

Lower Cow Creek 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management Environmental Assessment

Minnesota Flats Commercial Thinning
Decision Record

Bureau of Land Management
South River Field Office, Roseburg District Office
EA # OR105-07-11

Background:

The Lower Cow Creek 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzed approximately 722 total acres of commercial thinning of forest within the Matrix land use allocation and density management within Late Successional Reserves and Riparian Reserves. The Minnesota Flats timber sale was analyzed as part of the proposal, under Alternative 2.

Updated Information

Effects to resources, including wildlife and botany, were fully analyzed in the EA, p.11-44. At the time the EA was published, three surveys were incomplete; those results are disclosed below.

- Mollusk surveys of the sale units containing habitat (31-6-13B, 31-6-13C) did not detect either Chace Sideband or Oregon Shoulderband snails.
- Cultural inventories did not detect any significant historical resources.
- Botany surveys did not detect any special status plants occurring within sale units.

In addition, an abandoned mine adit was discovered adjacent to 31-6-13B, and is being occupied by big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), and the long-eared Myotis (*Myotis evotis*). Buffers of 250 ft (ROD/RMP p.47) were applied, reducing the unit size by approximately 2 acres. Because neither the adit nor the surrounding forest component within 250 feet will be modified, no direct impact to the adit or bats is anticipated.

Public Involvement & Response to Comment

The BLM received comments from seven organizations during development of the EA and during the public comment period on the EA (February 5 – March 6, 2008). Comments did not provide new information or identify relevant issues the BLM should have considered in the analysis. Only comments relevant to the Minnesota Flats timber sale (*italicized*) warranting clarification are addressed here.

Structural & Species Diversity

Comment: To promote structural and species diversity, the BLM needs to design silvicultural prescriptions that protects minor species, reintroduces minor species and by [sic] retains tree-clumps in the few places where they are found within the units. The EA says that in riparian reserves, the prescription “would be designed to enhance late seral forest structure by accelerating tree growth.” This is a limited definition of “forest structure”. Late seral forest structure includes more than just big trees.

Response: The silvicultural prescription provides for stand diversity by retaining hardwoods greater than 10 inches diameter at breast height, retaining some broken or deformed trees, retaining minor conifer species, and planting a variety of trees in openings and heavily-thinned areas (EA, p.4-5). Clumps are frequently retained through the variable marking prescription, unless they present an operational concern. Many clumps are reserved from harvest already, based upon the size of the trees.

The BLM recognizes the many components necessary to achieving a late seral forest structure. Many of these components are addressed through our prescription, as discussed on page 4 of the EA. The BLM intends to accelerate tree growth within the Riparian Reserves to provide for sources of large wood to streams. The BLM utilized a variable marking prescription, and applied variable width “no-harvest” buffers along all streams in the Riparian Reserves. The BLM will maintain structural and habitat diversity by retaining some trees with broken or deformed tops, maintaining hardwoods and minor conifers, and retaining snags on site.

Watershed Concerns

Comment: The EA failed to mention the Formosa Mine at the tip of same watershed as some of the units. The EA also failed to mention the community drinking water shed of Russell Creek, and how it would be protected from, or enhanced by, the logging activities.

The presence of the abandoned Formosa Mine site within the same watershed as some of the proposed units is not relevant to the environmental effects analysis of harvesting those units, as there are no shared effects between the Formosa Mine and the sale units.

The city of Riddle draws its water from Cow Creek, and has a small, unused water right on Russell Creek. Regardless, the EA explained that harvest would not adversely affect hydrologic functions or water quality (p.33-34, 36-38), because harvest activities are not expected to increase peak flows, increase sedimentation, or contribute to increased stream temperatures.

Decision:

It is my decision to authorize the Minnesota Flats Commercial Thinning project, implementing in part Alternative Two analyzed in the Lower Cow Creek 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management EA.

