

**Middle Fork Coquille Commercial Thinning 2001
Environmental Assessment (EA # OR-105-01-01)
South River Field Office**

Prepared: December 20, 2005

**Golden Gate Commercial Thinning
Decision Document**

Decision:

It is my decision to offer Golden Gate Commercial Thinning, which completes implementation of Alternative 2 of the Middle Fork Coquille Commercial Thinning 2001 EA, as described at pages 4 through 9 in the EA.

The final configuration of units differs slightly from those illustrated in Appendix A of the EA. For analytical purposes, prospective unit boundaries were based on stand composition and age as identified in Forest Operational Inventory and interpretation of aerial photographs. Refinements to final unit boundaries are based on field reconnaissance and layout.

This decision authorizes the commercial thinning and density management of 221 acres located entirely within Section 7 of T. 30 S., R. 8 W., W.M. Commercial thinning of approximately 162 acres and 3 acres of in-unit right-of-way clearing in the General Forest Management Area will yield an estimated 1,720 thousand board feet (MBF) chargeable toward the annual allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for the Roseburg District. Three Port-Orford-cedar trees outside of thinning unit boundaries are designated for cutting. These trees are located in an area beside Road No. 30-9-11.1 that is less than one acre in size. Density management on approximately 56 acres of Riparian Reserves will yield approximately 584 MBF, not chargeable toward the ASQ.

It is anticipated that additional volume will be modified into the sale contract associated with the cutting of individual trees to clear yarding corridors, provide safe working space at landings, and provide tailholds and guyline anchors for cable yarding operations.

Within the Riparian Reserves, all Pacific yew trees six inches and greater in diameter breast height will be marked for retention.

The extent and location of road construction and renovation also varies. Four temporary spur roads in Unit A (#1) and one in Unit C (#3) have been eliminated. Road No. 30-9-11.1 will be renovated and resurfaced to the west side of Section 7 to allow additional opportunities for winter operations. A temporary spur road, 880 feet in length, in the southeast corner of Unit C (#3) will be surfaced and made semi-permanent to accommodate winter operations. These roads were all identified in the EA and are all within the immediate project area. The changes are within the scope of the project as originally proposed and do not constitute any additional effects beyond those discussed in the EA.

Following completion of thinning operations, all temporary spur roads will be subsoiled, water-barred and blocked by BLM road maintenance personnel to prevent further vehicular use. The semi-permanent road will be water-barred and blocked. The intent is to decommission the unsurfaced roads in the same operating season in which they are renovated and used. If use of these roads cannot be completed in a single season because of events such as fire closure or an early onset of autumn rains, they will be winterized and reopened for use the following summer.

Rationale for the Decision:

The Roseburg District *Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan* (ROD/RMP, p. 62) states that commercial thinning should be applied “. . . in the matrix where practical and where research indicates increased gains in timber production are likely.” Commercial thinning will be programmed in forest stands allocated to the General Forest Management Area that are less than 80 years of age in order to assure high levels of timber volume production (ROD/RMP, p. 151).

Density management in Riparian Reserves is necessary to “. . . help achieve controlled stocking, establishment of desired non-conifer vegetation, and the desired vegetation characteristics needed to attain objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.” (ROD/RMP, pp. 153-154)

The chargeable volume is needed to contribute to the Roseburg District declared annual ASQ of 45 million board feet, and to provide for the socio-economic objectives of the Roseburg District *Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (Vol. I, p. xii). The sale also meets the requirement of the O&C Act which stipulates that the lands revested by the government from the Oregon & California Railroad are to be managed for sustained timber production.

Alternative 2 of the Middle Fork Coquille Commercial Thinning 2001 EA achieves these objectives. Alternative One, the alternative of “No Action” would not meet these objectives.

Comments on the two EAs were received from three organizations and one State governmental agency. These comments were considered in the preparation of this decision. No issues or concerns were identified which were not already considered and addressed in the EAs, or which constituted new information that would change the conclusions of the analysis.

The following discussion addresses the results of wildlife and botany surveys, anticipated effects to resource concerns identified in the project EA, and the manner in which the effects would be mitigated. Mitigation is derived from Best Management Practices contained in the ROD/RMP, amendments to management direction from the ROD/RMP, and project design criteria identified through conferencing with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service.

