

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
SPOKANE DISTRICT, WASHINGTON STATE**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TITLE PAGE**

<b>ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NO.</b> OR-134-08-EA-002	<b>SERIAL NUMBER</b> WAOR 53911 (exchange) WAOR 64679 (LWCF acq.)	<b>DATE OF REPORT</b> January 23, 2008
--	---	---

<b>RESOURCE AREA</b> Wenatchee	<b>COUNTY</b> Douglas, Okanogan
-----------------------------------	------------------------------------

**TYPE OF ACTION**

Acquisition of Non-Federal Properties through Central Washington Assembled Land Exchange and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (Moses Coulee project area)

<b>APPLICANT'S NAME</b> Clearwater Land Exchange, Inc.	<b>ADDRESS (Include zip code)</b> P.O. Box 1621  Orofino, Idaho 93544
---	--

**DATE(S) OF FIELD EXAMINATION** September 25, 2007, November 8, 2007, November 20, 2007

**LANDS INVOLVED**

<b>Township</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Meridian</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>Subdivision</b>	<b>Acres</b>
	***See	Appendix 1 for	Legal	Description***	

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To identify the environmental effects of acquiring four non-federal properties through the Central Washington Assembled Land Exchange (CWALE) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

## Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	3
A. Background Information .....	4
B. Purpose and Need .....	4
C. Conformance with Land Use Plan .....	4
D. Relationship to Existing Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans .....	4
<b>II. Proposed Action and Alternatives</b> .....	5
A. Alternatives Analyzed in this EA.....	5
<b>III. Affected Environment</b> .....	7
A. Physical Environment - Acquisition Lands .....	7
B. Land Status.....	16
<b>IV. Environmental Impacts</b> .....	17
A. Impacts of Alternative 1 (Proposed Action).....	18
B. Impacts of Alternative 2 (No Action).....	22
C. Other Resource Elements Considered .....	23
E. Cumulative Impacts .....	23
<b>V. Coordination with other Groups, Agencies and Individuals</b> .....	25
A. Public Involvement .....	25
A. Consultation with Other Agencies, Groups, and Individuals .....	26
<b>VI. List of Preparers</b> .....	26

### List of Appendices

- 1 - Legal Descriptions of Proposed Acquisition Lands
- 2 - Maps of Proposed Acquisition Lands

**Environmental Assessment #OR134-08-EA-002**  
**Proposed Addition of Properties M, N, and O to Central Washington**  
**Assembled Land Exchange and the Acquisition of Property L through the LWCF**  
**BLM - Wenatchee Resource Area**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. Background Information**

This environmental assessment addresses the proposed acquisition of four non-federal properties by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The acquisition of three of the parcels, designated as M, N, and O, would be accomplished through the Wenatchee Field Office's Central Washington Assembled Land Exchange (CWALE). Property L would be acquired by use of a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) account approved by the U.S. Congress for acquisition of lands in the Moses Coulee area. The BLM originally planned to acquire a portion of property L through the exchange, because the LWCF balance was insufficient to permit acquisition of the entire property. However, in January, 2008, Spokane District was allocated additional funds to allow purchase of this property solely via the LWCF.

The CWALE is a facilitated, multi-party land exchange being processed by BLM's Wenatchee Field Office. It is an assembled exchange, meaning it involves multiple parties and transactions completed over an extended period of time. The facilitator for the exchange is Clearwater Land Exchange (Clearwater), a private entity. The purpose of the CWALE has been to dispose of scattered and isolated public land tracts, using their value to acquire lands with higher public values. The exchange has allowed BLM to significantly improve and consolidate public land ownership in three separate Spokane District Management Areas, Moses Coulee, Yakima River Canyon, and Okanogan, while disposing of parcels in the Scattered Tract Management Area. Through transactions completed since the inception of the exchange in 1999, the BLM has acquired 7 non-federal properties (9,204.371 acres) in exchange for 33 tracts of federal land (2,730.35 acres). Because of value disagreements or other issues, the BLM has been unable to acquire several non-federal parcels previously considered in the exchange. At the same time, a ledger account from disposals of federal lands remains for acquisition of suitable non-federal properties. Consideration of the properties in this report will allow continued progress in reaching Spokane District's land tenure adjustment goals.

The Moses Coulee LWCF Project Area was created in fiscal year 2003, when the U.S. Congress allocated one million dollars for the purchase of suitable properties within a project area that encompasses the landscape feature known as Moses Coulee. The stated purpose of the project is to acquire suitable shrub-steppe habitat to provide a continuous corridor important for a number of shrub-steppe dependent species, to prevent future listing of threatened and endangered (T&E) species, and to provide new dispersed recreational opportunities in Central Washington. Thus far, the BLM has spent approximately half of the allocated amount to acquire three separate private properties (approximately 2,000 acres) within the project boundary. The BLM was unsuccessful in acquiring an additional three properties.

## **B. Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this action is to continue fulfilling goals of the CWALE and the Moses Coulee LWCF projects. As discussed in greater detail above, the purpose of the CWALE has been to dispose of scattered and isolated public land tracts, using their value to acquire lands with higher public values. The purpose of the LWCF project is to acquire suitable shrub-steppe habitat, to provide a continuous corridor important for a number of shrub-steppe dependent species, to prevent future listing of threatened and endangered (T&E) species, and to provide new dispersed recreational opportunities in Central Washington.

## **C. Conformance with Land Use Plans**

The Proposed Action (Alternative 1) is in conformance with the land tenure adjustment policy in the Spokane Resource Management Plan (Spokane RMP), as amended December 1992. According to the amended RMP (pages 13 and 14), BLM's highest land tenure adjustment priority in the Spokane District is consolidation of public land through land exchanges and purchases into, between and within the District's management areas. The RMP states that these actions would be used to acquire specific tracts that provide greater expanses of uninterrupted high value wildlife habitats, possess recreational values that can be better managed and/or developed in public ownership, provide legal access to other public lands, qualify as an ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern), have high scenic values, enhance the value/manageability of other public lands, or possess other resource values of public interest that would be devalued or lost if retained in private ownership.

## **D. Relationship with Existing Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans**

BLM LWCF acquisitions are authorized by Section 205 of FLPMA (43 USC 1715), as amended. Acquisitions pursuant to this section are to be consistent with the mission of the BLM and its applicable land use plans. Property L lies within the boundary of the area approved as the Moses Coulee LWCF project by the U.S. Congress in 2003. When the project was approved, Congress also allocated a sum of money to be used for the acquisition of lands or interests in lands.

BLM land exchanges are authorized by Section 206 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, (FLPMA; 43 USC 1716), as amended by the Federal Land Exchange Facilitation Act of 1988. Among other requirements, FLPMA stipulates that 1) a determination be made that the public interest would be well served by making an exchange, 2) lands to be exchanged be located in the same state, and 3) exchanges must be for equal value; differences may be equalized by payment of money by either party. The proposed exchange does not conflict with zoning regulations of the two counties where these properties are situated.

## **II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

## **A. Alternatives Analyzed in this Environmental Assessment**

The BLM is considering two alternatives in this EA, Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), and Alternative 2 (No Action). Legal descriptions of properties L-O are provided in Appendix 1, and maps of the properties can be viewed in Appendix 2.

### Alternative 1 – Acquisition of Properties L, M, N, and O

The Proposed Action is twofold: 1) acquisition of Property L through use of the LWCF Moses Coulee project account, and 2) acquisition of properties M, N, and O, using the ledger account from Phase II of CWALE to obtain fee title to the properties. If insufficient value remains in CWALE ledger account to acquire properties M, N, and O, the priority order for acquisition would be in the order the properties are listed.

Properties L and M are within the Moses Coulee Management Area (MA), established in the Spokane RMP Amendment (1992). Properties N and O are within the Okanogan MA. RMP objectives and program specific guidance for these MAs would apply to the respective parcels. The project design features listed below would apply to this alternative.

#### Project Design Features

- General: Once acquired, these properties would be managed according to applicable federal laws and regulations, including the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and in conformance with decisions in the Spokane Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision (ROD). Management under multiple use principles would apply, pursuant to guidance in the Spokane RMP. Any unique or fragile resource values on the acquired lands that are subject to new or revised laws or regulation and are not addressed in the current RMP would be protected and managed on an interim basis until the RMP is updated. Because properties L and M include habitat for the Greater sage grouse, future management actions would be consistent with the BLM's National Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy (Nov. 2004) and the State of Washington Greater Sage Grouse Recovery Plan.
- Soil, Air, Water and Vegetation: Project-level inventory, evaluation, and planning for soil, water, air, and vegetation resources would be conducted as site-specific projects are proposed on the acquired parcels. Soils would be managed to maintain productivity and minimize erosion. Corrective actions would be taken to reduce accelerated erosion. Air and water quality will be protected. Shrub-steppe and native vegetation will be monitored and provided protection in activity planning.
- Energy and Mineral Resources: All land obtained by the United States through the CWALE would remain closed to operation of the land and mineral laws for a period of 90 days after acceptance of title by the United States (43 CFR 2091.3-2(c)) Following this time period, and subject to valid existing rights, the lands would be automatically opened to operation under the public land laws and mineral laws. Lands purchased through use of the Moses Coulee LWCF account would not be automatically opened.

Opening of these lands would only occur if BLM subsequently publishes a notice in the federal register.

- *Special Status Wildlife & Vegetation:* Management actions would be consistent with conservation needs of special status species and would not contribute to the need to list any special status species (BLM Manual §6840.02.B).
- *Treatment of Noxious Weeds:* Any noxious weed treatments on lands acquired through the exchange and LWCF acquisition would be consistent with the Spokane District Resource Management Plan, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Vegetation Treatment on Bureau of Land Management Lands in Thirteen Western States (dated May, 1991); the Oregon/Washington Record of Decision for Vegetation Management FEIS, dated July 1991; the Spokane District Noxious Weed Control Environmental Assessment; and any updates to these documents.
- *Cultural, Archaeological, and Paleontological Resources:* Reasonable effort would be made to identify, record, and evaluate historical, cultural and paleontological resources. Before any proposed activities are implemented on acquired lands, the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, consulting tribes, and interested members of the public would be notified, and an inventory or assessment would be conducted to identify related impacts on cultural and paleontological resources in accordance with applicable laws, including section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended).
- *Recreation/Access:* The acquired lands would be available for dispersed recreation activities, subject to legal access, Spokane District management policy and guidance, applicable state regulations, and the need for resource protection.
- *Timber Management:* Under BLM ownership, management activities would seek to improve forest health and diversity, and limit the chance of future catastrophic wildfires.
- *Hazardous Materials:* Prior to acquisition, the non-federal lands would be subject to the environmental site assessment (ESA) process. Through the ESA's, the properties would be examined for the presence or likely presence of any hazardous substances or petroleum products that indicate an existing release, past release, or threat of a release. Any potential environmental issues or liabilities would be identified and addressed prior to acquisition.
- *Economics:* The acquired properties would generally be available for multiple uses (including livestock grazing and dispersed recreation) that provide economic support to local communities and the region, while adhering to Spokane RMP management direction for the Moses Coulee and Okanogan Management areas, and other applicable guidance (e.g., BLM's National Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy).

