



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504
email address: or110mb@or.blm.gov

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1792 (116)
Gopher Control
Program
A6112(LL:jl)

APR 13 2000

Dear Interested Public:

The *Gopher Control Program Environmental Assessment* (EA) is being advertised in the Medford Mail Tribune for a 14 day public review period. High populations of Mazama pocket gophers (*Thomomys mazama*) limit the success of reforestation in the Cascade Range on the Ashland Resource Area. Cumulative gopher-caused mortality of conifer seedlings is often high enough after two or three years to result in unacceptable tree stocking levels or complete failure on many reforestation units. The BLM proposes to limit gopher damage and increase stocking levels by trapping gophers in these areas. Enclosed is the EA and associated Finding of No Significant Impact.

The primary purpose of a public review is to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the BLM's determination that there are no significant impacts associated with the proposed action and, therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary.

We welcome your comments on the content of this document. We are particularly interested in comments that address one or more of the following: (1) new information that would affect the analysis, (2) possible improvements in the analysis; and (3) suggestions for improving or clarifying the proposed management direction. Specific comments are the most useful. Comments, including names and addresses, will be available for public review. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name and/or address 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 to 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 in their entirety. This EA is published on the Medford District web site, www.or.blm.gov/Medford/, under "Planning Documents."

All comments should be made in writing and mailed to Lorie List or Bill Yocum, Ashland Resource Area, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504. Any questions should be directed to Lorie or Bill at (541)618-2384.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Drehabl
Field Manager
Ashland Resource Area

Enclosure (as stated)

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for
GOPHER CONTROL PROGRAM GOPHER, EA No. OR-110-00-014

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The Bureau of Land Management's Medford District has analyzed a proposal for gopher control in the Ashland Resource Area. Design features and analysis of this proposal are discussed and supported in the Final Environmental Statement for the Jackson-Klamath Sustained Yield Units Ten Year Timber Management Plan (FEIS) of November 1979.

The proposed action and project design features are further described in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA). This FONSI and attached EA are tiered with the aforementioned FEIS. All documents may be reviewed at the Medford District Office.

The proposed gopher control project is located in Cascade Range of the Ashland Resource Area of the Medford District, Bureau of Land Management. The proposed action is not considered to be precedent setting and is considered to be a normal action in implementing the ROD.

Through the EA process the interdisciplinary team reviewed the following critical elements of the human environment as they relate to this project: air quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, cultural resources, environmental justice, farmlands, floodplains, Native American religious concerns, invasive, nonnative species, threatened and endangered species, hazardous/solid wastes, water quality, wetlands/riparian zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and wilderness. No substantive site specific environmental changes would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives as discussed in the associated EA. Should threatened or endangered plants or cultural or paleontological resources be discovered they would be protected.

The estimation of impacts was based on research, professional judgement, and the experience of the interdisciplinary team. This method of estimating effects on the environment reduces the uncertainties to a level which does not involve highly unknown or unique risks. The design features identified in the attached EA would assure that no significant site specific nor cumulative impacts would occur to the human environment other than those already addressed in the Medford District Resource Management Plan /EIS.

FONSI Determination

On the basis of the information contained in the EA and all other information available to me as is summarized and above, it is my determination that none of the alternatives analyzed constitute a significant impact affecting the quality of the human environment greater than those addressed in the Medford District Resource Management Plan /EIS. Therefore, a new EIS or a supplement to the existing EIS is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

Field Manager

Date

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

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

FOR

GOPHER CONTROL PROGRAM
FOR YEARS 2000-2005

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA

EA COVER SHEET

Project Name/Number: GOPHER CONTROL PROJECT, EA No. OR-110-00-014

Location: Ashland Resource Area

Preparer: Lorie List, Environmental Coordinator

Specialist	Title	Resource Value	Initials and Date
Tom Jacobs	Rangeland Specialist	Range Management	
George Arnold	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife, T&E Animals	GA 10 APR 00
Ted Hass	Soil Scientist	Soils & Water	JH 4/19/00
Jeannine Rossa	Fish Biologist	Fisheries	JR 4/10/00
Brad Tong	Botanist	T&E Plant	BT 4-10-00
Fred Tomlins	Recreation Specialist	Cultural Resources	
Lorie List	Environmental Coord.	Format/Adequacy	LL 4-10-00

This environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed gopher control project was prepared utilizing a systematic interdisciplinary approach integrating the natural and social sciences and the environmental design arts with planning and decision making.


