

**SUNRIVER HFRA ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

US Forest Service, Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest, Deschutes County, OR

Background

I have decided to implement the proposed action described in the Sunriver HFRA Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA was prepared under the authorities contained in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA, 2003). This project is designed to reduce hazardous fuels in the Sunriver wildland-urban interface (WUI) on the Bend /Fort Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest. The project area is located outside of the range of the northern spotted owl, within T 19 S, R 11 E, Sections 16-18, 20-23, 26-28, 33-35; T 20 S, R 11 E, Sections 3-5, Willamette Meridian, Deschutes County, Oregon.

During the 1920s, the Shevlin-Hixon company clear-cut harvested the large diameter ponderosa pine stands within the project area. These lands were subsequently purchased by the federal government for inclusion into the Deschutes National Forest. Since almost all the area was clear-cut harvested in the past, the vegetation conditions and attributes have been significantly altered from their historical range with almost a complete absence of large, old trees and open, fire-maintained ponderosa pine stands. Fire suppression during the preceding 80 years, vegetation growth and high stand densities have created a continuous vertical fuel ladder from the ground to the crowns of the trees with a horizontal layer of fuels such as shrubs, needles and limbs, resulting in an unacceptable risk of stand replacement wildfire (EA page 1).

The project area includes a portion of the Deschutes Wild and Scenic River corridor, Benham Falls day use site, Sunriver's major evacuation route (Cottonwood Road), municipal water storage tanks and electric utility corridors. The project area is located within the WUI identified in the Sunriver Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). It is composed of Federal lands that have conditions conducive to large-scale wildfire disturbance events which pose a substantial threat to both human life and property.

Decision and Rationale

The proposed action (Alternative 2) will treat approximately 1,673 acres to lower fuel loading by reducing crown, ladder, and ground fuels. Included in the treatments is an estimated 685 acres of thinning, 1,204 acres of underburning and 558 acres of mowing. Thinning and whole tree yarding with ground based equipment would focus on thinning small trees to reduce ladder and crown fuels that would allow the spread of crown fire. Non-commercial thinning followed by hand piling would further reduce crown continuity, ladder and surface fuels. Surface fuel reduction will be accomplished by prescribed underburning and mowing. There would be no new specified road construction or reconstruction. The estimated amount of firwood fiber associated with this alternative is 5,200 hundred cubic feet (CCF). In addition, this alternative would decommission 16.1 miles of unneeded roads and include the project area in the Tumalo Cooperative Winter Range Closure Area after completion of project activities.

I have chosen to implement Alternative 2 because the integrated fuels reduction treatments will reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire and beetle mortality within the ponderosa pine plant association group by decreasing canopy density, tree density, and surface and ladder fuels. Alternative 2 takes a landscape level approach to fuels reduction while managing dry pine sites within the vicinity of and contiguous to major access routes, homes, recreation and administrative sites to reduce fire risk. Treatments will increase firefighter safety during wildland fire by helping to keep fire on the ground and by providing for evacuation and access routes for the public and firefighters. This project will reduce existing fuels within the vicinity

of homes, structures and infrastructure and also provide for reduced ember production in the WUI. The analysis clearly shows that this action is needed to reduce the wildfire and beetle mortality risk to present and future forest values while protecting private and public property values and safety.

Other Alternatives Considered

Only one action alternative (Alternative 2) was considered as part of this project because it meets the criteria for WUI, and all treatment is within 1 ½ miles of an at-risk (EA page 3) community. A no action alternative (Alternative 1) was developed to display the effects and consequences of not taking action.

Public Involvement

Collaboration The initial notification process for this project began in 1999. This was followed by the completion of the Sunriver Community Wildfire Protection Plan in 2005 and the subsequent development of the proposed action in collaboration with the at-risk community of Sunriver, Deschutes County, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Oregon Wild, Blue Mountain Biodiversity Project, Sierra Club Juniper Group and other interested individuals.

Consultation The project area is within the areas of interest to the Klamath Tribes, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation and the Burns Paiute Tribe. All three tribes were consulted with on both a government-to-government and staff-to-staff basis prior to and during project scoping. None of the governments raised any issues with the proposed project.

Scoping A scoping letter, containing the detailed, collaboratively developed proposed action, was sent on February 20, 2007 to adjacent landowners, businesses, media, other agencies, organizations, and members of the public who had previously expressed interest in vegetation management projects. The February scoping letter included an invitation to attend a public meeting on February 28, 2007, in addition to requesting comments on the proposed action until March 20, 2007. *The Bulletin* and local radio stations ran and broadcast articles on the project the week before the public meeting and included contact information and the date and time of the February 28 meeting. This was followed by a KVTZ lead story on the project, the evening of February 28, which included interviews of participants at the public meeting, contact information and the March 20, 2007 time period for submitting written comments. A total of 29 people attended the public meeting and no negative comments on the proposed action were received from any of the attendees. The people and organizations contacted during collaboration and scoping with input of those who participated or responded and how their input was incorporated may be seen in Chapter 4 of the EA.

Issues

Issues identified during scoping are normally addressed by developing alternatives to the proposed action; however, no alternatives are required for this HFRA project (see above). Instead, the project team considered all the comments received during collaboration and scoping and refined the proposal presented in Chapter 2 to address the following issues:

The activities proposed could have an effect on both plant and animal TES species and other wildlife species such as Management Indicator Species; Ecological Indicator Species; Species of Concern; and Resident and Migratory Landbirds. *Project design elements to minimize or eliminate effects to species such as timing of treatments and other mitigation measures are included in the proposed action (EA pages 12-19, 93-141, 159-177).*

Vegetation management, fuels treatment and access may spread noxious weeds. *An integrated weed management plan was prepared and design elements aimed at preventing the introduction and spread of noxious weeds are incorporated into the proposed action (EA pages 16-17, 20, 187-190, Appendix C).*

The segment of the Deschutes River that flows through the project area is 303(d) listed under the Clean Water Act. *Design elements aimed at ensuring that resource management activities are consistent with and supportive of water quality recovery such as exclusion of all RHCAs (EA page 9) and sensitive areas from treatment are incorporated into the proposed action (EA pages 159-177).*

The proposed use of ground-based equipment can potentially increase the amount and distribution of detrimental soil conditions within the individual activity areas proposed for mechanical treatments. The removal of trees from activity areas can potentially cause adverse changes in organic matter levels. *Project design elements, mitigation and restoration treatments were included in the proposed action to maintain soil productivity (EA pages 13-15, 71-93).*

Vegetation management activities may negatively affect short-term visual quality. *Design elements aimed at maintaining the "sense of place" by reducing stand replacement wildland fire risk and enhancing scenic quality has been incorporated into the proposed action. Design elements aimed at ensuring that resource management activities are consistent with and supportive of scenic quality objectives are incorporated into the proposed action (EA pages 16, 152-156).*

Cultural Resources. *Design elements to avoid project related impacts to cultural resources have been incorporated into the proposed action (EA pages 16, 177-179, Appendix K).*

Smoke from prescribed fires and pile burning may intrude into Central Oregon communities or the Three Sisters Wilderness area, potentially causing impaired visibility, discomfort, and possible health hazards. *All prescribed burning would comply with the Clean Air Act and would be coordinated with the Oregon State Department of Environmental Quality and Oregon State Department of Forestry. All prescribed burning would be in compliance with state smoke management plans and ignition would occur only under prescribed conditions (EA pages 17, 22-45)*

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have determined through the Sunriver HFRA Environmental Assessment that this is not a major federal action individually or cumulatively that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This determination is based on the analysis of the context and intensity of the environmental effects, including the following factors:

(1) Beneficial and adverse direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the Environmental Assessment have been disclosed within the appropriate context and intensity. No significant effects on the human environment have been identified. There will be no significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects to soil, water, fisheries, wildlife resources, roadless areas, or other components of the environment (see EA, pages 12-19, 22-190 for full discussion of beneficial and adverse effects).

(2) No significant adverse effects to public health or safety have been identified. None are unusual or unique to this project. Implementing Alternative 2 would have a beneficial effect on public health and safety (EA page 186).

(3) There will be no significant adverse impacts to wetlands, park lands, wild and scenic rivers, floodplains, prime farm lands, old growth forests, range and forest land, Pacific Yew, minority groups, civil rights, women or consumers. No effects are expected to historic properties or cultural and scientific resources (EA pages 177-179). Riparian areas, RHCAs, wetlands and all sensitive soil types and areas have been excluded from all management activities (EA pages 71-93, 159-177). All Wild and Scenic River Values associated with the Deschutes River would be protected (EA pages 144-152). The combination of fuels reduction, road closures and other vegetation management activities would have a beneficial effect on river values (EA pages 144-152). There are no fish runs or essential fish habitat (Magnuson-Stevens Act) which could be affected by any of the alternatives and no consultation was required (EA pages 159-177). No significant adverse effects are anticipated to any other ecologically sensitive or critical areas (EA, pages 7, and 22-190).

(4) The effects of implementation of this decision are not highly controversial and there has been no scientifically backed information that indicates substantial controversy about the effects disclosed in the Sunriver HFRA Environmental Assessment (EA page 186).

(5) Based on previous similar actions in the area and the resource professionals that worked on this project the probable effects of this decision on the human environment, as described in the Environmental Assessment, are well known and do not involve unique or unknown risks. Activities approved in this decision notice are routine projects similar to those that have been implemented under the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 17 years (EA page 186).

(6) This action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Activities approved in this decision notice are routine projects similar to those that have been implemented under the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 17 years

(7) This decision is made with consideration of past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest land and other ownerships within potentially affected areas which could have a cumulatively significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Each resource section effects analysis contained in the Sunriver HFRA Environmental Assessment discusses cumulative effects; none were found to be significant (EA, pages 12-19, 22-190).

(8) Based on the pre-disturbance survey and record search, the project undertaking will have “no effect” (36 CFR 800.4 (a)-(c)) on any listed or eligible historic or cultural resources. The Forest Archaeologist has certified that the project complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, under the consultation terms of the 2004 Programmatic Agreement (PA) between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and USFS Region 6. This has resulted in a finding by the Forest Specialist of Avoided determination under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. In accordance with the PA, a copy of the documentation has been included in the appendices as supporting documentation (Appendix K-1).

(9) The effects on endangered or threatened species and their habitats are discussed in the Biological Assessments located in Appendix C and in the EA on pages 99-100, 173. There would be no effect/impact on any endangered, threatened, candidate or sensitive species that may inhabit the project area. Should any new information about endangered or threatened species become available they will receive full protection

under the Endangered Species Act and consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service will commence immediately, if necessary.

(10) This decision is in compliance with relevant federal, state and local laws, regulations and requirements designed for the protection of the environment. Effects from this action meet or exceed state water and air quality standards (EA, pages 44-45, 67-70, 92-93, 93-141, 144, 149-151, 156, 157-158, 173-176, 178-179, 184, 186, 188-190).

Other Findings

This decision is consistent with the goals, objectives and direction contained in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and accompanying final environmental impact statement dated August 27, 1990 as amended by the Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2 and Inland Native Fish Strategy (EA pages 1-2, 44-45, 67-70, 92-93, 93-141, 144, 149-151, 156, 157-158, 173-176, 178-179, 184, 186, 188-190).

Management systems utilized in this decision are appropriate for meeting the land management objectives identified in the Forest Plan and consistent with the seven vegetative manipulation requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b) (EA pages 67-71, Appendix I).

This decision is in compliance with Executive Order 12989 "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations". No minority or low-income populations would be disproportionately affected under any alternatives (pages 184-186).

Administrative Review Opportunity

A pre-decisional objection opportunity was offered on this project under 36 CFR 218. No objections were submitted. Mr. Riverwind of the Sierra Club suggested that "...the agency adopt variable diameter limits..." As noted in the EA on pages 45-70, thinning prescriptions are designed to thin from below to allow flexibility on a site-specific basis to achieve basal area guidelines with an overall cap on removal of 21 inches. dbh. This project is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(i).

Implementation Date

Implementation of this project can begin immediately.

Contact Person

For further information, contact Jim Schlaich Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District, 1230 NE Third, Bend, Oregon, 97701, (phone 541-383-4725) or Beth Peer (phone 541-383-4769). An electronic version of the final EA can be accessed and viewed on the Deschutes National Forest website at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/>



1/22/08

PHIL CRUZ
District Ranger
Deschutes National Forest



EA UNIT	MANAGEMENT AREA I/	NET ACRES	Vegetation Management Activities
5	9	46	Underburn
8	9	49	Underburn
10	9	17	Underburn
11	9	102	Underburn
12	9	110	Underburn
13	NNVM	86	Underburn
22	9	26	Underburn
23	NNVM	106	Underburn
27	9	53	Underburn
29	9	69	Underburn
7	9	215	Mow
16	9	75	Mow
32	8,9	8	Mow/Prune
35	8,9	26	Mow
1	17	15	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile
2	17	9	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile
3	17	15	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
4	NNVM	20	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
6	9	20	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Mow
9	9	16	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
15	9	5	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Mow
17	9	139	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
18	9	30	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Mow
19	9	13	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Underburn
20	9	11	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Underburn
21	9	139	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
24	9	4	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile
25	9	3	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile
26	9	18	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Underburn
28	9	43	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
30	9	50	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
31	8,9	76	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
33	8	34	Thin <21" dbh/Mow
34	8	10	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Mow
36	8,9	15	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Mow
Total acres of treatment (no overlap of treatments)			1,673
Underburn acres without thinning			664
Acres of underburning following thinning			540
Total acres of underburning (thinning and no thinning)			1,204
Acres of mowing without thinning			324
Acres of mowing following thinning			114
Total mowing acres (includes 10% of underburn acres)			558
Acres of thinning < 21 inches dbh (diameter at 4.5 feet)			685
Acres of Handpiling			153
Hundred cubic feet (CCF)/million board feet (MMBF) harvest			5200 CCF/2.6 MMBF

I/ 8-General Forest; 9-Scenic Views; 17-Deschutes Wild & Scenic River; NNVM-Newberry National Volcanic Monument LZ1



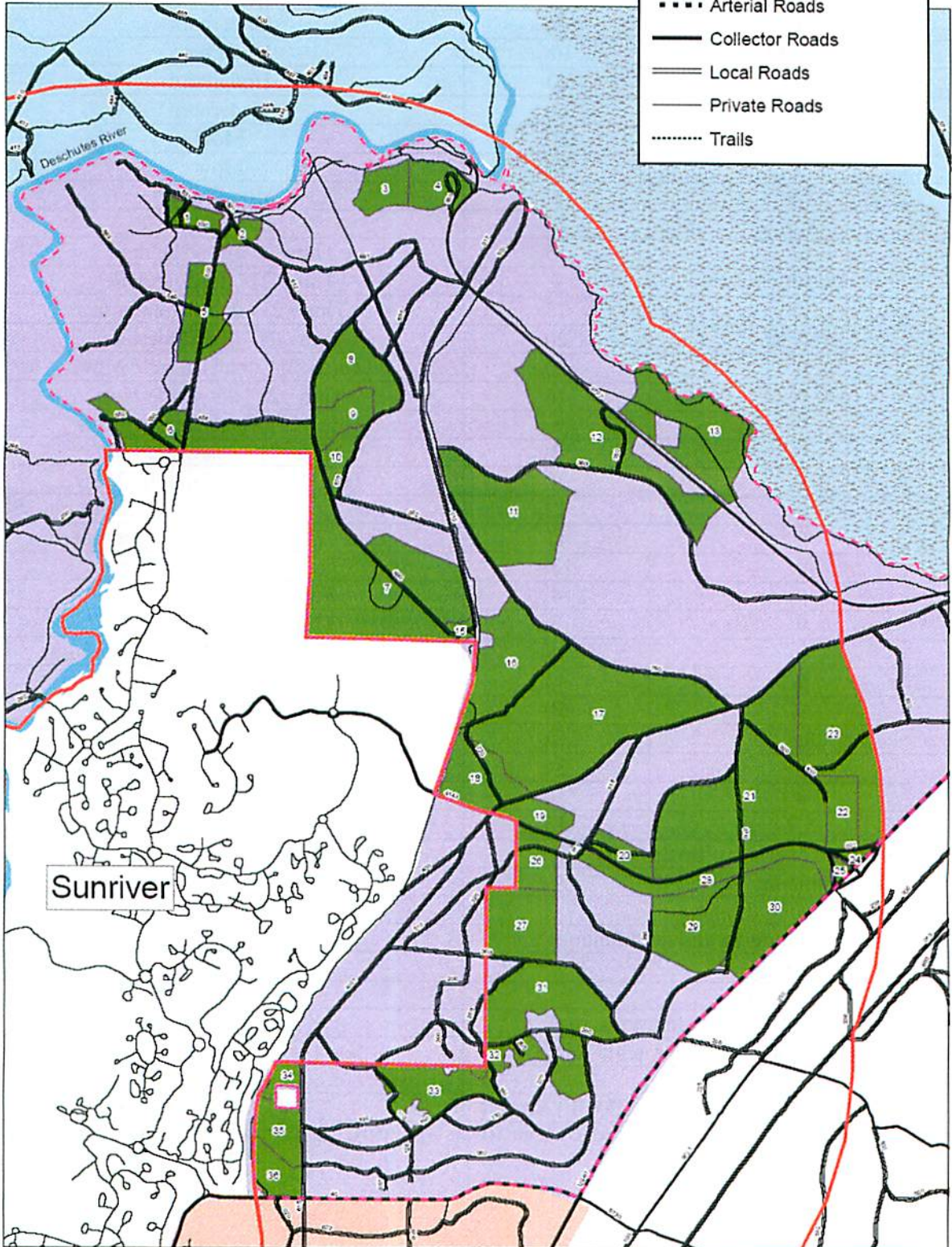
Sunriver HFI

- Project Boundary
- 1.5 mile buffer *Communities at Risk*
- Lava Flows
- Units
- BEND CWPP
- SUNRIVER CWPP
- UDRNRC CWPP

1:24,000



- State-BLM-County Roads
- Arterial Roads
- Collector Roads
- Local Roads
- Private Roads
- Trails

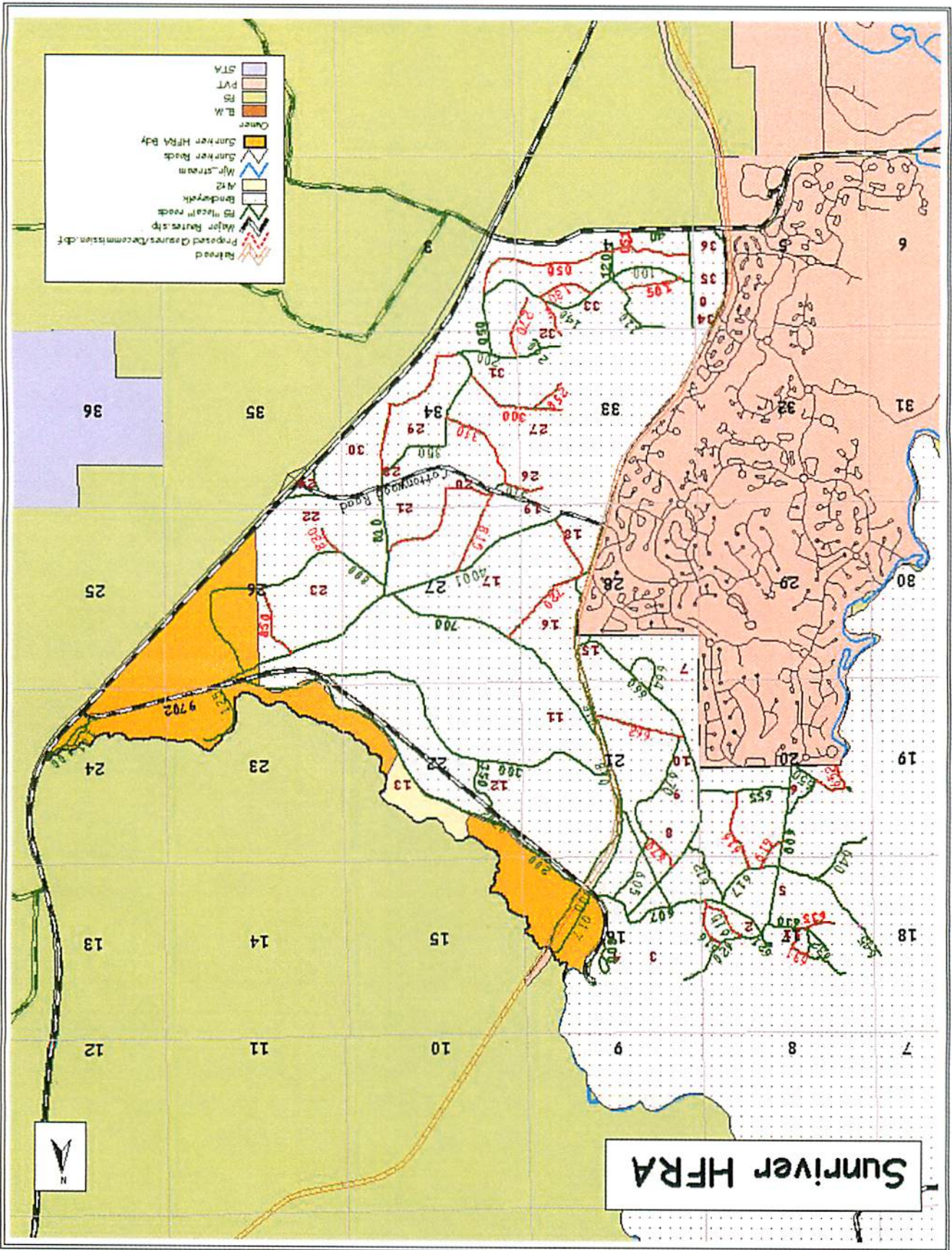




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17	9	139	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
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19	9	13	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Underburn
20	9	11	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Underburn
21	9	139	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
24	9	4	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile
25	9	3	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile
26	9	18	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Underburn
28	9	43	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
30	9	50	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
31	8,9	76	Thin <21" dbh/Underburn
33	8	34	Thin <21" dbh/Mow
34	8	10	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Mow
36	8,9	15	Thin <21" dbh/Handpile/Mow
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Cooperative Winter Range Closure Area time period, consistent with LRMF.