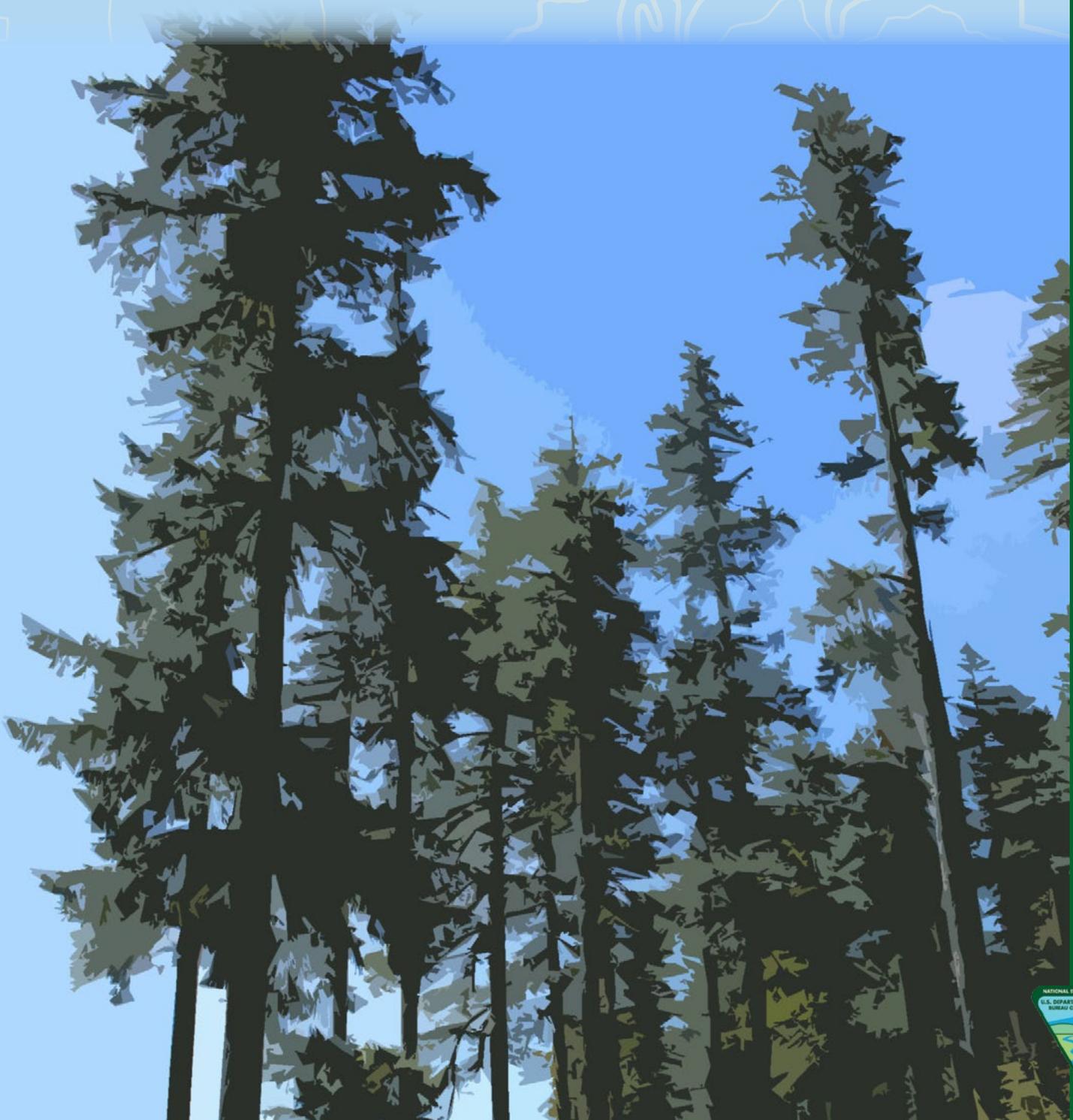

Cold Elk Forest Management Project

Scoping Guide

December 2015

BLM

Medford District - Grants Pass Field Office



Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in public lands and welcome to the Cold Elk Forest Management Project. This Scoping Guide is meant to help you understand the project and describes your opportunities to participate in the planning process. This guide describes the what, where and why of the work we are proposing to do.

This project is in the early planning stages. We are currently in the external or public scoping phase. Scoping is the process by which the BLM solicits input on the issues, impacts and potential alternatives that will be addressed in the Environmental Assessment.

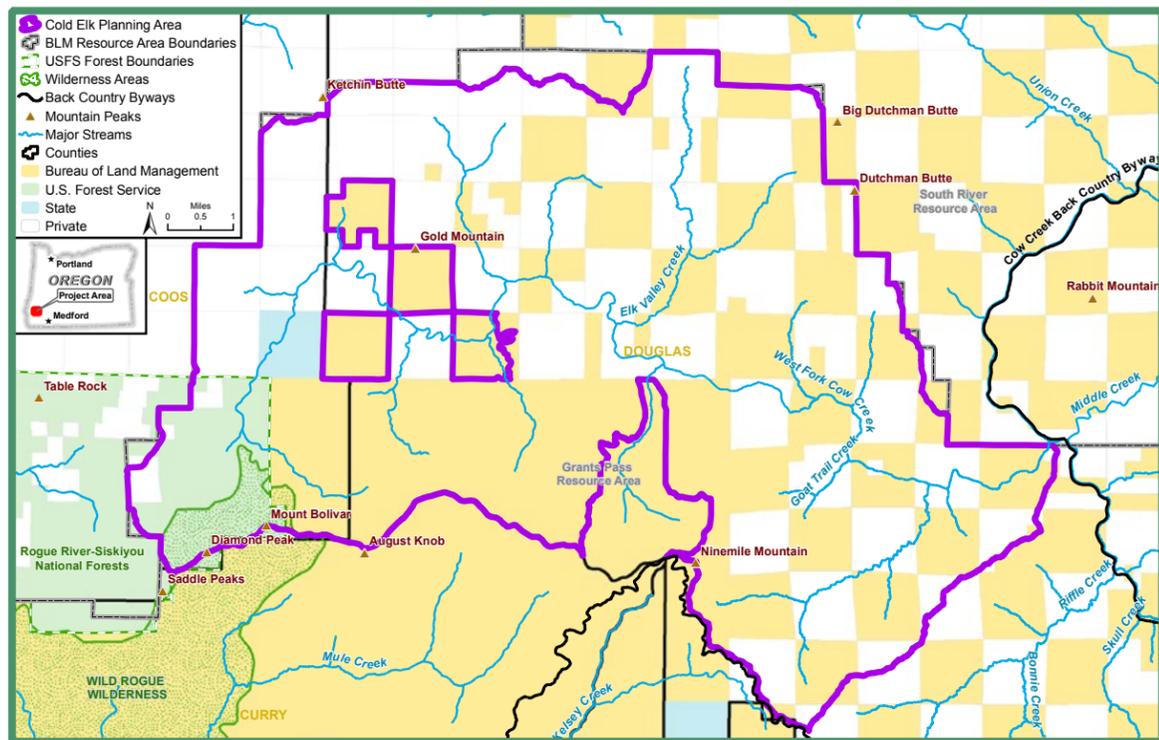
Inside this Scoping Guide you will find a Planning Area description, a discussion of the Purpose and Need for the project, a description of the types of treatments being considered, a map of the Planning Area with potential treatment units, public involvement information, and a Forest Management Tour.

We hope this guide helps you understand the proposed project and how your input best fits within the overall project development. Please contact our office if you have questions. Your input is an important part of the management of your public lands. Thank you.

Allen Bollschweiler, Grants Pass Field Manager

Planning Area Description

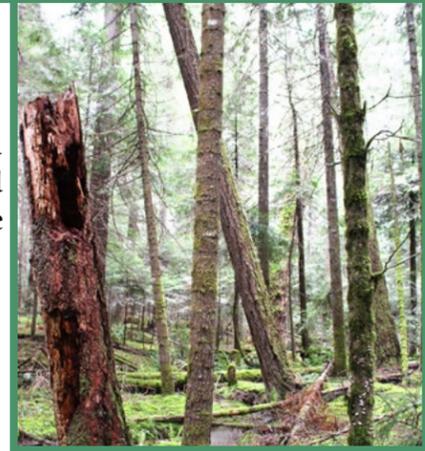
The Planning Area falls within the West Fork Cow Creek watershed. The watershed is part of the Umpqua River drainage in the Klamath Mountains province in southwest Oregon. This area is approximately 20 miles northwest of the town of Glendale. The southwestern portion of the Planning Area is mostly a solid block of BLM-managed lands within the BLM Medford District. The northern and eastern portions of the Planning Area have BLM lands intermingled with private lands, characteristic of Oregon and California (O&C) railroad lands of western Oregon.



Landscape Description

Historical Conditions

The West Fork Cow Creek watershed developed as both mixed conifer and Douglas-fir communities. Exceptions include the Bear Creek drainage and serpentine soil areas in Wilson Creek, which both had relatively sparse tree cover. A small but distinct white oak savanna woodlands populated small valleys and rocky flat areas. A long history of fire activity maintained open conditions and limited understory regeneration. Fire suppression beginning in the early twentieth century has shifted the type and growth rate of vegetation on the landscape. Overall, fire suppression, recent catastrophic large fires, timber harvest from the 1960s to the 1990s, and reforestation practices have decreased the acreage of mature and late seral forests.



Historically, stands showed great variety of density and fire was a frequent occurrence in the Planning Area

Existing Conditions

Much of the Planning Area is designated a North General Forest Management Area (O&C Matrix) and is within the Klamath West Unit of Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl. Current conditions exhibit high tree densities leading to reduced tree vigor. This increases the risk of habitat loss from trees dying as a result of fire, insects, and drought. Consecutive drought years have recently predisposed trees to these mortality agents.



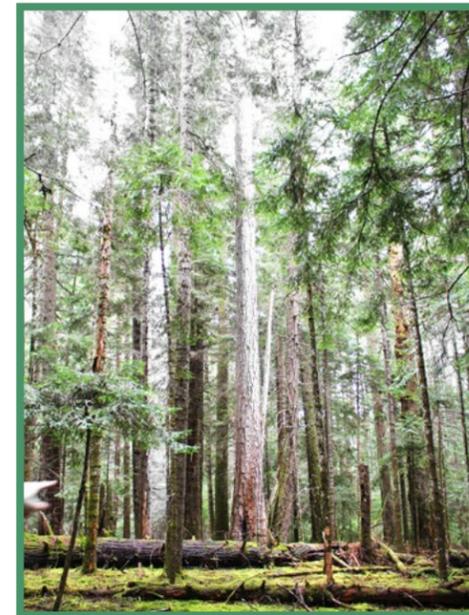
Overstocked forest stand with dead and dying trees.

The Planning Area also provides habitat for coho and chinook salmon, and cutthroat and steelhead trout. The Umpqua River basin cutthroat trout has been listed as an endangered species. Northern spotted owls also inhabit parts of the Planning Area, as do red tree voles and marbled murrelets.

Desired Conditions

The desired condition within the Cold Elk Planning Area is a mixture of multi-aged forests. This desired condition is reflective of the Matrix Land Use Allocation characteristic of the Planning Area, coupled with the need to manage for vigorous growing conditions by reducing stand densities and creating variable structure for northern spotted owls.

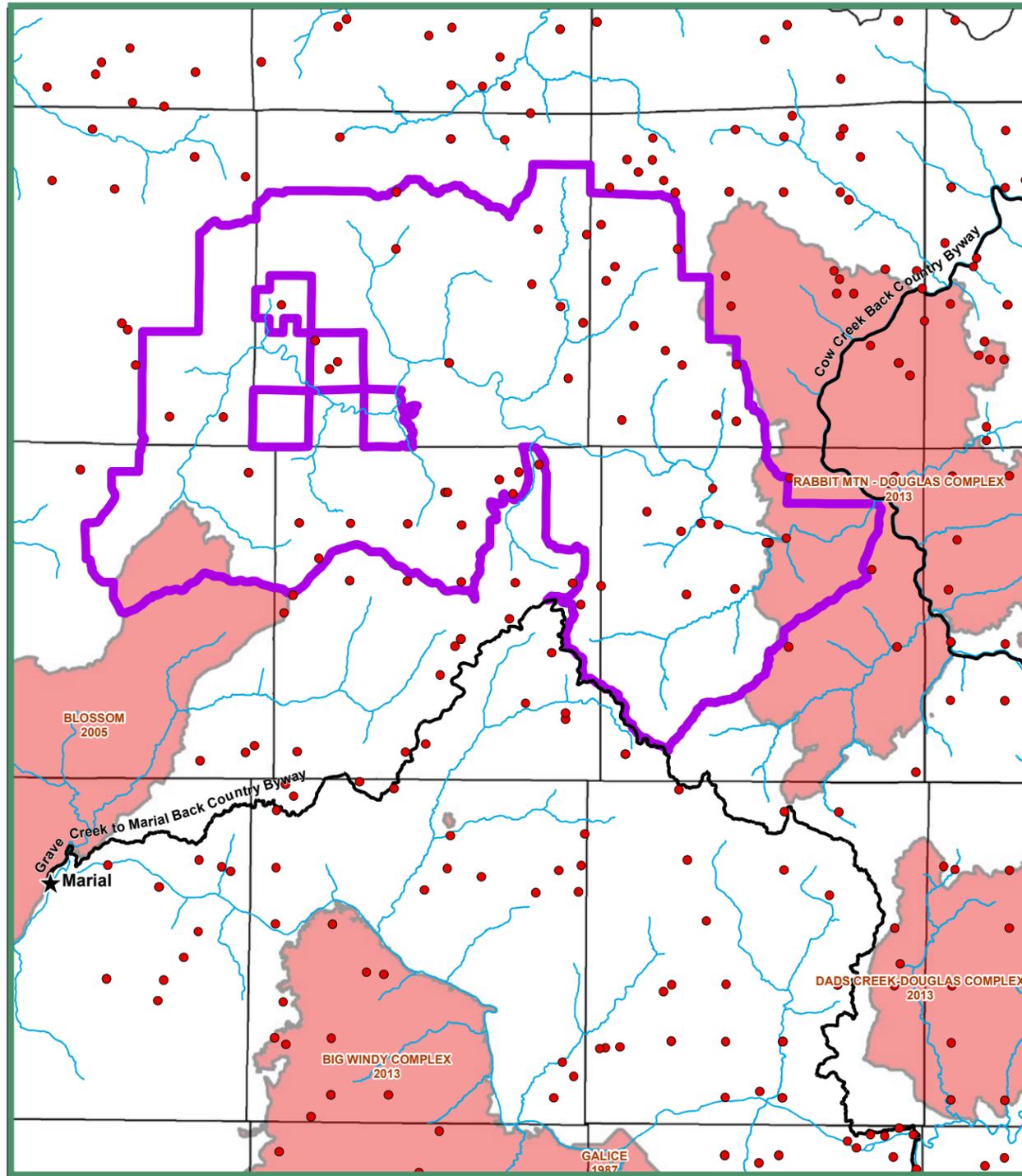
A desired condition for Critical Habitat Units in the Planning Area includes a forest ecosystem that is sustainable and resilient under current and future climate conditions. Long term recovery of the northern spotted owl can best be achieved by protecting, enhancing, and developing habitat.



High value northern spotted owl habitat such as this pictured above can be developed through active management actions.

Fire History in and Adjacent to the Planning Area

Fire has played a role in and adjacent to the Planning Area. The map below shows the fire history of the area since the early 1960s. Many of these fires were suppressed and kept small, influencing the modern landscape we see today. More recently, large scale fires have occurred adjacent to the planning area; for example the Douglas and Big Windy Complex fires of 2013, and the Blossom Fire of 2005.



▭ Cold Elk Planning Area ● Fire Starts Since 1960
▭ Large Fires in the Last 30 Years



Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to manage forests in the Matrix Land Use Allocation (LUA) and Riparian Reserves (RR) for timber production as outlined in the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan / Record of Decision using silvicultural practices, and/or



The majority of O&C Lands fall within the Matrix Land Use Allocation.

commercial and non-commercial treatments.

There is a need for the project because Matrix Land Use Allocation objectives include providing vigorous growing conditions and stand resiliency to reduce the risk of stand loss; to meet ACS components; and to provide a sustainable supply of timber and other forest commodities.



Riparian Reserves would be treated in a manner that protects their important values.

Land Use Allocations

The Cold Elk Forest Management Project is located in the West Fork Cow Creek watershed, in Douglas County, with a small portion in Coos County, Oregon. For a map of the Planning Area see the center pages of this Scoping Guide.

Treatment is desired within Matrix Land Use Allocations in order to improve forest vigor and health, provide a sustainable

supply of timber and other forest products to provide jobs and contribute to community stability, and to maintain connectivity between late-successional reserves.

There is a recognized desire for treatment within Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations. Treatment within Riparian Reserves would help promote Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives by providing ecosystem diversity, and develop structural and spatial stand diversity.

Treatments Being Considered

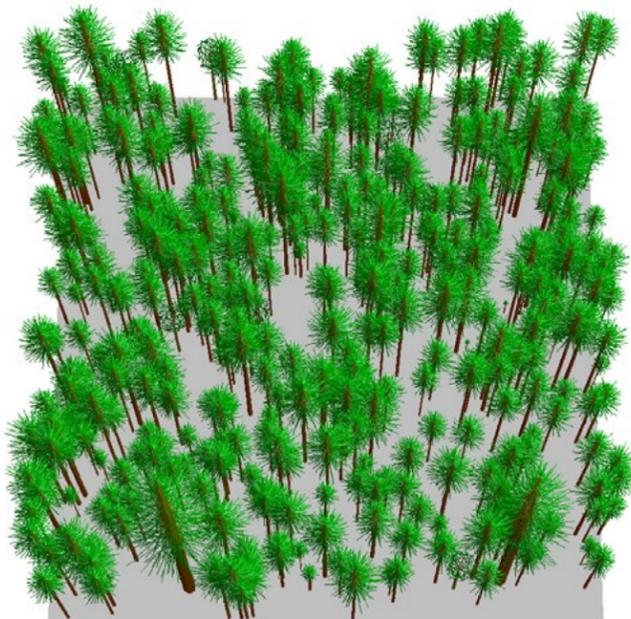
Variable Density Thinning

Variable density thinning treatments are applied to create complex forest structure. This type of thinning may include treatments that create space (gaps) around large legacy trees of less prominent species such as pine, oak and cedar. It may also maintain denser areas that may remain untreated, known as “skips.” Variable density thinning objectives include:

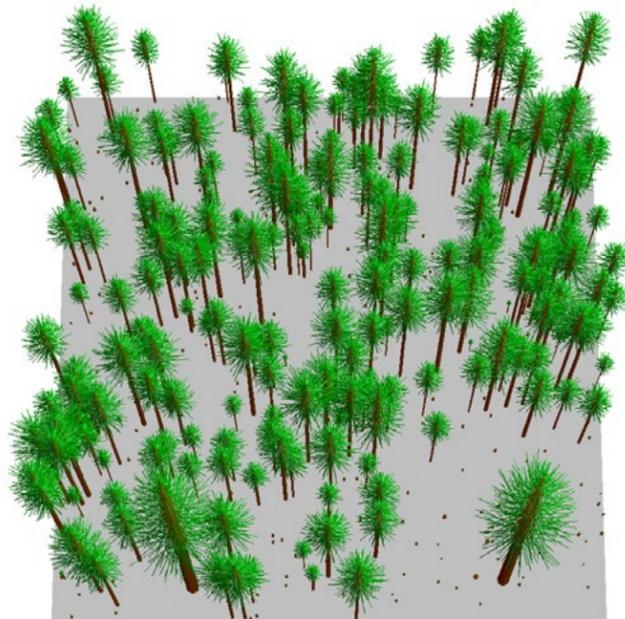
- Removing excess trees that create “ladder fuels,” which improves a forest stand’s ability to withstand wildfire.
- Increasing amount of spotted owl habitat over the long term.
- Favoring the retention of more fire tolerant and drought tolerant trees.

Example of Variable Density Treatment

Before Treatment



After Treatment



Above: The stand at left is experiencing competition for resources (such as light, nutrients, water, space). If no thinning were to occur, these stands would remain in stand exclusion (loss of a developed understory and midstory, spindly trees exhibiting growth suppression and susceptible to disease, mortality, and windthrow). Applying variable density thinning to the stand, at left, opens up the canopy, lets in available sunlight, and decreases competition for resources that lead to mortality.

Understory Reduction

Understory reduction is a treatment designed to reduce fuel loading and ladder fuels, potentially decreasing the risk of wildfire. This treatment would enhance tree growth and vigor and may increase fire resiliency.

Understory reduction includes the partial or complete removal of one or more understory canopy layers for the purpose of maintaining desired stand components and/or reducing the risk of stand replacement fire (RMP, p. 186).



Forest Stand in need of Understory Reduction Treatment.

Examples of Understory Reduction treatments as shown in these photos.

Treatments could include slashing, hand-piling, pile-burning, chipping, lop and scattering, biomass removal, and/or under burning.



Chipping

Handpiles

This unit was underburned in 2009



Pile-burning



Underburning



Lop-and-scatter

R10W

R09W

R08W

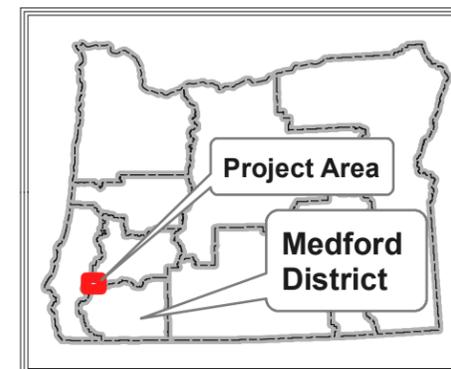
Cold Elk Scoping Map

12/14/2015

-  Cold Elk Potential Treatment Area
-  Planning Area
-  Resource Area Boundary
-  Perennial Streams
-  Major Highway
-  Paved Road
-  Rocked Road
-  Natural Surface Road
-  Not Known
-  Bureau of Land Management



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources and may be updated without notification.



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Operations Needed to Accomplish Goals

Yarding methods may vary depending on a number of factors, including environmental concerns, available roads, ease of access, and cost. Below are the three types of yarding operations being considered in the Cold Elk Project.

Cable Yarding

Cable yarding is the process of removing logs from a harvest unit to a landing by use of wire cables, a carriage, a tower, and a yarder.

- The carriage is the device from which logs are suspended and which rides back and forth between the yarder and tower, also called the “skyline carriage.”
- The tower is the anchor point placed on the far end of the yarding corridor, from which the carriage moves back and forth.
- On Medford District BLM lands, at least one end of the log must be suspended during yarding. This helps limit impacts to soils and other plants.

Ground-Based Harvesting/Yarding

Ground based harvesting is the cutting of trees in the harvest unit using a mechanized saw. Ground based yarding is the removal of logs from a harvest unit using wire cables and a tractor or dozer-like machine.

- On Medford District BLM lands, the tractor must be equipped with an integral arch so that one end of the log is suspended above the ground while being pulled to a landing. This protects soils and the remaining trees within the unit.

Helicopter Yarding

Helicopter yarding is the removal of logs from a harvest unit using wire cables and a helicopter to fully suspend the logs from the ground and transport them to a landing.

- Usually conducted when access to a unit is limited by one of a number of factors, including terrain difficulty, lack of available roads, and habitat concerns.
- This is often the most expensive and hazardous yarding method available.



A cable yarding operation.



A ground-based harvesting operation.



A helicopter yarding operation.

Proposed Road Work

Access to treatment units depend on the quality of available roads. The Cold Elk Forest Management Project Environmental Assessment will analyze roads within the project area and may propose a variety of actions, including: road maintenance, temporary route construction, and temporary route reconstruction. When forest management activities generate revenue, road maintenance activities occur on a regular basis and are associated with project activities. Such maintenance activities may improve the function of forest roads and decrease sedimentation from forest roads.

Temporary Route Construction*

- These routes are created in areas where no previous routes exist. They allow operators temporary access to harvest units.

Temporary Route Reconstruction*

- These routes already exist on the landscape.
- Reconstruction restores an existing road to its engineered condition.

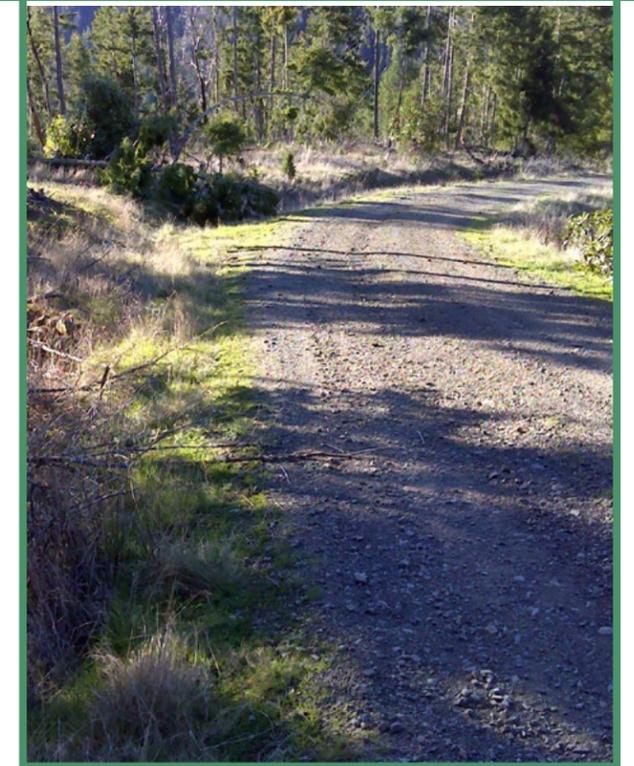
Temporary Route Renovation

- Restores an existing unmaintained route to its original or modified design standard.

Road Maintenance

- Maintenance on existing roads would help maintain their original design standard.
- Maintenance reduces sedimentation from road runoff.

*Temporary routes are usually decommissioned after use.



Typical BLM road.



Decommissioned road after more than 15 years.



Road Maintenance.



Recently decommissioned road.

Resources that May Influence the Project Design

The Interdisciplinary team (IDT) of resource specialists that develops projects like this identify the internal issues to be addressed. External issues are identified after reaching out to the public; local, federal and state agencies; federally recognized tribes; and other organizations that may be interested in the project.