Richard J. Drehobl
Ashland Area Field Manager

4-12-00
Date

**ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA
GOPHER CONTROL PROGRAM FOR CALENDER YEARS 2000 - 2005**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Chapter 1 - Introduction</u>	1
Purpose and Need for Proposal	1
Conformance with Existing Land Use Plans	1
Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and other Plans	1
Decisions to be Made on this Analysis	2
Issues of Concern	2
<u>Chapter 2 - Alternatives</u>	3
Description of Alternatives	3
<u>Chapter 3 - Environmental Consequences</u>	5
Wildlife	5
Silviculture	6
<u>Chapter 4 - Listing of Agencies and Persons Consulted</u>	8

APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
A Maps	A-1

**Environmental Assessment
for
Proposed Gopher Control**

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

High populations of Mazama pocket gophers (*Thomomys mazama*) limit the success of reforestation in the Cascade Range on the Ashland Resource Area. Cumulative gopher-caused mortality of conifer seedlings is often high enough after two or three years to result in unacceptable stocking levels or complete failure on many reforestation units.

Pocket gophers are widely distributed in timber stands, but are primarily concentrated in clearings, meadows, and other breaks in the forest canopy where ground vegetation provides ample forage. Openings created by harvest or wildfire, and the successional vegetation that follows, creates gopher habitat. Planting usually takes place soon after the forest has been disturbed and gopher densities are high. Young seedlings, therefore, are very vulnerable to gopher damage.

A. PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this program is to increase reforestation success in previously harvested areas by reducing gopher-caused damage and mortality until seedlings are large enough to withstand this damage. Most damage and mortality occurs to very young trees, making it necessary to control gopher damage early in the life of the plantation. The establishment of young trees and brush also modifies the environment, making it less suitable for gophers. The number of years a plantation requires gopher control will be less if control measures are taken when the stand is young. Even a low level of gopher damage may result in unacceptable stocking levels.

B. CONFORMANCE WITH EXISTING LAND USE PLANS

The proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with and tiered to the *Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (RMP) (USDI 1995^b)*. This Resource Management Plan incorporates the earlier *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and the Standards and Guidelines for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (USDA and USDI 1994)*. These documents are available at the Medford BLM office and the Medford BLM web site at <http://www.or.blm.gov/Medford/>.

C. RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER PLANS

The proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the direction given for the management of public lands in the Medford District by the Oregon and California Lands Act of 1937 (O&C Act) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

This EA is being prepared to determine if the proposed action or any of the alternatives would have a significant impact on the human environment thus requiring the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) as prescribed in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. It is also being used to inform interested parties of the anticipated impacts and provide them with an opportunity to comment on the various alternatives.

This document complies with the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) and the Department of the Interior's manual guidance on the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (516 DM 1-7).

D. DECISIONS TO BE MADE ON THIS ANALYSIS

The Ashland Resource Area Field Manager must decide:

- Are the impacts of the proposed action significant to the human environment beyond those impacts addressed in other applicable NEPA documents? (If the impacts are determined to be insignificant, then a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) can be issued and a decision can be implemented. If any impacts are determined to be significant to the human environment, then an environmental impact statement (EIS) must be prepared before a decision is made.)
- Should the proposed action alternative be implemented?

E. ISSUES OF CONCERN

The following issues were identified during the scoping process. All issues were reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Team. Issues that directly relate to the proposed action were analyzed in detail.

- Trapping of non-target wildlife.
- Disturbance during the nesting season of species listed as threatened under the auspices of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.
- Gopher damage may result in unacceptable stocking levels.

CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the no action and proposed action alternatives. This chapter also outlines specific project mitigation features that are an essential part of the project design.

Alternative I: No Action

Under this alternative, no action would be taken to protect seedlings from gopher damage. Gopher populations will increase in recently disturbed areas, and in areas where previous trapping has occurred. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to manage for an established stand of trees. There are currently some areas in the Ashland RA where seedlings are not protected from gopher damage. The reforestation success in these areas is very low to nonexistent. Some clearcuts would remain in a very low to non-stocked condition. Environmental conditions severely limit the opportunity for natural regeneration to occur in these areas.

Alternative II: Proposed Action - Trap Gophers

Under this alternative, below ground trapping in selected units with high gopher populations would be used to directly reduce these populations. Macabee or Victor traps would be placed in active burrow systems to trap and kill the gophers. Trapping would normally take place between April and November each year.

The treatment procedure would consist of setting and marking the traps, and then returning within 48 hours to check and reset the traps. The treatment units would continue to be checked and traps reset until few or no gophers are found in the traps, indicating effective treatment. It is anticipated that after the initial treatment two checks, and possibly more, may be required during each calendar year.

