

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

District	McCall Ranger District, Payette National Forest
Project Name:	Sloans Point Forest Resilience Project
Responsible Official:	Ann Hadlow, Acting McCall District Ranger
Project Contact:	Ann Hadlow, Acting McCall District Ranger
Scoping Period:	Comments requested by March 2, 2020
Submit Comments:	Via webform on the project webpage
Project Webpage:	https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57337

Project Description

The McCall Ranger District proposes the Sloans Point Forest Resilience Project (Sloans Point Project) to manage forest structure and species composition to recover from insect and disease disturbances and improve forest landscape resiliency by implementing a suite of vegetation management treatments (timber harvest, noncommercial thinning, prescribed burning, and limited riparian area treatments) and associated transportation system activities.

For the Sloans Point Project, the Forest Service is partnering with the Idaho Department of Lands through the Good Neighbor Authority (16 U.S.C. § 2113a), which enables the Forest Service to achieve restoration and resilient landscape objectives across ownership boundaries through cooperative agreements. This cooperative effort is helping improve forest health in the Sloans Point project area while simultaneously creating more jobs and economic benefits.

Proposed activities would restore species composition, stand structure, and size classes, and reduce undesirable species and stand densities while favoring the retention of larger diameter, seral trees throughout the project area. Approximately 2,273 acres would be treated, as displayed in Table 1, Figure 1, and Figure 2.

Table 1. Proposed activities for the Sloans Point Project

Proposed Activities	Units
Vegetation Treatments	
Shelterwood with reserves (acres)	554
Improvement cutting (acres)	37
<i>Overstory treatment totals (acres)</i>	591
Noncommercial thinning—with overstory treatment (acres)	591
Noncommercial thinning—without overstory treatment (acres)	1,682
<i>Noncommercial thinning total (acres)</i>	2,273
Prescribed Fire Treatments	
Prescribed burning total (acres)	2,273
Transportation System Activities	
National Forest System road maintenance (miles)	14.1
Temporary road construction—existing unclassified road (miles)	3.3
Temporary road construction—new template (miles)	0.7
Aquatic organism passage culverts being analyzed for replacement (number of culverts)	3
Routes being analyzed for potential decommissioning (miles)	5.5

For the Sloans Point Project, timber harvesting is proposed to address forest health issues, including insect, disease, and fire hazard by stopping or reducing actual or anticipated spread of insects and disease primarily using regeneration timber harvest methods (shelterwood with reserves prescription), but also improvement cutting. The removal of wood products, typically used for lumber, would be completed using ground-based logging systems with skyline systems used on steeper slopes. Timber harvesting would remove trees greater than 8 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) and would be followed with noncommercial tree thinning once harvesting is complete. The Sloans Point Project would maximize the retention of old growth and large trees, and the prescriptions include provisions to retain the legacy ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas-fir, which are generally the very large trees. Additionally, at least 20% of the acres within each forested potential vegetation group (PVG) found in a watershed would be maintained in the large tree size class (medium tree size class for PVG 10 [persistent lodgepole pine]) and the desired range of snags and coarse wood would be maintained as described in the 2003 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) Appendix A.

Noncommercial thinning would be used to promote desired vegetation and fuel conditions including promoting seral tree species (western larch, ponderosa pine, and Douglas-fir); promoting aspen; and reducing ladder fuels in prescribed burn areas to improve holding efforts.

Prescribed burning would be used to maintain or restore desired conditions by reducing the natural and activity fuels (limbs, tree tops, and dead and down woody material) generated from the timber and noncommercial harvest activities; breaking up horizontal and vertical fuel continuity; rejuvenating grasses and shrubs; and producing stand conditions favoring individual trees, gaps, and openings, creating a naturally repetitive mosaic where ecologically practicable within the project area.

Within Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs), limited prescribed burning and vegetation treatments are proposed which would focus on upland portions of coniferous vegetation found in RCAs. RCA treatments of the coniferous vegetation would have the same objectives of improving resiliency to disturbance as adjacent upland treatments. The RCA treatments have been designed to not degrade or retard attainment of properly functioning soil, water, riparian, and aquatic desired conditions. No Endangered Species Act listed fish species or critical habitat occurs in or near the project area, and no Forest Service sensitive fish species occur within the area.