Alternative 2 - No Action (no acquisition of properties L, M, N, and O)

This alternative represents a continuation of the existing situation, with no further effort made by the BLM to acquire these properties. Because of outstanding balances in the Moses Coulee LWCF account and CWALE ledger account, the BLM Spokane District would strive to identify other suitable acquisition lands in the Moses Coulee project area and in Central Washington, respectively.

### III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The following section describes the potentially affected environment by resource values. Since the properties have been in private ownership, the information is the best data currently available, collected by resource specialist during field visits or based upon records research and specialist's familiarity with similar properties nearby.

#### A. Physical Environment of Proposed Acquisition Lands

##### **Location and Topography:**

The properties proposed for acquisition in this environmental analysis are situated in two areas of north central Washington State: 1) Properties L and M are in Douglas County, in the upper portion of Moses Coulee, and 2) Properties N and O are located in Okanogan County, adjacent to Palmer Lake and near the historic townsite of Ruby, respectively. Legal descriptions and maps of the properties are provided in Appendix 1 and 2. Following are more specific details on the location and topography of each of these tracts.

*Property L:* This 2,668 acre contiguous parcel is situated approximately eight miles north of U.S. Highway #2, and adjoins the east side of Grimes Lake. The east side of the property has two miles of common boundary with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife's Chester Butte tract. On the Grimes Lake side, the property has over one mile of low and high bank waterfront. The property also mostly surrounds a 160 acre tract of BLM land. Because it lies within Moses Coulee proper, the topography of the property was significantly shaped by the prehistoric Spokane floods. It includes basalt cliffs and steep hillsides near Grimes Lake and moderately steep rolling topography farther from the lake.

*Property M:* Property M consists of three parcels situated about a mile to the east of Jameson Lake. The northern boundary of the parcel is one mile south of property L. The two largest portions are joined by a section owned by the Washington State DNR, and the smallest portion (160 acres) joins the largest tract at a corner. The largest tract has over one mile of common boundary on its west side with BLM public land that borders Jameson Lake. The property also mostly surrounds a 160 acre BLM tract. Because it is farther from the center of Moses Coulee, the topography is generally less steep than property L. However, it is crossed by Burton Draw and has a complex maze of drainage channels as a result.

*Property N:* Property N is a single parcel directly adjacent to the west side of BLM's Split Rock recreation site, at the south end of Palmer Lake. It is bisected by the paved Loomis-Oroville County road. The tract consists mostly of a level alluvial plain/wetland

adjacent to Sinlahekin Creek and the south side of the lake. The property south of the County road includes a portion of the steep north facing toe slope of Palmer Mountain.

Property O: Property O is in the Salmon Creek vicinity northeast of the historic townsite of Ruby. The property consists of two non-contiguous parcels, a 4.98 acre patented millsite claim and an irregular L-shaped block of four patented lode claims about 58 acres in size. Both properties are completely surrounded by BLM land. The lode claim block is situated mostly on a very steep north facing hillside, with the upright portion of the “L” extending across a valley to a moderately steep to steep sloping south-facing hillside. The millsite claim lays a few hundred feet to the northeast, and is moderately sloping. The gravel Ruby-Conconully County road crosses the upright portion of the “L” just south of its midpoint.

### **Vegetation, Including Special Status Species:**

Properties L and M: Big sagebrush/blue-bunch wheatgrass (*Artemisia tridentata/Agropyron spicatum*) is the dominant plant community on these properties. Big sagebrush/Idaho fescue (*A. tridentata/Festuca idahoensis*) and three tip sage/Idaho fescue (*Artemisia tripartita/Festuca idahoensis*) communities are lesser components (Daubenmire 1970). On sandy soils, bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) and needle and thread grass (*Stipa sp.*) communities occur. Wildflowers commonly found here are small bluebells (*Mertensia longiflora*), western groundsel (*Senecio integerrimus*), yellowbells (*Fritillaria pudica*), and Thompson’s paintbrush (*Castilleja thompsonii*).

Where there are shallow rocky soils (lithosols) the plant community type is stiff sage/Sandberg’s bluegrass (*Artemisia rigida/Poa secunda*) and thyme buckwheat/Sandberg’s bluegrass (*Eriognum thymoides/Poa secunda*). These associations are found as patchy inclusions within deeper soiled communities, and on ridgetops. Common plants of the lithosols are goldenweed (*Happalopappus stenophyllus*), Hood’s phlox (*Phlox hoodii*) and rock penstemon (*Penstemon gairdneri*).

Rock outcrops are common on the shoulders of drainages and the breaks of ridges. These areas provide unique habitats within and along their margins for a variety of plants, including serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), thicketleaved thelypody (*Thelypodium lacinatum*), and wax currant (*Ribes cereum*).

Draws that are dry most of the year support some shrubs and grasses including Wood’s rose, (*Rosa woodsii*), mock orange (*Philadelphicus lewisii*), and Great Basin wildrye (*Elymus cineris*).

Riparian shoreline vegetation was minimally developed. An occasional willow (*Salix sp.*), birch (*Betula sp.*), Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*) or cattail (*Typha sp.*) were noted along Grimes lake.

Although not extensively surveyed, the following weedy species were noted: diffuse knapweed along roadsides, Russian knapweed, Canada thistle, and Dalmatian toadflax in wetter areas near Grimes Lake. There were no substantial populations of any of the weeds noted. A few areas of the properties appeared to have been cultivated at one

time, being later seeded with crested wheatgrass when cultivation ceased. Sagebrush has re-colonized these areas over time.

The area has not been surveyed for Bureau Sensitive species. The following plants have been noted in adjacent areas and in similar habitats:

*Cryptantha leucophaea* (Gray Cryptantha)  
*Halimolobos perplexa* var. *perplexa* (Puzzling rockcress)  
*Juncus tiehmii* (Tiehm's Rush)  
*Juncus uncialis* (Inch-high Rush)  
*Mimulus suksdorfii* (Suksdorf's Monkey-flower)  
*Nicotiana attenuata* (Coyote Tobacco)  
*Astragalus multiflorus* (Loose-flower Milk-vetch)

Property N: The property is predominantly a mixture of cottonwood (*Populus* sp.)/Coyote willow (*Salix exigua*), and dry meadow communities. The area has a history of past grazing; therefore, introduced and early seral plant species are found throughout the area.

Although the property has not been surveyed for Bureau Sensitive species, the following plants were noted in adjacent areas and in similar habitats:

*Cypripedium parviflorum* (Yellow Lady's-slipper)  
*Eleocharis rostellata* (Beaked Spike-rush)  
*Luzula arcuata* (Curved Woodrush)  
*Spiranthes diluvialis* (Ute Ladies' Tresses)

Other than a few individual plants near access points, no weed infestations were noted during a field inspection of this property.

Property O: A dry forest of Ponderosa pine, bitterbrush and bluebunch wheatgrass covers most of the area, interspersed with non-forested openings of bitterbrush /bluebunch wheatgrass and rock outcrops. At higher elevations Douglas fir occurs. Common flowers include lupine species (*Lupinus* spp.), wild strawberries (*Fragaria* spp.), and Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja* sp.).

The area has not been surveyed for Bureau Sensitive species. The following plant has been noted in adjacent areas and in similar habitats:

*Mimulus washingtonensis* (Washington Monkey-flower)

Other than a few individual plants in disturbed areas, no weed infestations were noted during a field inspection of this property.

**Forestry:**

Property O: Forestry resources include multi-aged stands of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. The ponderosa pine stands at the lowest elevations have had one entry of selective logging that occurred approximately twenty years ago. These stands are on

relatively flat ground and developed under a low intensity/high frequency fire regime. Several aspen clones exist in this area. The Douglas fir stands in the upper portions of the unit consist of scattered older individuals and a second multi-age cohort of dense younger trees that have developed since fire exclusion. This area has experienced a moderate to high intensity/high frequency fire regime.

**Wildlife, Including Special Status Species:**

*Properties L and M:* These properties support a wide variety of animals common to shrub-steppe and riparian habitats of the Columbia Basin. Common species include mule deer, coyote, porcupine, canyon wren, raven, black-billed magpie, northern flicker, red-tailed hawk, gopher snake and western rattlesnake. Neotropical migrant birds use the area during migration, and many of these species are breeding summer residents. Birds in this category include western meadowlark, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, lark sparrow, and vesper sparrow. Waterfowl and wetland species such as coot, red-winged blackbird, and mallard are common at Grimes Lake.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Priority Habitats and Species known in the area include: shrub steppe, riparian, cliffs, talus, mule deer, white-tailed jackrabbit, Washington ground squirrel, golden eagle, sage thrasher, sage sparrow, loggerhead shrike, chukar, sage-grouse, prairie falcon, viceroy (butterfly), and Bonneville skipper (butterfly).

Bureau sensitive species that are known to use the area include the Greater sage-grouse (Federal candidate and Washington threatened) and Washington ground squirrel (Federal candidate and Washington candidate). There is evidence that the area supported pygmy rabbit (Federal endangered and Washington endangered), but none are known to occupy the area at present.

*Property N:* Wildlife expected on this parcel includes grassland, riparian, and wetland species such as killdeer, red-winged blackbird, yellow warbler, and white-tailed deer. Special status species known in the area include the common loon and bald and golden eagles.

*Property O:* Wildlife here include those species typically found in western ponderosa pine forest and Douglas-fir interior forest. Examples are mule deer, coyote, black bear, bobcat, western long-eared myotis, red-tailed hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, Cassin's finch, red crossbill, and red-breasted nuthatch. Primary cavity excavators expected or known to exist in the area include the Williamson's sapsucker, pileated woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, northern flicker, Lewis' woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, northern three-toed woodpecker, and black-backed woodpecker.

