United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Boise, Idaho 83705
http://www.id.blm.gov/offices/boise

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Birds of Prey National Conservation Area Fenceline Prescribed Burns

Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA)

Four Rivers Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to conduct prescribed burns of hazardous fuels along fences within the Birds of Prey NCA in accordance with the Snake River Birds of Prey NCA Resource Management Plan of 2008. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of March 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to reduce the build-up of hazardous fuels and subsequent wildland fire hazard along fencelines within the NCA. Prescribed burning is needed because it can successfully reduce fuels, and when conducted on a regular schedule, during the appropriate season, is a relatively low-risk, cost-effective method of hazard reduction. If burn plan objectives are met during prescribed fire operations and fuel build-up along fencelines is eliminated, the proposal would reduce the potential risk of future ignitions, spread and intensity of wildland fire. A side benefit of this action would be to provide training opportunities for prescribed and wildland fire crews by familiarizing them with prescribed fire safety measures, equipment, fire methods, and procedures. This proposed action is consistent with the Snake River Birds of Prey NCA Resource Management Plan (2008) Wildland Fire Ecology and Management Objective which states, “protection of native plant communities is one of the highest priorities for fire suppression” (pg 2-28).

Existing Condition

The NCA was established to conserve, protect, and enhance raptor (birds of prey) populations and habitats. It contains the greatest concentration of nesting raptors in North America and the greatest density of prairie falcons in the world. The area generally consists of sandy loam 8-10" ecological sites that have burned repeatedly by wildland fires over the last 20-30 years. The vegetation on many acres across the NCA is dominated by Russian thistle and invasive annual grasses. Russian thistle (*Salsola iberica*), otherwise known as tumbleweed, and other highly-flammable fuels are regularly blown by the wind and accumulate along fencelines in the NCA during the fall and winter. As the plant skeletons accumulate, they become dense enough to block the flow of wind. This pressure can bend fenceposts, but most often entire stretches of fenceline are pulled out of the ground due to the pressure from wind, effectively rendering the fence useless. Additionally, the dense accumulate expands outward from the fenceline and can partially or entirely block roadways, causing public safety concerns. These highly flammable fuels often approach or exceed hazardous levels, and if ignited, pose a threat to surrounding natural resources, firefighter, and public safety.

Proposed Action

The proposed action would be to reduce vegetation fuel build-up along approximately 1,057 miles of fenceline within the NCA (see enclosed maps). Burning would occur between the months of November and April during the first burn period of a day from 6:00am through 6:00pm. Multiple ignition days (7-10 days) within a given burning season would be probable. Staffing for the prescribed burns would include a minimum of seven firefighters (a Type 4 fire engine with an engine operator and two qualified firefighters for fire holding, three ignition specialists, and one Type 2 burn boss). Ignition devices would include a Terra Torch mounted onto the bed of a one ton pick-up truck and/or drip torches. Flammable material used for ignition in the Terra Torch would consist of a gas/diesel mixture with Flash 22 as an additive to make the mixture gel. Drip torches would contain the gas/diesel mixture only.

Three to five miles of fence line burning would be accomplished during any one burning period. Weeds (predominantly Russian thistle) occurring along both sides of a fence line would be burned. Any wooden fence posts that catch fire would be extinguished immediately by holding personnel. The average width of the burned area along a fence line would be 40 feet (20 feet on either side) with a minimum width of 10 feet and a maximum of 100 feet. Fire intensity would be high following ignition but the duration of this intensity would be short-lived and fuel would move into the smoldering phase of combustion within 2-5 minutes. Any creeping of fire into plant litter and or duff adjacent to the burn area would be extinguished immediately by fire personnel and there would be very little to no potential for escape by the time personnel leave the prescribed fire area. All mapped slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliforum*) occupied sites would not be burned and would be avoided by operational personnel and equipment.

Soil conditions during burning operations would be either frozen or mostly dry. Ruts left by fire trucks and support vehicles would be avoided or minimal. All operational vehicle traffic would be restricted to within 100 feet on either side of fencelines. Prescribed burning personnel would comply with the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group requirements for smoke management. The decision to burn on a particular day would be based in part on whether the meteorologist with the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group approves the day's smoke emissions based on local atmospheric conditions and other planned prescribed fire operations in the immediate region.

Preliminary Issues

Special status species of wildlife and plants as well as slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium pailliforum*), a threatened plant species designated under the Endangered Species Act will be considered in the effects analysis of the environmental assessment.