Proposed road management activities designed to support vegetation and prescribed fire treatments for the Sloans Point Project include approximately 14.1 miles of road maintenance, 3.3 miles of temporary road construction on existing templates, and 0.7 miles of new temporary road construction; additionally, 3 aquatic organism passage (AOP) culvert replacements and 5.5 miles of route decommissioning are being analyzed for potential inclusion in the project.

The Sloans Point Project includes numerous project design features to minimize or avoid potential undesirable effects to resources and would comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and direction.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Sloans Point Project is to manage forest structure and species composition to improve forest landscape resiliency to insect and disease and other disturbances, with an

emphasis on maintaining and promoting early seral tree species (e.g., ponderosa pine and western larch) and aspen, and contributing to achievement of Forest Plan desired vegetation and associated wildlife habitat conditions within upland forest communities and upland portions or coniferous vegetation in RCAs.

Numerous insects and disease agents are operating within the project area, including western spruce budworm, balsam woolly adelgid, western pine beetle, red turpentine beetle, pine-engraver beetles (*Ips* species), mountain pine beetle, Douglas-fir beetle, fir engraver beetle, Douglas-fir tussock moth, wood borer beetles, dwarf mistletoe, conks (Indian paint fungus and red belt fungus), and western gall rust. Evidence of disease and infection within the project area include root and stem rot, frost cracks, cankers, defoliation, clustering of needles and branches, and increasing tree mortality. Without forest management actions or major disturbance events, such as fire, in the long term, the western spruce budworm, balsam woolly adelgid, and dwarf mistletoe could have the most impacts to stand development in this area, and bark beetles may remove the large early seral species—such as ponderosa pine and western larch—within each habitat type as the stands age.

A need exists to improve forest landscape resiliency by managing species composition and forest structure primarily in the warm dry Douglas-fir; cool dry Douglas-fir; dry grand fir; cool moist grand fir; cool dry subalpine fir; and cool moist subalpine fir potential vegetation groups to reduce the hazard associated with insects and disease consistent with Forest Plan goals.

A need also exists to manage species composition and forest structure in the project area to provide for a diversity of densities and age classes and a shift to more seral tree species to move toward the Forest Plan desired vegetation and wildlife habitat conditions within upland and riparian communities consistent with Forest Plan goals and objectives and Management Area 8 objectives.

Project Area

The 2,273-acre project area is located on National Forest System lands on the McCall Ranger District of the Payette National Forest southeast of McCall, Idaho (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The project area is in the Kennally Creek Subwatershed in Valley County and is accessed by the Paddy Flat Road (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The project area location is Section 1 of Township 16 North, Range 4 East; Sections 5, 6, and 7 of Township 16 North, Range 5 East; Section 25 of Township 17 North, Range 4 East; and Sections 19, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33 of Township 17 North, Range 5 East, Boise Meridian, Valley County, Idaho.

The proposed Sloans Point project area is part of the Kennally Creek Watershed in the North Fork Payette River Subbasin, designated a national insect and disease treatment area by Governor Otter under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), as amended by the [2014 Farm Bill](#)¹.

The project is located within the Kennally Creek Management Area 8 in Management Prescription Category 5.2, Commodity Production Emphasis, as described in the Forest Plan. The project area is not located in nor contains any wilderness, wild and scenic river corridors, national recreation areas, or research natural areas. Though the project area is adjacent to the Needles Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA), no activities are proposed within the IRA (Figure 4).

¹ <https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/farm-bill/area-designations>

Environmental Analysis and Comment Process

The Sloans Point Project is being evaluated as a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as provided for in Section 603 of HFRA (16 U.S.C.6591b). Section 603 established a categorical exclusion for qualifying insect and disease projects in designated areas on National Forest System lands. A decision is anticipated in May 2021 for layout in summer 2021 and sale in 2022.

As a categorical exclusion, no additional designated public comment periods for this project would occur, so this “scoping” phase is the best opportunity for public input.

To assist the Forest Service in meeting its goals of reducing our carbon footprint and to achieve a sustainable operation, we are now using a web-based electronic comment system that allows all interested parties to receive project materials (scoping documents, updates, NEPA documents, and decisions) and submit comments by e-mail.