Noxious Weeds

In order to reduce the likelihood of introducing or spreading noxious weeds into the project area, contract provisions will require that, with the exception of logging trucks, all logging and road construction equipment be pressure washed or steam cleaned prior to being moved into the sale area, or at any time when the equipment is removed from the area and later returned.

Port-Orford-cedar Root Disease

On May 10, 2004, the *Record of Decision for Management of Port-Orford-Cedar in Southwest Oregon* (POC ROD) was signed, amending the Roseburg District ROD/RMP. The POC ROD and Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (POC FSEIS) address effects of forest management on the spread of Port-Orford-cedar root disease. This does not constitute new information as the Middle Fork Coquille Commercial Thinning 2001 EA identified and considered relevant factors addressed by the POC FSEIS and proposed mitigation consistent with direction contained in the POC ROD.

The POC ROD provides management direction for assessing risk and controlling spread of the disease, in order to maintain Port-Orford-cedar as an integral component of the vegetative communities of which it is a part. The risk key contained in the POC ROD is used for site-specific analysis to assess the need for application of additional management practices. An assessment of the project area indicates no special mitigation is required.

Although no additional mitigation is indicated, measures to reduce the risk of further spread of Port-Orford-cedar root disease described in the Middle Fork Coquille Commercial Thinning 2001 EA (pp. 36-37) will be implemented. These measures include: equipment washing as previously described; restricting road construction and renovation to the dry season (May 15th to October 15th); restricting hauling on unsurfaced roads to the dry season; removing all merchantable Port-Orford-cedar trees within 20 feet uphill and 50 feet downhill of roads in or adjacent to thinning units or along the haul route; and decommissioning and blocking unsurfaced roads upon completion of thinning operations.

Botany

Following the implementation of the 2004 *Record of Decision to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines*, all vascular and non-vascular botanical Survey & Manage species whose range includes the lands of the Roseburg District were assigned to the BLM Special Status Species Program, and designated as Bureau Sensitive, Bureau Assessment or Bureau Tracking species.

Consistent with the requirements of the BLM Special Status Species Program, clearances and surveys were conducted for all Special Status Species botanical species with a reasonable likelihood of being present in the timber sale area. The results of these surveys were negative. The BLM has fulfilled survey requirements consistent with the direction of the 2001 *Record of Decision For Amendment to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation*

Measures Standards and Guidelines, as amended by the 2001-2003 Annual Species Reviews. The Golden Gate Commercial Thinning project is not anticipated to contribute to a future need to list any of these species.

Wildlife

Potential habitat was identified in the project area for the Oregon shoulderband snail (*Helminthoglypta hertleini*), Chace sideband snail (*Monadenia chaceana*); green sideband snail (*Monadenia fidelis beryllica*); and spotted tailed dropper (*Prophysaon vanattaie pardalis*). All four species, currently classified as Bureau Sensitive species under the BLM Special Status Species Program, were previously listed under the Survey and Manage program. No other wildlife species previously listed under the Survey and Manage program would be expected in the project area based on species' range and habitat requirements.

Surveys of suitable habitat for the four species were conducted. None of these mollusk species were located. The BLM has fulfilled survey requirements consistent with the direction of the 2001 *Record of Decision For Amendment to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines*, as amended by the 2001-2003 Annual Species Reviews. The Golden Gate Commercial Thinning project is not anticipated to contribute to a future need to list any of these species.

Marbled Murrelet

The project area is located within the Murrelet Inland Management Zone 2, but is outside of the Roseburg District's seasonal restriction corridors. Suitable but un-surveyed habitat exists within the 100 yard of the northern boundaries of the three thinning units, but the thinning project would not remove or modify suitable nesting habitat.

Portions of the thinning units located north of Road No. 30-9-11.1 are potentially within 100 yards of un-surveyed suitable habitat, within the disturbance threshold distance. Any thinning operations north of Road No. 30-9-11.1 would be subject to Daily Operational Restrictions during marbled murrelet nesting season, the period from April 1 through August 5. These Daily Operational Restrictions prohibit commencement of operations until two hours after sunrise, and require cessation of operations two hours before sunset. As a consequence, the BLM determined that the project "may affect" but is not likely to adversely affect marbled murrelets.