Preliminary Alternative Development

Two alternatives to the proposed action and no action alternatives have been proposed including manual removal of accumulated thistle skeletons from fencelines and the application of molasses to the thistle which would attract livestock to graze them down. These alternatives were considered but will not be analyzed in detail because they would be cost prohibitive and very difficult logistically.

Decision to be Made

The Birds of Prey NCA Manager will decide whether to approve the implementation of the proposed action or an alternative to the proposed action based on the outcome of an environmental assessment and the issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI). The decision will include any mitigation and/or monitoring requirements and as outlined in 43 CFR 5003.3 (a) and (b), protests of the decision may be made within 15 days of the publication date.

Public Input Needed

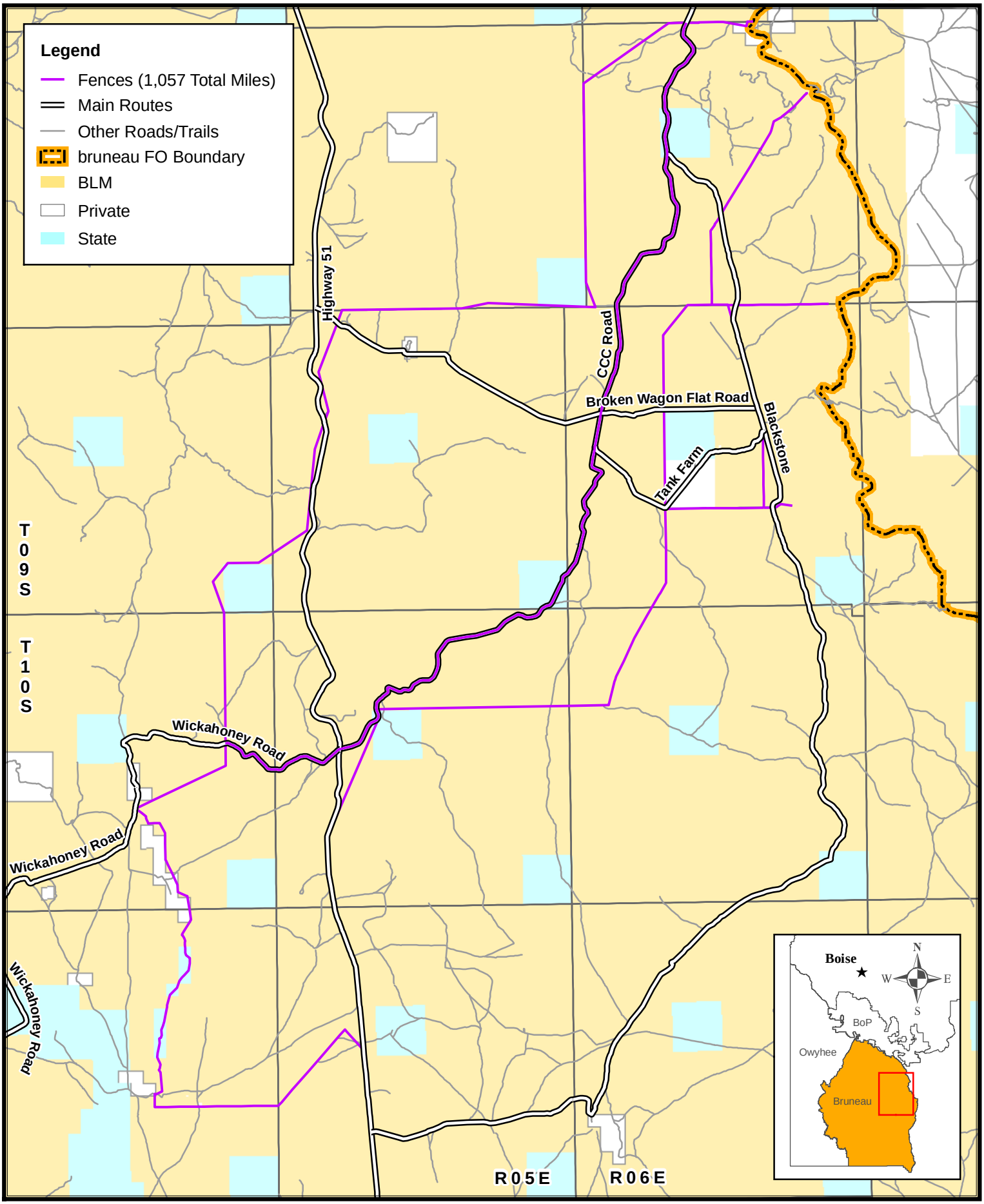
Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by February 5, 2010 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Comments sent electronically should be sent to Sarah_Heide@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

The primary contact for questions and comments on this analysis is Sarah Heide, Fire Use Specialist, BLM Boise District 3948 Development Ave., Boise Idaho 83705, (208)384-3396.

