

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ROSEBURG DISTRICT

NEPA CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW

A. Background:

BLM Office: Roseburg District, South River Field Office CX#: OR-105-08-25
777 NW Garden Valley Blvd
Roseburg, Oregon, 97470
Phone: 541-464-4930

Proposed Action Title: Top Cat Commercial Thinning

Location of Proposed Action: Section 13, T. 29 S. R. 9 W.

B. Description of Proposed Action: The proposed action is commercial thinning of two forest stands approximately 45-years-old, and 44 acres in area, allocated to the General Forest Management Area and Riparian Reserves. No road construction would be necessary.

The stands are primarily composed of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and grand fir (*Abies grandis*), with incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*), pacific madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), and golden chinquapin (*Castanopsis chrysophylla*) also present.

The following Table describes current stand conditions for upland portions of the two units and the Riparian Reserve associated with the larger of the two units, and also describes anticipated post-treatment conditions.

	Current Condition			Post-Treatment		
	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 2 Riparian	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 2 Riparian
Trees per Acre	199	222	222	99	99	64
Quadratic Mean Diameter (inches)	13.3	12.6	12.6	15.7	15.5	17.3
Basal area (square feet)	191	191	191	130	130	105
Relative Density	0.60	0.61	0.61	0.38	0.38	0.29

There is unsurveyed suitable spotted owl habitat within the 35-yard disruption threshold for heavy equipment operation. However, the units, themselves, are dispersal-only habitat and are located outside of any designated critical habitat units. No suitable nesting habitat would be removed or modified as the units are dispersal habitat only.

The proposed commercial thinning area is located within the seasonal restriction corridor within marbled murrelet management Zone 2, but outside any designated critical habitat units. Unsurveyed suitable nesting habitat is present within the 100-yard disruption threshold for heavy equipment operation. The units themselves, are not suitable nesting habitat and the thinning would not remove or modify any suitable habitat.

Surveys were conducted to determine the presence of Oregon shoulderband snails, green sideband snails and spotted tailedroppers, mollusk species designated as Bureau Sensitive species. None of these species were identified in the surveys.

Project Design Features of the Proposed Action

The upland portions of the units, outside of Riparian Reserves, would be thinned to maximize future stand volume growth. Approximately 100 trees per acre would be retained and canopy closure reduced to about 60 percent. The healthiest, best-formed trees would be retained, as commodity production of timber is the primary objective for this land use allocation.

In Riparian Reserves associated with Unit 2, “no-harvest” buffers would be established on all intermittent streams within the unit boundaries. The buffers would be a minimum slope distance of 20 feet in width, measured from the top of the stream bank, in consideration of a variety of factors, including unique habitat features, streamside topography, and vegetation. Susceptibility of streams to solar heating would also be considered in determining specific buffer widths. Trees designated for cutting and removal would be felled away from these “no-harvest” buffers.

Within the Riparian Reserves, but outside of the “no-harvest” buffers, a variable spacing marking prescription would be employed based on a combination of spacing and basal area that would retain approximately 64 trees per acre and encourage accelerated growth of the trees as a future source of large wood for instream recruitment. Larger diameter cedars and hardwoods would be favored for retention. Douglas-fir would be favored over grand fir as the percent of the stands composed of grand fir far exceeds levels typically present in native stands in the watershed. Post-treatment canopy closure would be 45 to 50 percent, on average.

Trees would be selected for removal based on size and species with Douglas-fir favored for retention over grand fir due to its natural resistance to fire. The ideal residual proportion by species would be 70 percent Douglas fir, 20 percent grand fir, and 10 percent other conifers and hardwoods consisting principally of incense-cedar, Pacific madrone and golden chinquapin.

Snags that are greater than 16 inches diameter breast height and at least 16 feet tall would be marked for retention and protected with a buffer of rub trees extending 20 feet out from the snag. Hardwood trees greater than 12 inches diameter breast height would be protected in the same manner. Cedar trees greater than 8 inches diameter breast height would be marked for retention on a 22-foot spacing and would not count toward the target residual basal area.

Operations would not commence until after August 6th. Ground-based yarding would be completed prior to the onset of steady autumn rains, typically around in mid-October. Yarding would be accomplished using harvester/forwarder equipment.