For purposes of analysis, it is assumed that all areas described on the attached maps would be treated between calendar years 2000 - 2005. Approximately 10,000 + sets (two traps per set) will be used under contract for treatment for each year. Treatment of these units would continue on a yearly basis until gopher trapping is no longer needed to meet minimum established stocking goals. Units with marginal stocking may have higher priority for treatment because any further mortality may decrease the stocking to unacceptable levels. It is anticipated that it will take approximately 10 years of gopher control before conifer seedlings are established to the point that the treatment can be discontinued (Reference Appendix A for potential units of treatment.).

Project Design Features

(Project design features are included for the purpose of mitigating or reducing anticipated adverse environmental impacts that might stem from the implementation of the proposed action alternative.)

- All personnel will be trained to locate and probe main runways.
- Protective gloves will be worn by all contractor crew members and government project inspectors to reduce the slight hazard of contracting tularemia infection through contact with gophers killed in traps. The slight hazard of tularemia would come from contacting any blood from the gopher or any transfer of ectoparasites that may be on the gophers.
- All personnel will be trained and be familiar with safety precautions and proper handling of traps.
- No traps will be left or set above ground level.
- From January 1- August 31 work activities will not take place within 0.25 mile of active bald eagle nests or roosts, or within 0.5 mile of active bald eagle nests or roosts if the activity is line-of-sight.
- There would be no spring trapping in the NW¼, Section 21, T.40S., R.4E.
- Botanical surveys were conducted prior to the flowering period in the year 2000. Special Status plants were found in three treatment areas. These populations and any other Special Status species found will be protected.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

1. Habitat Modification Alternative

Herbicides would be applied to the proposed units at two-year intervals to maintain low vegetative food sources. This would minimize the carrying capacity for gopher population buildup or invasion from surrounding areas. Herbicide application would be used in combination with a direct control method, such as baiting with poisons, to obtain a more effective result. *This alternative is eliminated in accordance with a court injunction preventing the use of herbicides on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management.*

2. Direct Seedling Protection

Trees would be planted in wire or plastic meshes extending below and above the ground. These would be maintained until the trees are large enough to resist gopher attack. *This alternative would not be practical on the proposed units, since they have already been planted and attempts to protect the roots with mesh material would likely disturb and kill the trees.*

CHAPTER 3: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following "critical elements" of the human environment are subject to requirements specified in statutes, regulations or executive order (for example, the Clean Water Act of 1977):

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Cultural Resources
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands, Prime/Unique
- Floodplains
- Invasive, Nonnative Species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Threatened & Endangered Species
- Wastes, Hazardous/Solid
- Water Quality
- Wetlands/Riparian Zones
- Wild & Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

Only substantive site specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives are discussed in this document. 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. General or "typical" effects from projects similar in nature to the proposed action alternative are also described in the documents to which this plan is tiered.

The locations of the potential treatment units are identified in Appendix A. The general environment of the proposed treatment areas is described in the Medford District Resource Management Plan/EIS. This document is available for review in the Ashland Resource Area. Significant details regarding individual treatment units are recorded on the treatment unit maps (Reference Appendix A).

B. WILDLIFE

1. Existing Condition

The areas proposed for trapping are characterized by early seral vegetation, and wildlife species representative of this habitat are present in areas to be trapped. e.g., pocket gophers, voles, blacktailed deer.

2. Impacts

Alternative I: No Action

No impacts are anticipated.

Alternative II: Proposed Action - Trap Gophers

The number of gophers would be reduced in the areas to be trapped. They would not be extirpated from these areas, however, due to immigration from adjacent areas that are not being trapped, and the limits of trapping in gopher eradication.

Due to the duration and intensity of the trapping effort, it is likely some non-target animals would be trapped. However, the safeguards to be implemented (e.g., training in gopher tunnel identification, ensuring that set traps are not left on the ground, and covering the trap sets) would minimize the number of non-target animals trapped. Records of non-target animals that are trapped will be part of a monitoring plan for the treatment area.

3. Threatened and Endangered Species

Bald eagles and northern spotted owls, both threatened species, are the only listed species known to be present in the general area of the proposed action. Since traps will be set underground, individuals of these species are not in danger of being trapped, but there is potential for eagles and owls to be disturbed while nesting. Implementation of the project design features would mitigate this potential disturbance.