MAPS

See Enclosed Maps

Bruneau Fenceline Prescribed Burns



The sources of the data are from Idaho-BLM Corporate Data, and the USGS.
1/13/2010

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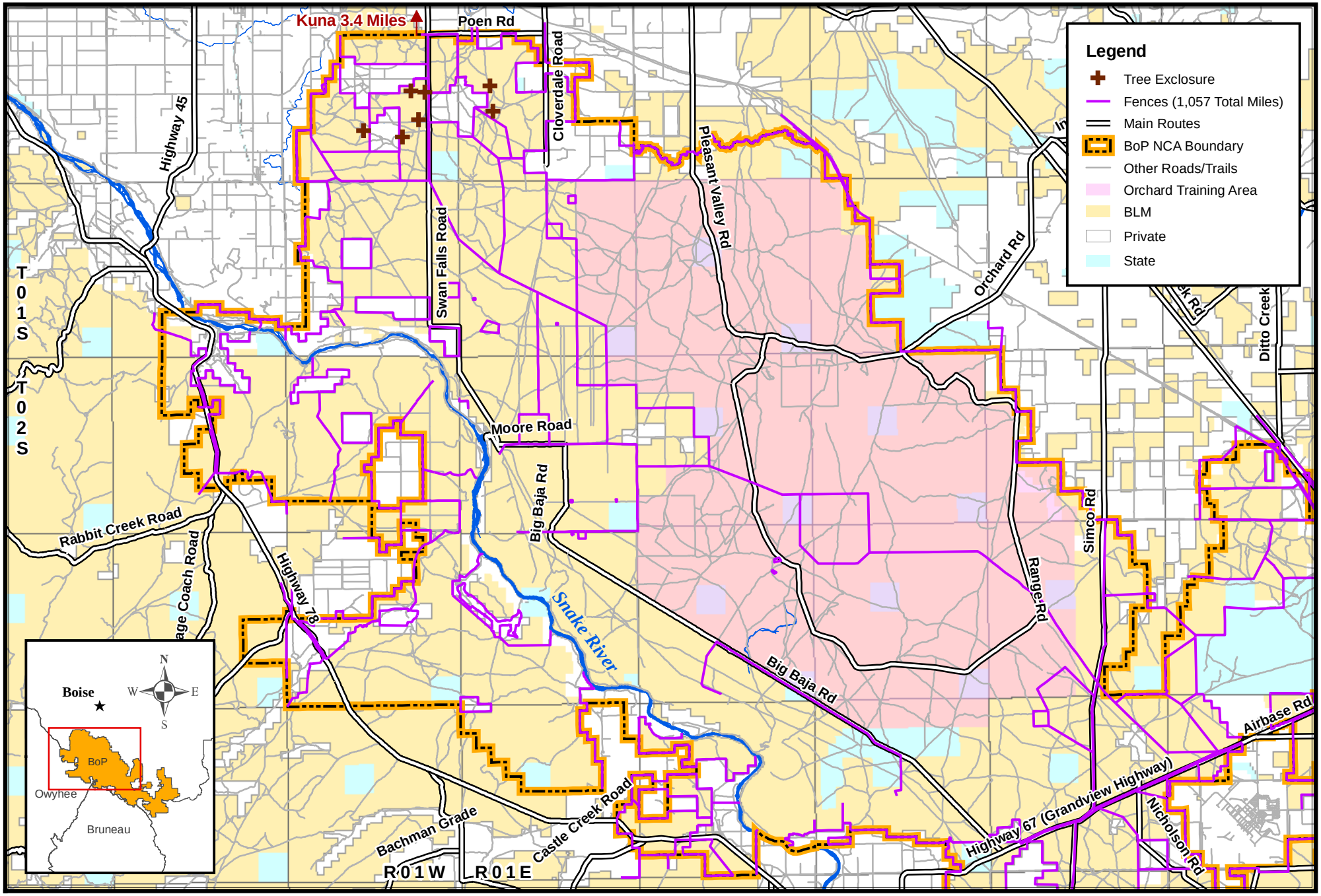
Birds of Prey NCA Fenceline Prescribed Burns - West



