



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT



Cottonwood Field Office  
1 Butte Drive  
Cottonwood, Idaho 83522

In Reply Refer To:  
5000 (IDC020)

Dear Interested Public:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Cottonwood Field Office is proposing to salvage timber and conduct reforestation activities near John Day Mountain, approximately 2.5 miles northeast of Lucile, Idaho. This includes the harvest of dead and dying timber on approximately 940 acres affected by the 2012 Sheep Fire. The fire burned at moderate or high severity on approximately 3,370 acres of timber of BLM administered lands. The BLM is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) to analyze the potential effects of a proposed action and no action alternative on the quality of the human environment. The enclosed scoping package and map contain more details regarding the proposed action, the purpose and need for action, preliminary issues and a solicitation for public comment into the project.

We welcome your comments regarding this proposal and encourage you to submit them prior to December 10, 2012, as stated in the enclosed report. If you have any further questions, please contact Zach Peterson, Forester, at (208) 962-3594.

Sincerely,

\s\ Will Runnoe 11/13/2012

Will Runnoe  
Field Manager

3 Enclosures:

1. Scoping/Information Package (5 pgs)
2. Project Map (1 pg)
3. Project Location Map (1 pg)

## SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

BLM Idaho, Cottonwood Field Office

### **Sheep Fire Timber Salvage**

November, 2012

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to harvest merchantable dead and dying timber within the Sheep Fire perimeter. The 2012 Sheep Fire burned approximately 5,060 acres or approximately 13.8 percent of the commercial timber landbase as identified in the 2009 Approved Cottonwood Resource Management Plan. Within the BLM ownership near the proposed project, approximately 3,370 acres of timber land was burned at a high or moderate severity. The BLM proposes to harvest and reforest 940 acres (28% of this area) potentially yielding approximately 9.5 million board feet of logs and utilizing approximately 2.75 miles of temporary road construction.

The purpose of this report is to inform potentially interested and affected parties of the proposal and to invite comments to assist with the review of the proposed action in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA) NEPA Register No. DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2013-0003-EA. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action that may lead to development of alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

#### **Location**

Idaho County, Idaho near John Day Mountain approximately 2.5 miles north east of Lucille, Idaho.

Boise Meridian, T 26 N, R 2 E, secs 21, 28-32.

See the attached location map.

#### **Purpose of and Need for Action**

The purpose of the proposed action is to address the following two goals as key components of the Cottonwood Resource Management Plan (RMP) as approved on December 21, 2009 (BLM 2009):

Goal VF-1—Manage forests to maintain or improve forest health, composition, structure, and diversity consistent with site potential, and historical range of variability (HRV). Almost all of the project area lies within a desired future condition (DFC) block. At the broader landscape scale of John Day creek and Wet Gulch watersheds there is a disparity from the HRV. The most recent changes to the vegetation are the result of the severity of the Sheep wildfire within the project and:

- Approximately 3,370 acres of timber land was burned at a high or moderate severity resulting in greater than 80 percent mortality of the overstory vegetation.

- This has immediately altered stand conditions such that seral structural stages, grass/brush and seedling stands will be the dominant stand structure for many years.

The objectives are to:

1. Manage for forest health and/or habitat diversity in desired future condition (DFC) blocks of 1,000 or more forested acres.
2. In areas not included in DFC blocks, manage for multiple resource values.

To attain these objectives requires managing forest cover types and structure (size class, stand density and canopy layers) across the landscape. Stands need to be reforested as soon as possible and there is a definite lack of a seed source to provide for natural regeneration in the short term.

Goal FP-1—Provide forest products to help meet local and national demands. Much of the BLM lands in the project have never sustained timber harvest. Some of the lands had a commercial entry in the 1960’s, and a small portion in 2004.

The objectives are to:

1. Maintain a forest management program that complements resource objectives for other programs.
2. Prioritize vegetation treatment projects that will maximize forest commodity recovery by expediting salvage to capture economic return.

To attain these objectives requires treating as much of the area as quickly as possible given the logistical and resources constraints endemic to the project area.

The need for the proposed action is generated by the difference between current conditions in the project area and the desired conditions for the two goals described above.

**Decision to be Made**

The decision to be made by the Cottonwood Field Manager is whether to salvage timber and replant within the BLM ownership affected by the Sheep Fire and also to what scale and intensity should these activities be done. Previous decisions made include RMP action FP-1.3.1 which calls for the BLM to expedite salvage to capture a fair economic value of burned timber following a wildfire.