One-hundred sixty-two acres of mid-seral, second growth forest approximately 46-55 years old will be thinned from below. Units are located in Sections 13 and 15 of T. 31S, R. 6W., Willamette Meridian. Sale units are designated as follows:

Sale Unit	EA Unit Designation
Unit 1	31-6-13B
Unit 2	31-6-13C
Unit 3	31-6-15A
Unit 4	31-6-15B
Unit 5	31-6-15C

The Minnesota Flats project will occur entirely within the Connectivity/Diversity Block (130 acres) and associated Riparian Reserves (32 acres) land use allocations. Access to the units will be provided by the existing road network, and construction of three dirt spurs totaling 930 feet (0.17 miles) in length. These spurs will all be blocked and decommissioned after use (EA, p. 7). Commercial thinning will be accomplished predominantly with cable yarding equipment, with some ground-based equipment used, as described in the EA (page 8).

The Minnesota Flats Commercial Thinning project will generate an estimated 2,128 thousand board feet (mbf) of timber; 1,721mbf of this is credited to the District's allowable sale quantity (ASQ).

The implementation of this decision is subject to several seasonal restrictions (EA, p.8-9):

- Felling and yarding of timber except for clearing rights-of-way is generally prohibited from April 15-July 15 (barkslip period).
- Yarding and hauling of timber on unsurfaced roads is restricted between May 15th and the onset of regular autumn rains.
- Treatment within 65 yards of any unsurveyed suitable habitat, known nest sites, or known activity centers from March 1-June 30th, is prohibited unless current year surveys indicate that Northern spotted owls are not present, are present but not attempting to nest, or nesting attempts have failed.

Decision Rationale

I am offering the Minnesota Flats timber sale for the following reasons:

- It meets the purpose and need for action “to provide timber, improve stand quality and vigor, and accelerate the development of late successional habitat on forest land within the Matrix and LSR allocations, in accordance with the ROD/RMP” (EA, p. 1)
- Project Design Features described in the EA (p. 8-10) will protect resource values and minimize disturbance. The resource information and analysis within the EA indicates that only limited impacts may occur to some resources (p. 11-44), and the analysis resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Expressly, this sale does not affect any Northern spotted owl suitable habitat and will not negatively affect individual owls or reduce the ability of home ranges to support spotted owls (EA, p.19-22). The sale units are beyond range of the marbled murrelet (EA, p.22). The sale will not impact special status mollusks or botanical species (Decision Record, p.1). There is no Port-Orford-cedar within the units or along the haul route for this sale (EA, p. 12-13, 74). No significant cultural or historic resources will be impacted (Decision Record, p. 1).
- Impacts of this project are within those analyzed in the EA, and these impacts will not exceed those identified in the *Final – Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/EIS)*.
- Public input did not raise any new or significant issues related to the proposal.
- This decision conforms to direction of the Roseburg District *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan ((ROD/RMP) USDI, BLM 1995a)* and complies with all applicable laws, including, but not limited to, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the O&C Act.
- The No Action alternative (Alternative One) did not meet the BLM's purpose and need for action, as described above.

Monitoring:

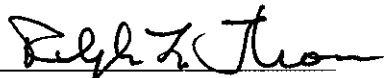
Monitoring of the effects of the proposed action, if implemented, would be done in accordance with provisions contained in the ROD/RMP, Appendix I (p. 84, 190, 193, & 195-199), and would focus on the following resources: Matrix, Water and Soils; Wildlife Habitat; Fish Habitat; and Special Status Species Habitat.

Protest Procedures:

As outlined in 43 CFR § 5003 – Administrative Remedies at § 5003.3 (a), protests may be filed within 15 days of the publication date of the timber sale notice. Publication of such notice on August 19, 2008, in *The News-Review*, Roseburg, Oregon, constitutes the decision date from which such protests may be filed. Protests shall be filed with the authorized officer and contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision.

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

As set forth in 43 CFR 5003.3 (c), protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the timber sale notice are not timely filed and shall not be considered.

