United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Soda Springs Ranger District | 410 East Hooper Avenue
Soda Springs, ID 83276
208-547-4356
Fax: 208-547-2235

Dear Forest User:

The Soda Springs Ranger District of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest is seeking public comments on the proposed Bridge Creek Forest Management Project (BCFMP). The project area is located approximately 29 air miles northeast of Soda Springs, ID, and approximately 20 miles west of Freedom, ID. It is in the Bridge Creek and Tin Cup drainages (see Figure 1) on the Soda Springs Ranger District in Caribou and Bonneville Counties. This project proposes to treat approximately 11,000 acres with a combination vegetation management activities throughout the project area to improve the condition of the forest ecosystem.

Background:

The 2003 Revised Caribou Forest Plan (RFP) allocated areas of the Forest to various prescriptions or management themes and provided management direction. The RFP highlighted a surplus of mature and late seral vegetation which is the result of suppression of disturbances, particularly wildfire. Because of this imbalance and risks associated with being out of balance, the RFP recognized the need to increase early and mid-seral stands to improve wildlife habitat diversity (RFP 2-6). The RFP stated that landscapes in this condition are difficult and costly to manage, are less able to provide values that human's desire, and are often ecologically unstainable. It further states that disturbances are inevitable, as well as critical to ecosystem function, so management actions should focus on making landscapes resilient to these disturbances (RFP 2-2). Maintaining the integrity, function and resilience of ecosystems is the key to maintaining the biological diversity of the Forest (RFP 1-5).

In 2017, Soda Springs Ranger District staff began assessing the condition of the Bridge Creek and Tin Cup drainages (see **Figure 1**). This assessment evaluated the overall condition of the area and identified opportunities to implement the RFP. It showed that the forested landscape as a whole is currently 97% mature/late seral (old[1]), which is outside of the Desired Future Condition's (DFC) outline in the Revised Caribou Forest Plan (RFP). The assessment also stated that there were opportunities to use active management to move forest vegetation toward DFC and thus improve diversity of wildlife habitat within the project area.

Historically fire played an important role in shaping the forests in this landscape. Mixed and low severity fire burned relatively frequently across the landscape, killing patches, clumps and individual trees. This created a mosaic of ages, densities, sizes and species of trees. Stands and the landscape as a whole were more resilient to disturbance events because of the diverse mosaic of stand conditions and composition which resulted from the natural disturbance regime. In the

[1] The Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest (USDAFS, 2003a) and the associated Final Environmental Impact Statement (USDAFS, 2003b) used the terms "old" and "late seral" interchangeably, in this document late seral is used in an attempt to avoid confusion between "old" and "old-growth." .

absence of fire; fuels, tree densities, late seral tree species and average stand ages have all increased while early seral tree species and large old trees have decreased due to competition.

A *fire regime condition class* (FRCC) assessment was conducted on this landscape, which is an assessment of the fire regimes, ecological departure from historical reference conditions and landscape pattern. The assessment indicated that the landscape qualifies as *condition class 2*, which means that: *vegetation composition, structure and fuels have moderate departure from the natural regime and predispose the system to risk of loss of key ecosystem components* (For more information on FRCC assessments visit https://landfire.gov/frcc/frcchome.php). The FRCC assessment indicates there is a need to manipulate stand structure, density, species composition, and fuels to improve the overall condition class, health, and resilience of the landscape.

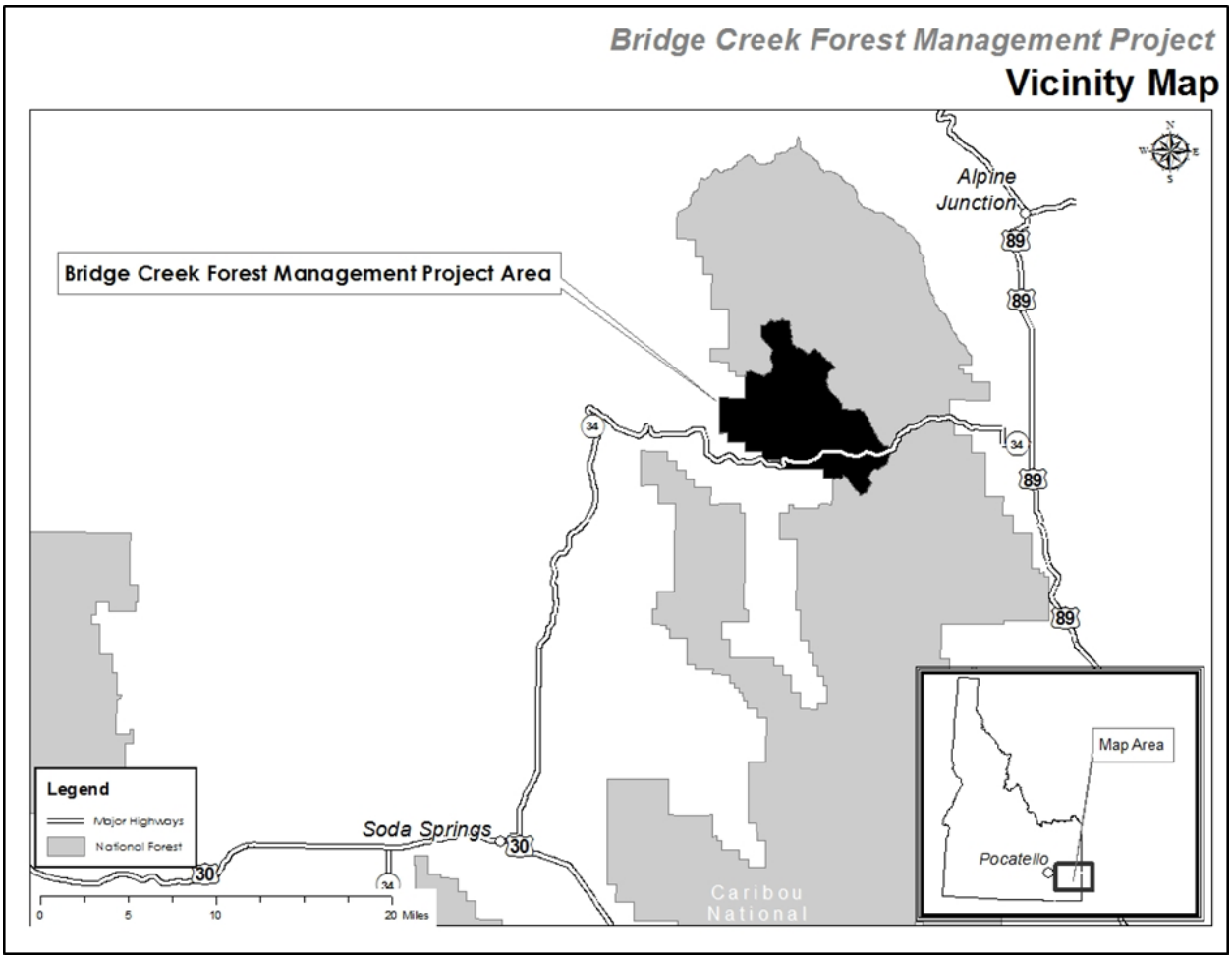

Figure 1 Bridge Creek Forest Management Project Area. The project area is north and east of Soda Springs Idaho in the Bridge Creek and Tin Cup drainages. Most of the project areas is north of highway 34.

The BCFMP project area and general location is shown in **Figure 1** (vicinity map). The project area covers numerous RFP prescription areas and two Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA). The prescription code, description, and acres are provided in **Table 1** and shown in **Figure 7** (see attachments). The IRA name, Idaho Roadless Rule management classification, and acres are provided in **Table 2** and shown in **Figure 8** (see attachments)

RFP prescriptions set the management theme or emphasis for an area. The vast majority of acres are within the Range Management prescription (6.2(b)). This prescription focuses on maintaining and restoring rangeland ecosystem processes and functions to achieve sustainable resource conditions. Management activities in this prescription area can include a full range of land resource treatments designed to achieve restoration goals, including harvest and prescribed fire. One of the goals for this prescription area is to make forage and other commodity products available for purchase, to the extent possible, to support the economy and achieve restoration objectives in an efficient and cost effective way. Some additional detail on management direction summarized from the RFP can be found in an attachment to this letter. For more detail on the RFP and prescription areas see: https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ctnf/landmanagement/planning.

Table 1: Bridge Creek Project Area RFP Prescription Areas

RFP RX	RFP RX Description	Acres
1.3(e)	Recommended Wilderness	206
2.1.2(b)	Visual Quality Maintenance	2,338
2.1.4(b)	Special Emphasis Area Caribou Mtn	2,102
2.7.2(d)	Elk and Deer Winter Range	183
3.2(b)	Semi-Primitive Motorized	3,154
6.2(b)	Range Management	21,105
8.1u	Concentrated Development Area - Utilities	134
Private	Private Inholding	867
	Total	**30,089**

The purpose and need for this project as well as the proposed action has been designed to follow RFP management direction and move the landscape toward DFC. It has also been designed to be compliant with management direction for Inventoried Roadless Areas and associate themes outline in the Idaho Roadless Rule.

Table 2 Bridge Creek Project Area RFP Inventories Roadless Area acres/

ROADLESS AREA NAME	MGMT CLASSIFICATION	Acres
Caribou City	Backcountry Restoration	15,961
	Forest Plan Special Area	2,986
	Wild Land Recreation	206
Caribou City Total		**19,152**
Stump Creek	Backcountry Restoration	3,050
	Forest Plan Special Area	835
Stump Creek Total		**3,885**
Total		**23,037**

Purpose and Need for Action:

The purpose of this forest management project will be to improve the overall health and resilience of forests in the landscape by reducing tree density and accumulated fuels, while shifting species composition and age-class structure toward desired conditions:

The project is needed because forest structure, density and composition has changed due to the lack of fire in the landscape over the last 120 years.

Currently, approximately 97% of the forested acres in the landscape are in the mature or late seral age-class, this is well outside of the desired condition outline in the Caribou National Forest Revised Forest Plan (RFP). Landscapes outside the historical range of conditions are less resilient to future disturbances. Which is why there is a need to manage forested stands within the landscape.

The current surplus of late seral classes and corresponding shortage of mid seral and seedling/sapling classes creates a need to increase age class (structural) diversity.

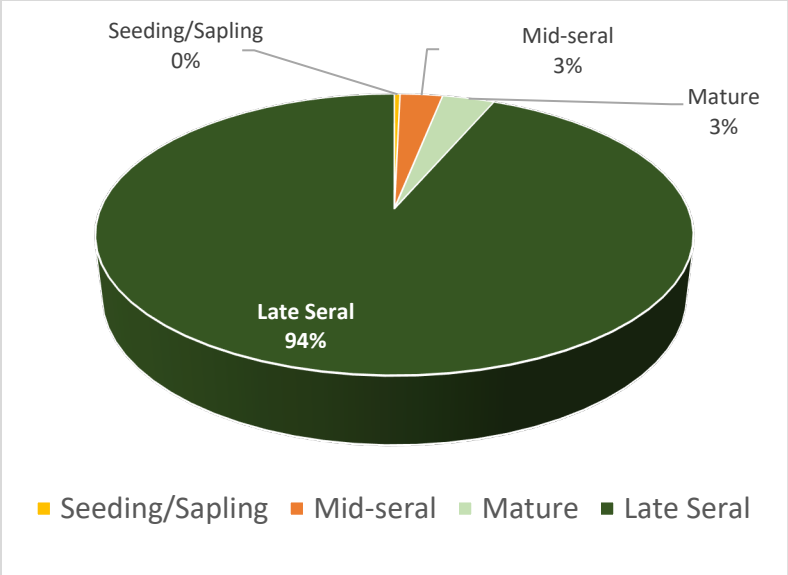

Figure 2 Forest Structural Stage. *This figure show that 94% of the acres in the analysis area have been classified as "late seral" an additional 3% as "mature" making a total of 97% mature/late seral. Landscapes with this lack of age-class diversity are not considered to be as resilient as those that have greater heterogeneity.*

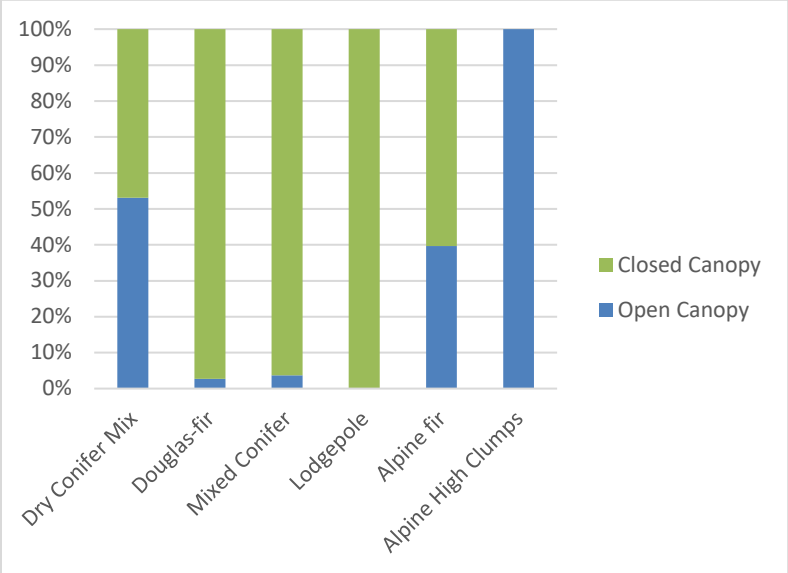

Figure 3 Canopy Cover in Conifer Cover Types. *This figure shows the canopy cover for late seral conifer types. The Dry Conifer Mix types should be mostly open, the other types should be a more even mix of open and closed canopy. The Alpine High clumps at the stand scale should be open and closed at the clump scale. So high elevation alpine fir is the only type that is close to historical condition.*

The disruption of the natural fire regime has led to the imbalance in landscape scale structure and an increase in conifer density, thus increasing biomass and ladder fuels. These changes result in stands that are less resilient to natural fire events, which creates a need to reduce density and/or rearrange biomass/fuels at the stand scale.

Aspen within the project area is declining in numbers and overall health. Under the natural disturbance regime, early seral species such as aspen would have been more plentiful. The RFP highlighted aspen as an early seral tree species that is declining as a result of succession in the absence of disturbance. It also explains aspens many important roles in the natural ecosystems. Aspen is often referred to as a keystone species because it is so important in ecosystems (Bartos, 2001).

