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DECISION NOTICE  
and  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

USDA Forest Service  
Umatilla National Forest  
Pomeroy Ranger District  
Columbia County, Washington

TUCANNON TIMBER SALE AND FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT #13

This Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the Forest Service decision to implement a timber sale and related actions within the area described in the Tucannon Timber Sale Environmental Assessment.

The information in this document is described in more detail in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA documents the analysis of the area and is available for public review at the office of the Forest Supervisor in Pendleton, Oregon and at the Pomeroy District Office in Pomeroy, Washington. The EA is tiered to the Umatilla National Forest Land and Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision dated June 11, 1990, and as amended in Plan Amendment #10, *Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Portions of California (PACFISH)*, dated February 24, 1995, and Amendment #11, *Continuation of Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales* (Regional Foresters Amendment No. 2 Screens) dated June 12, 1995.

The area analyzed for the Tucannon Timber Sale encompasses a gross area of approximately 2500 acres within the Tucannon watershed. It includes portions of Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, and 12 of T.8N., R.41E., and Sections 32, 33, 34 and 35 of T.9N., R41E., in Columbia County, Washington.

Key Issues

Key issues were identified through project scoping and specialist involvement and were used to analyze alternatives. The following key issues were addressed in all of the alternatives:

- What opportunities exist to improve ecosystem sustainability and accelerate the attainment of forest health on a landscape basis?
- How will the project affect big game habitat?
- What is the cost effectiveness of the project, and what commodity outputs will it generate?

Decision

Based on the results of the interdisciplinary team analysis and resource specialist input, I have decided to implement Alternative C. Based on the information gained through the area analysis, Alternative C will help to ensure long term site productivity for the area.

Alternative C will treat approximately 900 acres for ecosystem sustainability, and harvest an estimated 4 MMBF of timber. It will thin over-stocked stands and remove excess dead and dying trees as well as treat trees imminently susceptible to fire or insect attack. The live trees treated will be independent of diameter, species, or historical range of variability.

The silvicultural prescription for all treated acres will be an uneven-aged system of individual tree selection, and all units will be logged by helicopter which will limit the impacts to soil. All thirteen existing helicopter landings may be used. The future species composition of the treated stands will be 80% ponderosa pine and 20% Douglas-fir.

There will be no road construction. There will be 3.77 miles of reconstruction and resurfacing to Road #4712. The reconstruction will consist of road preparation, light excavation to remove stumps buried in the roadway, drainage work of installing elbows and an additional 56 foot section of culvert. Resurfacing will consist of aggregate placement.

Alternative C will convert approximately 60 acres of satisfactory cover to marginal cover. Implementation of Alternative C will not increase or decrease Winter Range Elk HEI. It will remain at the existing level of 64.

The gross sale area of approximately 2500 acres will be scheduled to be burned under site specific burn plans using various methods and strategies. The gross sale area will be divided into three units of 850 acres each and will be burned in three successive years (weather permitting). The number of acres burned outside the timber units is contingent upon the amount of funding available.

Alternative C will provide a benefit to cost ratio of 4.22, and contribute approximately \$52,000 in revenue to the local community.

Associated projects include: stabilization of existing road cut and fill slopes; slash disposal by underburning or lopping trees; reforestation of conifers by natural seeding; structural improvements of existing haul routes; and the landings will be used for dispersed recreation after the sale.

Sale area improvements which are dependent on funding include: the treatment of natural fuels; grass seeding and shrub planting for soil stabilization; stocking level control in the sapling component of residual stands; prescribed burning; and treatment of noxious weeds.

Mitigation measures and monitoring elements for Alternative C, and all action alternatives are described thoroughly in the EA.

#### Site-Specific Forest Plan Amendment

It is my decision to implement the following adjustments under the authority of 36 CFR 219.10. The changes have been determined not to be significant for the purpose of the planning process and represent a non-significant amendment to the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This amendment was analyzed and documented within the EA for this project, completing the necessary NEPA procedures and the associated public notification required under CFR 219.10.

Alternative C is not consistent with the Forest Plan as amended by Amendment #11, *Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales* (timber sale screens) because some live trees  $\geq 21$  inches DBH in the warm/dry biophysical group will be removed. In the Tucannon watershed the warm/dry (Douglas fir) biophysical group is below its historical range of variability (HRV) in single storied stands, and therefore any removal of live trees  $\geq 21$  inches is not consistent with the guidelines identified in the wildlife screen. However, it is consistent with the overall intent of the timber screens because this prescription will move individual stands and the landscape as a whole toward the late and old structural (LOS) stage that it historically occupied, thereby, providing for long-term sustainability, and contribute to making the forest more resistant to disease and insect infestation.

The existing Habitat Effectiveness Index (HEI) in the Tucannon Winter Range is not consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines for Management Area C3, due to existing natural conditions of high elevation and natural large openings. In Management Area C3 - Big Game Winter Range,

Forest Plan standards and guidelines require a Habitat Effectiveness Index (HEI) no less than 70. The Tucannon Winter Range does not meet this requirement nor will it meet it in the future. The potential for the Tucannon Winter Range is an Elk HEI of 64. Implementation of any of the alternatives, including the No Action alternative, would require a site specific non-significant Forest Plan amendment.

It is my decision to issue this site-specific, non-significant Forest Plan amendment addressing the exception to Amendment #11 and the changes to the C3 Management Area in the Tucannon Winter Range. The amendment, consisting of two parts, is as follows:

The Forest Plan is amended by allowing an exemption from the  $\geq 21$  inch DBH removal for live late/old structure (LOS) trees in the warm/dry biophysical group, that have been identified to be treated, in all applicable harvest units in the Tucannon Timber Sale.

The Forest Plan is amended by requiring an HEI of no less than 64 for the C3 Management Area that is included in the Tucannon Winter Range.

### Rationale for Decision

I have chosen to implement Alternative C because it provides the best combination of responses to the key issues that were identified, and the underlying needs for the proposed action. Instead of treating just the symptoms, it will contribute to making the forest more resistant to disease and insect infestation through vegetation management on a landscape level providing for long-term sustainability. Additional reasons for selecting Alternative C are:

- Management of the stands, along with prescribed fire, will develop the site specific potential of the area while restoring it to its historic range of species composition, size and structure, and historic fuel loads. I feel that moving the forest toward this historical stand structure and fire regime is a desirable objective in developing a sustainable ecosystem. It will more closely mimic the historic natural amount of biomass present in the treated stands.
- Alternative C is expected to move the area toward its desired future condition of a healthy, natural appearing and sustainable ecosystem in a shorter time frame than the No Action alternative.
- By treating trees independent of size, this alternative will most improve forest health, because it brings all microsites within treated units into the sustainable range of biomass. By treating all microsites within the proposed units having excess biomass this alternative will best meet the intent of providing late/old structure for the long term. Without treating trees independent of size, clumps of ponderosa pine trees with many trees greater than 21 inch DBH will still be at risk to western pine bark beetle as basal areas in the clumps remain higher than limited microsite resources can support.
- By implementing Alternative C, greater individual tree productivity of all residual trees regardless of size throughout the treated stands will provide less probability of stand loss to disease and insects and will provide for a more even flow of vegetation resource elements over time. It reduces the imminent risk to identified individual trees and stands, of disease and insect infestation by controlling the stocking levels in the sale area. Dense forests are more vulnerable to outbreaks of insects and pathogens adapted to detecting and reaching scattered, isolated, stressed hosts.