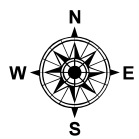
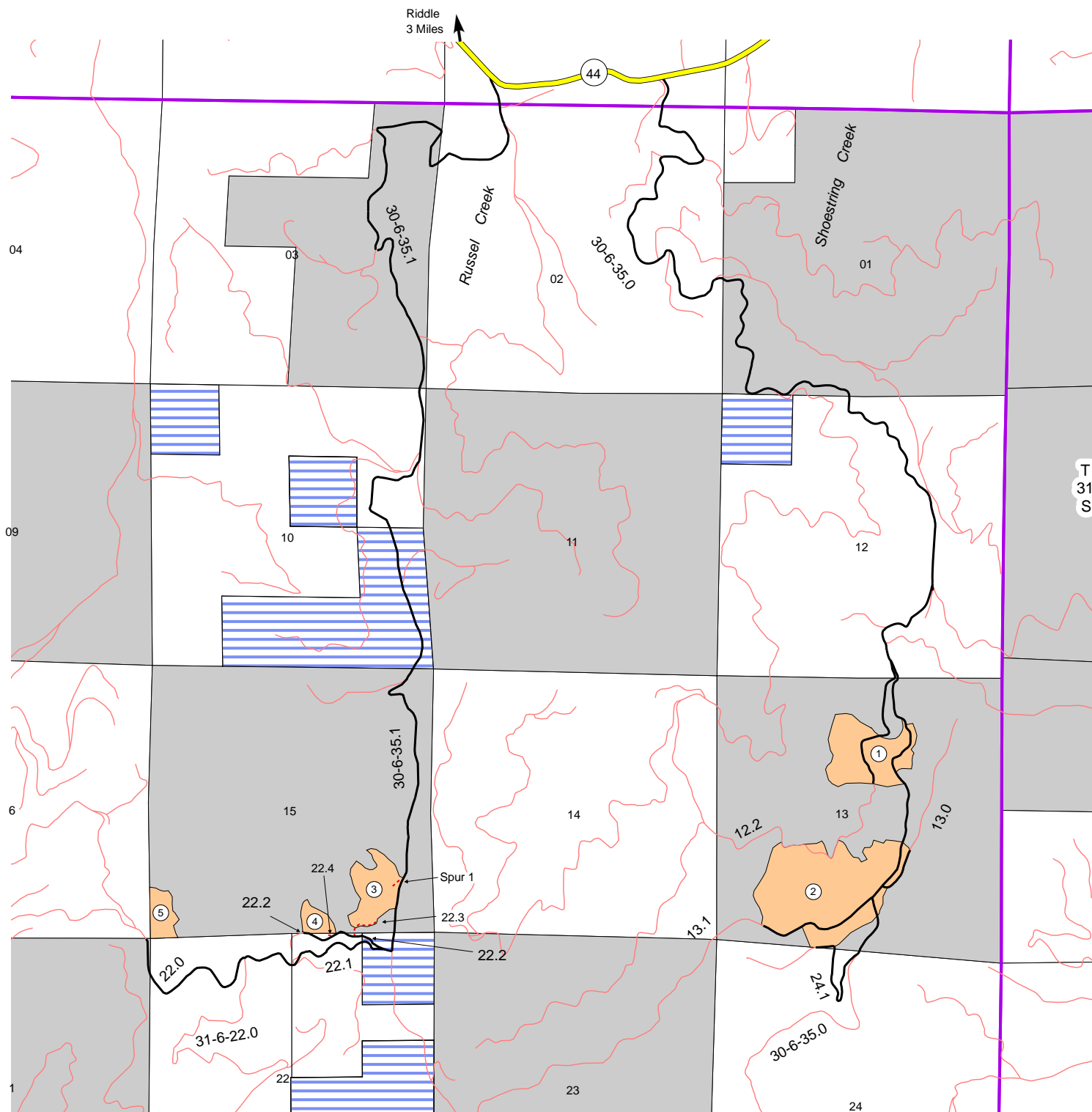


Ralph Thomas
Field Manager
South River Field Office

8/18/08
Date

MINNESOTA FLATS

Commercial Thinning



T31S, R6W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR

R 6 W



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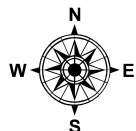
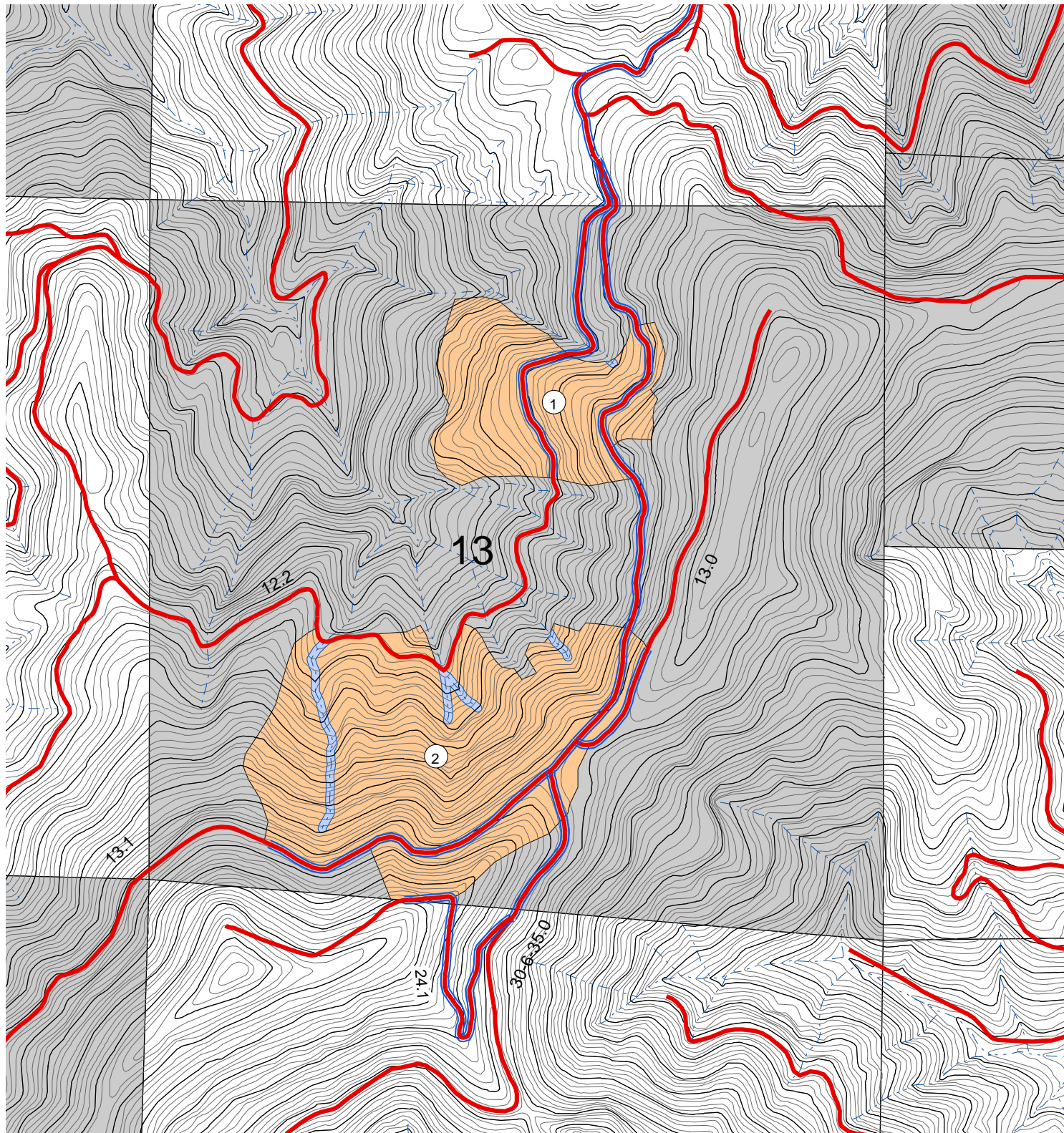


- Paved Highway
- Haul/Access Route
- Existing Road
- Road to Construct, Decommission