B. SILVICULTURE

1. Existing Condition

The proposed areas are previously harvested clearcuts from the 1980s, and are located within the upper elevation white fir plant community in the Southern Cascades. The proposed treatment areas are minimally stocked with trees because of a variety of harsh environmental conditions. An open canopy has created favorable gopher habitat, which further impedes the ability of these areas to become stocked with trees as seedlings are very vulnerable to gopher damage. Natural regeneration is limited in these areas.

2. Impacts

Alternative I: No Action

Stocking will decrease to unacceptable levels, before the trees are large enough to withstand gopher damage. A few trees will survive, but not enough to be useful in developing a closed canopy of trees and other vegetation. The seral stage dependent on the gophers will continue indefinitely, until natural succession continues past this stage which would require several decades.

Alternative II: Proposed Action - Trap Gophers

Gopher control should help the reforestation of treated areas. Plants dependent on the seral stage created by logging and site preparation, and maintained by gophers, would be replaced by other plant species in later seral stages.

CHAPTER 4: AGENCIES CONSULTED AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A. FEDERAL AGENCIES

Gopher trapping is covered under a programmatic consultation for silvicultural projects completed with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in October 1996 (Biological Opinion 1-7-96-F-392).

Gopher trapping is covered as a programmatic action under an August 11, 1997 letter of concurrence and an August 15, 1997 Biological Opinion from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

B. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

1. Publicity

Public notice of the availability of this EA was provided through advertisement in the Medford Mail Tribune and the BLM Medford District's central registration and recording system.

2. Notification

A copy of the EA was mailed to the following organizations:

- Association of O&C Counties
- Audubon Society
- The Confederated Tribes
- Friends of the Greensprings
- Headwaters
- Jackson County Commissioners
- Jackson County Stockman's Association
- Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Oregon Natural Resource Council
- The Pacific Rivers Council
- Sierra Club, Rogue Group
- Southern Oregon University Library

