

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

for the

Peavine Helicopter Landings Rehabilitation Project

(EA# OR110-01-013)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
MEDFORD DISTRICT  
GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

*May 2001*

Dear Reader:

We appreciate your interest in the BLM's public land management activities. We also appreciate your taking the time to review this environmental assessment (EA). If you would like to provide us with written comments regarding this project or EA, please send them to Abbie Jossie, Grants Pass Field Manager, at 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504. If you would prefer, you may also email comments to me at: *or110mb@.or.blm.gov*.

If confidentiality is of concern to you, please be aware that comments, including names and addresses of respondents, will be available for public review or may be held in a file available for public inspection and review. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this clearly at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or officials of organizations or businesses will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

Abbie Jossie  
Grants Pass Field Manager

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
MEDFORD DISTRICT

EA COVER SHEET

RESOURCE AREA: Grants Pass

FY & REPORT # EA Number OR-110-01-013

ACTION/TITLE: Peavine Helicopter Landings Rehabilitation Project

LOCATION: T.34S., R.8W., Sections 21, 29, 31 Willamette Meridian, Josephine Co., Oregon.  
T.34S., R.9W., Sections 23, 25, 36 Willamette Meridian, Josephine Co., Oregon.  
T.35S., R.8W., Section 6 Willamette Meridian, Josephine Co., Oregon.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Abbie Jossie  
Medford District Office, BLM  
3040 Biddle Road  
Medford, Oregon 97504  
(541) 618-2303

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM/PREPARERS	TITLE	RESOURCE VALUES ASSIGNED	
Jeanne Klein	Recreation Planner	Recreation, VRM, Cultural	
*Leslie Welch	Wildlife Biologist	Prime or Unique Lands, Wildlife, and Grazing	
*Denise Dammann	Hydrologist	Flood plains, Wetlands, Soils, and Water	
Dale Johnson	Fisheries Biologist	Fisheries	
*Gary Larson	Forestry Technician	Silviculture	
*Doug Miller	Engineer	Roads, Quarries, Road Agreements, Easements	
Linda Mazzu/ *Armand Rebischke	Botanist	T&E Plants	
*Al Mason	Fuels Technician	Fire and Fuels	

\* Project Planning Core Team Member

GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

*Peavine Helicopter Landings Rehabilitation Project*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>Purpose of and Need for Action</b> . . . . .	2
A.    Introduction . . . . .	2
B.    Purpose and Need for the Proposal . . . . .	2
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Proposed Action and Alternatives</b> . . . . .	5
A.    Introduction . . . . .	5
B.    Alternative 1: No Action Alternative . . . . .	5
C.    Alternative 2: Proposed Action . . . . .	5
D.    Project Design Features . . . . .	6
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>Environmental Consequences</b> . . . . .	7
A.    Introduction . . . . .	7
1.    Resource: Soils and Water . . . . .	7
2.    Resource: Botany (habitat and special status species) . . . . .	8
3.    Resource: Wildlife (special status, S&M species) . . . . .	9
4.    Resource: Recreation/Cultural . . . . .	10
5.    Resource: Fire and fuels . . . . .	10
6.    Resource: Fisheries . . . . .	10
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Agencies and Persons Consulted</b> . . . . .	12
A.    Agencies and Persons Consulted . . . . .	12
B.    Availability of Document and Comment Procedures . . . . .	12
<b><u>Appendices</u></b>	
Appendix A	
Project Maps . . . . .	13
Appendix B	
Issues Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Analysis . . . . .	16
Appendix C:	
Potential Monitoring . . . . .	17

## **Chapter 1**

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

#### **A. Introduction**

The purpose of this environmental assessment (EA) is to assist in the decision making process by assessing the environmental and human affects resulting from implementing the proposed action and/or alternatives. This EA will also assist in determining if an environmental impact statement (EIS) needs to be prepared or if a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is appropriate.