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

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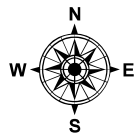
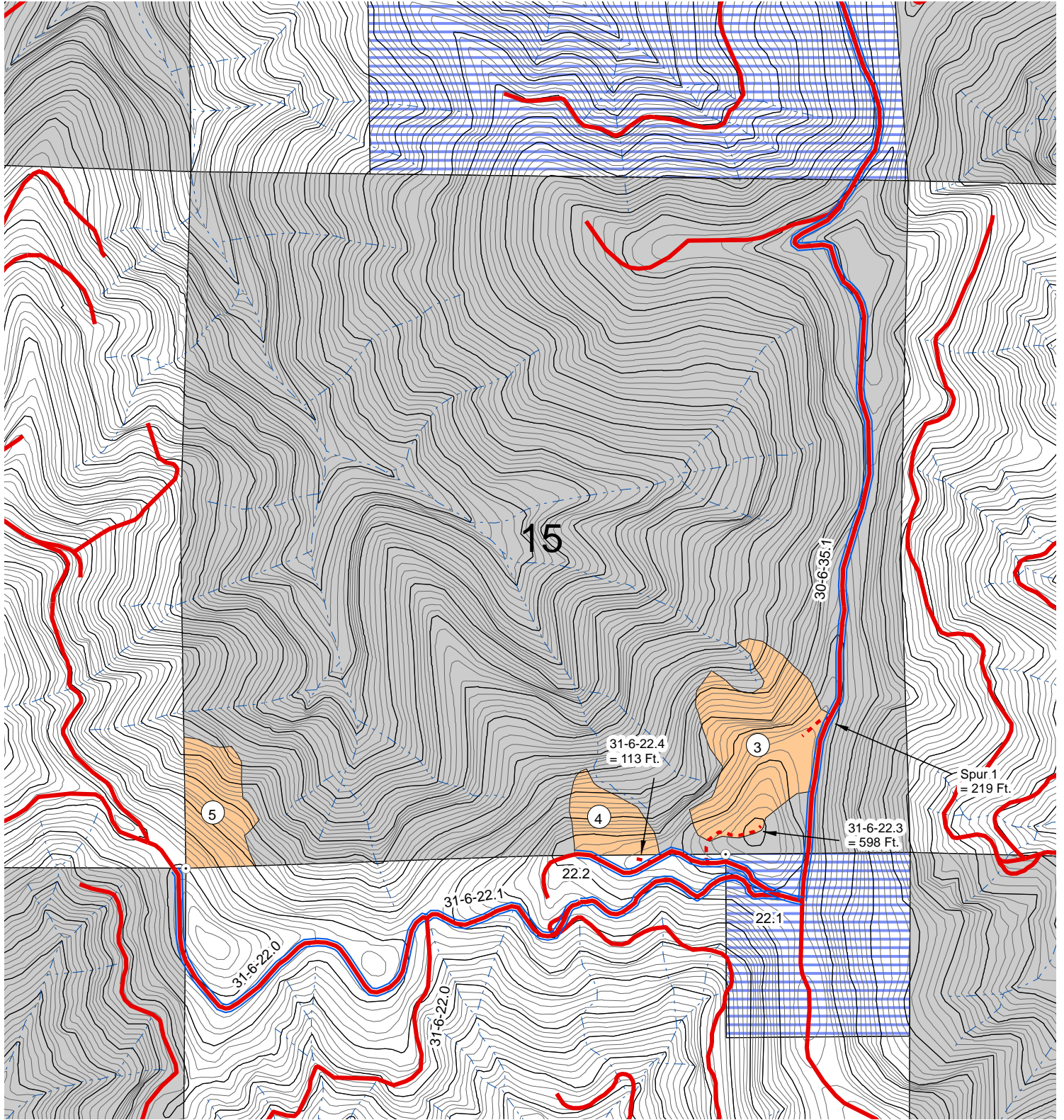


- Existing Road
- Haul/Access Route
- Stream
- 20 ft. Contour
- 100 ft. Contour

- Thinning Area
- No Harvest Buffer
- BLM (PD) Land
- BLM (O&C) Land
- Non-BLM Land

MINNESOTA FLATS

Commercial Thinning



T31S, R6W

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