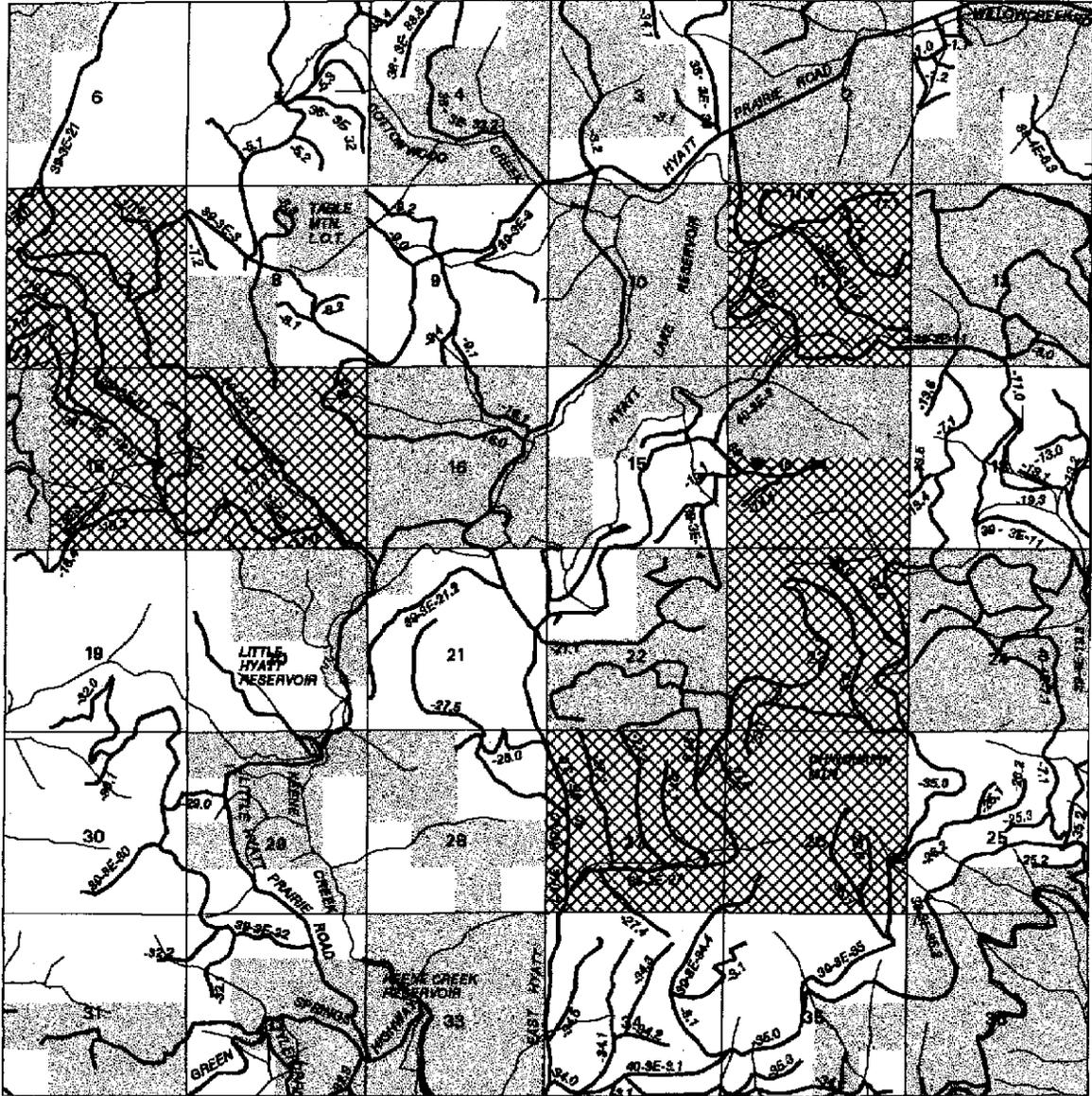
3. Availability

A copy of this EA is available upon request from the Ashland Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management, 3040 Biddle Rd., Medford, OR 97540, (541) 770- 2200. The EA has also been placed in the public reading room at the Bureau of Land Management office (above address).

APPENDIX A

GOPHER TRAPPING TREATMENT AREAS (2000-2005)