To subscribe to receive email notifications about this project, go online to the project website listed above. On the project website, you will see a box titled "Get Connected" on the right-hand side of the page. Click on "Subscribe to Email Updates." When you click on that item, you will be prompted to provide your e-mail address and select a password in the GovDelivery program. When you have logged in, you will be able to manage your account by subscribing to projects by Forest, District, project type, or project purpose. You will also be able to change your e-mail address and password. If you no longer wish to follow the projects, simply delete your subscription. Once you are subscribed, you will receive all project information via e-mail, unless you request hard copies. Only those who subscribe to the GovDelivery mailing list or submit comments will receive future correspondence on this project.

To submit comments using the web form, select "Comment/Object on Project" under "Get Connected" on the right panel of the project website. The comment portal is only open during public comment periods, and submitted comments are available for public viewing in the Public Comment Reading Room.

Comments may also be submitted in hardcopy to Acting District Ranger Ann Hadlow at McCall District Office 102 West Lake Street, McCall, Idaho 83638 or hand delivered to the District Office during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday–Friday, excluding holidays.

Comments received in response to this request will be released in their entirety if requested pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act.

Maps

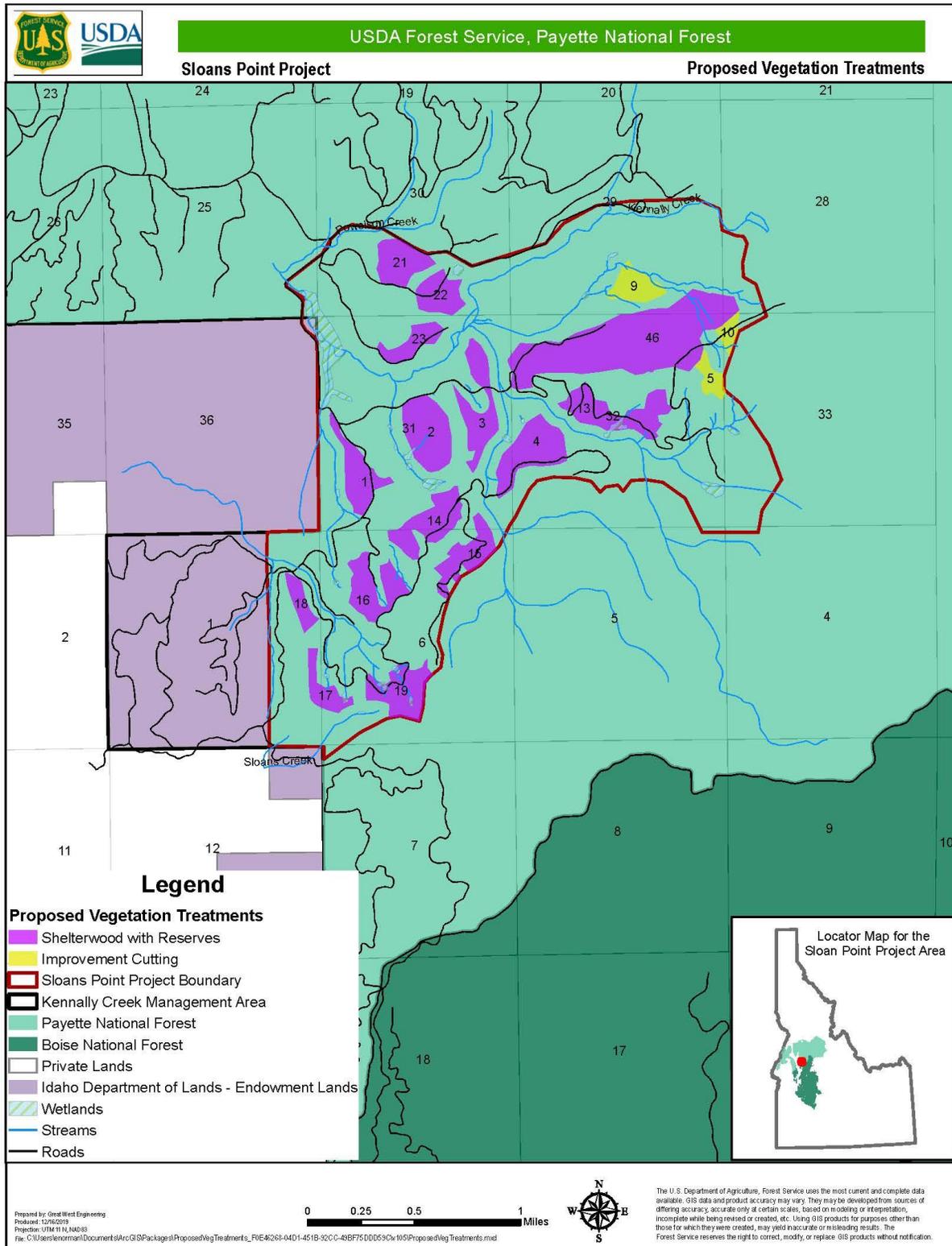


Figure 1. Proposed vegetation treatments for the Sloans Point Project

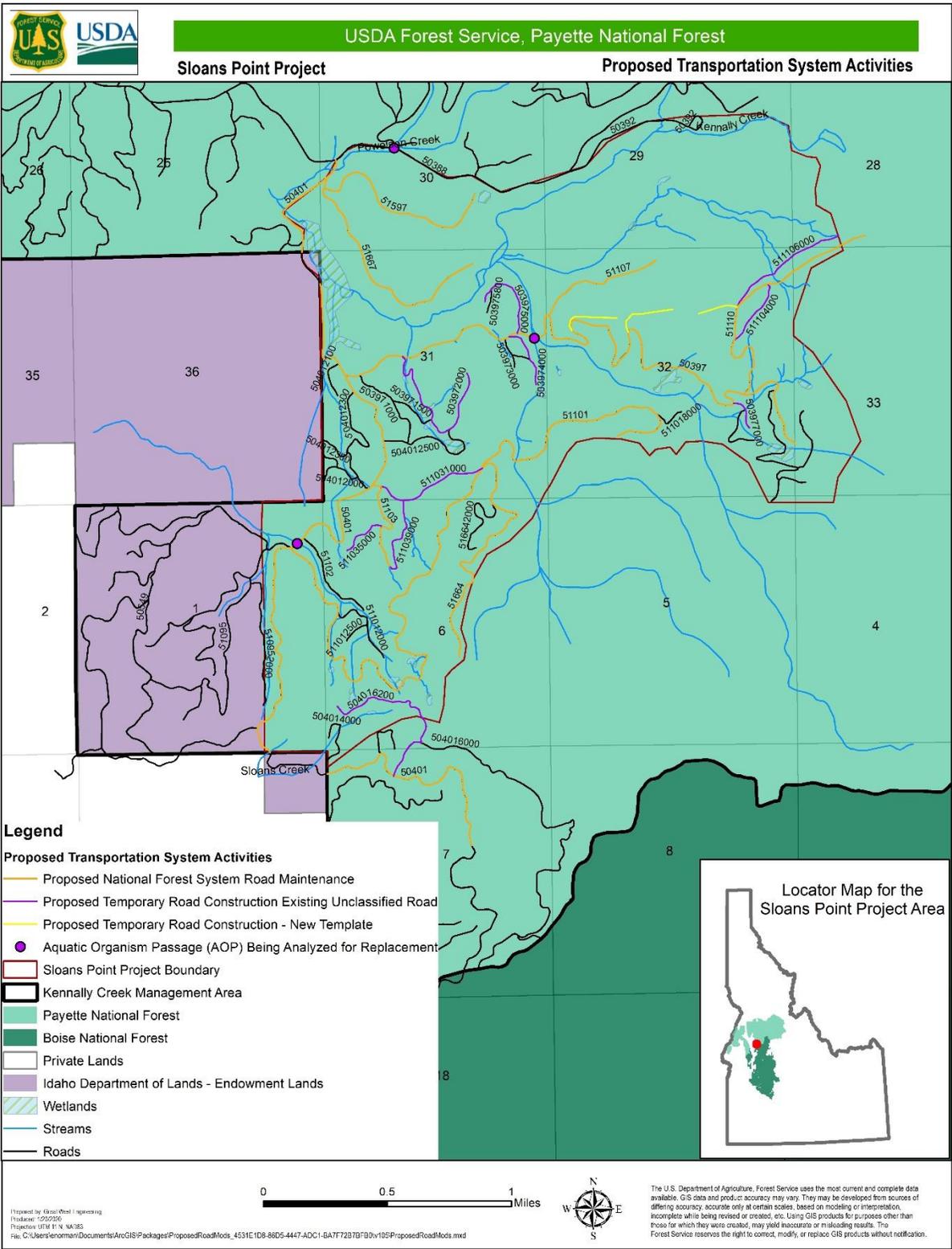


Figure 2. Proposed transportation system activities for the Sloans Point Project

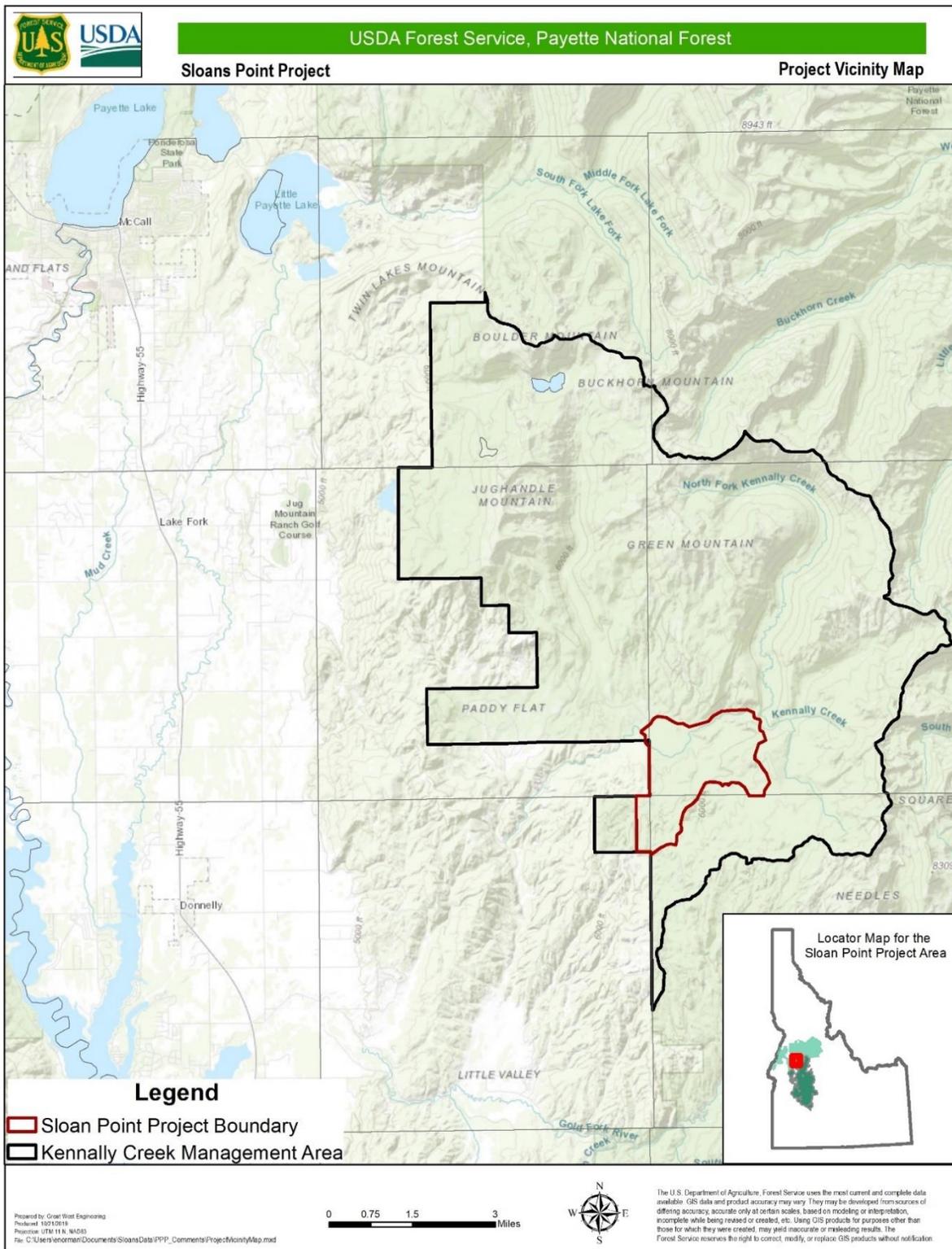


Figure 3. Project vicinity map for the Sloans Point Project

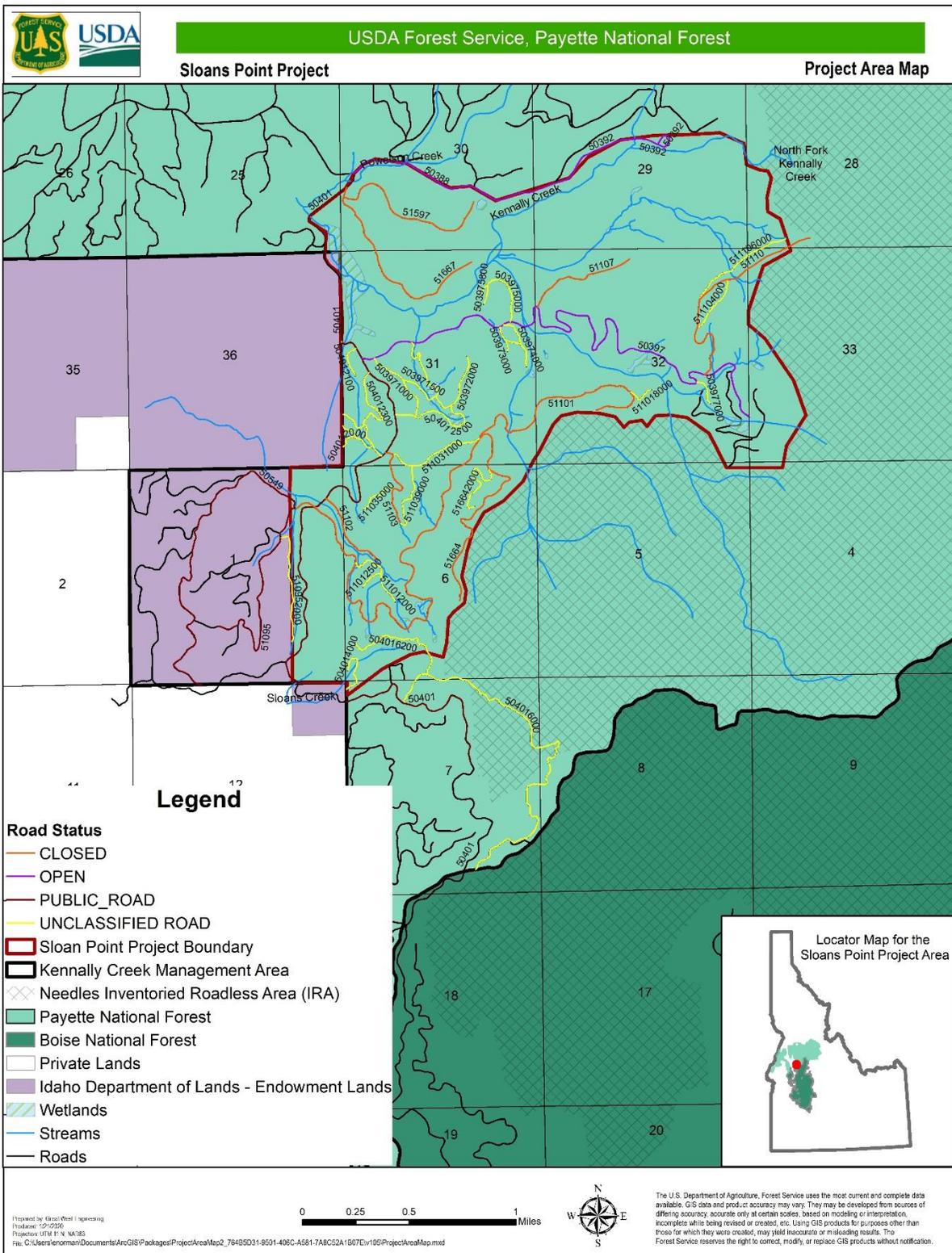


Figure 4. Project area map for the Sloans Point Project