- Alternative C satisfies the underlying needs that were identified by the IDT of safeguarding long-term site productivity of the area, and facilitating the recovery and improvement of forest productivity, vegetation and habitats.
- Provides a framework for ecosystem health and economic and social stability compatible with the resource base. It provides the local and regional communities with revenue, products, and jobs that contribute to their social and economic needs.
- Limits the impacts to big game habitat. Alternative C will not result in any significant negative cumulative impacts to big game or other wildlife habitat.
- Recognizes and protects riparian and fisheries habitat, water quality values, and soils in the planning area.
- Meets (and in most capable areas exceeds) the habitat requirements for cavity nesters by managing snags and green tree replacements for trees  $\geq 21$  inches DBH at 100% based on information outlined in *Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests - The Blue Mountains of Oregon and Washington* (Thomas and others, 1979) and the Forest Plan. See Appendix A of this document for the Snag Density Table by Sale Unit in the Tucannon Timber Sale area.

### Other Alternatives Considered

**Alternative A - No Action** was analyzed in detail. This alternative proposed to defer entry within the area. It would continue with the current management practices of the area and would not initiate any additional or new activities at this time. Only those activities which are considered part of normal maintenance or those allowed under previous EAs would occur. Those activities include access management, road maintenance, and fire protection. Fuel levels would continue to increase.

**Alternative B** was analyzed in detail. It was developed to begin the process of moving the area on a landscape level closer to its desired future condition as identified in the Forest Plan. All of the action items in Alternative B are the same as Alternative C with the exception of limiting the long-term site productivity by not harvesting all trees that are at-risk from insects and disease, independent of diameter ( $\geq 21$  inches DBH), species or historical range.

**Alternative D** was analyzed in detail. Alternative D was designed to limit the impacts to big game habitat. It would not harvest or prescribe burn any units containing satisfactory cover. It would eliminate four (4) harvest units for a total of 127 acres of which 61 acres are satisfactory cover. The future species composition of the treated stands would be 60% ponderosa pine and 40% Douglas fir. All other actions, such as silvicultural prescription, logging system, and road reconstruction are the same as Alternative B.

**Alternative E** was not analyzed in detail. Alternative E was designed to maximize timber harvest by using even-aged management. This alternative was eliminated because of the Forest Plan recommendations of the management areas located in the sale area, and the restriction under Forest Plan Amendment #11 which limits group selection and other even-aged prescriptions.

**Alternative F** was not analyzed in detail. This alternative was designed to minimize recreation conflicts by limiting the amount of time that timber could be harvested, extending the life of the sale. It was eliminated because of the extended intrusion on big game habitat and the cost effectiveness of the sale.

Alternative G was not analyzed in detail. Alternative G was developed to create or enhance the scenic quality of the sale area. This alternative was eliminated because Alternatives B, C, and D will treat the area with uneven-aged management using individual tree selection and will be within the visual standards and guidelines for all of the Management Areas located within the project area.

### Public Involvement

This project was included in several publications of the Umatilla National Forest's *Schedule of Proposed Activities* in 1995 and 1996.

In September, 1995 a letter was mailed to approximately 200 addresses, this included individuals, organizations and agencies. This letter included maps of the area, a description of the proposed action, the need for the action, and a request for comments. Four letters were received in response to this scoping and are located in the project analysis file.

In April, 1996 copies of the Environmental Assessment for the Tucannon Timber Sale were mailed to all individuals who had expressed an interest in this project for a 30-day review. Letters were sent to approximately 200 addresses informing the recipients that the EA was completed and available for a 30-day review. A public notice was also published in the *East Oregonian* (paper of record) announcing the availability of the EA and requesting comments.

### Consistency with Applicable Laws, Regulations and Policies

Any project proposed for implementation has to meet the requirements of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). In accordance with these requirements I conclude from the results of the site specific analysis documented in the Tucannon Timber Sale Environmental Assessment and analysis file that the selected alternative, with the site specific non-significant Forest Plan amendment, is consistent with the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and Record of Decision (ROD) dated June 11, 1990 and all subsequent amendments.

All alternatives were developed to be consistent with the requirements of the Record of Decision for the Pacific Northwest Region, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Competing and Unwanted Vegetation and the associated Mediated Agreement.

### Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis documented in the EA, I have determined that this is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not needed. Beneficial, and adverse direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts discussed in the EA have been disclosed within the appropriate context. These impacts are expected to be of low intensity. No significant effects to the human environment have been identified. This determination is based on the mitigation measures designed into the selected alternative and the following factors:

- There will be no significant expected irreversible commitment of resources. Sufficient information has been disclosed in the analysis to make a reasoned choice among alternatives, and no significant impacts on the human environment have been identified. Information available from past actions of similar context and intensity in this area also indicate that no significant impacts will be anticipated.
- There will be no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to soil, water, fisheries, wildlife and cultural resources, or other components of the environment.

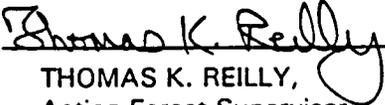
- Biological Evaluations have revealed that the selected alternative will have no significant impacts on any Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive (TES) species of plant or animal, or to their habitats. Should any TES species be found to be impacted, the environmental analysis will be reviewed and revised.
- A Biological Assessment has been completed for Snake River spring/summer and fall chinook salmon and informal consultation with the NMFS has been initiated. Implementation of this project will not occur before consultation is completed and the deciding officer has reviewed the results of consultation to determine whether the consultation contains any new information.
- There will be no significant adverse impacts to wetlands, floodplains, prime farmland, range land, or forest land, minority groups, civil rights, women or consumers. No significant effects are anticipated to any other environmentally sensitive or critical area.
- No significant adverse effects to public health or safety have been identified.
- The selected alternative will be in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations and requirements designed for the protection of the environment.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215.7. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

Any written appeal filed under CFR 215.7 must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, Acting Regional Forester Robert W. Williams, ATTN: 1570 APPEALS, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Oregon 97208-3623 within 45 days of the date the legal notice of this decision appears in the *East Oregonian* Newspaper.