Scheduling timber harvest after August 5th would eliminate the risk for disturbance to spotted owls that may be nesting in unsurveyed habitat (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Letter of Concurrence on not likely to adversely affect determinations for FY 2005-2008 Management Activities, Reference # 1-15-05-I-0511; p. 6).

Daily operating restrictions would be applied between August 6th and September 15th to avoid potential disruption to marbled murrelets that may inhabit unsurveyed habitat (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Letter of Concurrence for FY 2005-2008 Management Activities not likely to disturb murrelets, 1-15-05-F-0512; p. 14). Operations would be prohibited until two hours after sunrise and would cease two hours before sunset.

C. Land Use Plan Conformance:

The proposed action is subject to and in conformance with the *Roseburg District Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision* (ROD/RMP), approved: June 2, 1995, because it is specifically provided for in the following decisions:

- In the General Forest Management Area, commercial thinning would be programmed in stands under 80 years of age and would be designed to assure high levels of timber volume productivity.
- In Riparian Reserves, density management is to be applied to control stocking levels, establish and manage non-conifer vegetation, and acquire vegetation characteristics consistent with Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives (pp. 153-154).

D. 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 (C) (7), which authorizes harvest of live trees from up to 70 acres for the purpose of thinning overstocked stands to achieve desired stocking levels and increase stand health and vigor.

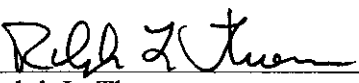
This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment as documented in the following table. The proposed action has been reviewed in the following table, and none of the extraordinary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

E. Categorical Exclusions - Extraordinary Circumstances Documentation:

THE PROPOSED CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION ACTION WILL:	YES	NO
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
<p>Rationale: All activities associated with the proposed commercial thinning would be conducted in a forested location outside of population centers and would conform to established Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules concerning health and safety.</p>		
2.2 Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
<p>Rationale: The project area is not located in any park, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, or national natural landmarks. There are no floodplains, prime farmlands, wetlands, national monuments, or other ecologically significant or critical areas present in the project area. Commercial thinning may alter but would not eliminate the ability of the stand to provide habitat for migratory birds, nor appreciably alter the function or abundance of mid-seral forest habitat provided by BLM-administered lands in the watershed. Commercial thinning operations would occur after the nesting and fledging season of migratory birds, so potential loss of nests, eggs and/or nestlings would not be expected.</p>		
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].		X
<p>Rationale: Past experience has shown that the environmental effects of commercial thinning in young forest stands are not highly controversial. The ROD/RMP established the land use allocation and goals for the affected lands. As such, there is no unresolved conflict regarding other uses of these resources.</p>		
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
<p>Rationale: Commercial thinning of young forest stands is a long-standing practice that has not been demonstrated to have highly uncertain or potentially significant effects, or involve unique or unknown risks.</p>		
2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
<p>Rationale: Commercial thinning is addressed and authorized under the existing ROD/RMP, and as such, this project would represent implementation of that land use plan decision, not a decision in principle on future actions. Commercial thinning is a silvicultural practice, the application of which is based on forest stand conditions. It has been widely used on BLM and Forest Service lands throughout Oregon and has not been shown to have potentially significant impacts.</p>		
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
<p>Rationale: This proposed project has no direct relationship to other current or planned projects in the watershed. The units were originally evaluated in 2002 for consideration in the South River Commercial Thinning 2002 Environmental Assessment as part of the proposed Taylor Made Commercial Thinning timber sale, which was sold in 2005 and logged the following year. At the time, the stands comprising the proposed Top Cat Commercial Thinning timber sale were not sufficiently developed for commercial thinning. Growth over the past five years was sufficient to support an economically viable entry at this time.</p> <p>Commercial thinning of these units would not alter the forest age class distribution of BLM lands in the watershed.</p> <p>Commercial thinning would not create canopy gaps across an area sufficient to alter timing or magnitude of peak and base flows in the watershed. There would be no increase in road density or flow routing by roads which would affect stream flows. "No harvest" buffers on intermittent streams would preserve streamside shading and maintain stream temperatures and filter any sediment-laden over land flow. Dry season hauling would eliminate the potential for sediment transport from roads because, absent precipitation, there would be no vector for sediment transport.</p>		

