

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
Wall Fire Rehabilitation/Stabilization Project

EA Number OR-110-03-07

Proposed Action Title/Type

Rehabilitation/stabilization of the Wall Wildfire Lands

Location of Proposed Action

T32S., R1W., Section 30,31,and 32, Will. Mer. (See Map)

BLM Office

Medford District Office, Butte Falls Resource Area.

Tiering

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to assist in the decision-making process by assessing the environmental and human effects resulting from implementing the proposed action and/or alternatives. The 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: (1) the *Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD)* dated June, 1995 for the *Medford District Resource Management Plan* dated October, 1994; and (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* dated February, 1994; and (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* dated April 13, 1994; and (4) Medford District, Integrated Weed Management Plan and Environmental Assessment OR-110-98-14, Tiered to the Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program EIS dated December 1985 and Supplement March 1987.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

A wildfire in T32S., R1W., Section 30, Section 31, and Section 32 burned 315 acres of land on July 13 through September 14, 2002. Of the 315 acres burned, the Butte Falls Resource Area, Medford District, Bureau of Land Management manage 212 acres. The proposed action is for emergency rehabilitation on 40 acres of federal land of the fire area. This EA is being proposed in order to develop an approved rehabilitation plan and secure funding for the completion of work in the fall prior to winter rains. If conifer salvage is undertaken a separate EA for that activity will be prepared.

Rehabilitation/stabilization activities are needed on 40 acres of federal land to reduce additional site deterioration and repair site damage resulting from the fire. Surface runoff, soil erosion, soil productivity, and subsequent sedimentation and degradation of local stream channels are limited and reduced by unburned areas with intact tree canopies. Conditions created by the fire and utilization of fire suppression equipment increased the risk of noxious weeds becoming established within the fire area. The Wall Fire resulted in some survey and manage and threatened species needing to be monitored to determine the fires' effect upon them and their habitat. Planting of conifers and hardwoods is needed to reinstate the vegetative communities occupying the area prior to the fire. Bare soil areas created by burned vegetation and mechanically disturbed areas from fire suppression activities are at the most risk for potential erosion. These areas are expected to require some form of surface protection and rehabilitation for the first 1-3 years, after which risk levels for soil erosion are expected to decline as the areas revegetates and stabilize.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action :

Conifer trees, primarily ponderosa pine trees and Douglas-fir would be planted on an 10 ft. x 10 ft. spacing, which would result in 435 trees per acre being planted. Conifers would only be planted in burned areas upon which conifers previously grew prior to the fire. Hardwoods, such as big leaf maple and alder, would be planted in riparian areas along streams to rehab those areas. Survival of the planted trees is crucial to the rehabilitation of the fire area. In FY-05, the areas planted would be hand treated to control competing vegetation to the planted trees. The hand treatment would not be required within the riparian areas.

To eliminate or reduce the threat of noxious weed expansion, search for and treat noxious weed species (see attached list). In order to kill the entire root system as well as the above ground portion, RODEO⁷ will be applied by backpack sprayer to individual plants. Applicators (with state applicators licenses) will apply RODEO⁷ to annual and non-woody species at a 1.5% solution. Woody species like Scotch broom will receive applications at a 50% rate to the cut stems.

Known areas with threatened and / or survey and manage species would be monitored to determine the fires' effect upon them and their response to the fire and noxious weeds if those weeds occur within the fire area. Conifer survival surveys would be conducted after planting and in FY-05 to monitor the effectiveness of the treatments. Survey and Manage monitoring surveys will be paid through the 6334 activity and not the 2821 activity.

No seeding of native species or grass seeding of sterile species is being proposed for the Wall Fire. The severity of the fire and terrain in combination with the reestablishment of native grass and brush precludes the need for such actions.

Alternative 1: No Action

Rehabilitation/stabilization activities on the Wall Fire would not occur.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Introduction

Only substantive site-specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives are discussed here. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered effects to the 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; areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC); cultural or historical resources; Native American religious sites; prime or unique farmlands; floodplains; endangered, threatened or sensitive plant, animal or fish species; water quality; wetlands/riparian zones; wild and scenic rivers; and wilderness areas. In addition, hazardous waste or material are not directly involved in the proposed action or alternatives.

General or Atypical effects from projects similar in nature to the proposed action or alternatives are also described in the EIS's and plans this EA is tiered to. For this project, the occurrence of the fire is the cause of the rehabilitation/stabilization proposal not the described proposed action.

Description of the Affected Environment:

Soils

The dominant soil types within the wildfire area are the McNull soil and the Freezner soil. The McNull soil is moderately deep and well drained. It formed in colluvium's derived from andesite, tuff, and breccias. The surface layer is typically a gravelly loam with clay loam subsoil. Permeability is slow and very slow in the subsoil. Runoff is medium and the water erosion hazard is moderate. Limitations effecting management actions are erosion, compaction, seedling mortality, and plant competition.

The Freezner soils are very deep and well drained. It formed in colluviums derived from andesite. They have a gravelly loam surface layer and clay loam subsoil. They are well drained with moderate permeability. Runoff is medium and the water erosion hazard is moderate. Limitations effecting management actions are erosion, compaction, seedling mortality, and plant competition.

Due to the impacts on these soils as a result of the fire, the current erosion potential for both soil types are moderate, particularly in areas where the fire burned extremely hot. The existence of rock cliffs and unburned conifers and other vegetation will help in reducing the amount of soil erosion from the fire. The condition will persist until the areas revegetates and stabilize. It is anticipated to take 3-5 years to get back to baseline levels.

Vegetation

Plant Vegetation Communities

This report uses the vegetative series and associations described in a Field Guide to the Forested Plant Associations of Southwest Oregon, USDA, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region, September 1996. Three plant series occurred within the perimeter of the fire, the Oregon White Oak Series, the Ponderosa Pine Series, and the Douglas-fir Series. These plant series are located within the fire area on the valley floor and lower foothills and many times surround open

meadows. The Oregon White Oak Series includes the Oregon White Oak-Douglas-Fir/Poison Oak association and the Oregon White Oak/Hedgehog Dogtail association. The dominant species include White Oak (*Quercus garryana*) and Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*) with under story of Poison oak, Buck brush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*), and Deerbrush (*Ceanothus integerimus*), Common snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*), native grasses consisting of Western fescue (*Festuca occidentalis*), California fescue (*Festuca californica*), Bluegrass (*Poa scabrella*), Lemmon's needle grass (*Achnatherum lemmonii*), and California oat grass (*Danthonia californica*). Many non-native grass and forbs dominate the community such as Hedgehog Dogtail (*Cynosurus echinatus*), Brome (*Bromus tectorum*), and Medusa head (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*).

The Ponderosa Pine series is comprised of two associations, the Ponderosa Pine and Douglas-fir association and the Ponderosa Pine California Black Oak association. Shrub components include Deerbrush, Snowberry, Poison Oak and Hairy honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula*). Forbs and grasses are dominated by California fescue (*Festuca californica*), California oat grass (*Danthonia californica*) Woodland tarweed (*Madia marauds*), and Mountain sweet-root *Osmarhiza chilensis*) and the non-native grasses.

The Douglas-fir Series is comprised of 21 associations of which only one occurs within the fire area. Douglas -fir dominates in the over-story with a secondary component of Ponderosa Pine and Sugar Pine. The Shrub component is comprised primarily of Poison oak, Piper's Oregon grape, Creeping Snowberry, Deerbrush and Cream bush ocean-spray along with a diverse forbs component.

Open meadows occur within the fire area where grasses and forbs are the climax community. The principal native grass species consist of Bluegrass (*Poa scabrella*), Lemmon's needle grass (*Achnatherum lemmonii*), and California oat grass (*Danthonia californica*). Many non-native grass and forbs dominate the community such as Hedgehog Dogtail (*Cynosurus echinatus*), Brome (*Bromus tectorum*), and Medusa head (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*).

The chaparral community, although not a plant association, is a seral stage which commonly Develops after a few years of a disturbance and before the dominant plant associates begin to differentiate and express dominance. The most representative species are madrone, black oak, buck brush and deer brush ceanothus, poison oak and manzanita where Douglas- fir or Ponderosa pine is lacking in the over-story.

No known sites of noxious weeds have been identified upon the fire area at this time. Noxious weeds at this time are not present.

Threatened & Endangered Plants

The Wall Fire is outside the range of any Threatened and Endangered plant species.

Special Status and Survey & Manage Plants

Special Status & Survey and Manage vascular plant surveys were conducted in 2000 on 171 acres of BLM land in the Wall Creek Fire area. Non-vascular plant surveys were conducted in Trail Creek in 2002 as part of the Trail Creek Timber Sale project, but only 5 acres fall within the fire perimeter. No Special Status or Survey & Manage vascular or non-vascular plant sites are known

from inside the fire perimeter. Multiple sites were discovered, however, within 12 miles of the fire include *Isopyrum stipitatum* (Bureau Assessment), *Cypripedium montanum* (Bureau Tracking and S&M C), *Perideridia howellii* (Bureau Tracking), *Dendriscoaulon intricatum* (S&M E), *Calicium viride* (S&M F), *Tortula subulata* (Bureau Tracking), *Leptogium rivale* (S&M E).

Threatened Wildlife Species

Northern Spotted Owl - federal and state listed threatened.

Of 212 BLM acres within the burn, about 170 were suitable owl habitat (nesting, roosting, foraging), with the remainder in open rocky meadows. Approximately 100 acres was nesting habitat. Most of this was a relatively low intensity under burn. The fire would disrupt the prey base, so the habitat was degraded to roosting/foraging.

20 acres of the fire was within the designated 100 acre core for the Off The Wall spotted owl site (#3394). An adult pair was present in 2001 and 2002, with the birds last producing young in 1998. Both adults are color banded to enable monitoring as individuals without having to recapture them to read their numbered US Fish & Wildlife band.

The wildfire reduced the probability of successful nesting in 2003 or 2004. Prey populations (wood rats, red tree vole) will begin to recover within a few years. An adult owl was viewed within the burn during mop up three weeks following the initial fire.

Survey and Manage Wildlife Species

Red Tree Vole - Survey & Manage

The burn area had been surveyed for RTV in 2000 and 2001, with several nests located. It is unknown whether the voles would have survived the heat and smoke, since RTVs spend almost all their time in the canopy, vs. a ground dwelling species that can escape fire in a burrow.

Molluscs - Survey and Manage

The burn area had been surveyed for several species of snail in 2000 and 2001 for upcoming timber sale clearance. None of the S&M species were located in that survey.

Effects of the Proposed Action:

Planting in riparian areas will reduce soil erosion and start the reestablishment of riparian vegetation. Conifer planting will result in the maintenance of the conifer ecosystem. Without conifer planting, the resulting vegetative community that would develop following the fire will be brush species developed through fire events. The resulting brush community from the fire would preclude conifers from becoming a component of the vegetation established after the fire. Under the proposed monitoring plan, the fire area would be surveyed to determine the success of the rehabilitation/stabilization efforts on the fire area. If noxious weed sites were discovered, the proposed action would eliminate those sites and prevent the establishment of future sites within the Wall Fire Area.

Consultation and Threatened & Endangered Plants

No T&E plant species are located within the perimeter of the fire. Therefore, the rehabilitation/stabilization activities planned under this EA would have **ANo Effect@** on any T&E plant species.

Special Status and Survey & Manage Plants

The greatest ground disturbance and habitat alteration has already occurred in the form of the fire itself and the fire suppression and emergency rehabilitation activities. The proposed rehabilitation/ stabilization activities planned under this EA will not cause additional significant disturbance and are not expected to have short-term or long-term adverse effects to any undetected Special Status or Survey and Manage species within the fire areas. On the contrary, the rehabilitation measures aimed at preventing erosion and reducing occupancy by noxious weeds would benefit Special Status plants potentially occurring in the fire areas and would improve native habitat for future occupancy by Special Status and Survey and Manage vascular and non-vascular plants. Surveys are not required for Special Status or Survey and Manage plant species prior to implementation of the rehabilitation and stabilization activities planned under this EA

Wildlife

Northern Spotted Owl

Most emergency rehabilitation measures have already been completed as fire crews were mopping up the fire. Dozer lines have been water barred and seeded. The main work remaining is installation of some straw/fabric check dams in streams, and some spring tree planting in the more severely burned spots.

The emergency rehab activities would have negligible impact to spotted owls or to suitable owl habitat. The disturbance and alteration occurred during the fire itself. Dozer lines disrupted ground layers of suitable habitat, but the later erosion control work was no additional habitat change. The native grass seeding and water bars will help the bare ground become revegetated sooner. Check dam construction in streams in the fall will not disturb the owls.

Any impacts from emergency rehab work is within the allowable disturbance granted for incidental take by US Fish & Wildlife Service in the 2001, 2002, 2003 programmatic consultation package.

Red Tree Vole

We do not know the effect of the fire on the RTV population, or of how fast they might recolonize the burn area. Emergency rehab work such as seeding, water barring, check dams would have no impact on RTV persistence. The voles eat green conifer needles.

EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: No Action

Soil erosion, loss of soil productivity, and sedimentation are expected to be greater if no rehabilitation/stabilization activities are implemented on the fire area in the short term. A greater possibility of noxious weed invasion on the fire area is likely with the no action alternative. A change in the conifer component of the ecosystem is probable if conifers are not planted on the fire area. Recovery of the riparian areas will be slower with the no action alternative. Stream channels are more subject to deterioration with no action. Conditions existing following the fire will dictate the development of special status plants and wildlife concerns with this alternative.

Monitoring:

Fire lines will be surveyed to determine if noxious weeds have been introduced into the fire area. The survey will consist of walking the fire lines and treating noxious weed species if found.

Planted conifers and hardwoods will be surveyed following the first growing season and third growing season to determine the survival levels of the treatment. The surveys will be conducted in accordance with the BLM Oregon State reforestation manual. The survival survey results will be entered into Micro-Storms for record keeping and future treatment recommendations. Additional surveys, if needed, after the third year survey will be funded from the 6320 activity.

Mitigation Measures and Residual Effects:

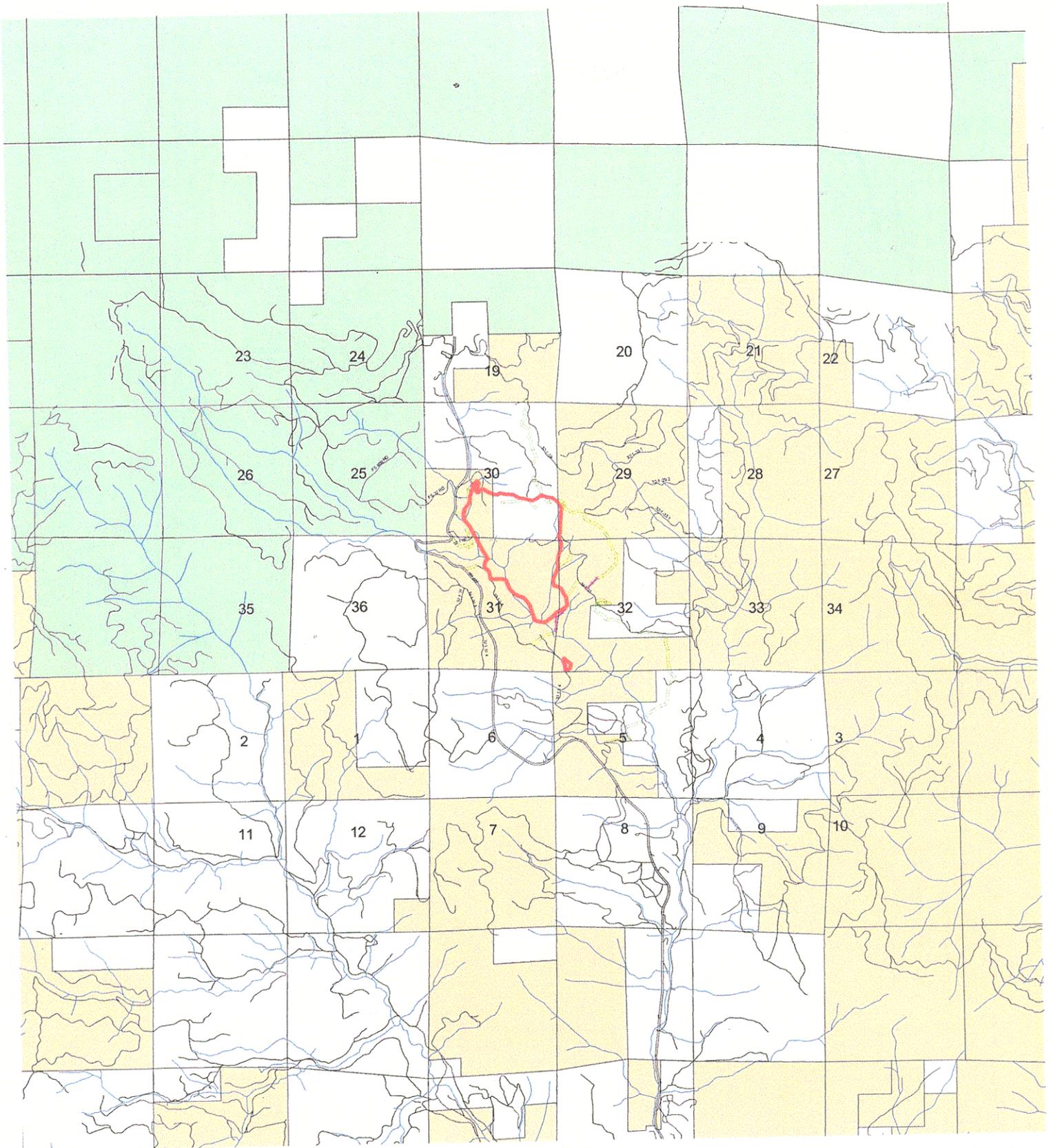
Mitigating measures are being proposed under the proposed action. The proposed action will reduce the adverse environmental effects of soil erosion, loss of soil productivity, sedimentation, and invasion of noxious weeds. There would be no long-term residual impacts of the proposed action or for any alternative. No additional measures have been identified as necessary to mitigate impacts.

CONSULTATION and SURVEY & MANAGE:

See plants and wildlife effects of the proposed action above.

PERSONS OR AGENCIES CONSULTED.

Public Notice made this EA available for formal public review in October, 2000.



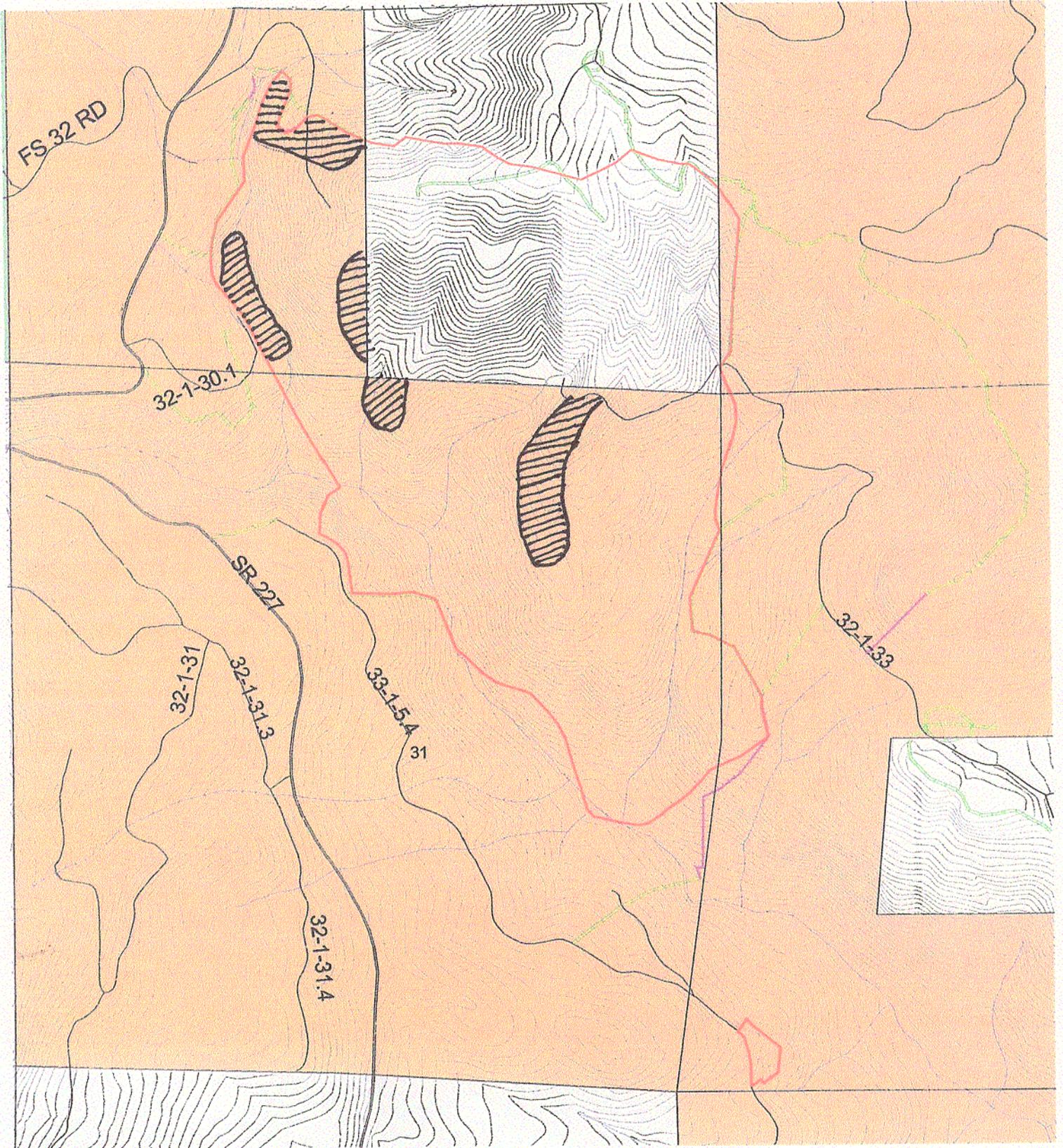
WALL CREEK FIRE
 TOTAL ACRES = 315
 BLM ACRES = 212

T32S R1W
 9/10/02

FIRELINES
 CAT
 HAND

 FIRE PERIMETER
 LAND OWNERS
 BLM
 FOREST SERVICE





WALL CREEK FIRE
 BLM ACRES = 212

T32S R1W
 8/14/02

FIRELINES
 CAT
 HAND

FIRE PERIMETER
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 BLM
 FOREST SERVICE



▨ Areas To Be Planted
 40 Acres