This EA tiers to the following documents:

- (1) the Final EIS and Record of Decision dated June 1995 for the Medford District Resource Management Plan dated October 1994 (RMP);
- (2) the Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (February 1994);
- (3) the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 13, 1994) (NFP);
- (4) the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines dated January 2001

This EA also draws from the following documents:

- (1) Far Out Watershed Analysis, Medford District, Grants Pass Resource Area;
- (2) Big Hog Watershed Analysis, Medford District, Grants Pass Resource Area;
- (2) the Southwest Oregon Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (October 1995) (LSRA).

#### **B. Purpose and Need for the Proposal**

During the 1987 Silver fire complex suppression activities and subsequent timber salvage, multiple helicopter landings were constructed. Construction and use of these landings left these sites highly compacted and piled with varying amounts of logging debris. Many of these landings remain largely unvegetated and consequently provide poor vegetative and habitat conditions and contribute to surface water runoff and sedimentation.

Seven of these landings have been selected for rehabilitation: soil amelioration and revegetation.

#### **C. Project Location**

The general location of the proposed project area is shown on Map 1 in Appendix A. It is within the Galice/Fish Hook Late Successional Reserve and the Rogue-Recreation Section (“Big Hog”) and Wild Rogue - South (“Far Out”) watersheds. The seven helicopter landings included in this project are located as follows (See Map 2):

- T34S,R8W, Section 21 (Site 1) - 2.6 acres
  - T34S,R8W, Section 29 (Site 2) - 1.5 acres
  - T34S, R8W, Section 31 (Site 3) - 1.0 acres
  - T34S, R9W, Section 23 (Site 4) - 2.0 acres
  - T34S, R9W, Section 25 (Site 5) - 1.6 acres
  - T34S, R9W, Section 36 (Site 6) - 2.2 acres
  - T35S, R8W, Section 6 (Site 7) - 1.0 acres
- Total     11.9 acres

#### **D.     Issues and Concerns Relevant to the Project**

Relevant issues and concerns were identified during the initial scoping of this project. These were identified by the project planning team and the resource area's Interdisciplinary (ID) team or have been drawn from the documents noted above. These issues were used in the design of the proposed project and alternatives. In some cases, an issue identified at the onset was eliminated from further consideration because it was judged to be outside the scope of the project. These are summarized in Appendix B.

The issues identified as pertinent for this project are:

1. The helicopter landings proposed for rehabilitation are located in the Fish Hook/Galice Late Successional Reserve (LSR). The Southwest Oregon LSR Assessment recommends maintenance and/or enhancement of unique habitats such as meadows, if their effect on late-successional forest species is negligible.
2. In their current condition, these unvegetated sites offer habitat for only a few species that are able to inhabit highly disturbed sites.
3. Current soil conditions limit the recovery potential of these sites.

#### **E.     Land Use Allocation and Objectives**

The broad management objectives for land use allocations are spelled out in the NFP and the Medford District RMP. The Southwest Oregon Late-Successional Reserve Assessment resulted in management recommendations for the LSRs it addressed.

The RMP provides management direction for habitat improvement projects in Late-Successional Reserves (LSRs). RMP direction is to design and implement watershed restoration projects consistent with late-successional reserve objectives. The RMP supports projects designed to improve conditions for fish, wildlife, special status species if they provide late-successional habitat benefits or if their adverse effect on late-successional forest associated species is negligible (RMP, pg. 34 and 47).

The LSRA's management recommendations include protecting and enhancing conditions of late-successional and old growth forest ecosystems. It also emphasizes the importance of managing for the unique habitats within the LSRs including the need to maintain meadow and oak savanna habitats as important elements of maintaining biological diversity. Maintenance of these areas ensures these

habitats continue to function and provide biological diversity. (LSRA, p. 143).

Oak savannas, small meadows and other small openings create vegetation diversity and habitat diversity important for the viability of some rare plants and many wildlife species. These types of sites provide forage areas for deer and elk using adjacent areas of more optimal thermal cover, especially during severe weather (Brown 1985). The LSRA recommends that the meadows in LSR be managed to maintain or improve their value to wildlife noting that, except for buffer strips of meadow/forest edge habitat, meadows should be managed for other than late-successional forest. (LSRA, p. 78)

## Chapter 2 Proposed Action and Alternatives

### A. Introduction

This chapter describes the proposed action and alternatives that are addressed and analyzed in this EA.