T39S-R3E



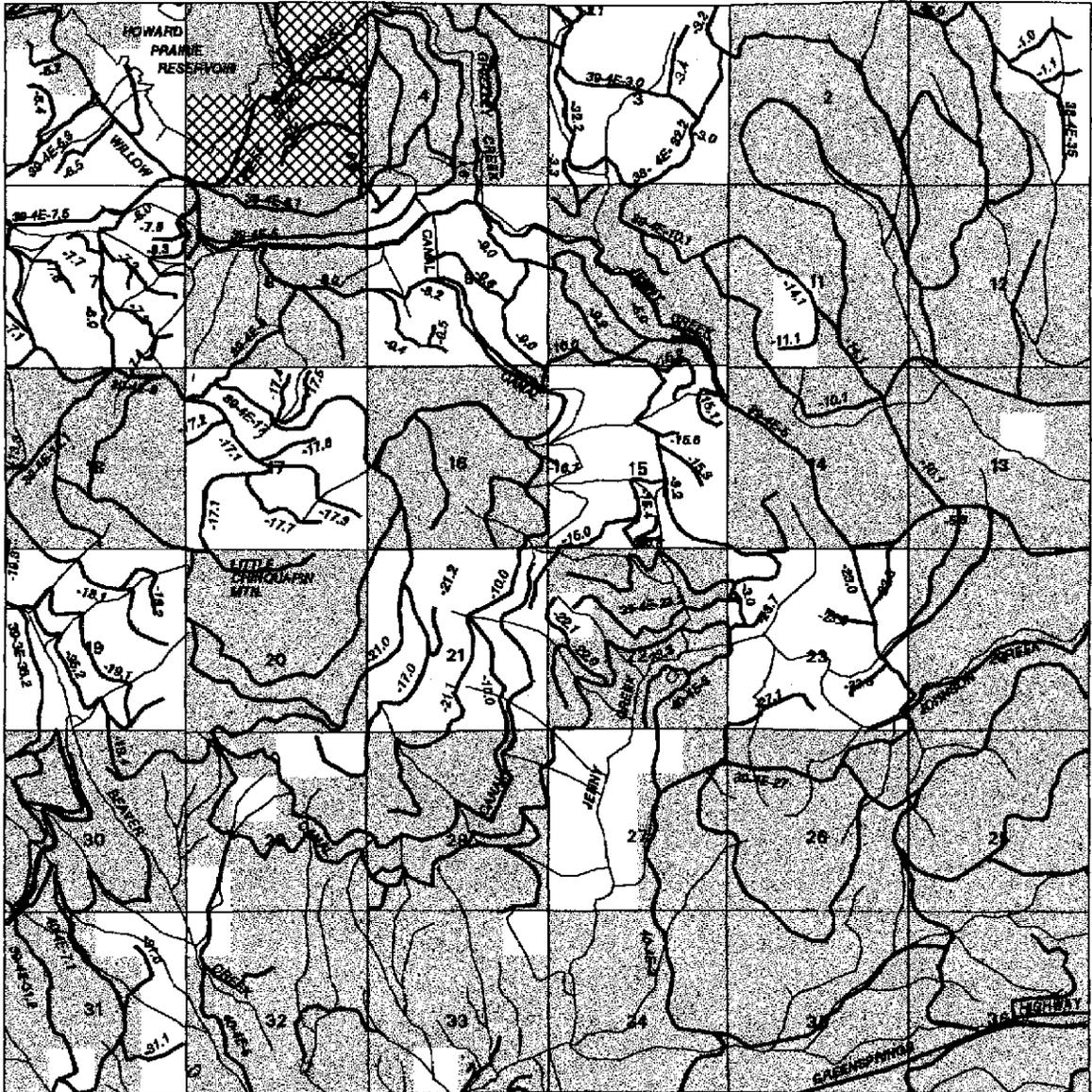
LEGEND

-  NON BLM LANDS
-  GOPHER TRAPPING AREAS

SCALE 1" = one mile

GOPHER TRAPPING TREATMENT AREAS (2000-2005)

T39S-R4E



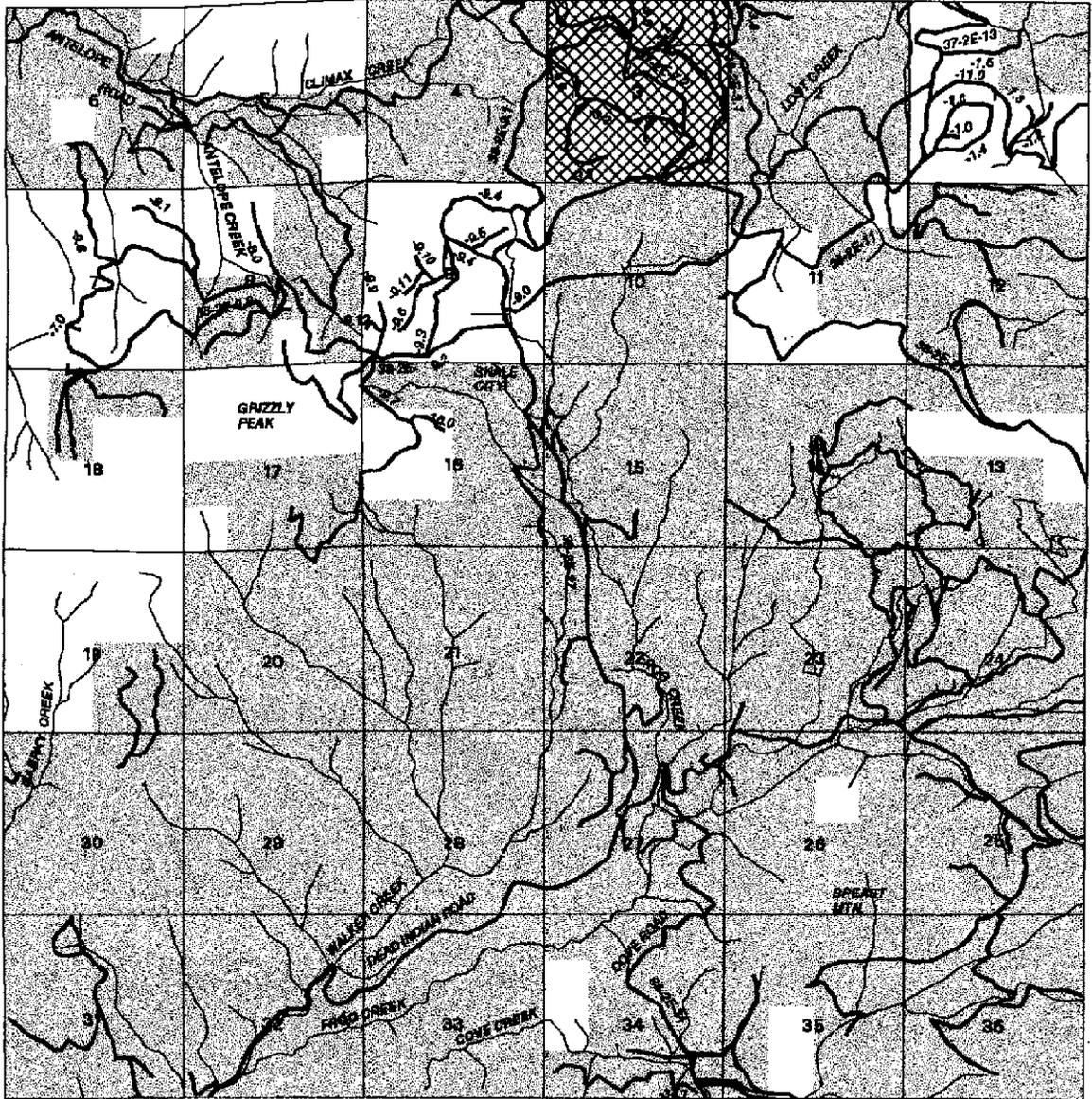
LEGEND

-  NON BLM LANDS
-  GOPHER TRAPPING AREAS

SCALE 1" = one mile

GOPHER TRAPPING TREATMENT AREAS (2000-2005)

T38S-R2E



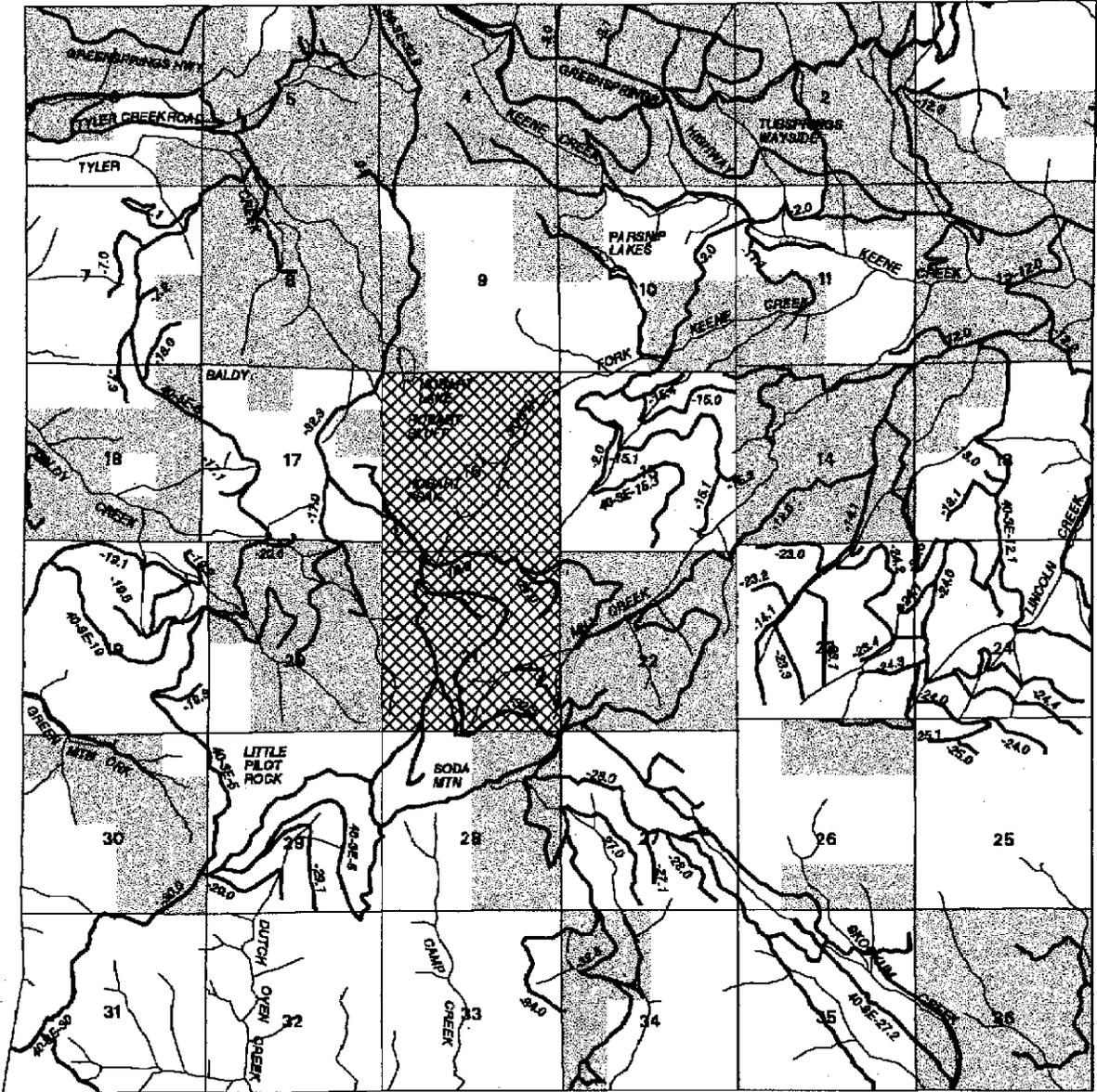
LEGEND

-  NON BLM LANDS
-  GOPHER TRAPPING AREAS

SCALE 1" = one mile

GOPHER TRAPPING TREATMENT AREAS (2000-2005)

T40S-R3E



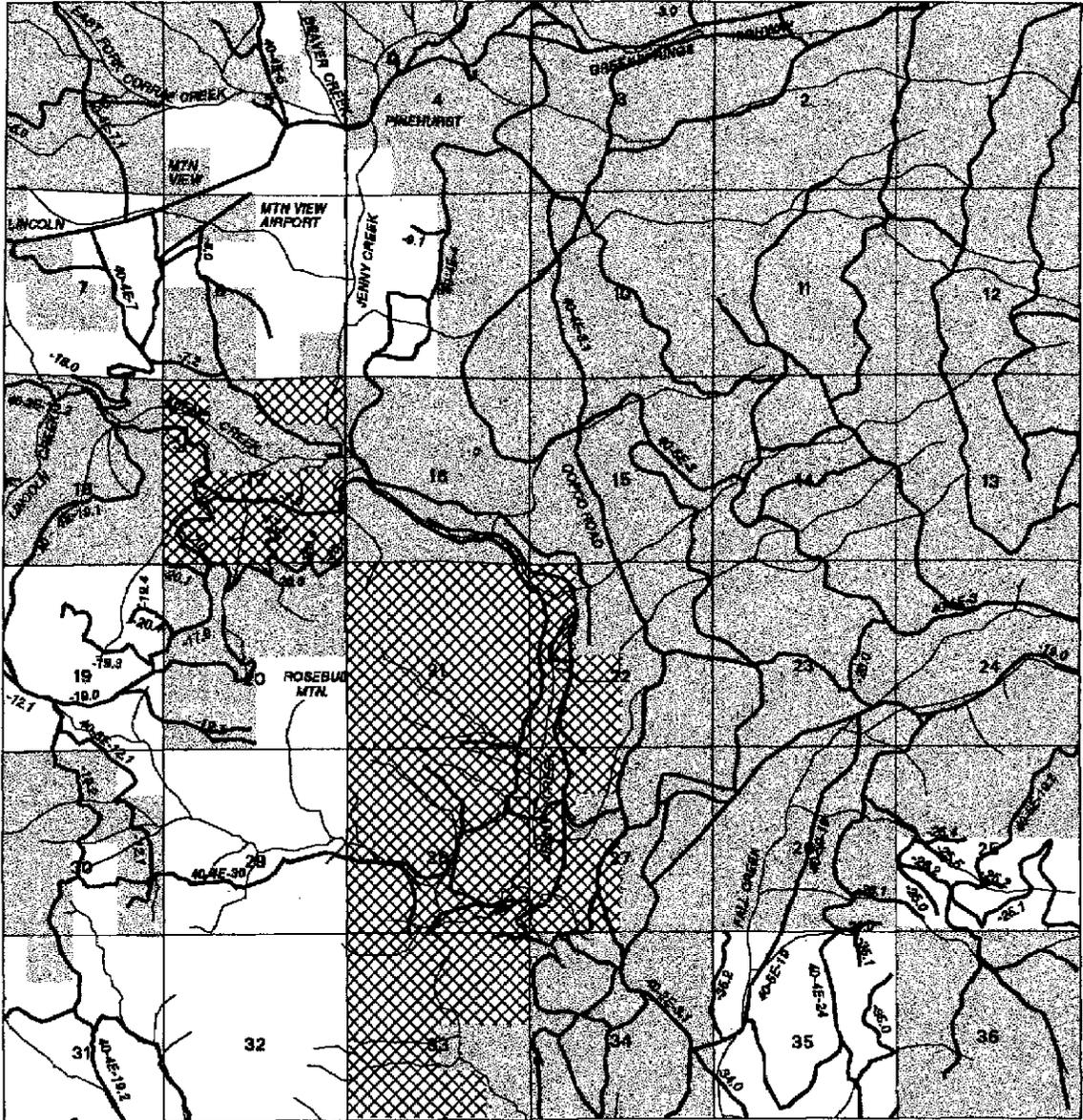
LEGEND

-  NON BLM LANDS
-  GOPHER TRAPPING AREAS

SCALE 1" = one mile

GOPHER TRAPPING TREATMENT AREAS (2000-2005)

T40S-R4E



LEGEND

-  NON BLM LANDS
-  GOPHER TRAPPING AREAS

SCALE 1" = one mile