2.7 Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		X
Rationale: Surveys conducted by the BLM have not identified any cultural or historical resources that would be affected by the proposed commercial thinning project.		
2.8 Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, as an Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
<p>Rationale: The extent of coho salmon distribution, critical habitat for coho salmon, and Essential Fish Habitat is limited by a waterfall barrier approximately 0.8 mile below the confluence of the Middle Fork Coquille River and Twelvemile Creek. The proposed commercial thinning units are approximately eight miles upstream from this natural barrier. "No-harvest" buffers would be designated within the Riparian Reserves which would filter out sediment from overland flow before it reached streams. Timber hauling would be limited to the dry season, when absent persistent rainfall, the risk for mobilizing road sediments is negligible. Consequently, there are no discernible means by which sediment would reach coho salmon, critical habitat or Essential Fish Habitat downstream of the project area.</p> <p>The proposed units were surveyed for Special Status botanical species. No populations of the threatened Kincaid's lupine or any Bureau Sensitive vascular plants, lichens or bryophytes were located that could be affected by harvest operations.</p> <p>With implementation of seasonal and daily operational restrictions, described on pages 2 and 3 of this document, the proposed thinning would not have adverse effects to spotted owls and marbled murrelet, nor to suitable habitat for the two species.</p>		
2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
Rationale: The proposed action is in conformance with the direction given for the management of public lands in the Roseburg District ROD/RMP, which complies with all applicable laws, such as the Federal Land Policy Management Act, Endangered Species Act, Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act and others.		
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 2898).		X
Rationale: No potential impacts have been identified by the BLM internally or through public involvement indicating that commercial thinning projects would have an impact on low-income or minority populations in Douglas County.		
2.11 Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).		X
Rationale: There are no identified sacred, ceremonial or religious Indian sites in the resource area.		
2.12 Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).		X
Rationale: Pressure washing or steam cleaning of logging equipment would be required prior to move-in to remove any soil or other materials that may be contaminated with seed or other propagative material as a means of reducing the risk of introducing any spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species into the project area.		

F. Signature:


 Ralph L. Thomas
 Field Manager
 South River Field Office

6/16/08
 Date

G. Contact Person & Reviewers:

For additional information concerning this Categorical Review, contact:

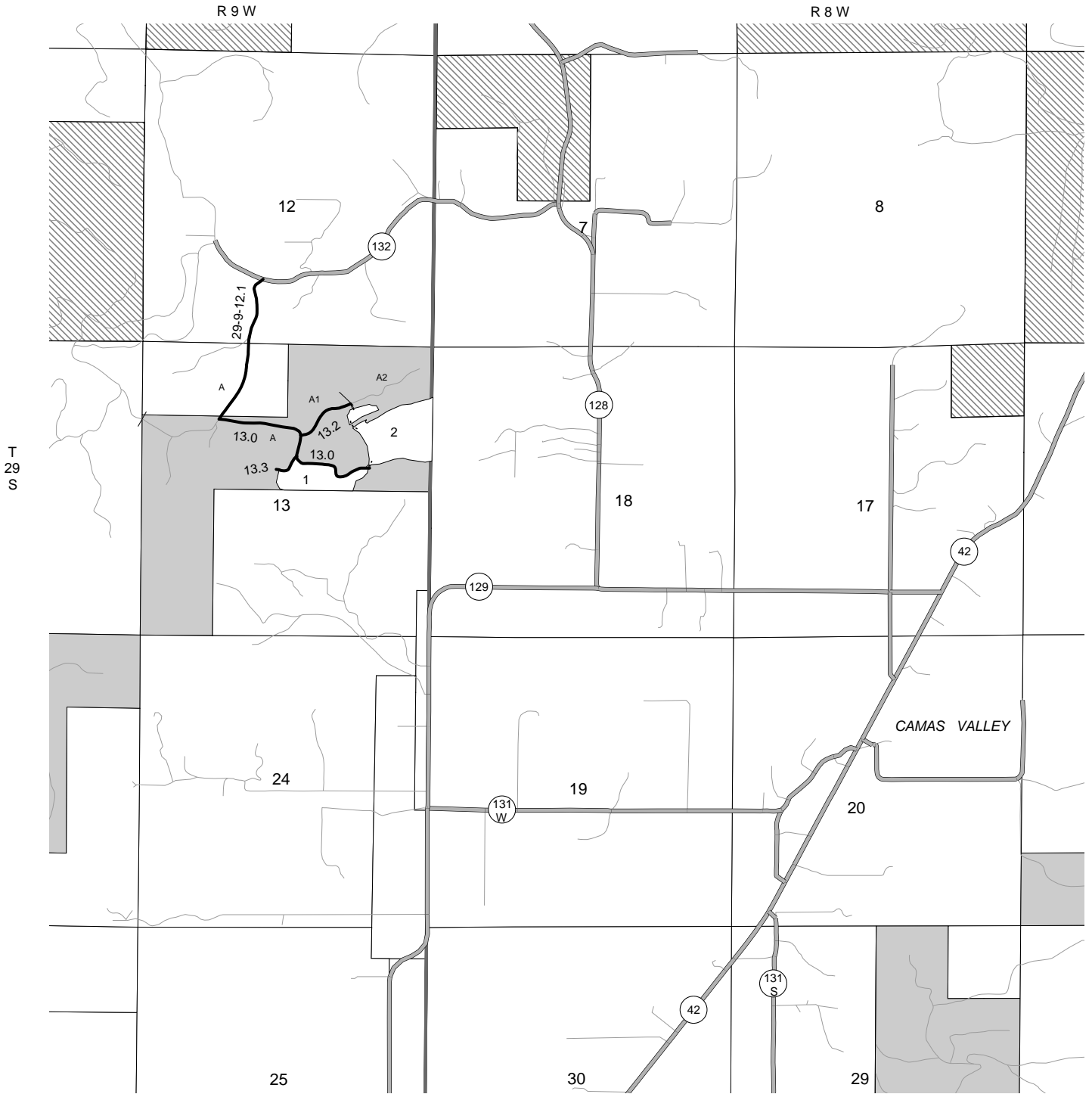
Paul Ausbeck, Environmental Coordinator
South River Field Office
Roseburg District Office, Bureau of Land Management
777 NW Garden Valley Blvd.
Roseburg, OR 97470
(541) 464-3270

Reviewers	Resource	Initials	Date
Paul Ausbeck	Planner/Environmental Coordinator	PA	6/16/08
Cory Sipher	Fisheries Biologist	CS	6/11/08
Roli Espinosa	Wildlife Biologist	RE	6/10/2008
Gary Basham	Botanist	GB	6/16/2008
Jill Ralston	Hydrologist	JR	6/12/08
Ward Fong	Soil Scientist	WF	6/12/08
Isaac Barner	Archaeologist	IB	6/13/08

ACCESS AND MAINTENANCE MAP EXHIBIT "C"

TOP CAT

Commercial Thinning



T29S, R9W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR.

- Paved Highway
- Existing Road
- Haul Route w/ Segments

- Thinning Area
- BLM (O&C) Land
- BLM (Coos Wagon Rd.) Land
- Non-BLM Land

District	Township	Range	Section	Meridian	Contract Number
Roseburg	29 S	9 W	13	Willamette	OR-10-TS08-17








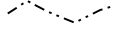

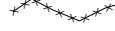


AREA	HARVEST ACRES	HARVEST METHOD
1	14	GROUND BASED
2	30	GROUND BASED

TOTAL THINNING AREA ----- 44 Ac.
 RESERVE AREA ----- 156 Ac.
 TOTAL CONTRACT AREA ----- 200 Ac.