**Preliminary Description of the Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to harvest approximately 940 acres of dead and dying timber within 15 harvest units and 1 plant-only unit as shown below in Table 1. Harvest methods include tractor (ground based) skidding on slopes less than 35% and cable yarding on slopes greater than 35%.

**Table 1.** Proposed Sheep Fire Timber Salvage Harvest Units, Harvest Methods and Areas

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Harvest Method</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
1	Tractor	40
2-A	Tractor	7
2-B	Cable	11
2-C	Tractor	45
2-D	Tractor	6
4	Cable	26

Unit	Harvest Method	Acreage
5-A	Cable	87
5-B	Tractor	152
5-C	Tractor	129
5-Y	Tractor	6
5-Z	Cable	165
8-A	Tractor	84
8-B	Cable	81
9-A	Cable	77
9-B	Tractor	24
P-Plant Only	Plant only	52*
	<b>Total Harvest Area:</b>	<b>940</b>

\* Not included in harvest total

The units will be accessed by a combination of existing roads and new temporary roads. Approximately 2.75 miles of new temporary roads would be constructed and then decommissioned following harvest and reforestation activities.

Snags would be retained for wildlife purposes pursuant to the Cottonwood RMP as shown in Table 2 (below) for the Potential Vegetation Group 2 (Warm-Dry Douglas-fir/Moist Ponderosa Pine). Snags may be left as individuals scattered throughout the harvest unit or left as unharvested patches of varying size within a unit.

**Table 2.** Sheep Fire Timber Salvage Snag Retention

Diameter Group	Snags per acre
10"-20"	1.8-2.7
>20"	0.4-3.0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2.2-5.7</b>
<b>Min. Height</b>	<b>30'</b>

Reforestation would be planned for the entire harvested area as funding and seed supply is available. Should funding or adequate seed stock not be available immediately, the Interdisciplinary team will prioritize areas to plant first while awaiting additional funding and seed supply.

### **Alternatives Development**

Alternatives to the proposed action as identified by the Cottonwood BLM interdisciplinary (ID) team include a No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would not permit the BLM to harvest salvage timber. The standing dead timber would remain on site. No new temporary road construction would occur. Reforestation of the project area would not occur as part of this project and the forest would be left to natural reforestation and may persist in an early seral stage for decades or longer.

## **Preliminary Issues**

Preliminary issues, as determined by the ID team include:

-Proposed activities may increase erosion and sediment yield, which could temporarily impair fish habitat in the South Fork and Main Fork of John Day Creek and the Main Salmon River.

-Proposed activities have the potential to cause increased sediment delivery to streams in the area, temporarily decreasing the quantity and quality of spawning, rearing, and overwintering fish habitat for federally listed and BLM sensitive species.

-Proposed activities may decrease long-term soil productivity and directly affect other physical properties of this landscape including watershed condition. Slope failure can occur in response to management activities, particularly roads.

-Proposed activities include temporary road construction to access harvest areas. Access to complete management activities requires a transportation network. Designing a transportation system that balances implementing the project cost effectively versus the environmental impacts is an important project consideration.

-The proposed project affects the vegetative composition of the project area in the short and long term.

-The cost of implementing the project and the rapid decrease in product value compared to the economic benefits is a concern.

## **Public Input Invited**

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, alternatives and preliminary issues. Comments would be most helpful if they are directly relevant to the proposal and project area and identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions and design of the proposed action and alternatives or the analysis of effects to be presented in the EA.

To ensure we can consider your input as we prepare the EA, the BLM requests you provide your comments on this proposal in writing by **December 10, 2012**. Comments may be submitted to the Cottonwood Field Office, at 1 Butte Road, Cottonwood, ID 83522. Comments sent electronically should be sent to [BLM\\_ID\\_SheepSalvage@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_ID_SheepSalvage@blm.gov). Please include the title of this project in the subject line.

Please also identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization or agency, and your contact information if you wish to receive future notices or a copies of the NEPA analysis and decision document(s). Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

**Contact**

The primary contact for questions on this proposal is Zach Peterson, Forester, 208-962-3594.

**MAP ATTACHMENT(S)**

Sheep Fire Salvage Proposed Action Units and Roads

Sheep Fire Salvage Location Map

R 1 E

R 2 E

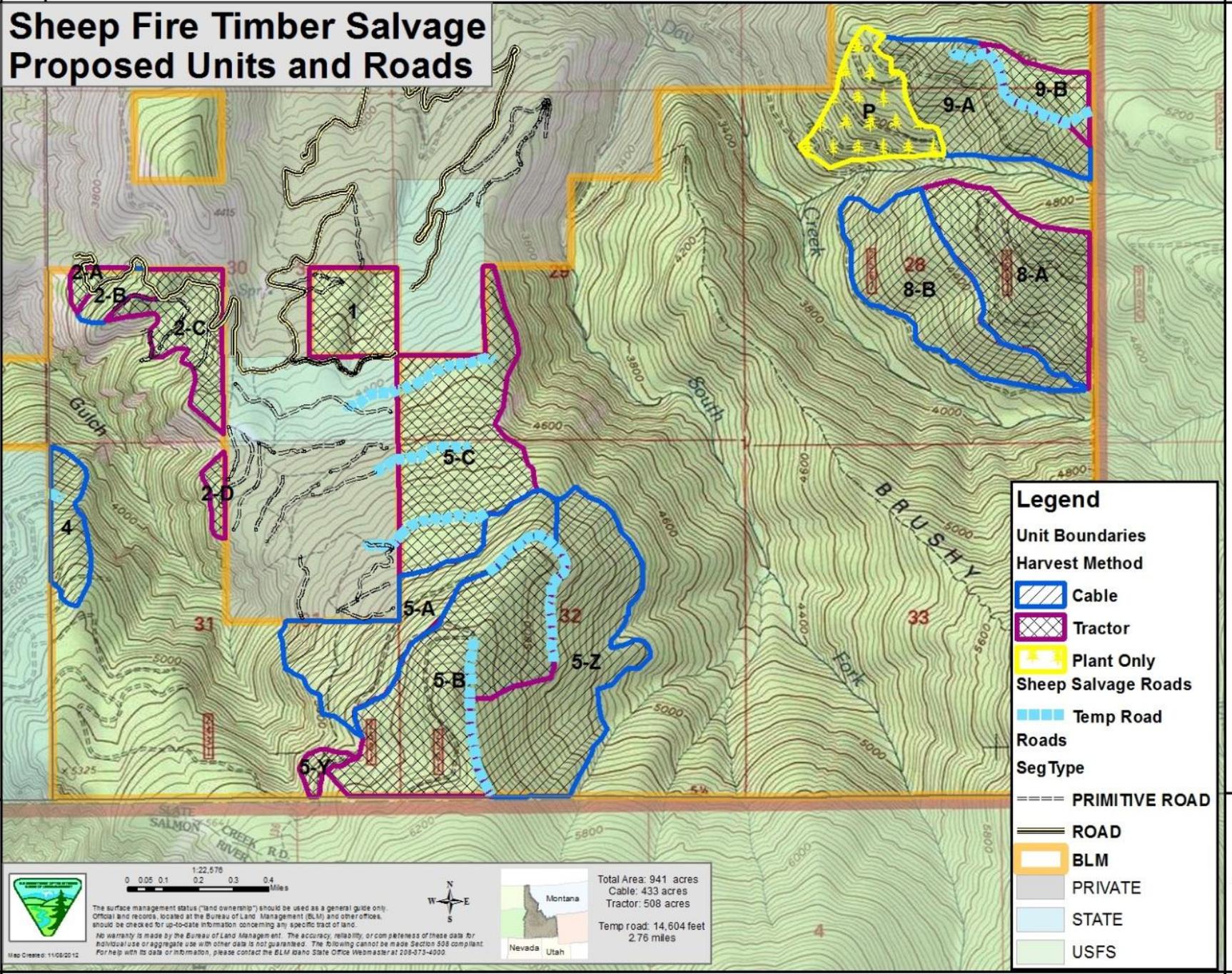
# Sheep Fire Timber Salvage Proposed Units and Roads

T 26 N

T 26 N

T 25 N

T 25 N



**Legend**

**Unit Boundaries**

**Harvest Method**

- Cable
- Tractor
- Plant Only

**Sheep Salvage Roads**

- Temp Road

**Roads**

**Seg Type**

- PRIMITIVE ROAD
- ROAD
- BLM
- PRIVATE
- STATE
- USFS



Scale: 0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles

1:22,576

The surface management status ("land ownership") should be used as a general guide only. Official land records, located at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and other offices, should be checked for up-to-date information concerning any specific tract of land.

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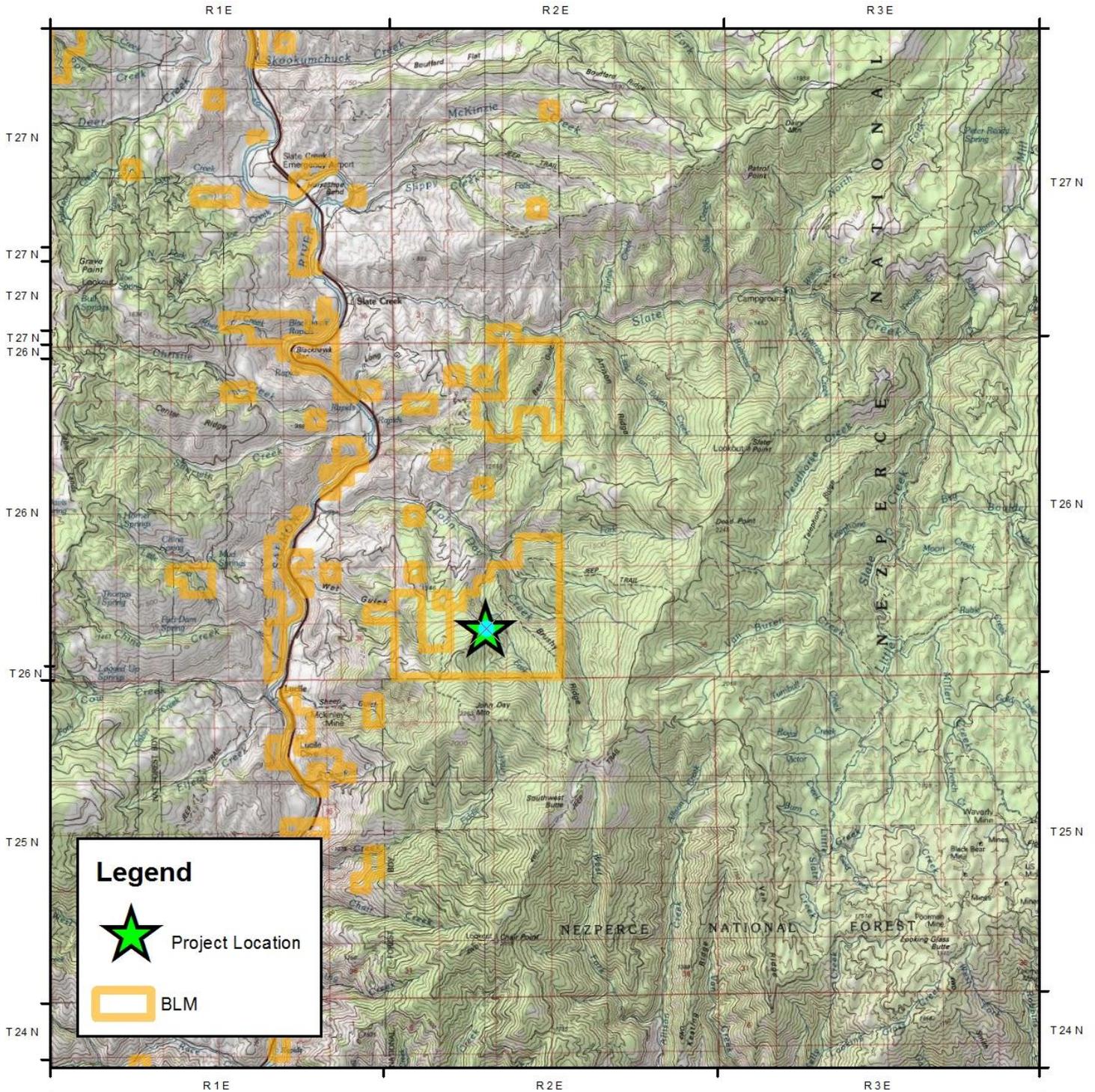
Total Area: 941 acres  
 Cable: 433 acres  
 Tractor: 508 acres

Temp road: 14,604 feet  
 2.76 miles



R 2 E

# Sheep Fire Timber Salvage General Location



**Legend**

-  Project Location
-  BLM



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1:150,000  
0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Miles  
Data displayed in UTM Zone 11N, NAD83



Map Created: 11/6/2012

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