Past projects have taken into account mitigation measures to protect resources. On these two pages are some of the resource concerns that are often analyzed as part of projects such as Cold Elk.

Wildlife

Wildlife biologists will consider the effects of proposed project activities on the northern spotted owl, their habitat, and their prey species, as well as effects to red tree voles, fishers, marbled murrelet, and other species of concern.



Northern Spotted Owl



Red Tree Vole (RTV) surveyor, verifying nest occupancy.

Soils

Effects to soil and site recovery and nutrient cycling are analyzed by resource specialist who will incorporate measures to reduce potential impacts to soils.

Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds

BLM resource specialists will evaluate proposed project activities for the potential spread of invasive/noxious weeds. Measures may be incorporated into the project design to reduce the likelihood of spreading non-native plant species.



BLM Soil Scientist assessing soil compaction.



Contract Administrator verifying equipment is washed to prevent noxious weed spread prior to entry on public land.

Hydrology / Aquatics

A project goal is to protect water quality and quantity, fish, and aquatic habitat. Resource specialists will analyze project effects on the physical integrity of the aquatic system, as well as sediment and instream flow. Measures may be incorporated into the project design to protect sensitive species such as Coho Salmon.



BLM employee surveying a stream.



Effects to fish, such as Coho Salmon will be analyzed as part of the Cold Elk Project.

Fuels / Fire

Variable Density Thinning and Understory Reduction treatments are intended to create fire resilient stands by reducing surface fuels, ladder fuels, and crown density through thinning. Thinning followed by treatment of surface fuels and activity fuels can reduce potential fire danger and increase resiliency to natural fire. Thinning can, to a degree, restore fire resiliency.

Stand Condition

Resource specialists assess and evaluate site conditions and determine need and extent of forest management treatments.



Silviculturist verifying stand age.



Thinning may allow for both natural and prescribed fire to burn with low intensity.

Archeological Resources

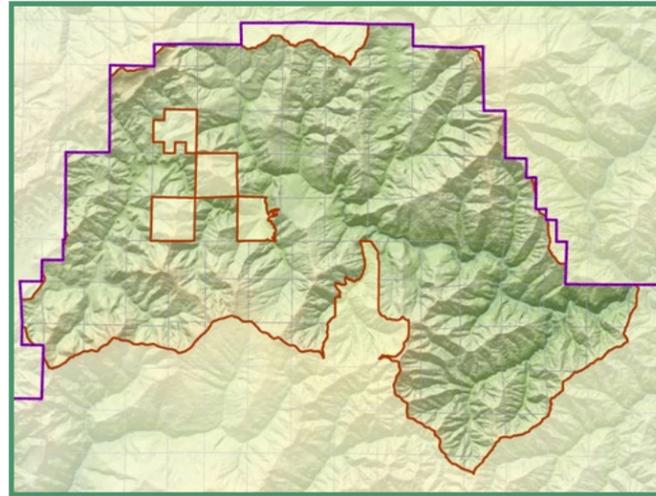
Surveys in the Planning Area will be carried out according to BLM Archeological standards to determine potential impacts to cultural resources. Measures would be incorporated to protect cultural and paleontological resources if discovered during project design or implementation.



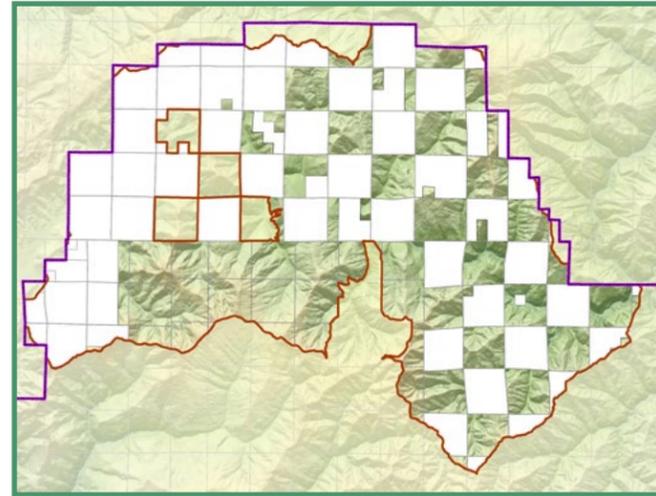
Flint found and protected at a BLM archaeology site.

Cold Elk Project Unit Selection Process

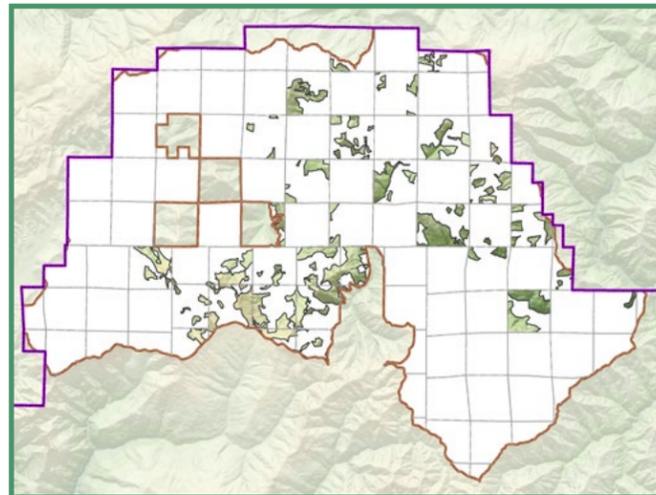
An interdisciplinary team (IDT) of resource specialists is brought together during the planning stages of a project. There are many steps that the IDT must go through before the final proposed treatment units are selected. Below is a brief description of the unit screening and selection process.