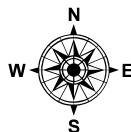
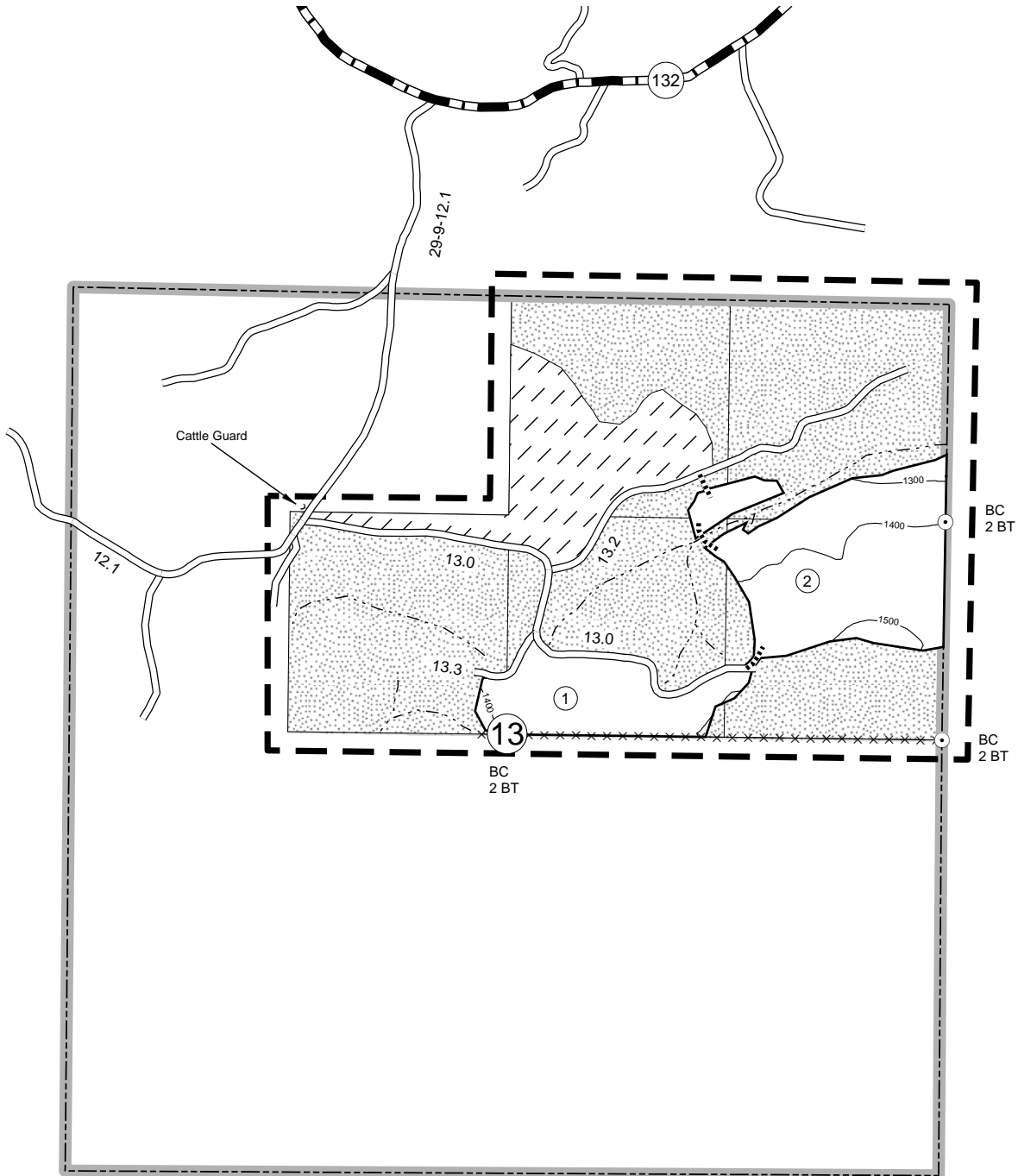
NOTE:

- HARVEST UNIT BOUNDARIES ARE PAINTED ORANGE AND POSTED WITH WHITE "BOUNDARY OF TIMBER RESERVE" TAGS, EXCEPT ON PROPERTY LINES WHICH ARE ONLY POSTED WITH ORANGE AND WHITE "TIMBER CUTTING BOUNDARY" TAGS.
- RETENTION TREES ARE MARKED WITH ORANGE PAINT ABOVE AND BELOW STUMP HEIGHT.

LEGEND

	HARVEST AREA		EXISTING ROAD
	RESERVE AREA		FORWARDER TRAIL
	RESERVE AREA - PREVIOUS SALE		100 FT. CONTOUR LINES
	BOUNDARY OF CONTRACT AREA		STREAM
	BOUNDARY OF CUTTING AREA		FENCE
	SECTION LINE		
	SURVEY CORNERS FOUND		
BC	BRASS CAP		
BT	BEARING TREE		

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T29S, R9W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR