United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Nez Perce National Forest
104 Airport Road
Grangeville, ID 83530
208-983-1950
Clearwater National Forest
12730 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
208-476-4541

File Code: 1950
Date: February 3, 2014

Dear Planning Participant:

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests will be considering the attached project and conducting environmental analyses in the near future.

The Palouse District Ranger has made a preliminary assessment that this project falls within a category of actions listed in 36 CFR 220.6, thereby excluding it from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

To submit comments on this proposal, please follow the instructions provided in the "How to Provide Comments" section.

Thank you for your continued participation in projects involving the Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests.

Sincerely,

RICK BRAZELL
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures: Maps of Project Site

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How to Provide Comments

Please review the following proposal and submit your site-specific comments as described below so they can be included in our analyses for this project.

Written, facsimile transmitted, hand-delivered, and oral comments will be accepted for **30 calendar days following publication of a legal notice in the *Lewiston Tribune*.** The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. One should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

If you have any questions or would like additional information regarding this project, please contact Linda S. Helm, Small NEPA Coordinator, Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests, Kamiah, Idaho or call (208) 935-4285. Oral comments must be provided to her during normal business hours *via t*elephone or in person. Written comments should either be mailed or hand-delivered (between 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (PST), Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays) to her c/o Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests, Supervisor's office, 104 Airport Road, Grangeville, Idaho 83530; or submitted *via* facsimile transmittal to her at (208) 935-4275, where they will be forwarded to the Kamiah office *via* electronic mail. Electronic mail comments should be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc) or portable data format (.pdf) to comments-northern-nezperce@fs.fed.us.

If you choose to comment on this proposal, please include the following: (1) your name, address, and (if possible) your telephone number, and organization represented (if any); (2) title of this project; and, (3) specific facts and relevant rationale concerning this project that you feel should be considered. **Please note that we will not respond to "boiler-plate" objections that are not specific to the particular project.** For appeal eligibility, each individual must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request. Additional information regarding how to comment can be found at 36 CFR 215.6.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names, telephone numbers, addresses, and electronic mail addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; **however, those who submit anonymous comments may not have standing to appeal** the subsequent decision pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the Agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentially should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the Agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality and the available options at that time (see 7 CFR 1.27 for further information).

Project Proposal

Palouse Ranger District

Pocket Gopher Baiting

Proposed Category: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6): *Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.*

Specific Stands, Acreage, and Legal Coordinates and Subwatersheds of Project Sites:

Stand Number	Acres	Township	Range	Section	Subwatershed
28203032	16	40N	1W	24	East Fork Potlatch River
28203034	7	40N	1W	23	East Fork Potlatch River
27905067	11	41N	1W	2	West Fork Potlatch River-Potlatch River
27805073	13	42N	1W	29	West Fork Potlatch River-Potlatch River

Background: These recently harvested stands have been planted or will be planted with conifer seedlings. The need to suppress pocket gopher populations arises due to the seedling mortality the gophers cause by their predation on these young, succulent, nutritious nursery grown seedlings; the loss of reforestation investments; and, the potential failure to meet the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirement to adequately reforest within 5 years following final harvest.

Narrative Summary: Damage to conifer seedlings by pocket gophers is a major factor limiting reforestation success in the western United States. Pocket gophers can seriously affect conifer regeneration up to 10 years after planting. The most serious damage, however, occurs within the first, second or third years. Regeneration surveys have determined that stocking levels can be reduced by as much as 50 to 75 percent in stands with high levels of pocket gopher activity.

Gophers commonly injure seedlings by pruning the roots and by girdling or clipping the stems. When stems are 0.5 inches or less in size, gophers may pull planted seedlings into their tunnels from below, leaving little evidence of the tree's existence above ground. Root pruning in plantations may go unnoticed until the tops turn brown from summer drought or until normal appearing seedlings tip over at odd angles.

Project Design Specifications/Equipment to be Used: This proposal would suppress pocket gopher populations by hand placing poison bait underground on approximately 47 acres. The EPA approved rodenticide for treating pocket gophers below ground is 0.5 percent strychnine alkaloid treated steam-rolled oats (EPA

Registration Number 56228-20). One teaspoon of the oat bait is deposited below ground directly into the gophers' burrows. Treatment application rates of 1/8th to 1 pound of bait per acre is usually adequate but may be increased up to 2 pounds per acre in heavily infested stands.

Experience and research have shown that below ground hand baiting is the safest, most effective and practical means of controlling damaging pocket gopher populations in the forest environment. Strychnine does not accumulate in living organisms and it breaks down rapidly in the environment, where it is subject to decomposition by micro-organisms into non-toxic chemical elements. Research suggests a half-life for the strychnine in the bait of from two weeks to one month. Strychnine treated bait begins to mold within 10 to 14 days under average soil moisture conditions and after that time period the bait becomes unpalatable to rodents.

The proposed gopher treatment will be performed by contract and the contractor must be licensed by the State of Idaho as a professional pesticide applicator. The grain bait will be kept in a well-marked locked container while not in use. Transferring bait to dispensing containers will be done over plastic sheets. Bait dispensers will have covers to prevent spillage.

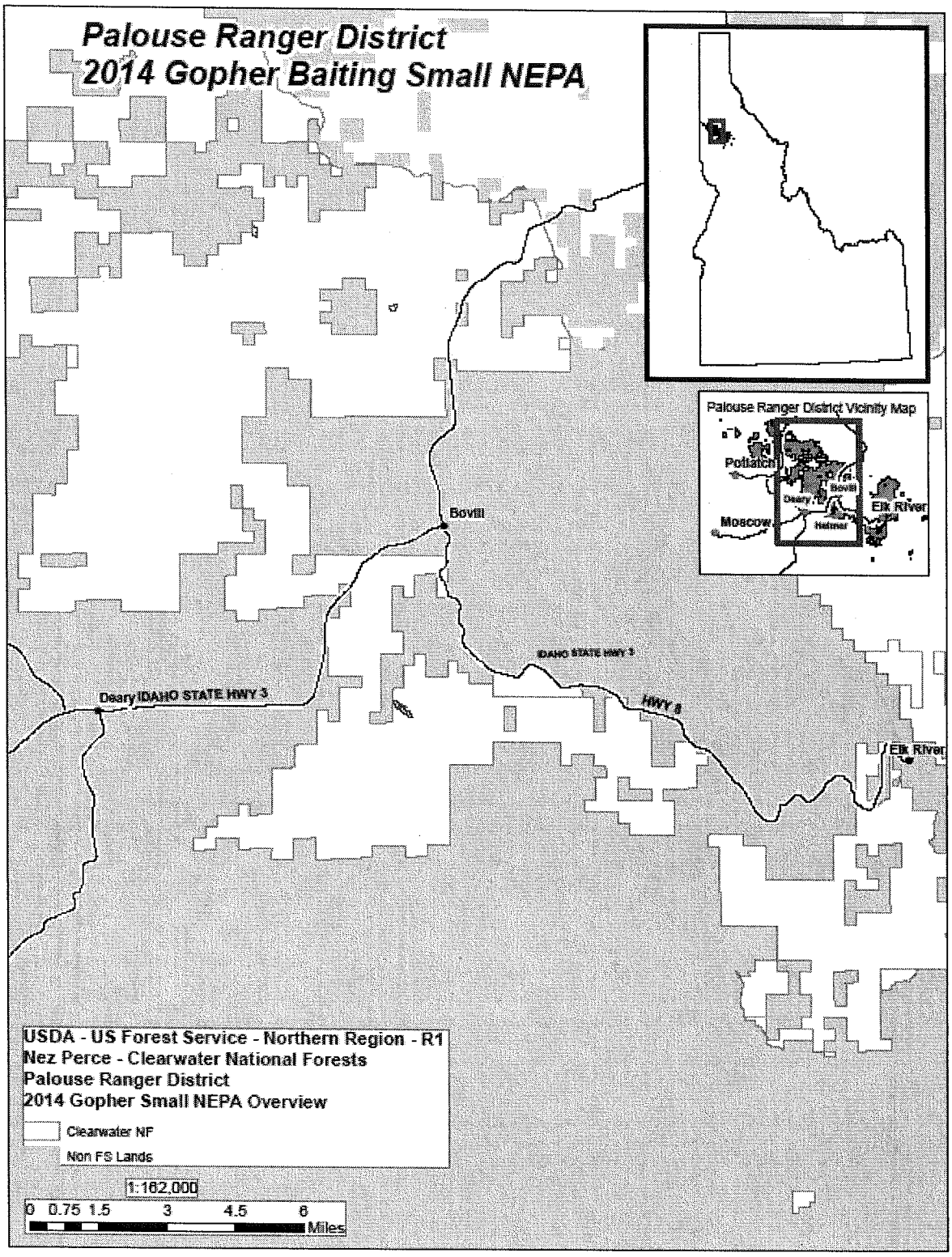
There will be no ground disturbing activities with this proposed action. All units will be hand baited using a steel probe.

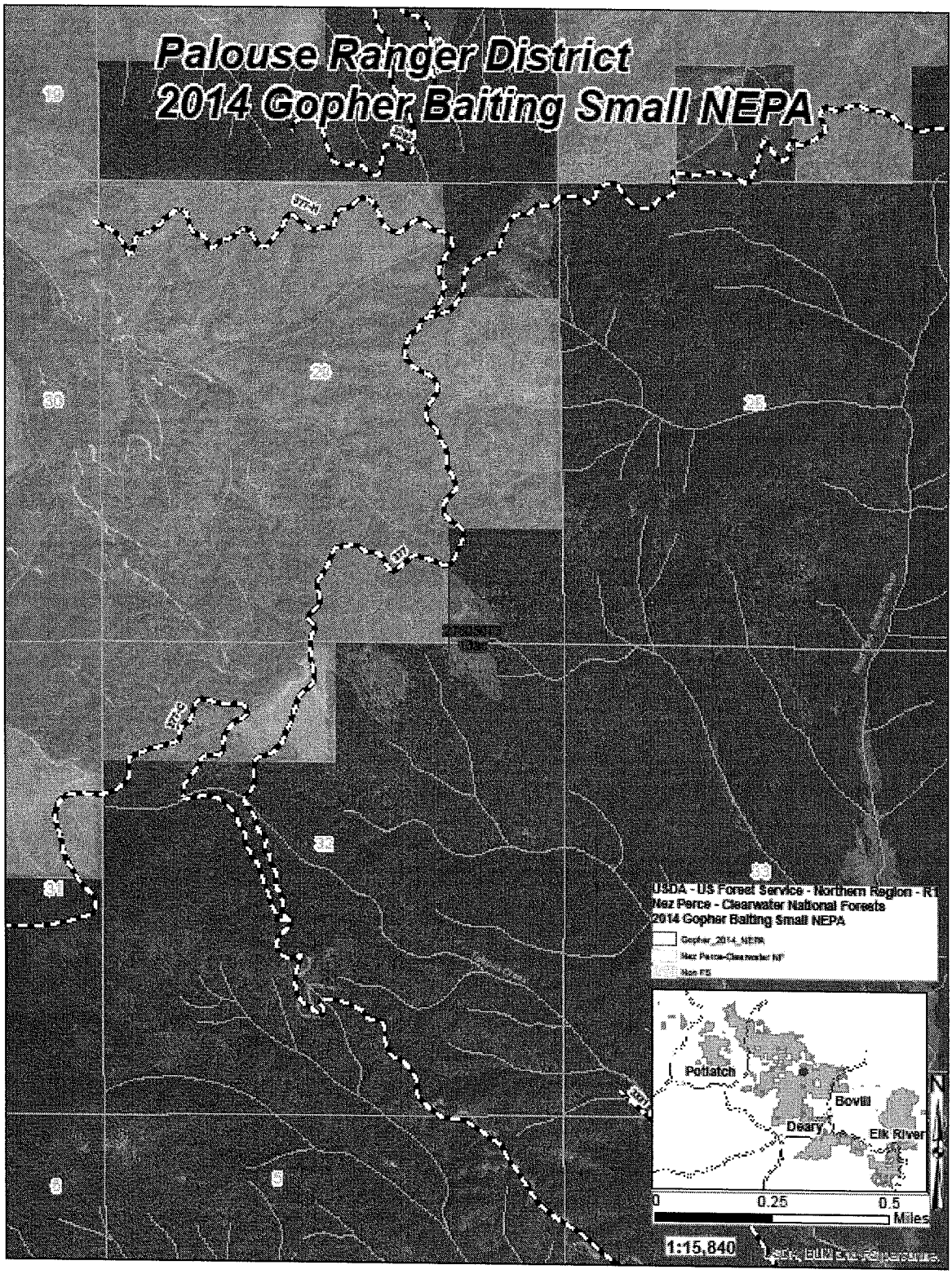
The grain is deposited in the underground burrows through a hole made in the top of the burrow and is immediately covered up. Treatment would be suspended when soils are wet or heavy rain is predicted. Gopher treatment will generally follow INFISH/PACFISH buffers of 50 to 300 feet but in no case will treatment be closer than 15 feet of any open water. To provide additional protection to listed anadromous and resident fish species and other aquatic-dependent resources in the Potlatch River drainage and North Fork Clearwater River drainage, no strychnine-laced oats will be applied within 25 feet of the stream banks, of any live water, within areas of saturated soils or during periods when heavy precipitation is forecast. No bait will be stored within 200 feet of any water source.

Treatments usually begin in early July when soil conditions are still moist but not saturated. Most contractors can treat between 50 – 100 acres per day depending on unit size and the amount of pocket gopher activity. The Forest has over 20 years of experience in treating for pocket gopher damage and no problems are anticipated with this project.

Project Information: For additional information regarding this project, contact Marc Valencia (208) 875-1721.

MAP OF PROPOSED GOPHER BAITING SITES




Palouse Ranger District
2014 Gopher Baiting Small NEPA
USDA - US Forest Service - Northern Region - R1
Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests
2014 Gopher Baiting Small NEPA
Potlatch
Bovill
Deary
Elk River
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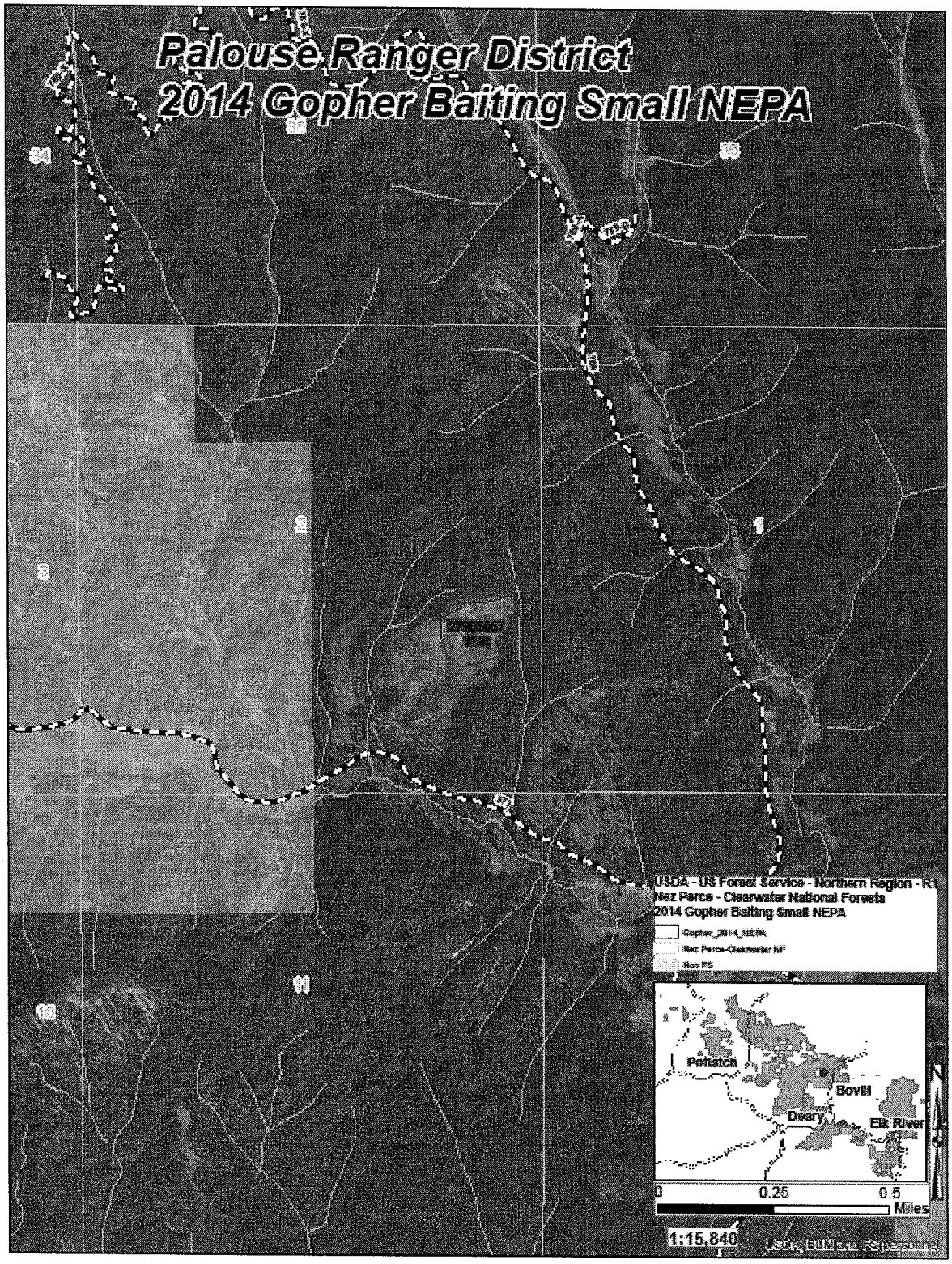
Miles
1:15,840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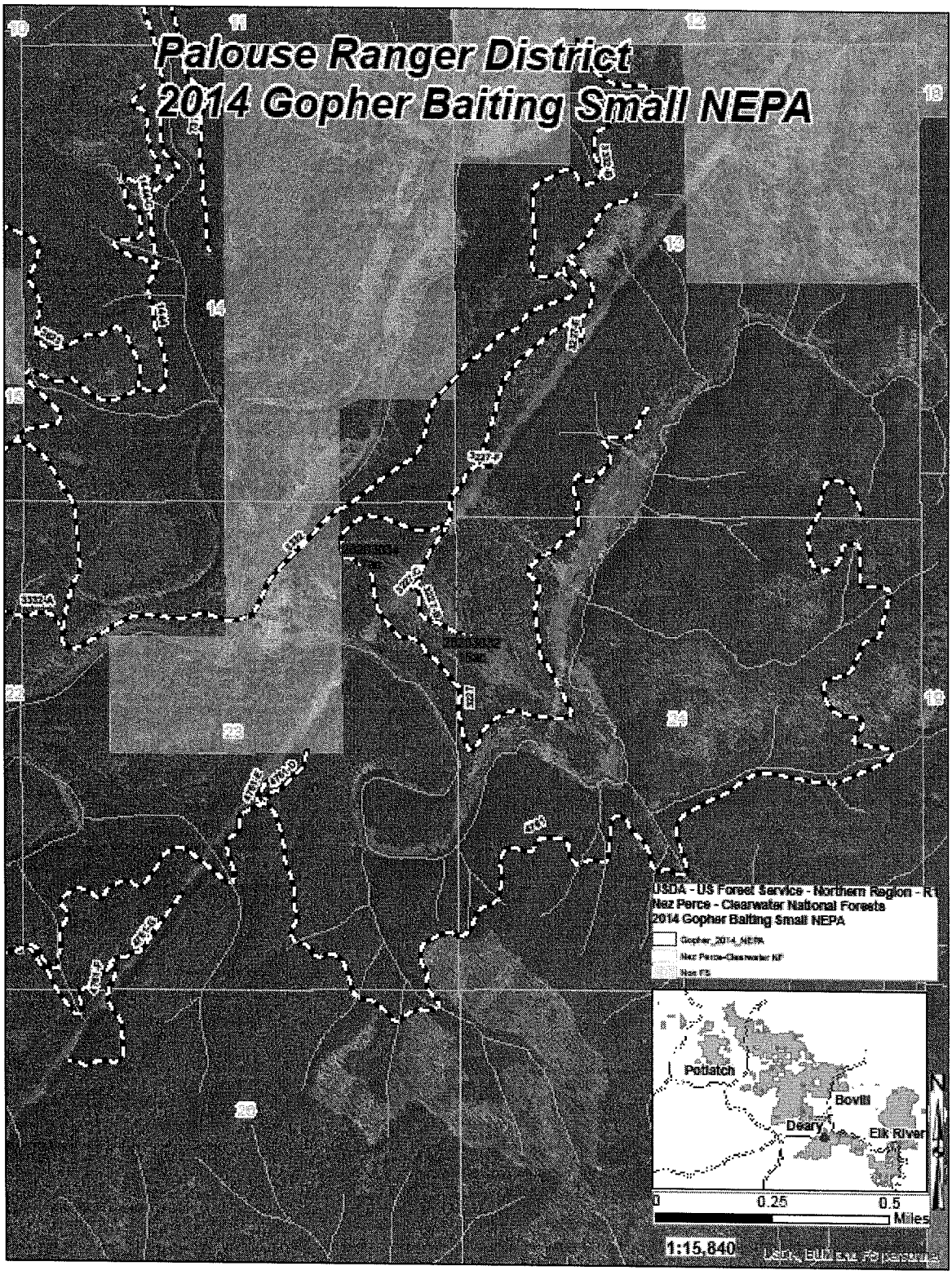
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