In a Letter of Concurrence (File No. 1-15-05-I-0596, p. 7) dated July 20, 2005, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that because project standards comply with applicable project design criteria, this type of project is not likely to adversely affect marbled murrelets.

Northern Spotted Owl

It was determined that disturbance associated with the planned thinning operations "may affect" but is not likely to adversely affect spotted owls because there is no un-surveyed suitable habitat, no known nest sites and no activity centers within the appropriate disruption threshold distances.

Thinning would be limited to dispersal habitat, would maintain at least 40 percent canopy closure, and would not remove primary nesting and roosting habitat constituents. Within 10-15 years canopy closure will return to pre-thinning levels, and use by owls for dispersal and foraging is expected to rise as the greater structural and vegetative complexity will support more abundant prey. As a consequence, the BLM has made a determination of “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” for habitat modification.

In a Letter of Concurrence (File No. 1-15-05-I-0511, p. 27) dated June 24, 2005, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that this type of project is not likely to adversely affect spotted owls because project operations associated with chainsaws and heavy equipment will not occur within appropriate disruption distances of any un-surveyed suitable habitat, known nest site or activity center, will not remove any suitable habitat components within one-quarter mile of known nest sites or activity centers between March 1- September 30.

The thinning units are located in Critical Habitat Unit OR-62 where they provide dispersal habitat for the northern spotted owl. Thinning will modify habitat conditions for the short term by reducing canopy closure, but canopy closure will remain above 40 percent and return to pre-thinning levels in 10-15 years. A determination that the effects of thinning are not likely to preclude the use of the stands for owl dispersal, and will not have an adverse effect on nor interfere with the intended function of the Critical Habitat Unit (EA, pp. 39-40).

In the June 24, 2005 Letter of Concurrence, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that the commercial thinning would not adversely affect or preclude the intended function of Critical Habitat because:

- Post-treatment canopy cover will be no less than 40 percent.
- Although primary constituent elements contributing to canopy cover and multiple canopy layers will be altered, stands commercially thinned will continue to provide sufficient primary constituent elements for spotted owl dispersal across the landscape based on the fifth-field analysis for dispersal habitat.
- These stands are expected to retain dispersal function because post-project canopy cover will not fall below 40 percent, a value widely used as dispersal function threshold (Thomas *et al.* 1990).
- The effect of degrading dispersal-only habitat would be insignificant because there would be adequate dispersal habitat available to the spotted owl in the action area pre-harvest and post-harvest.

Fish and Essential Fish Habitat

There are no streams that support Oregon Coast coho salmon, nor any reaches designated as Essential Fish Habitat within two miles of any of the thinning units. The sole potential effect would be associated with sediment. The BLM has determined that the likelihood of sediment

reaching areas inhabited by coho salmon and steelhead trout is negligible and that the project is not likely to adversely affect these species and would have no adverse affect on Essential Fish Habitat. In a letter dated June 30, 2003, NOAA/Fisheries concurred with this finding.

Monitoring:

Monitoring will be done in accordance with provisions contained in the ROD/RMP, Appendix I (p. 84, 190, 193, & 195-199). Monitoring efforts will be directed toward these resources: Riparian Reserves; Matrix; Water and Soils; Wildlife Habitat; Fish Habitat; and Special Status Species Habitat.

Protest and Appeals Procedures:

As outlined in 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies, protests may be filed with the authorized officer within 15 days of the publication date of the Decision Notice in *The News-Review*, Roseburg, Oregon.