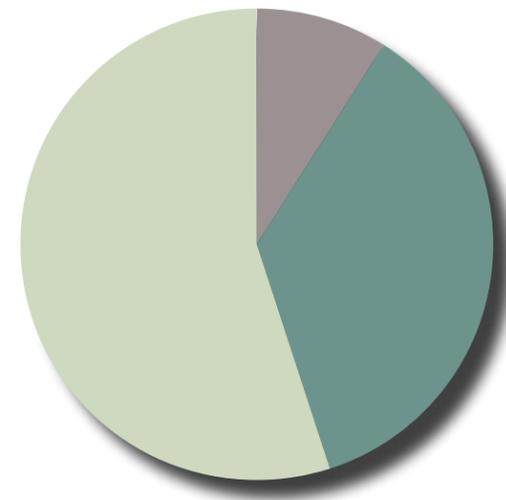
Step 1 - Delineate Project Area



Step 2 - Identify BLM-Managed lands



Step 3 - Screening Process: Remove or mitigate sensitive areas, Northern Spotted Owl nest patches, sensitive soils, flora and fauna protection areas from the project



Proposed Cold Elk Units as compared with Total Project Area

- BLM Managed lands under consideration for treatment within the Planning Area: 9%
- BLM Managed lands screened out: 36%
- Non-BLM land within the Planning Area: 55%

Public Involvement

To the right is a diagram which briefly explains the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Environmental Assessment process. Scoping is a form of public involvement in the NEPA process and generally occurs early and extends through the development of alternative ways to meet the purpose and need listed on page 5 of this Scoping Guide.

Scoping Comments and Public Meeting

The Grants Pass Field Office seeks your input to help identify any issues or concerns specific to this project. Please submit your written comments to Grants Pass Interagency Office, 2164 NE Spalding Avenue, Grants Pass, OR 97526 by Friday, February 5, 2016. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., closed on holidays. Those who provide comments or display an interest during this scoping period will be notified when the Environmental Assessment for this project is ready for public comment.

A public meeting will be held on January 27, 2016 at the Grants Pass Interagency Office (address above) from 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM. The meeting will provide members of the public an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the project. For more information about the meeting, and about the project please visit the BLM's planning website at <http://tinyurl.com/BLMePlanning-ColdElk>, or call us at the number below.

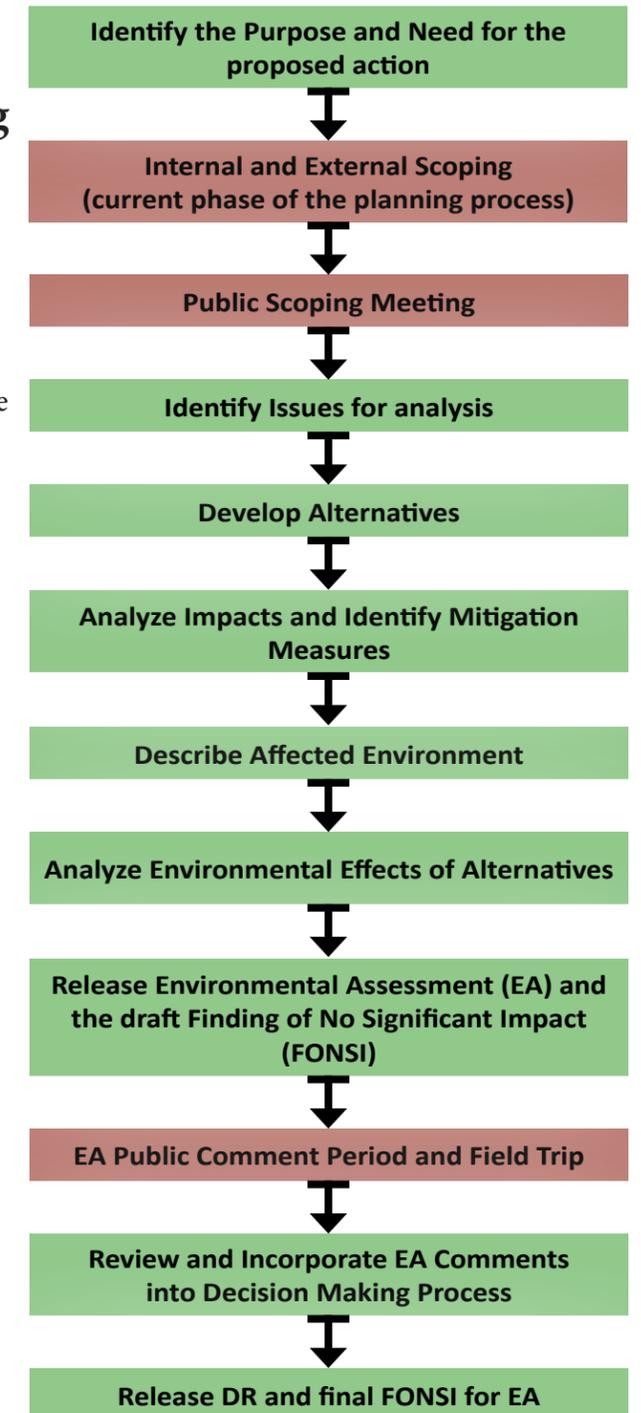
Comments submitted will become part of the public record for this project. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your personal information from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored by the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection on their entirety.

Primary Contact

Leah Schofield • Planning and Environmental Coordinator
(541) 471-6504 • lschofie@blm.gov

Understanding the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

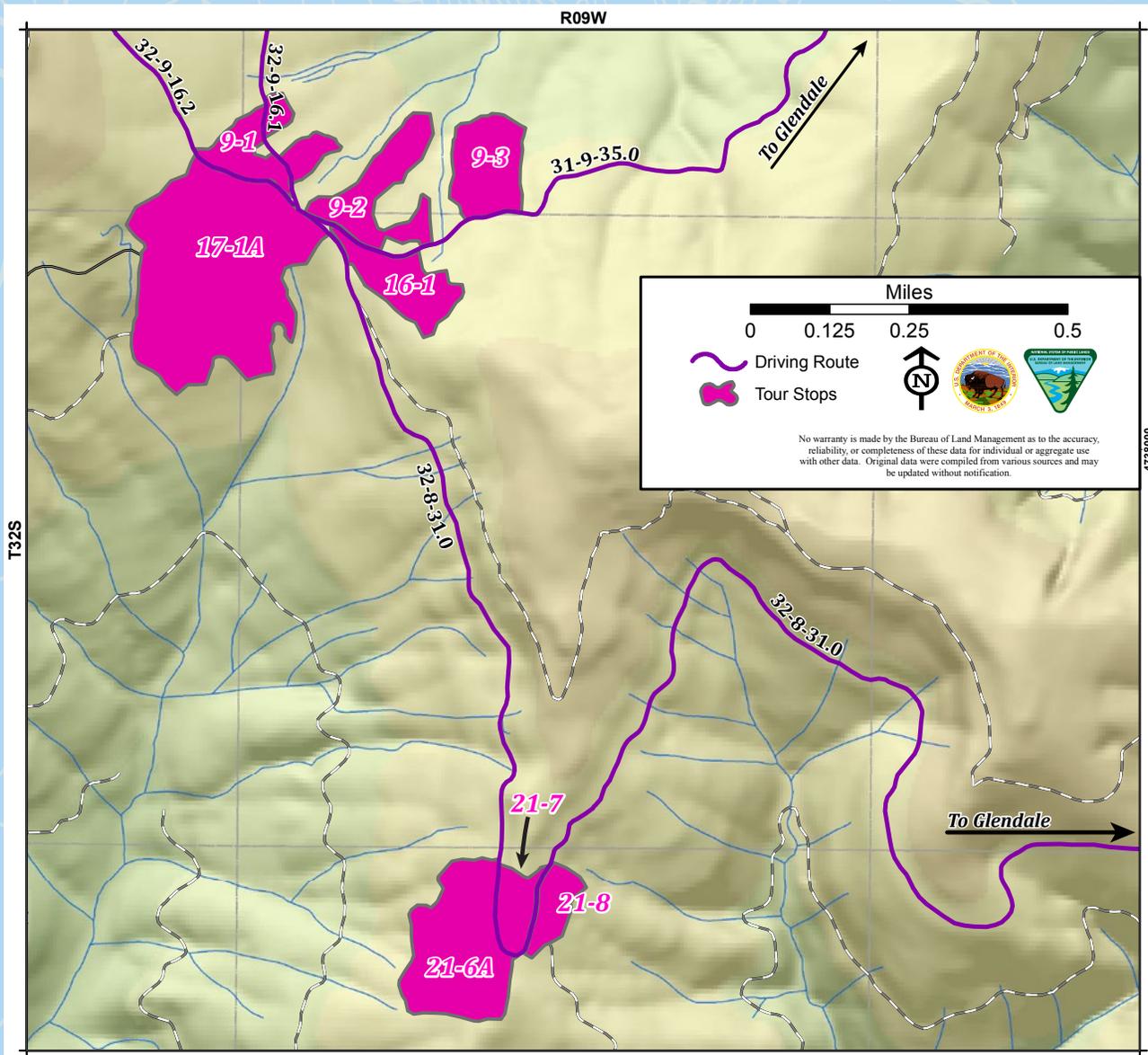
The Environmental Assessment Process



Key Points of Public Participation

Forest Management Tour in the Cold Elk Area

The Grants Pass Field Office invites you to personally view previous BLM forest management treatments, similar to the types of treatments proposed in this project. These units were part of the Anatouvik Thin treatment of 2010 and 2011. These sites may not be accessible in the winter. If you choose to make this trip, please plan accordingly: Check the weather forecast, bring appropriate clothing and equipment, and tell someone where you are going. This tour may take approximately 5 hours. An additional forest management tour that shows treatments closer to Grants Pass may be found on this project's online planning page at <http://tinyurl.com/BLMePlanning-ColdElk>.



9-1, 9-2: 2010 Commercial Thin, tractor yarding, 40% canopy target

9-3: 2010 Commercial Thin, cable yarding, 40% canopy target

16-1: 2011 Commercial Thin, cable yarding, 40% canopy target

17-1A: 2011 Commercial Thin, tractor yarding, 40% canopy target

21-6A: 2010 Commercial Thin, cable yarding, 40% canopy target

21-7, 21-8: 2010 Commercial Thin, tractor yarding, 40% canopy target

Medford District Bureau of Land Management • Grants Pass Field Office

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541-471-6500