### B. Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

In this EA, the "no-action" alternative is defined as not implementing any aspect of the proposed action alternative(s). Defined this way, the no action alternative also provides a baseline or reference point for evaluating the environmental effects of the action alternatives. Inclusion of this alternative is done without regard to whether or not it is consistent with the Medford District RMP.

The no action alternative is not a "static" alternative. Implicit in it is the continuation of the environmental conditions and trends that currently exist or are occurring within the project area. This would include trends such as vegetation succession and consequent wildlife habitat changes, rates of erosion, trends in fire hazard changes, OHV use, *etc.*.

### C. Alternative 2: Proposed Action

#### 1. Objective

The objective of this alternative is to ameliorate soil conditions sufficiently so that the sites can be revegetated using native species to create early seral stage vegetation / habitat at the scattered locations of the landing sites.

#### 2. Description of Alternative 2

Site amelioration and reseeded will be done using the follow the sequence of activities at each site, as appropriate:

- Tractor pile the residual logging debris (e.g., a large amount of bark) and burn the piles. Coarse wood material would be retained and distributed on the sites, at the edges or into the adjacent stand. For sites 1, 2 and 3, a 1/4 acre area adjacent to the road will be maintained free of all large wood material to provide future helicopter landing for fire suppression. The current saplings and shrubs would be piled and burned as well.

- Site 6 contains geotextile fabric across its entire area at an approximate depth of approximately 24 inches. Where practical, this fabric will be excavated and removed from the site and disposed of in a landfill.

- Soil testing indicates acidic conditions at Sites 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 due to the decomposition of large amounts of bark left on site after logging. The pH at these sites is below the levels needed for grass growth. To raise the pH on these sites, one ton/acre of dolomite lime will be

added to the soil and evenly spread.

- Sites 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are nitrogen deficient due to the utilization of soil nitrogen by bark decomposition process. To replenish nitrogen, 50 pounds/acre of fertilizer will be evenly spread across each of these sites. Fertilizer used for this purpose will have 20-30% nitrogen, with at least 50% of this in a slow release form. Site 3 will not be fertilized due to its strong serpentine soils (Nitrogen fertilizer would not be beneficial).

- All seven sites will be ripped and scarified to a depth of 24 inches. Ripping and scarification would take place after liming and/or fertilizing.

- Following scarification, all seven sites will be mulched and seeded with sterile wheatgrass for initial erosion control. The rate of application would be approximately 20 lbs/acre. The following year, all seven sites will be seeded with a native grass species, Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*) at a rate of approximately 8.5 lbs/acres.

#### **D. Project Design Features**

Project design features (PDFs) are included in the proposed action for the purpose of reducing anticipated adverse environmental impacts which might stem from the implementation of the proposal.

##### **1. Botanical Resource Protection**

If any federal candidate, Bureau Sensitive or survey and manage plant species are encountered within the proposed project area, mitigation measures will be implemented to protect these populations.

##### **2. Cultural Resource Protection**

If cultural sites are found in the proposed project area, mitigation measures will be implemented to protect the sites.

##### **3. Soils**

All activities will be limited to the dry season (May 1 - October 15, or when conditions are appropriate) to prevent soil clod formation, erosion, and/or runoff.

##### **4. Wildlife**

If any federal candidate, Bureau Sensitive or survey and manage wildlife species are encountered within the proposed project area, mitigation measures will be implemented to protect these populations.

## Chapter 3 Environmental Consequences

### A. Introduction

Only substantive site specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives are discussed in this chapter. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered effects to that component and found the proposed action or alternatives would have minimal or no effects.

Similarly, unless addressed specifically, the following were found not to be affected by the proposed action or alternatives: air quality; cultural or historical resources, Native American religious concerns, prime or unique farmlands, flood plains, endangered, threatened or sensitive plant, animal or fish species, water quality (drinking/ground), wetlands/riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers. In addition, hazardous waste or materials are not directly involved in the proposed action or alternatives.

General or "typical" effects from projects similar in nature to the proposed action or alternatives are also described in the EISs and plans to which this EA is tiered.

### B. Site Specific Beneficial or Adverse Effects of the Alternatives

1. Resource: Soils and Water
  - a. Affected Environment

Table 1 summarizes pertinent features and conditions for each of the seven project sites.

Table 1: Soil/Water Affected Environment - Site Characterization							
	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
5 <sup>th</sup> field watershed	Rogue - Wild	Rogue - Wild & Rec	Rogue - Rec	Rogue - Wild	Rogue - Wild	Rogue - Rec	Rogue - Wild
6 <sup>th</sup> field sub-watershed	Howard	Howard & Galice	Galice	Howard	Howard	Galice	Howard
Elevation (feet)	3800	3500	3480	3130	2320	2680	3000
Annual Precipitation	50 inches	54 inches	64 inches	80 inches	60 inches	76 inches	68 inches
Soil Type	Speaker-Josephine	Vermissa-Beekman	Dubakella-Pearsoll	Vermissa-Beekman	Vermissa-Beekman	Vermissa-Beekman	Vermissa-Beekman
pH level	acceptable	low pH	low pH	lowpH	low pH	acceptable	low pH
Transient snow zone*	In	In	In	In	Below	Below	In

\* Transient snow zone as set forth in USDI (1999) and USDI (2000)

Speaker-Josephine gravelly loam soil is characterized as being moderately deep and well drained. Vermisa-Beekman complex soil is characterized as being shallow to moderately deep and well drained to excessively well drained. Dubakella-Pearsoll complex soil is a serpentine soil that is characterized as being shallow to moderately deep and well drained.

Sites 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 are highly compacted, with high amounts of organics in the form of bark, and sparse vegetation.

b. Environmental Effects

1) Alternative 1: No Action

The conditions that affect hydrologic condition should remain similar to current conditions. This applies for both the short (0-5 years) and long (5-20 years) term. The helicopter landings would remain compacted with minimal infiltration and reduced capacity for vegetation growth. There would be a minimal amount of sedimentation from runoff and most would stay in the vicinity of the landings. In the short term, the soil pH would remain low, but, in the long term, the organics would break down and the soil pH should slowly increase to productive levels.

2) Alternative 2

The short (0-5 years) and long (5-20 years) term effects of planting the sites with grass would be increased infiltration resulting in reduced pooling and runoff with less sediment moving off of the sites. There would be increased productivity. In the short term, a very minimal amount of nitrates and phosphates from the fertilizer may travel short distances off site, but would not enter any water source due to their distance from the sites. The lime added to sites 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 would alter the soil pH, but would have no negative short or long term effect on soil or water resources.

2. Resource: Botany (habitat and special status species)

a. Affected Environment

The sites proposed for rehabilitation were visited on May 11, 2000. No threatened and endangered or survey and manage plant species were found on the project sites. In general, they are characterized by bare mineral soil and logging debris including woody material and bark. Tree species present on some sites includes sparsely scattered 1-3 foot tall Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, sugar pine, incense cedar, and chinquapin saplings. Shrub species occurring on the project sites include scattered manzanita and coffeeberry. Orchard grass and blue wild rye are present on or near most sites. Due to soil compaction and lack of adequate substrate, habitat at these sites is poor for lichens, bryophytes and fungi.

b. Environmental Consequences

1) Alternative 1: No Action

The helicopter landings will continue on their current trajectory for recovery. As the woody material and bark on site begins to decompose, there would be potential for recruitment of additional

vegetation. However, the level of severe compaction would slow this process and continue to limit productivity. Sites 1,2,4,5,6, and 7 have potential to support some conifer regeneration. However, it is likely that this regeneration would be sparse and delayed in development. Site 3 which is heavily influenced by serpentine soils would be more likely to produce shrubs, forbs, and grasses than conifers. Given the reduced productivity of all sites, it is unlikely that quality late-successional forest characteristics would be obtained.

2) Alternative 2

Soil scarification and amendments associated with rehabilitation would remove most of the species currently occurring on the site. However in the long term, the proposed soil treatments and planting of native grass species will enhance site productivity by restoring soil structure, pH levels and providing for organic layer development. As Idaho fescue grows and occupies the site, wildlife habitat and foraging potential will improve. Meadow openings have the potential to provide habitat for early seral/grassland special status vascular plant species.

3. Resource: Wildlife (special status, S&M species)

a. Introduction

The helicopter landings do not currently support any threatened and endangered or survey and manage wildlife species. There is no suitable nesting spotted owl habitat within 0.25 miles of the seven sites proposed for rehabilitation.

b. Environmental consequences to wildlife

1) Alternative 1: No Action

The helicopter landings will continue on their current slow recovery trajectory. Although there will be potential for some additional recruitment of forbs, shrubs and grass on these sites, productivity will continue to be limited by soil conditions. Given the reduced productivity of all sites, it is unlikely that quality late-successional forests would be obtained. This will affect the long term suitability of these sites for threatened, endangered, and survey and manage species.

2) Alternative 2

With rehabilitation, all sites would provide quality habitat for early seral associated species. As grass and forb production increases, the potential for these sites to provide potentially suitable habitat for early seral species is improved. Examples of species that would potentially benefit from this include black bear, deer, elk, mountain quail, western bluebird, and olive sided flycatcher.

4. Resource: Recreation/Cultural

a. Affected Environment

There are no cultural resources or recreation sites occurring in any of the helicopter landings.

b. Environmental effects - No effects under any of the alternatives

5. Resource: Fire and fuels

a. Affected Environment

*Hazard* is defined as the existence of a fuel complex that constitutes a threat of wildfire ignition, unacceptable fire behavior and severity, or suppression difficulty. The helicopter landings proposed for rehabilitation are within areas identified as having a moderate to high fire hazard. However, the small size, isolated nature, limited fuels and scattered vegetation characteristic of the helicopter landings contribute to their low fire hazard condition. The seven sites are all currently useable as helicopter landing sites.

b. Environmental Effects

1) Alternative 1: No Action

The conditions that affect fire hazard should remain similar to current conditions. This applies for both the short term (0-5 years) and long term (5-20 years).

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The rehabilitation of the existing helicopter landing sites will have an inconsequential effect on current fuel hazard of the affected watersheds. The small amount of new slash created by clearing shrubs and saplings will be reduced with piling and burning to eliminate any significant increases of slash or fuels. Sites 1, 2 and 3 would have the highest priority for availability for helicopter use in the event of fire suppression needs. The proposed action retains their value for this purpose.

6. Resource: Fisheries

a. Affected Environment

The landing sites are located on ridges away from riparian areas and are not contributors of sediment to the streams.

b. Environmental effects

1) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The project will not have any impact on the quality of aquatic habitat or fisheries, nor will prevent or hinder attainment of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Agencies and Persons Consulted**

#### **A. Agencies and Persons Consulted**

As a part of project planning, the BLM discussed the proposal with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Game.

A project public scoping period was held in March 2001. No comments were received.