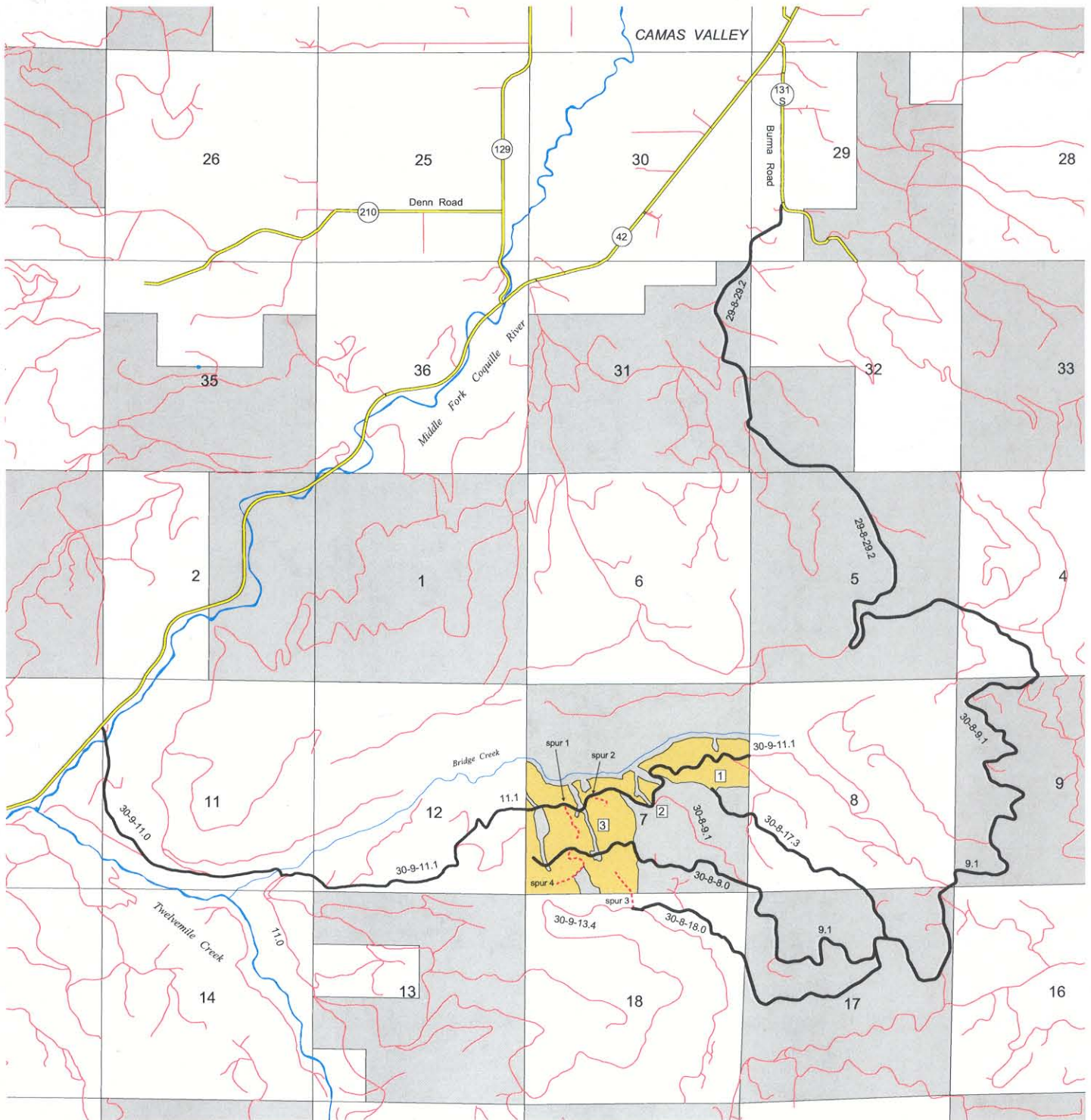
43 CFR 5003.3 subsection (b) states that: "Protests shall be filed with the authorized officer and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision." This precludes the acceptance of electronic mail or facsimile protests. Only written and signed hard copies of protests that are delivered to the Roseburg District Office will be accepted.