Special habitats in the area include Salmon Creek, wetlands, riparian areas, aspen groves, mine openings, rock outcrops, and late seral trees. The parcel lies within the range of the gray wolf and grizzly bear, and goshawks and golden eagles are known to use the area. Other sensitive species that may occur include the spotted frog, long-eared myotis, long-legged myotis, small-footed myotis, Yuma myotis, and Townsend's big-eared bat.

### **Fisheries:**

Fisheries values are present on properties L and N because of the frontage each has on Grimes Lake and Palmer Lake, respectively. The lakes themselves, up to their mean high water marks, are owned by the State of Washington, having been granted to the State upon its entrance into the Union. Palmer Lake has a mixed fish assemblage of perch, bass, rainbow trout and kokanee salmon (landlocked), and burbot. The only practical legal public access to Palmer Lake for fisherman is BLM's boat launch at Split Rock and the DNR recreation site at the north end of the lake. Grimes Lake is inhabited by a Lahontan cutthroat trout fish species.

### **Recreation:**

*Property L:* Property L has high recreation value, mostly due to the extensive lakeshore frontage along Grimes Lake. The lake is well known as a quality Lahontan cutthroat trout fishery, and fishing typically occurs with float tubes or in boats with electric motors. A small parking lot that is just west of the parcel's west boundary line is typically filled with cars on weekends during fishing season. A private hunting club controls the west side of Grimes Lake, which includes control over the primary access used by fishermen. However, the WDFW has an agreement with the Club that allows public access during the fishing season (June 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>). The WDFW also has an agreement with the owners of property L, allowing the public to use the lake shore during fishing season. The narrow, gravelly beach located on property L offers an excellent vantage point for this large lake. Occasional shotgun shells and campfire rings were observed near the lakeshore, suggesting possible hunting or dispersed camping use. Wetlands near the lake and isolated aspen stands offer scenic variety and habitat for birds and other wildlife.

A very scenic box canyon, seasonal waterfall and stream are located in the southwest corner of the property. Upland areas away from the lake likely receive recreation uses such as deer and bird hunting by permission.

*Property M:* This tract consists of shrub-steppe scenery, with views into the upper reaches of Burton Draw. The northwestern portion of the property is legally accessible by the Douglas County "5 NE" road along its north side, and across BLM public land adjacent to its west side. Current recreation uses likely include deer and bird hunting by permission.

*Property N:* This property has high recreation value due to its location along the sandy shore of Palmer Lake. The property is separated by a barbed wire livestock fence from BLM's Split Rock recreation site, a developed day use site and the only sandy beach accessible by the public on Palmer Lake. The Split Rock site is very popular for fishing, boat launching, picnicking, and enjoying views of the second largest lake in Okanogan County.

*Property O:* Property O has recreation value due to its location in a moderate sized block of BLM and State land near the historic townsite of Ruby, in Okanogan County.

The large, open ponderosa pine stands and high points on the ridge offer views of the rolling Okanogan hills, and the property is easily accessible by the Ruby-Conconully road. The old townsite of Ruby is directly adjacent to Salmon Creek. The BLM currently manages approximately 2.5 miles of Salmon Creek extending north and south of the townsite. The property has some mining related open cuts on a steep north facing hillside, but no obvious hazards (i.e, open shafts or adits) were apparent.

**Range Resources:**

*Property L:* This property was most recently grazed with cattle during 2006 by one of the owners and his partners. Westerly portions of sections 29 and 32, situated below the rimrock and along the lake, were grazed with cattle during 2007 by an adjacent landowner. Some heavy grazing was observed in the flat area adjacent to the shoreline of Grimes Lake. Several livestock water sources in the uplands and livestock access to portions of Grimes Lake is evidence that there is good livestock water distribution across the property. Based on field observations and review of the Douglas County soil survey, the terrain, generally loamy soils and existing plant communities make this property suitable for livestock production. Overall, past grazing use appears to have been light to moderate.

*Property M:* This property is currently grazed with cattle by the owner and his partners. Grazing occurs from May 15 to November 28. Grazing utilization observed in the fall of 2007 was estimated to be generally light to moderate. The property has at least three developed livestock water sources, one of which considered poor quality by the owner. Based on field observations and review of the Douglas County soil survey, the terrain, generally loamy soils and the plant communities make this property suitable for livestock production.

*Property N:* This property is currently grazed. Grazing utilization levels vary throughout this 26 acre parcel with some areas of heavy grazing. Both herbaceous and woody species are grazed.

*Property O:* Currently, only about 16 acres of the property situated north and west of the Ruby-Conconully road are grazed. These 16 acres are within pasture boundaries of a BLM grazing allotment which includes 6 parcels (294 acres) of BLM lands. The allotment takes in roughly 2700 acres of private lands. The grazed portion is timbered and use is limited by distance to water. The portion of property O situated south of the Ruby-Conconully road is generally too steep for grazing.

Rangeland plant communities on properties L-O are described in the Vegetation section.

**Soils:**

*Properties L and M:* Based on soil survey data of the Douglas County area gathered by the NRCS (USDA, 2007), properties L and M are mapped as having a variety of soil complexes. Common soil units identified on the gentle to moderately sloping upland portions of properties L and M include the Heytou-Stubblefield Complex, 3-15% slopes, Touhey-Lickskillet-Argabak Complex, 0-15% slopes, and Touhey-Stubblefield-Tagear Complex, 0-15% slopes. Present on the nearly level area adjacent to Grimes Lake are

the Strat-Tubspring complex, 0-8% slopes and the Halaquepts Complex, nearly level. The cliff areas of L are mapped as Rubbleland-Rock Outcrop Complex, very steep. Areas of Burton Draw on property M include the Heytou-Timentwa-Strat Complex, 20-70% slopes, Strat-Tubspring-Nemire Complex, 0-30% slopes, and Strat-Tubspring-Skaha Complex, 0-15% slopes. In general, most of the soils listed above are cobbly or stoney loams or sandy loams, all of moderate depth.

Property N: Based on NRCS soil survey data for Okanogan County (USDA, 2005-2006), the nearly level area of this parcel is mapped as Colville Silty Loam. This is a deep, poorly drained soil with a depth to the water table of 0-48". The upland area is mapped as Lithic Xerochrepts-Donavan-Rock outcrop complex, 15 to 45 percent slopes.

Property O: No soil survey information is available for this property.

### **Geology, Energy, and Mineral Resources:**

Geology of Properties L & M: These two parcels are on the northwestern fringe of the Columbia Plateau geomorphic province. Within this province, a series of Miocene basalt flows known as the Columbia River Basalt Group erupted from fissures during an 11-million year period between 17 million and 6 million years ago. Grande Ronde and Wanapum Basalts cover the subject parcels. The basalt covers older Cretaceous intrusive igneous and metamorphic rocks most likely equivalent or correlative those rocks exposed to the west along the Columbia River drainage. The basalt flows were locally inter-bedded with tuffaceous sandstones, silt, clay, and conglomerates of fluviolacustrine origin. During the Pleistocene, these parcels were initially inundated by ice-age catastrophic floodwaters forming localized northerly trending coulees within the basalt. Glacial sediments such as till and outwash associated with the Cordilleran Ice Sheet mantle the basalts and older flood deposits. Loess of Pleistocene to Holocene age blankets most of this property.

Geology of Property N: The geology of this property consists of weakly to moderately metamorphosed igneous rocks of the Palmer Mountain Greenstone of Triassic to Permian age. The parcel is covered by Pleistocene Cordilleran Ice Sheet deposits (outwash and till) and more recent alluvium.

Geology of Property O: This property consists primarily of Salmon Creek metamorphic rocks (schists and gneisses) of pre-Jurassic age, which were intruded by the Cretaceous Conconully Granodiorite (granitic rocks). Locally the parcel is covered by Pleistocene Cordilleran Ice Sheet deposits (outwash and till), and more recent alluvium.

### **Energy and Mineral Resources:**

Leasable Minerals: Because these properties have exposed metamorphic and/or igneous rocks at the surface or are suspected to be underlain by these rocks, the likelihood of oil and gas or coal deposits is unfavorable. There may be a low potential for geothermal resources.

Locatable Minerals: The likelihood of metallic locatable minerals on parcel O is high, based on the close proximity to past working mines within the area. Parcel N,

although covered by alluvium, may have a low potential for locatable minerals based on past producing mines in the area having the same rock type. Because diatomite beds occur locally within basalt flows, a low mineral potential is given to parcels L and M.

Salable Materials: The properties all have a moderate potential for deposits of salable materials (such as sand and gravel), due to being covered by Pleistocene glacial deposits. Since parcels L and M are predominately underlain by basalt suitable for quarry material, a high potential is given.

Potential Mineral Interference: Surface interference on or adjacent to the parcels is anticipated to be low. Allowance of future mineral exploration and development (including attendant surface interference) would generally be discretionary, and governed by federal regulations and BLM surface management policy. Actual mineral development on any of the properties is unlikely.

### **Cultural Resources and Native American Values:**

The acquisition properties are located within the traditional use areas of Native American groups including the Southern Okanogan, Columbia Salish and the Similkameen. Cultural resources associated with seasonally resource locations where foodstuffs including roots, berries and other plant materials were gathered or where fishing and hunting occurred are evident on or near the acquisition properties. Cultural resources associated with Native American use of the properties likely include rock features and lithic scatters. Additional inventory of the parcels would likely identify other cultural resources.

Although specific traditional resource use areas have not been identified on the acquisition properties, the habitats found in these areas are possible indicators of culturally important plant and animal resources. Habitats on lands to be acquired include upland plant communities favorable to traditional economic plants and important summer and winter wildlife habitat. The favorable habitats on these properties would provide potential opportunities to harvest plant and wildlife species important to tribal communities.

In addition to the subsistence activities, traditional religious and cultural beliefs and practices may have occurred on or near the acquisition properties. The properties are within the traditional use areas of the peoples represented by the Colville Confederated Tribes.

EuroAmerican expansion into the region began in the early 1800's with the establishment of Fort Okanogan at the mouth of the Okanogan River. By the 1850's, discovery of gold in the region brought further expansion and changes to the traditional Native American uses of the region. Two of the acquisition properties (N and O) are located within the former Moses Columbia Reservation, established in 1879 and rescinded in 1884. In tandem with mineral development came agriculture, particularly cattle grazing to support the miners and prospectors and growing number of settlers entering the region. Cultural resources associated with post contact agriculture

including cattle grazing are evident on several of the acquisition properties (L, M, and N).

*Properties L and M:* The properties are located within the traditional lands of the Columbia Salish and Southern Okanogan peoples and are located within their traditional root and berry gathering and hunting areas. Traditional Native American subsistence and religious activities, including plant gathering and hunting are among the cultural values potentially associated with the habitats identified on the acquisition parcels. Cultural properties associated with post-contact agriculture and development, including structures, roads, trails, fences, and farming/ranching equipment also occurs on the properties.

*Property N:* The property is located within the former Moses Columbia Reservation and the traditional lands of the Similkameen band. Traditional Native American subsistence and religious activities, including plant gathering, hunting and fishing are among the cultural values potentially associated with the habitats identified on or near the acquisition parcel.

*Property O:* The property is located within the former Moses Columbia Reservation and the traditional lands of the Southern Okanogan peoples. Traditional Native American subsistence and religious activities, including plant gathering, hunting and fishing are among the cultural values potentially associated with the habitats identified on or near the acquisition parcels. In addition, the property is comprised of a group of historic mineral lodes located near the historic mining community of Ruby and within the historic Ruby Mining District established in 1887. Cultural resources associated with historic mineral exploration occur on the property.

### **Hazardous Materials/Physical Hazards:**

Each of the subject properties have been inspected by field visits, as well as interpretation of recent (2006) aerial photography. Prior to acquisition, each property would be subject to a detailed environmental site assessment (ESA), in conformance with current Department of the Interior and BLM guidance. Preliminary investigations have revealed the presence of old homestead structures and livestock water development projects on properties L and M, a livestock corral and electric transmission line on property L, an electric distribution line and paved road crossing a portion of property N, and a gravel county road and mining related open cuts on a portion of property O. Property O also has a small dump and a 1950's vintage truck abandoned on the property.

### **Economics:**

Items considered under this heading include property taxes and current uses of the properties that benefit local economies. Most of the properties are in a deferred tax category for agriculture; therefore, the tax revenue received by the counties is relatively minor (see Environmental Impacts section for recent figures). Due to the larger size of properties L and M, they have potential to provide a moderate amount of livestock forage, helping to maintain the agriculture dependant economy of Douglas County. Property L provides additional benefits from the recreational fishing that seasonally

occurs at Grimes Lake. Local businesses profit from providing goods and services to the recreational users, many of whom travel from the larger populations centers in Washington State.

## B. Land Status

The four properties have varied ownership histories. Pre-existing rights are generally limited to county road easements on each of the properties, and a transmission line and distribution line right-of-way on tract L and N, respectively. The State of Washington owns the lakebed of Grimes Lake up to the mean high water mark. The mineral estate on 240 acres of property L was previously reserved by the United States. The United States also reserved the right to construct ditches and canals on all of the properties. As part of the acquisition/exchange process, title commitments and encumbrance documents will be obtained for each property. Before a given property can be acquired, title sufficiency is reviewed and approved by an Interior Department solicitor.

Primary Use of Properties L-O: Properties L and M are primarily used for livestock grazing. Recreation use of the lakefront portion of Property L occurs during fishing season under an agreement between the landowners and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. Some hunting use may also occur on properties L and M by permission. Other than the possibility of hunting by permission, Property N is also primarily used for livestock grazing. Property O is mostly used for open space, although some recreation use may occur. The property is completely surrounded by BLM land and the boundaries are not posted by the landowner.

Ownership and Use of Lands Adjacent to Properties L-O: The four non-federal tracts adjoin a mixture of private ranchlands, state lands, and BLM public lands. Ownership and principal uses of the adjacent properties are described below. The maps in Appendix 2 display adjoining private, state and federal ownerships.

*Property L:* This property is bordered by private ranch land and state land, with a minor component of BLM public land. State owned property includes the WDFW's Chester Butte tract on the east side, and a single section of DNR (Department of Natural Resources) land on the north side. Uses of adjoining land include livestock grazing, recreation, and wildlife habitat. The Chester Butte property was specifically purchased by WDFW for wildlife habitat. Besides livestock grazing, lands on the west side of Grimes Lake are also used by a private hunting club, who controls two of the primary access roads to the lake.

*Property M:* Although property M is mostly bordered by private ranch lands, the tract has sizeable boundaries with BLM, DNR and WDFW ownerships. The WDFW owned property was specifically purchased for wildlife habitat. Like property L, the primary uses of adjacent lands are livestock grazing, recreation, and wildlife habitat.

*Property N:* This property adjoins BLM public land on its east and south sides, and private ranchland on its west side. The north side borders the state owned Palmer Lake. Adjacent lands are used primarily for livestock grazing and recreation.

*Property O:* Property O is entirely surrounded by BLM public land. Uses of the BLM land include wildlife habitat, recreation, and forest resources, with a small portion used for livestock grazing. The primary use of private lands bordering the northeast side of the BLM is livestock grazing.

#### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

This section addresses potential affects and impacts that may occur as a result of implementing the proposed action or the no action alternative. Analysis is based on the assumptions made regarding the likely public uses for these tracts and any pertinent land use planning guidance for the BLM's Moses Coulee and Okanogan Management Units, into which these tracts would be placed if acquired. Specific assumptions used in this analysis include:

- *Grazing:* On properties L and M, livestock grazing would likely be allowed to continue on previously grazed areas. However, before grazing could be authorized by BLM, allotment management plans (AMP's) and the associated environmental analysis would be completed to determine suitable grazing practices. Any future grazing must be consistent with BLM's National Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy (November, 2004) and the State of Washington Greater Sage Grouse Recovery Plan. Target grazing utilization levels would be light (21 to 40%), and would also emphasize improvement of riparian area conditions.

Grazing would not be authorized on property N (Palmer Lake) unless later needed to achieve a resource objective such as noxious weed control. On property O, approximately 16 acres lying north and west of the Ruby-Conconully road are within a BLM grazing allotment and would be grazed in accordance with the existing authorization for this allotment. The current level of grazing use would not change on the 16 acres. Grazing would not be authorized on the lands lying south of the Ruby-Conconully road, as they have steep terrain and are not suitable for grazing.

- *Range Improvements:* Rangeland improvements such as fencing and water development could be developed or modified, consistent with BLM management objectives, site-specific environmental analysis, and BLM approval. Construction of range improvements is subject to available funding.
- *Recreation/Access:* Possible recreation improvements and resource protection measures are as described by tract below.
  - Properties L and M: Future BLM actions would include designation of public access points or roads, parking areas, and non-motorized trails; and installation of suitable signs. The lakeshore and riparian areas of property L would be fenced to exclude livestock, and old homestead buildings on both properties may be removed.
  - Property N: Future BLM management actions may designate riparian interpretive trails, install signing, and place picnic tables on the beach. The existing barb-wire fence on the property line would be removed, and a fence would be constructed on the new west boundary.

- o Property O: No actions planned

A. Alternative 1: Acquisition of Properties L-O (Proposed Action)

Potential Impacts to Vegetation: The greatest impacts to the plant communities would be changes in livestock use and recreation, especially likely for Properties L and M. Provided that grazing is authorized, the light grazing (21-40%) to be specified in the spring and summer would result in overall impacts to the plant communities similar to current use, with some improvement of conditions in areas where existing use is at a higher level. More recreation use on the Grimes Lake property may cause minor alterations to the plant communities and an increase in weedy species from compaction and spread by vehicles, if motorized access is allowed.

Elimination of livestock grazing would occur on parcel N if it is transferred to public ownership. Changes in understory composition would occur, with a likely increase in species diversity. Weedy and woody species might also thrive, since the area has been heavily grazed while under private ownership. Increased recreation use would cause localized change in the vegetation from informal trail development, picnic and camping use by the public. Likely changes are removal of vegetation by trampling, and an increase in weedy species.

No or minimal change in the vegetation is expected on parcel O since current grazing is expected to continue on a portion, and the bulk of the property is less accessible because of steep slopes.

Potential Impacts to Forestry: Likely future BLM management actions on property O and adjoining public lands would seek to reduce stocking and improve stands, thereby reducing the threat of catastrophic, stand-replacing fire. These actions would also decrease competition among the remaining trees for water, nutrients and light, thus reducing the stresses on the remaining trees that leave them susceptible to insect and disease damage.

Potential Impacts to Wildlife: Changes in livestock use and recreation could have the greatest impacts on wildlife under Alternative 1. Currently, sage-grouse use properties L and M for winter habitat and probably also nesting, since both parcels have suitable nesting and brood-rearing habitat. Target forage utilization on other BLM grazing allotments in the area is 30%. If this level of utilization is allowed on the acquired lands, livestock should have little effect on sage-grouse and other shrub-steppe obligates, particularly in the best habitats that are farthest from water. Higher levels of upland utilization would reduce the quality of habitat for most shrub-steppe wildlife. Greater impacts could occur along one mile of shoreline at Grimes Lake and half mile of spring-fed stream in the southwestern portion of parcel L. Approximately 5.5 acres of riparian and wetland habitats could be degraded by livestock unless fencing or timing of grazing allow for protection and recovery of these areas.

As noted elsewhere, property N is heavily utilized by livestock. Under public ownership, this parcel would be protected as part of the Split Rock Recreation Site, with

grazing eliminated. Species that prefer open grassland such as brown-headed cowbird and killdeer would lose habitat while species that prefer tall herbaceous and woody vegetation, such as red-winged blackbirds and yellow warblers would benefit. The entire 26 acres would improve under this alternative. For property O, habitat conditions would not vary in the short term as no immediate change in management is expected.

Recreational use of all parcels is likely to increase under public ownership. Parcel L would provide improved public access to Grimes Lake, allowing use by hikers, fishermen, and hunters. Hunting and harvest of upland game birds, waterfowl, mule deer, and coyotes would increase, as would fishing on Grimes Lake. Increased vehicle travel would have the greatest direct and indirect effects on wildlife. Vehicles would increase short term disturbance of wildlife, increase erosion and spread of noxious weeds, and facilitate littering and vandalism. Vehicle travel in summer would increase the chance of wildfire.

Recreation use of parcel N would be concentrated on the beach and have little impact on wildlife. Some hunting of white-tailed deer, pheasants, and waterfowl could occur in the fall. Although recreation use of parcel O might increase slightly, much of the parcel is too steep for most activities.

*Potential Impacts to Fisheries Habitat:* If the proposed action is implemented, a minor benefit could accrue to the Grimes Lake fishery from reducing or eliminating livestock grazing on areas next to the lake. However, this benefit could be offset by increased use of the shore area by fisherman and other recreationists.

*Potential Impacts to Recreation:* If acquired by BLM, a positive impact to recreation would occur due to additional recreational opportunities for the public. Recreation use is anticipated to increase on all of these properties if acquired, particularly L and N. These two properties are adjacent to large lakes where some public use already occurs. Depending on the type of future access provided by BLM, Property L could experience much more use of the beach and lakeshore property. Uses such as fishing, hunting, camping, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel would likely increase. This could lead to impacts such as soil compaction, vegetation disturbance; weed infestations, litter, and chance of wildfire (*see additional comments in Wildlife and Vegetation sections*). It's also possible that trespass could occur on the private hunting reserve adjacent to Property L. Grimes Lake access would no longer only be controlled by the private hunting club, which would allow more year-round use of the property and potential conflicts with the hunting club. Public use of the non-lakefront portions of property L would increase to some extent, primarily through hunting, camping, and horseback use.

Property M would experience some additional recreation use, primarily hunting and primitive camping, especially since it is adjacent to the existing BLM ownership in Burton Draw. Off highway vehicle (OHV) use associated with hunting and camping may create new roads and hill climbs in areas off the main access road. Additional recreation use would likely result in litter, weed infestations, soil compaction, vegetation disturbance, and increased chance of wildfire.

Property N would experience more use due to its location next to the popular Split Rock recreation site. If acquired, the fence along the property line would be removed to allow the public walk-in access along the beach and into the property. The property would also need to be fenced on its west side to exclude livestock. The main access to Property N would be through the Split Rock recreation site. The site's sandy beach would be well used by visitors to Split Rock, especially those wishing for more solitude or with a sense of adventure. Visitors might also eventually create user-made trails leading farther into the property, and potential primitive camping and hunting could occur. These uses could lead to additional litter, soil compaction, and vegetation damage. Recreation use of property O may marginally increase once local residents or public land users learn that it is in BLM ownership. Uses would more likely be limited to the flatter areas near the road, with hunting and dispersed camping possible. Property O is near the snowpark location at Ruby, so snowmobiling on the old mining roads and flatter areas may occur in the future.

Potential Impacts to Range Resources:

Property L: Light grazing use is anticipated if a grazing lease is later issued for this property. Grazing use along the lakeshore and in other riparian areas would be reduced to light levels of utilization or not permitted. Season of use and utilization levels may need adjustments in order to meet BLM's National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy and to be in conformance with the State of Washington Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery Plan. This may result in a reduction in the period of time the parcel is grazed and the amount of forage consumed. Because of the low level of current grazing use, the impact upon grazing operations would be negligible.

Property M: Impacts would be similar to those described above on property L. If grazing is authorized on the property, light use would be specified. Distribution of grazing use may change, however, due to likely repair and maintenance of livestock watering facilities and placement of mineral supplements. Season of use and utilization levels may need adjustment to meet BLM's National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy and to be in conformance with the State of Washington Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery Plan. This could result in a reduction in the period of time that the parcel is grazed and the amount of forage consumed.

Property N: This property would no longer be grazed. Loss of grazing use of the 26 acre parcel would be a negligible impact to the current livestock operation.

Property O: If the proposed action is implemented, no change in the grazing use of this parcel is anticipated.

Potential Impacts to the Soil Resource: Acquisition of these properties by the BLM under Alternative 1 would mean more recreation use but less grazing use. The recreation use would be dispersed, as no developed sites are planned. Impacts to the soil resource would include minor compaction and soil erosion, primarily from vehicles, campsites, and creation of foot trails. Control of access to the properties, and existing fences would help limit motorized uses in most areas. In other areas, barriers or fences may be necessary to restrict vehicle use and attendant damage.

Potential Impacts to Energy & Mineral Resources: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), the mineral estates of the subject parcels would be transferred to the United States, resulting in a net increase in the amount of publicly owned mineral estate. In accordance with 43 CFR 2201.9(b), all of the tracts except property L would be automatically segregated for 90 days from the operation of the public land laws and mineral laws. After 90 days, properties M, N, and O would be open to mineral entry, unless they are withdrawn from operation of the locatable mineral laws. Compared to the existing situation of private mineral ownership, the transition to public ownership is not expected to make it more likely for development to occur. Because all mineral activities that could occur are regulated by BLM, and approval of most is discretionary, it is unlikely BLM would approve development that would interfere with the wildlife and recreation values that are driving the acquisition of these properties. The only exception from discretionary review is locatable minerals, for which Parcel O would have a high potential of occurrence based on past mining activity within the area.

Potential Impacts to Native American Values/Cultural Resources: Cultural resources of historic or cultural value would be managed and protected by federal laws, regulations and policies. Federal acquisition of the parcels and cultural resources would increase the number and types of cultural resources managed, as well as improve access to and conservation of those resources.

In addition, acquisition of the parcels would provide opportunities for access to the traditional use areas and allow for traditional activities such as plant gathering. Impacts on cultural properties from grazing would likely decrease on properties where grazing levels are reduced, however, improved public access and recreational development may result in greater recreational use and damage or vandalism of cultural properties.

Potential Impacts to Economics: A primary economic impact would be changes in the revenue stream received by the two counties in which these properties lie. Due to acquisition by BLM, the properties would no longer be subject to property tax or other assessments levied by the counties. Under federal ownership, however, the properties would be subject to the congressionally authorized Payment in Lieu of Taxes program (PILT). In 2006, the PILT program returned payments of \$0.71/acre and \$0.65/acre to Douglas and Okanogan Counties, respectively, for all qualifying federal lands within each county's borders. Use of these figures gives estimated payments of about \$3,381 to Douglas County and \$58 to Okanogan County for the subject tracts in 2006. During tax year 2007, Douglas County received \$234.73 and \$184.11 for properties L and M, respectively (totaling \$418.84). Okanogan County received \$25.10 and \$346.68 for properties N and O, respectively (totaling \$371.78). Therefore, if the properties are acquired as proposed under Alternative 1, Douglas County would see a yearly gain of about \$2,963 in revenue and Okanogan County would experience a yearly decrease of roughly \$314.

Because future livestock grazing could be authorized on properties L, M, and O, use of these lands would continue to meet local needs for grazing forage. This in turn would provide direct economic support to the grazing lessees along with indirect support to the livestock industry and local communities. The BLM would receive grazing fees from

the use, half of which would be paid to the applicable counties and half would be available for range improvement projects.

The boost in public land acres would directly result in improved hunting opportunities, along with protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat to support healthy populations of both. This would enhance fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing. The local economies benefit from these activities through the sale of goods and services to the recreational users.

#### B. Alternative 2: No Action

Under this alternative, the subject properties would not be acquired by the United States. Therefore, no impacts would occur from future management actions by BLM. Remaining in private hands, the properties would be subject to highest and best uses as determined by the marketplace and allowed by local zoning regulations. For property M, little is likely to change in the short term. This property would continue to be used for livestock grazing, with little economic incentive for the owners to enhance or protect the sage grouse or other wildlife habitat present on the tract. Although the upland portion of property L is similar to property M, the Grimes Lake frontage of this tract stands a higher chance of future recreation or occupancy related development. Property N is part of a larger ranch holding, so its use is not likely to change in the short term unless the larger property is split up or sold. Since it consists of easily accessible lakefront, there is a strong possibility of future development. Because of its small size and convenient county road access, property O is a likely candidate for future recreation or homesite related development, at least on its flatter portions. Removal of bitterbrush through development of this portion of the property would impact deer winter range values. Any cultural resources occurring on the on the parcels would remain in private ownership and wouldn't be protected or managed under federal cultural resource laws.

#### C. Other Resource Elements Considered

The critical elements listed below, not otherwise mentioned in the text of this EA, have been reviewed and would not be affected by this action.

- Air quality
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Prime/unique farmlands
- Floodplains
- Special area designations (including Areas of Critical Environmental Concern)
- Wilderness
- Surface and ground water
- Adverse impacts to energy
- Minority or low-income populations (Environmental Justice)

#### D. Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts include those impacts that would result from incremental effects of this exchange and LWCF acquisition proposal, when added to other past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions. In general, the range of actions includes efforts by BLM to consolidate public lands through the disposal of scattered and isolated tracts of range and forest or woodland, and the acquisition of non-federal properties (usually contiguous with other public lands) by BLM, generally within the Wenatchee Resource Area (WRA) boundaries. Also included within the range of actions are acquisitions using the LWCF and donations. These actions, unlike exchanges, are not associated with disposals of federal land. Although the WRA takes in the western two-thirds of Washington, most of the BLM public lands lie east of the Cascade crest, within seven central Washington counties (two of which are represented in the current exchange/LWCF effort): Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, and Yakima. Following is a discussion of how the proposed action relates to other completed and planned BLM exchanges and acquisitions within WRA, focusing primarily on changes in shrub-steppe and forest/woodland.

Within the WRA, the proposed action would be the fourth exchange with Clearwater designed to fulfill the land tenure goals of the Spokane RMP. The subject exchange would be the 14<sup>th</sup> to be processed by the Wenatchee Resource Area since the RMP was completed in 1985.

Through the previous thirteen exchanges, BLM acquired approximately 34,950 acres of non-federal lands within Central Washington. During the same time period, BLM-WRA acquired about 13,373 acres by means of numerous LWCF (Land and Water Conservation Fund) purchases and several donations (also within central Washington). Through the previous exchanges, 117 tracts of public land in Central Washington were traded out of federal ownership. Disposed lands totaled roughly 1,622 acres of forest and woodland in Okanogan County, 70 acres of woodland in Chelan County, 53 acres of forest land in Kittitas County, and about 12,648 acres of shrub-steppe land in Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Franklin, Grant, Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, and Yakima Counties. About 160 acres of the federal forest land conveyed to the DNR in Okanogan County were later included in a Natural Area Preserve. The non-federal lands acquired through all of these realty actions totaled about 47,240 acres of shrub-steppe and roughly 1,083 acres of forest and woodland.

Net changes from the above described realty actions (exchanges, LWCF acquisitions, and donations) were a decrease of about 539 acres of federal forest/woodland and an increase of roughly 34,591 acres of federal shrub-steppe. Most of the disposed federal forested acres came from Okanogan County and most of the incoming non-federal forest land came from Klickitat County. As for shrub-steppe, the incoming acres are spread across most of the Central Washington counties, except for Chelan County, where no lands have been acquired. The largest increases in federally owned shrub-steppe (in the Wenatchee Resource Area) have occurred in Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, and Okanogan Counties.

Besides the actual disposals noted above, 510 acres of mostly shrub-steppe lands have been previously approved for disposal through CWALE, but not yet conveyed. The disposal of these tracts is anticipated to occur in the first quarter of 2008.

Selection of Alternative 1 in this EA would add 4,782 acres of shrub-steppe land, 63 acres of woodland, and about 20 acres of wetland to federal ownership. When these figures are combined with the exchanges, acquisitions, and donations noted above, the overall net change would be a 476 acre decrease in federal forest/woodland and an increase of about 38,863 acres of federal shrub-steppe within Central Washington. The cumulative effect would be net decreases in the amount of BLM federal forest/woodland in Okanogan (-861 acres), Chelan (-70 acres), and Kittitas (-53 acres) counties, and a net increase in Klickitat County (+480 acres). The decrease in BLM federal forest/woodland acres that has occurred in these three counties is considered negligible, especially since few of the disposed lands had late-seral forest characteristics. For Okanogan County, the small decrease in BLM-administered forest land has been more than offset by efforts of the U.S. Forest Service and the Washington State DNR, which have increased their forested holdings in Okanogan County and adjoining Ferry County through land exchanges and outright acquisitions.

Large expanses of federally owned shrub-steppe have resulted from BLM's exchanges, acquisitions, and donations in WRA. Through implementation of Alternative 1 of the current proposal, public ownership of a key area of wildlife habitat in upper Moses Coulee would be increased. The public would also gain a unique area of wetland/shoreline next to a developed recreation site, and an inholding within a BLM managed block in the Salmon Creek area.

The larger public land tracts produced by BLM's exchange and acquisition programs increase the probability of maintaining functional shrub-steppe ecosystems in central Washington, increasing the habitat availability for shrub-steppe dependent plant and animal species. Both the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and The Nature Conservancy have noted that placing shrub-steppe habitat under BLM management provides a level of formal protection for special status species not legally available in private ownership. In addition, aggregation of federal lands has allowed increased access and improved opportunities for management of cultural landscapes and traditional uses in areas previously closed to public use and traditional practices. Cultural and historical properties identified on the acquisition lands are managed in accordance with federal laws and regulation.

The larger expanses of public land that BLM has assembled have also measurably increased recreation opportunities available to the public in central Washington. This has occurred by three means, 1) a net increase in publicly owned lands, 2) exchange of lands lacking legal access for lands with access, and 3) the improvement of access to previously isolated tracts by consolidation. With few exceptions, the BLM has been able to improve public access to lands through these efforts, without a separate need to later acquire access easements. The improvement of access has also led to increased impacts associated with public use. Primary impacts are vegetation and soil disturbance caused by off-road vehicle travel, foot traffic, and camping.

Future land exchange efforts by BLM would strive to continue improvements in the public land pattern in central Washington, pursuant to the guidance in the Spokane RMP and national priorities. Projected exchanges would trade mostly scattered and isolated

shrub-steppe lands for consolidated shrub-steppe lands. The BLM has few forested lands within WRA suitable for disposal; therefore, they would generally be no more than a minor acreage component in future exchange disposals. Consolidated forested lands would be acquired as well, as opportunities arise. Scattered forested tracts in western Washington would also be considered for disposal.

## V. COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES, GROUPS, AND INDIVIDUALS

### A. Public Involvement

A discussion of previous public involvement opportunities and responses for the CWALE is described in the CWALE Phase II EA and CWALE Property K EA. Because of the proposed acquisition of a portion of property L and all of properties M-O through CWALE, it was necessary for BLM to issue and publish a new “Notice of Exchange Proposal” (NOEP), so that the public would be given an opportunity to comment on the proposal. This notice was published in the legal notice sections of the *Wenatchee World* newspaper once a week for four consecutive weeks starting on October 11, 2007. The notice was also sent to an extensive list of government entities, public and private organizations, and all interested parties of record. The notice provided a 45 day comment period starting on the first date of newspaper publication and ending on November 25, 2007. Two letters were received in response to the notice.

One letter was received from the Western Lands Project, and another from a private individual. The Western Lands Project is a non-profit membership supported organization that monitors federal land exchange policy. The organization requested a copy of the environmental assessment, when available, and made two suggestions for the EA: 1) BLM should provide clear maps showing the ownership surrounding the parcels that would be acquired, and 2) BLM should include a description of surrounding land uses that might affect the land being brought into public ownership. The BLM considered these items during development of this EA. The second letter was submitted by a private individual who is very familiar with the four properties being considered for acquisition. Having frequently recreated on public lands, the individual supports the acquisition of these lands by BLM. Included in the letter was a description of specific resource values the individual was aware of.

If Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) is approved, the BLM will mail a Notice of Decision to each of the entities that received the earlier NOEP. The notice will provide details for obtaining a copy of this environmental assessment and the BLM decision record. The notice will be published one time in the newspaper noted above.

### B. Consultation with Other Agencies, Groups, and Individuals:

Consultation was initiated with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCT) by letters dated November 21, 2007. The Colville Confederated Tribes also received a copy of the Notice of Exchange Proposal that was sent out on October 11, 2007. Both entities were requested to identify any concerns they had with the proposed

acquisition properties. A description of previous tribal and DAHP consultation for this land exchange is present in the CWALE Phase II EA and CWALE Property K EA.

## VI. LIST OF PREPARERS

The following Spokane District personnel provided input for this environmental assessment:

- Pamela Camp, Botanist, Wenatchee Field Office
- Brent Cunderla, Geologist, Wenatchee Field Office
- Neal Hedges, Wildlife Biologist, Wenatchee Field Office
- Joe Kelly, Fisheries Biologist, Wenatchee Field Office
- Dana Peterson, Range Management Specialist, Wenatchee Field Office
- Diane Priebe, Recreation Planner, Wenatchee Field Office
- William Schurger, Realty Specialist, Wenatchee Field Office
- Mark Williams, Forester, Wenatchee Field Office
- Rich Bailey, Archaeologist, Spokane District Office
- Scott Pavey, Planner & Environmental Coordinator, Spokane District Office

Appendices

1.....Exhibit A (legal descriptions of Properties L-O)

2 ..... Maps of Properties L-O

**Appendix 1: Legal Descriptions of Proposed Acquisition Lands**

**Property L:**

T.26N., R.26E., Willamette Meridian, Douglas County

Section 17: SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  (120 ac.)

Section 20: Lots 3, 4, 7, E $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$  (233.20 ac.)

Section 21: All (634 ac.)

Section 28: All (637.5 ac.)

Section 29: Lots 1, 3, E $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  (405 ac.)

Section 32: NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , W $\frac{1}{2}$ , SE $\frac{1}{4}$  except tax #1 (638.3 ac.)

Comprising 2,668 acres, more or less

**Property M:**

T.25N., R.26E., Willamette Meridian, Douglas County

Section 8: N $\frac{1}{2}$  except road, S $\frac{1}{2}$  except road (635.80 ac.)

Section 15: S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , N $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$  (197 ac.)

Section 17: NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , N $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , S $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{2}$  (480 ac.)

Section 20: NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$  (40 ac.)

Section 21: SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$  except road, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , N $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  except road (236 ac.)

Section 22: NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$  except road, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  (519 ac.)

Comprising 2,107.80 acres, more or less

**Property N:**

T.39N., R.26E., Willamette Meridian, Okanogan County

Section 18: Lot 6 (26.05 ac.)

Comprising 26.05 acres, more or less

**Property O:**

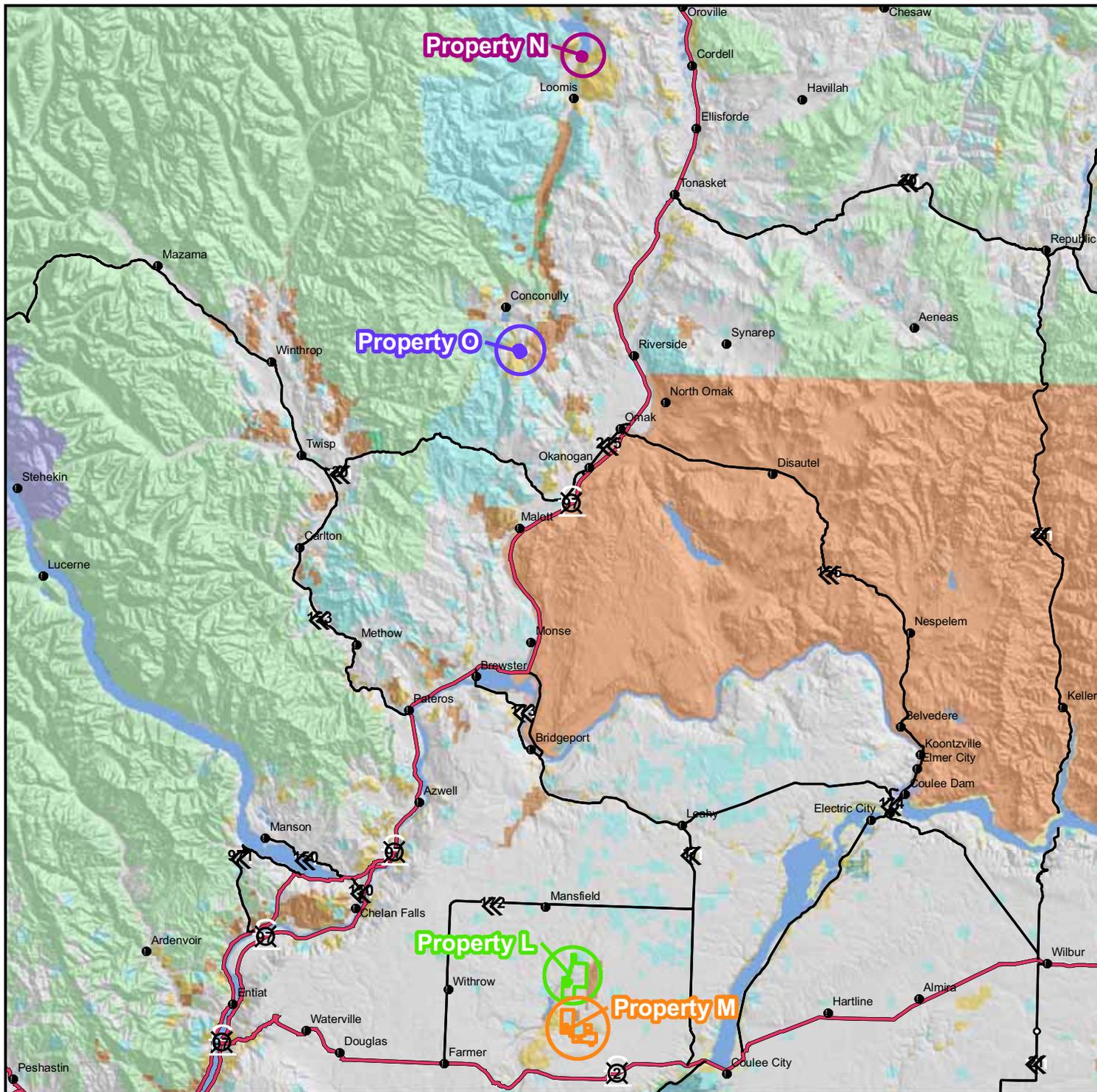
T.35N., R.25E., Willamette Meridian, Okanogan County

Section 29: The Davidson, Adams, M.A. Schnebly, and Nonesuch Lodes (all Mineral Survey #82A), and Schnebly Mill Site (M.S. #82B)

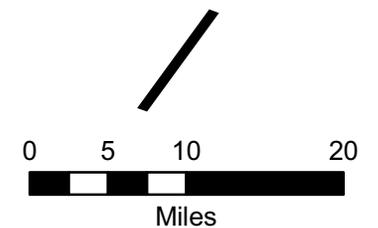
Comprising 63.01 acres, more or less

# Overview Map

## Property L, M, N and O

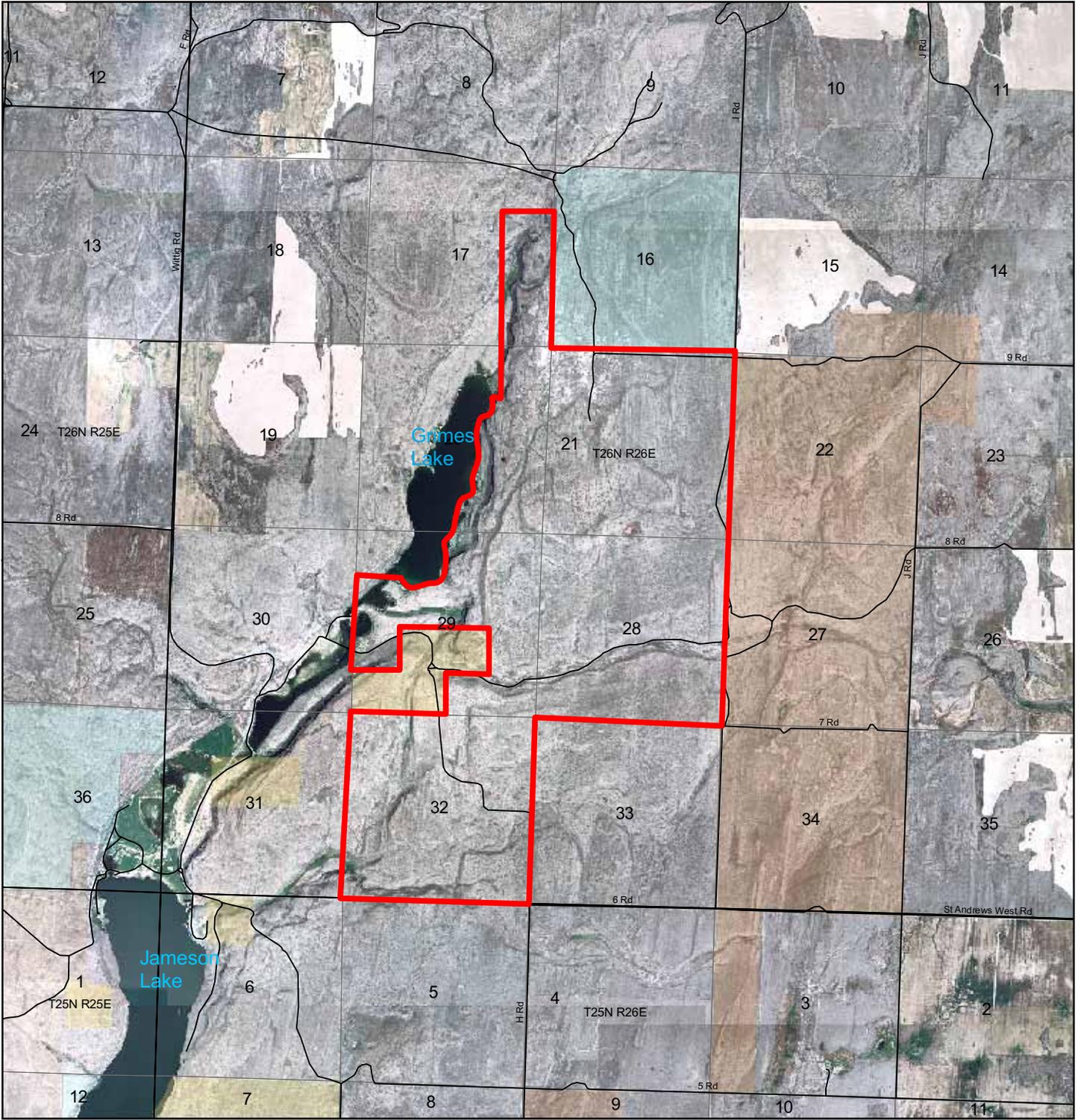


- BLM Administered Land
- WA Department of Natural Resources
- WA Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Indian Reservation
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Forest Service
- National Parks Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Other Federal
- WA State Parks and Recreation
- County or City Government
- Private Land



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.

# Property L

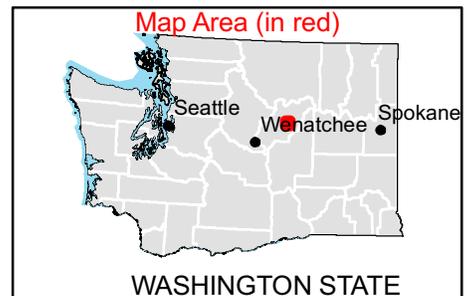
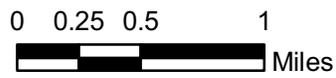


## Legend

 Property L

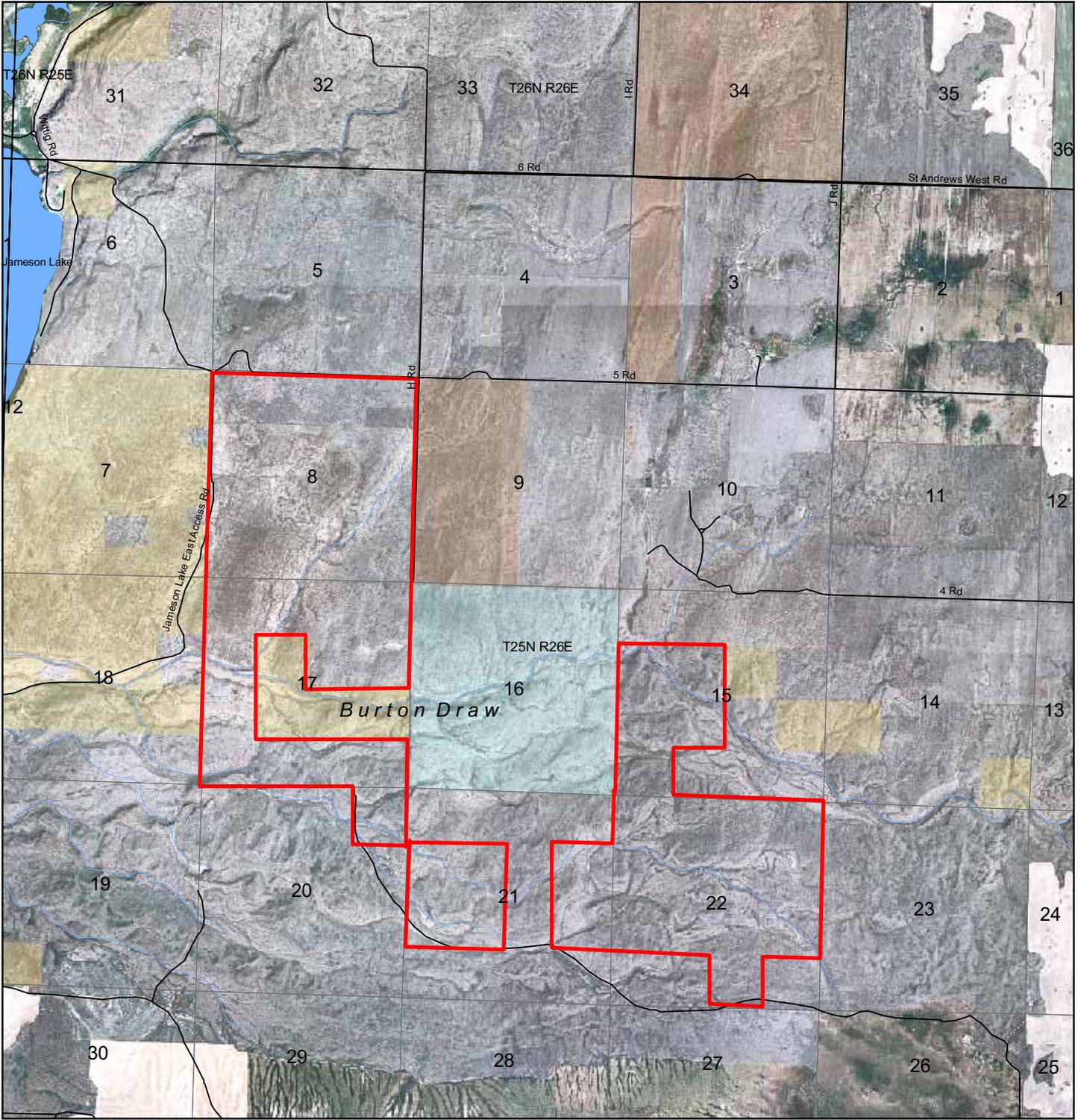
### Administered Lands

-  Bureau of Land Management
-  WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
-  Department of Natural Resources



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.