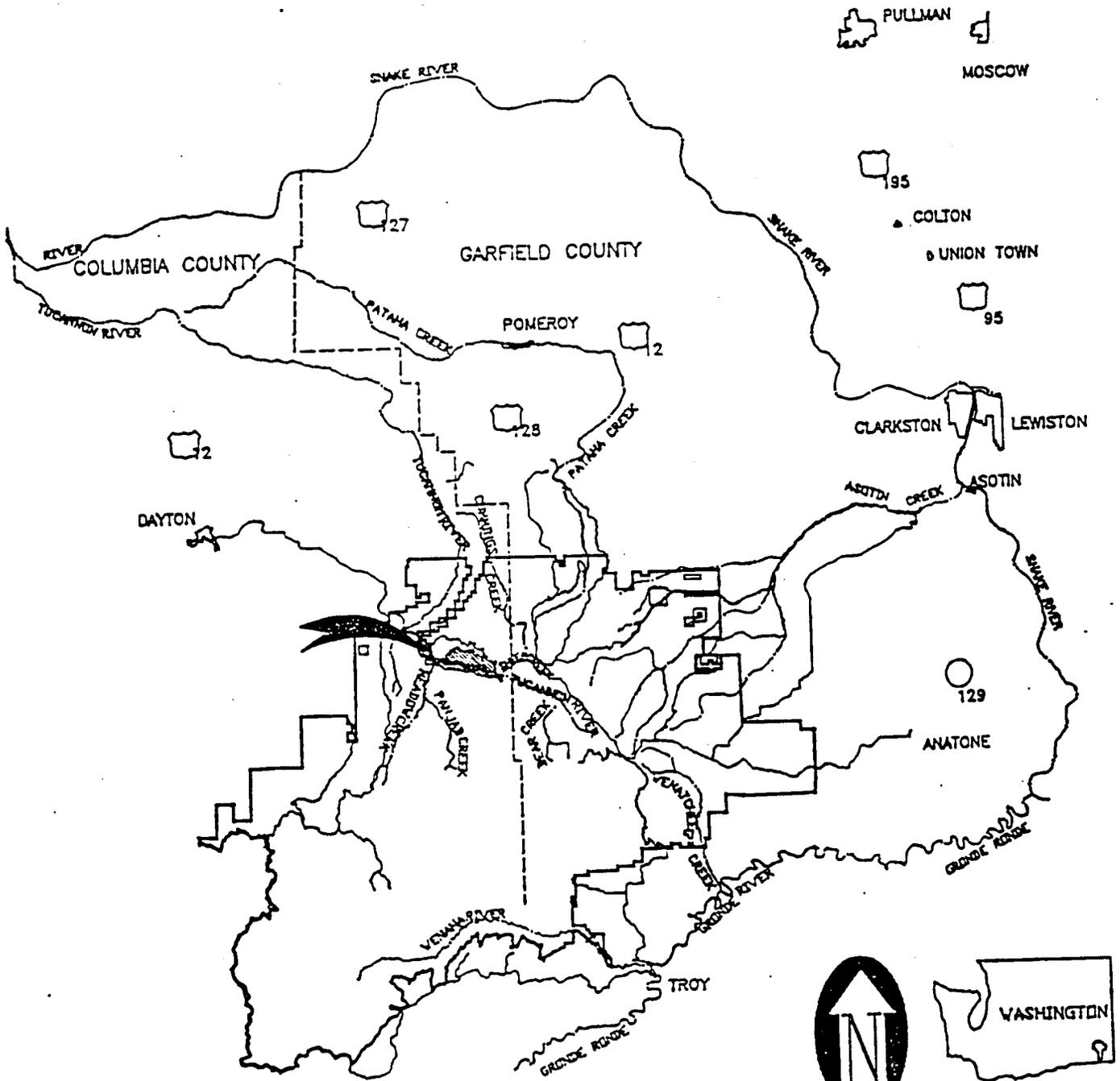
If no appeal is filed, implementation of this project may occur after 5 business days following close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal or appeals are submitted, project implementation shall not occur until after 15 days following the date of the last appeal disposition.

For further information contact Randall Walker, Environmental Coordinator, at the Pomeroy Ranger District, Route 1 Box 53-F, Pomeroy, Washington 99347, or call (509) 843-1891.

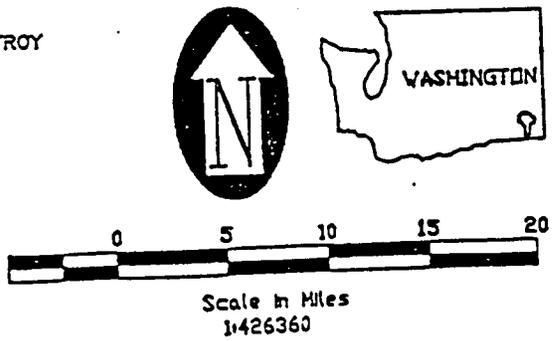
  
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 THOMAS K. REILLY,  
 Acting Forest Supervisor

5/29/96  
 date

# TUCANNON VICINITY MAP UMATILLA NATIONAL FOREST POMEROY RANGER DISTRICT



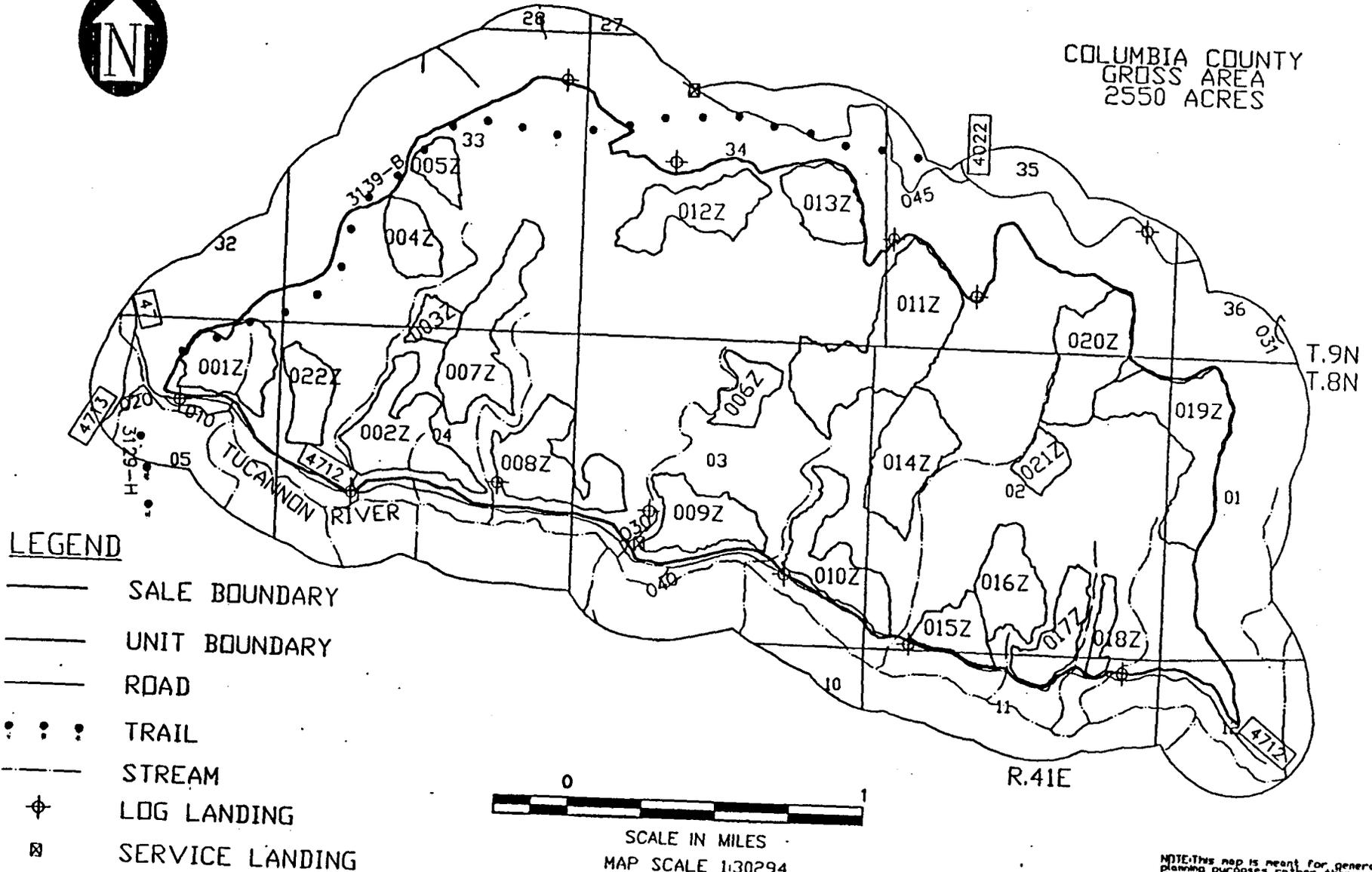
 LOCATION OF PROPOSED TUCANNON TIMBER SALE  
 ROADS  
 FOREST BOUNDARY  
 COUNTY LINE  
 RIVERS



# PROPOSED TUCANNON TIMBER SALE ALTERNATIVE C



COLUMBIA COUNTY  
GROSS AREA  
2550 ACRES



NOTE: This map is meant for general  
planning purposes rather than  
decisions on the specific tracts  
of land.  
03/05/96