William S. Haigh
Field Manager
South River Field Office

Date

GOLDEN GATE

Commercial Thinning



T30S, R8W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR

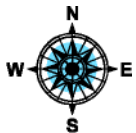
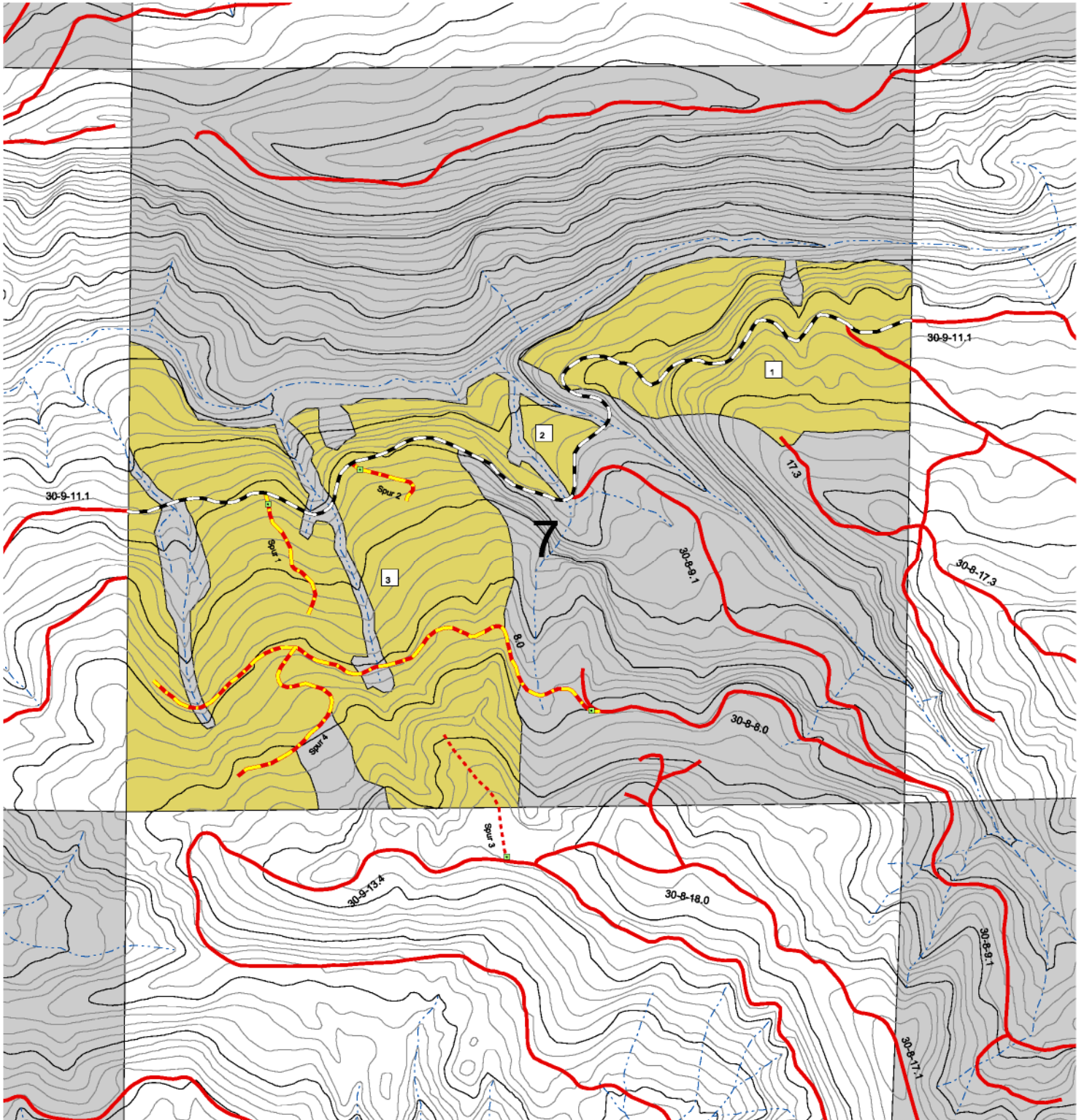
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- Paved Highway
- Haul/Access Route
- Existing Road
- Construct / Renovate Road
- Thinning Area
- BLM (O&C) Land
- Non-BLM Land

GOLDEN GATE

Commercial Thinning



T30S, R8W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR



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- Construct Roadblock
- Existing Road
- Renovate, Permanent Rock
- Renovate, Decommission
- Construct Semi-Permanent Spur
- Stream
- 100' Contour
- 20' Contour

- Thinning Area
- BLM (O&C) Land
- Non-BLM Land