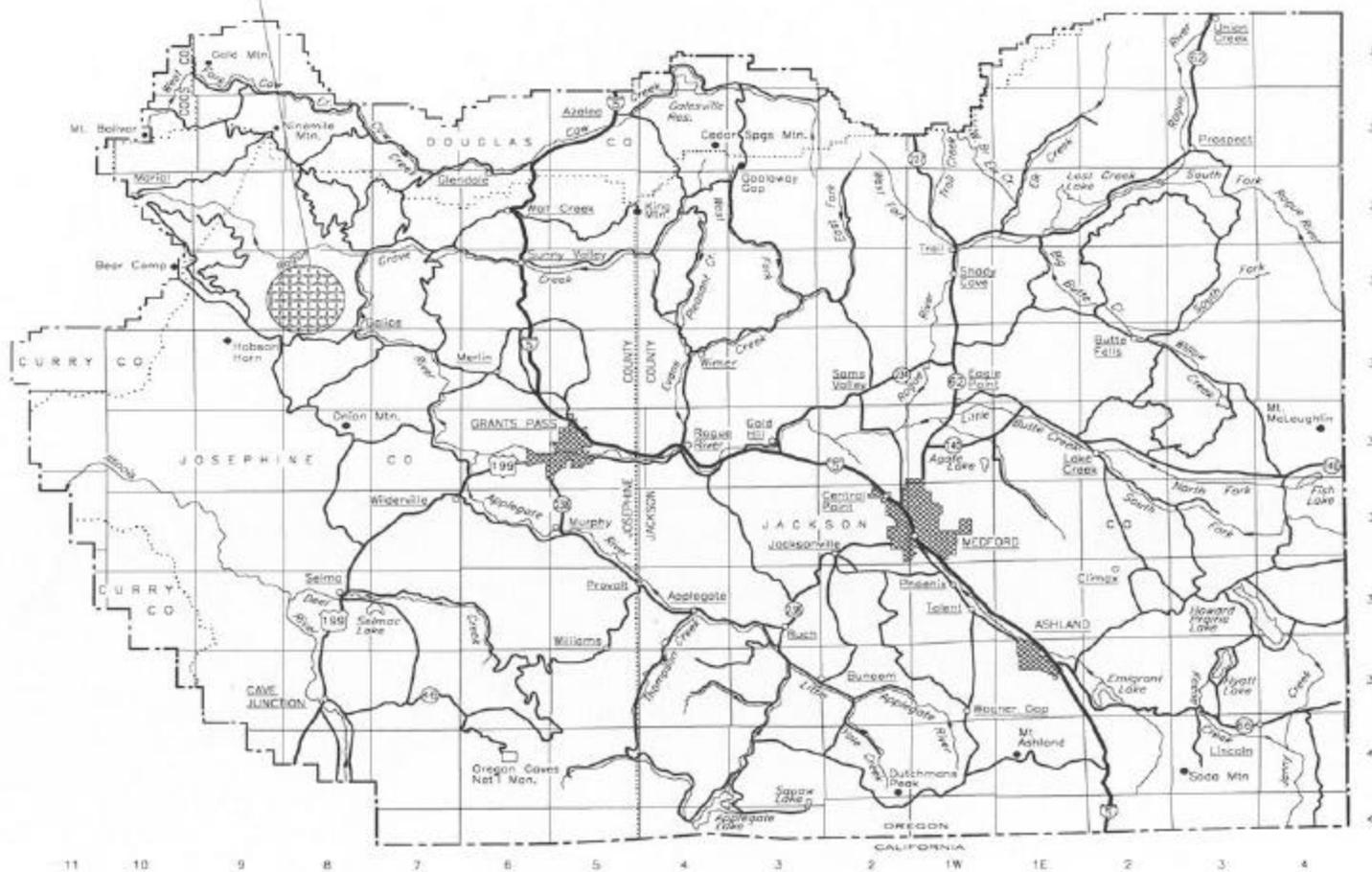
#### **B. Availability of Document and Comment Procedures**

The EA will be available for public review and comment for a 15 day period. Copies of the EA will be available upon request and it will be available on the internet at the BLM's web page. Initiation of the comment period will be done with an announcement in the Grants Pass Courier.

**Appendix A**  
**Project Maps**

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
 MEDFORD DISTRICT  
 GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

*Peavine Helicopter Landing Rehabilitation Project*



VICINITY MAP

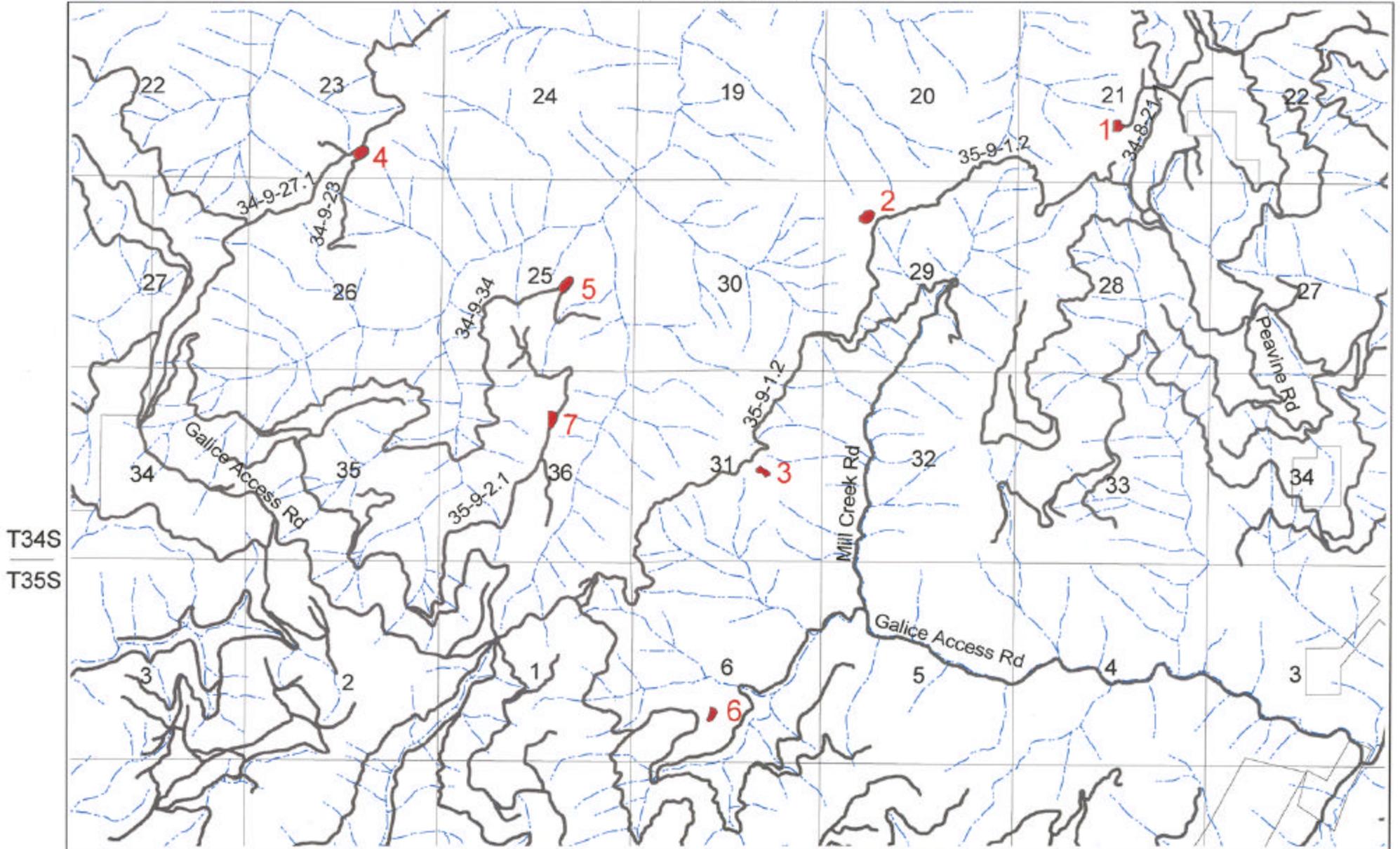


# PEAVINE HELICOPTER LANDING REHABILITATION PROJECT

Grants Pass Resource Area

Revision Date: 03/07/2001

Medford District BLM



T34S  
T35S

R9W R8W

- Helicopter Landings Proposed For Rehabilitation
- Roads
- Streams
- Section Lines



**Appendix B**  
**Issues Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Analysis**

The following issue was considered but eliminated from discussion and incorporation in the project plan:

1) The project area is within the Galice/Fish Hook Late-Successional Reserve. LSR objectives include the development, maintenance and enhancement of late-successional forest conditions as well as managing for unique habitats such as meadows and small openings. Consideration was given to the opportunity for planting trees immediately after scarification is completed. Although considered, this was eliminated from detailed analysis and incorporation into the proposed alternatives. This was eliminated because one of the project's emphasis was to create more productive early seral habitat at these scattered locations. It was recognized that after site / soil amelioration work, natural seeding of conifers and hardwoods would occur over time.

## Appendix C: Potential Monitoring

The sites will be monitored annually for a period of 5 years to evaluate the effectiveness of the soil treatments and the effectiveness of the grass seeding. Noxious weed monitoring will occur at the same time to evaluate the need for early noxious weed control.