, grazing, or other approaches that reduce the three dimensional fuel profiles and reduce the risk of crown fire or uncontrollable surface fire.” (page 62 Upper Deschutes Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan)

13. Restoration and fuels treatments using mechanical methods will provide opportunities to harvest juniper for furniture wood, hobby wood, fence posts, boughs, and other uses where available and where appropriate.

14. For long-term sustainability of the public firewood program, opportunities will be sought to transition away from cutting of dead standing trees to utilization of smaller diameter green trees obtained from thinning and fuels reduction treatments.” (Page 95 Upper Deschutes Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan)

C. Compliance with NEPA

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, D10 Vegetation management activities, such as seeding, planting, invasive plant removal, installation of erosion control devices (e.g., mats/straw/chips), and mechanical treatments, such as crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, mowing, and prescribed fire when the activity is necessary for the management of vegetation on public lands. Such activities:

- (a) Shall not exceed 4,500 acres per prescribed fire project and 1,000 acres for other vegetation management projects;
- (b) Shall not be conducted in Wilderness Areas or Wilderness Study Areas;
- (c) Shall not include the use of herbicides, pesticides, biological treatments or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure;
- (d) May include temporary roads which are defined as roads authorized by contract, permit, lease, other written authorization, or emergency operation not intended to be part of the BLM transportation system and not necessary for long-term resource management. Temporary roads shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources; and
- (e) Shall require the treatment of temporary roads constructed or used so as to permit the reestablishment, by artificial or natural means, of vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover was disturbed by the construction or use of the road, as necessary to minimize erosion from the disturbed area. Such treatment shall be designed to reestablish vegetative cover as soon as practicable, but at least within 10 years after the termination of the contract.

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2 apply. See attached checklist.

D. Signature

Authorizing official:



Date

5/5/09

Molly Brown
Deschutes Field Area Manager

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this review, contact: Janice Madden, Acting Fuels Specialist, Prineville Field Office, 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR 97754, telephone (541) 416-6575, jmadden@fs.fed.us.

R 16 E

R 17 E

PLA Cutting Units

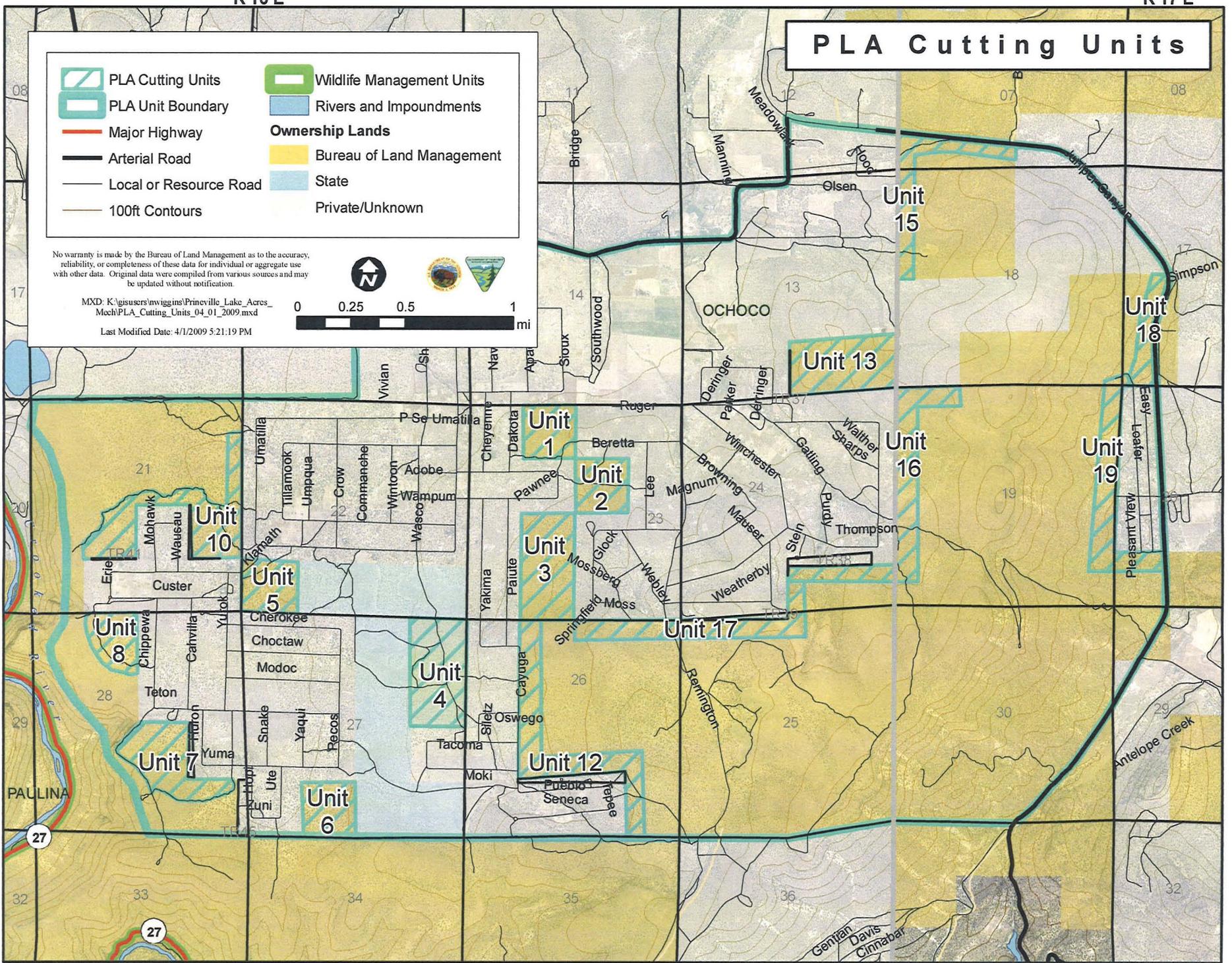
-  PLA Cutting Units
-  Wildlife Management Units
-  PLA Unit Boundary
-  Rivers and Impoundments
-  Major Highway
-  Arterial Road
-  Local or Resource Road
-  100ft Contours
- Ownership Lands**
-  Bureau of Land Management
-  State
-  Private/Unknown

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 and may be updated without notification.

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PAULINA

Antelope Creek

Gentian Davis Cinnabar