# Property M

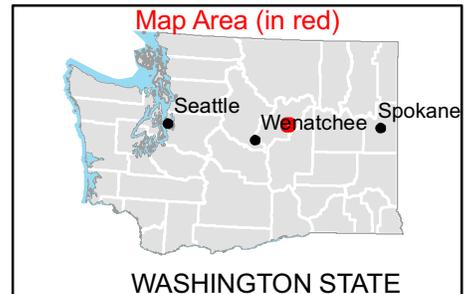
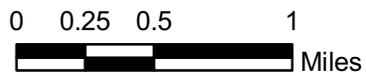


## Legend

 Property M

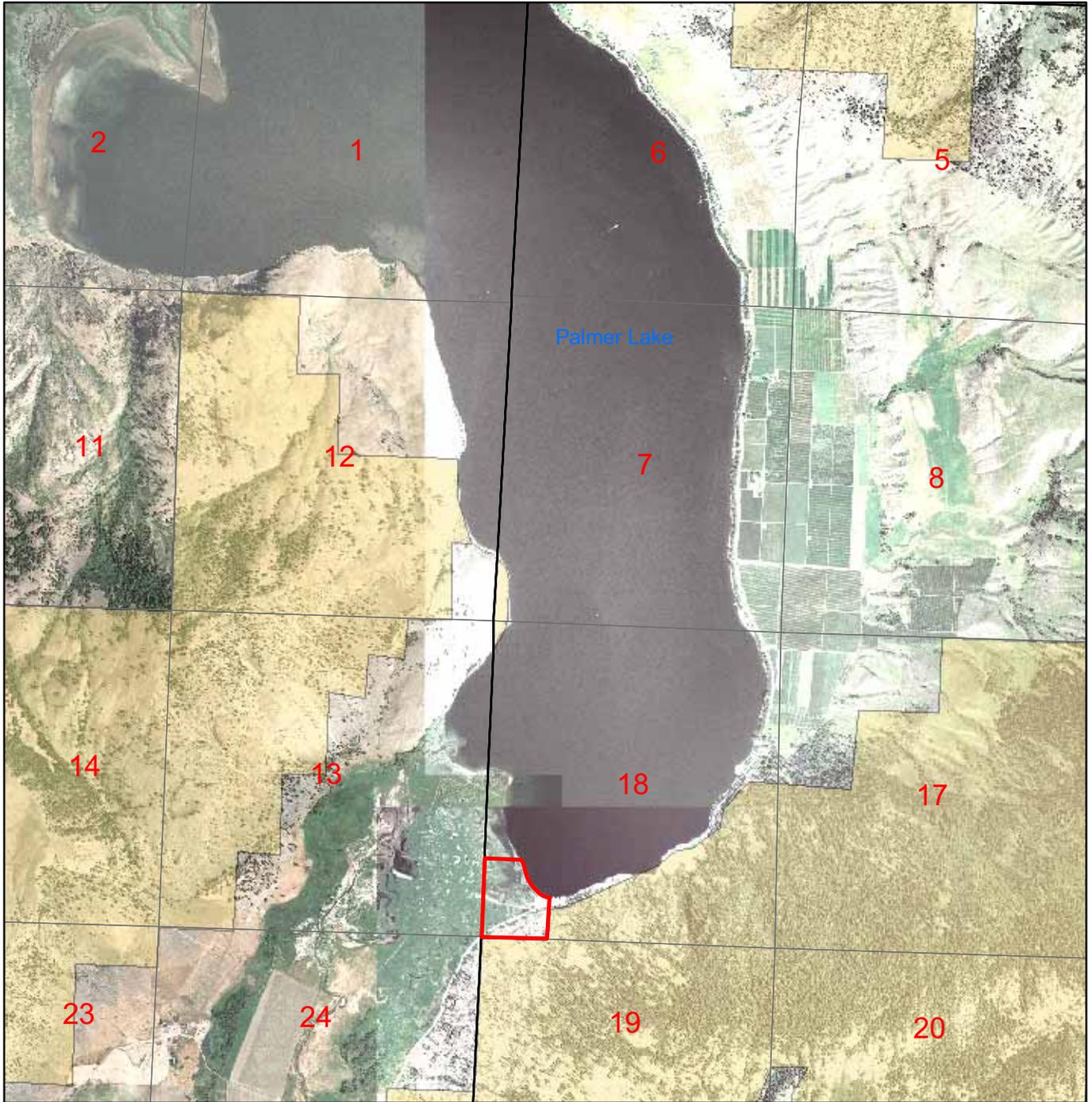
### Administered Lands

-  Bureau of Land Management
-  WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
-  Department of Natural Resources



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.

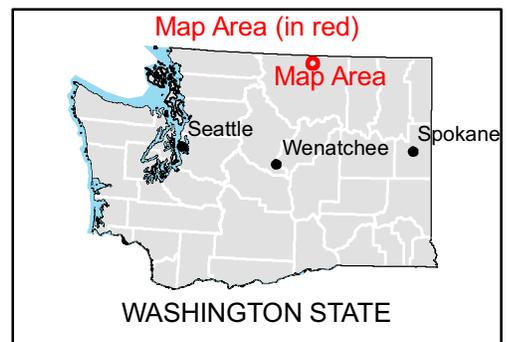
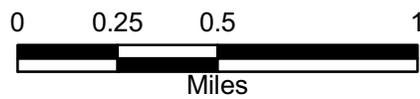
# Property N



Lot 6, Sec. 18, T.39N., R.26E., Willamette Meridian

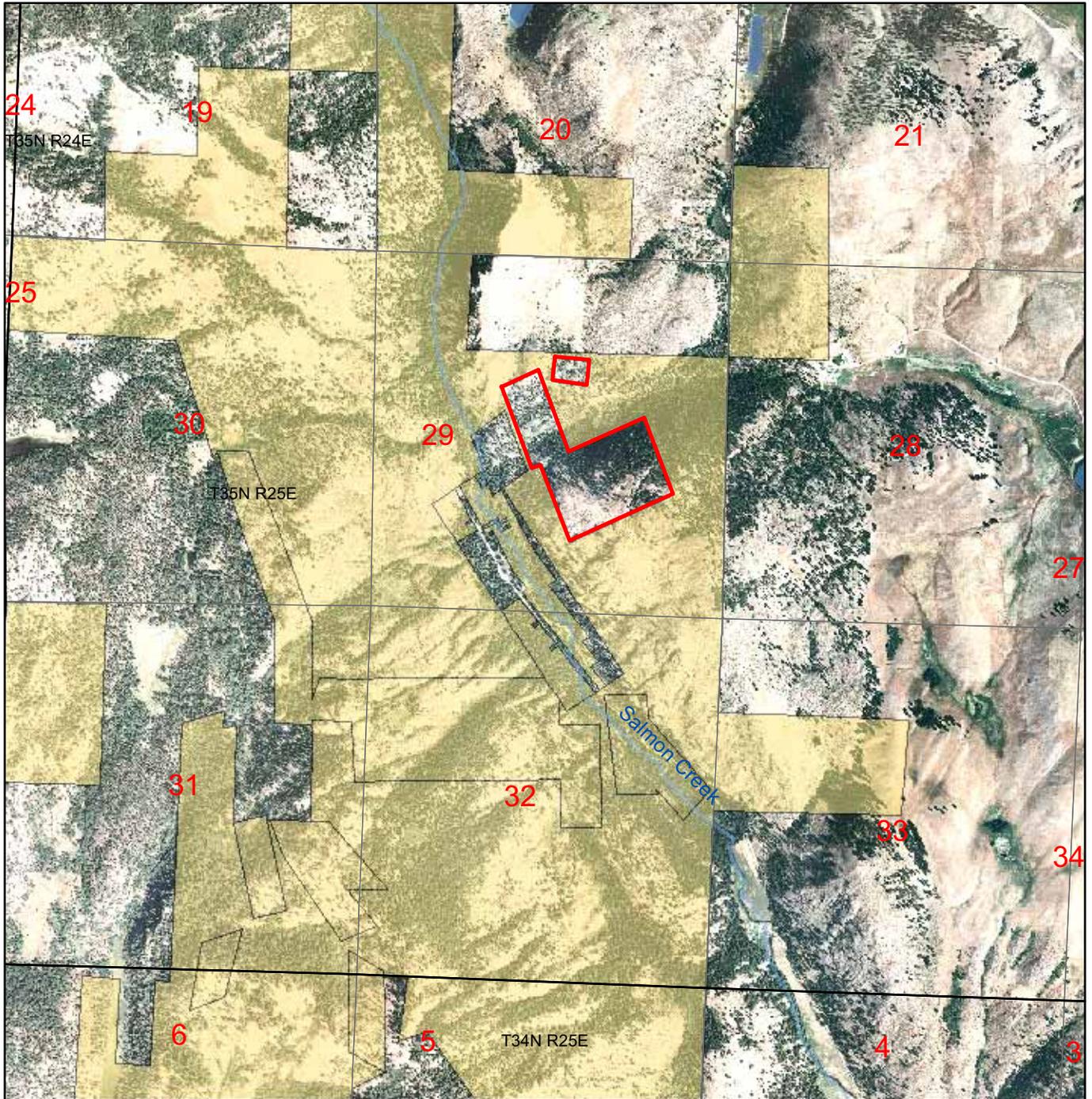
## Legend

-  Property N
-  BLM Lands



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.

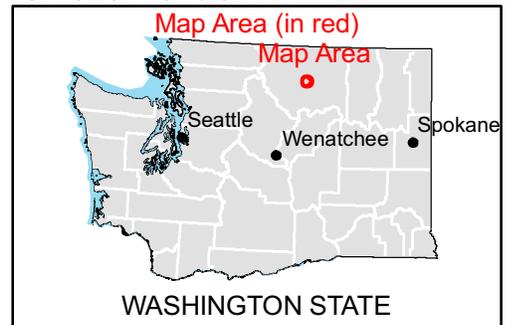
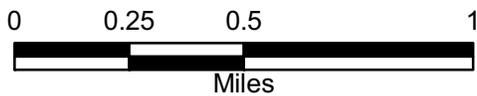
# Property O



Davidson, Adams, M.A. Schnebly, & Nonesuch Lodes, and  
Schnebly Millsite; Sec. 29, T.35N., R.25E., Willamette Meridian

## Legend

-  Property O
-  BLM Lands



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.