The sources of the data are from Idaho-BLM Corporate Data, and the USGS.
1/13/2010

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

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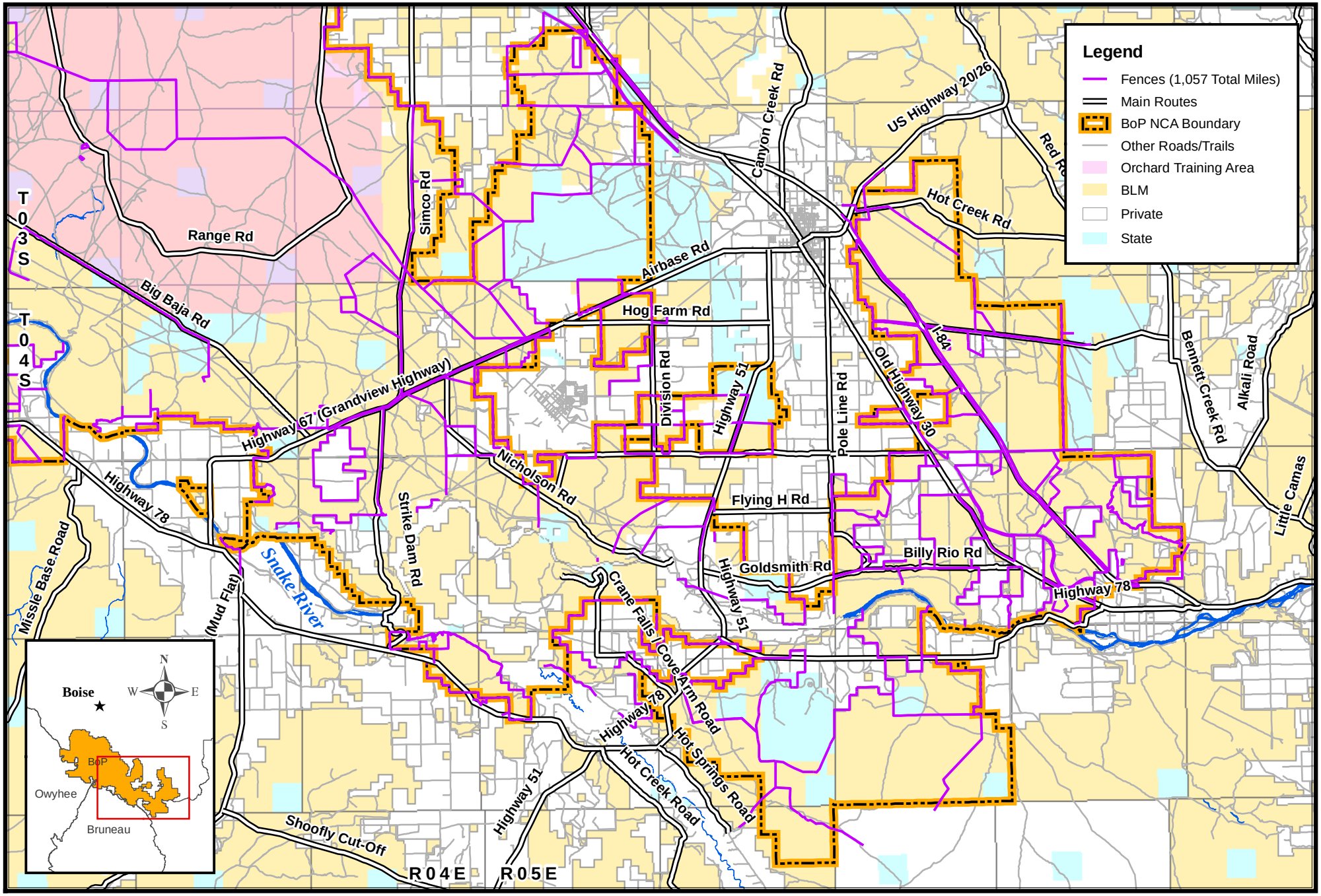
Birds of Prey NCA Fenceline Prescribed Burns - East



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