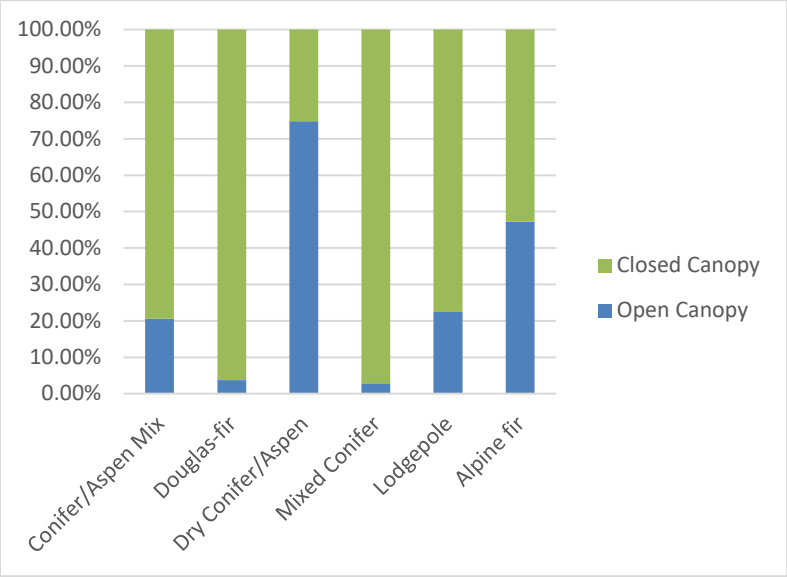

Figure 4 Canopy cover seral aspen types where conifer dominates. *This chart shows that in the 66% of seral aspen functional types where conifer dominates in all by the dry aspen conifer (DAC) type the canopy is closed which limits aspen regeneration.*

In the project, acres classified as seral aspen functional type (Rogers etal 2014) conifer dominated on 66% of the acres while aspen dominate on 34%. Regeneration of aspen is currently limited or absent in many stands in the project area, due to high conifer canopy cover. This situation is a threat to the health and resilience of aspen stands and the ecosystem as a whole, because when aspen decrease so do the species that rely on them. There is a need to emphasize aspen regeneration and reduce density in stands currently dominated by conifer.

The Proposed Action:

The proposed action described below was developed by an interdisciplinary teams (IDT). It was developed to address the purpose and need for the project and to comply with the Revised Forest Plan (RFP) and Inventoried Roadless management direction. The proposed action (see **Figure 5** & **Figure 6**) would:

- Treat 974 acres of mature timber with mechanical harvest of surplus merchantable timber followed by other stand tending activities such as thinning, piling, pile burning, jackpot burning and chopping.
    - Silviculture treatments would be designed to create primarily uneven-aged stand but a few would be designed as two-aged with reserves.
    - Approximately 98% of the acres would be harvested using tractor skidding. The remaining 2% would be logged with off-road jammer or similar machine to avoid tractor skidding on short slopes that exceed 40%.
- Treat 1,164 acres with various stand tending activities (thinning, piling, pile burning, jackpot burning and chopping).
    - These activities will vary from acre to acre and unit to unit based on the condition and need of the unit. Generally treatments would reduce density of conifer that are less than 8 inches and reduce and or rearrange the fuels that have accumulated in the absence of fire.
- Treat 8,000 to 9,000 acres with prescribed fire.
    - Units proposed for this treatment would be evaluated and individual burn blocks would be developed in a detailed burn. The target would be to reduce conifer density and initiate younger age-classes where aspen is a stand component.
    - Planned burn blocks and targets would be adjusted to account for any natural fire in the area. If a natural fire exceeds the late-seral reduction in one unit the adjacent unit target would be adjusted to compensate.
    - Some pre-slashing may be done to increase the burn window or to allow for burning when risk of escape is lower.
- To facilitate removal of the timber several types of road work are proposed. The road work proposed is to meet timber harvest transportation system needs. Approximate mileages and type of work included in the proposed activities are outlined below. Approximate locations by type of work are shown on **Figure 5** & **Figure 6**.
    - Approximately 4.6 miles of road would be reconstructed. Work would include some or all of the following: Improve drainage (shaping, dips, culverts, etc.), graveling, widening the surface, creating turnouts, brushing and clearing.
    - Approximately 3.9 miles of existing routes will be used without reconstruction. Some minor improvement or shaping would occur. These routes will be closed or returned to existing status (e.g. ATV trail) after use.
    - Approximately 7.2 miles of temporary road will be constructed. These routes would be closed and rehabilitated following project implementation.
- Attached design features (or similar) will also be a part of the proposed action.

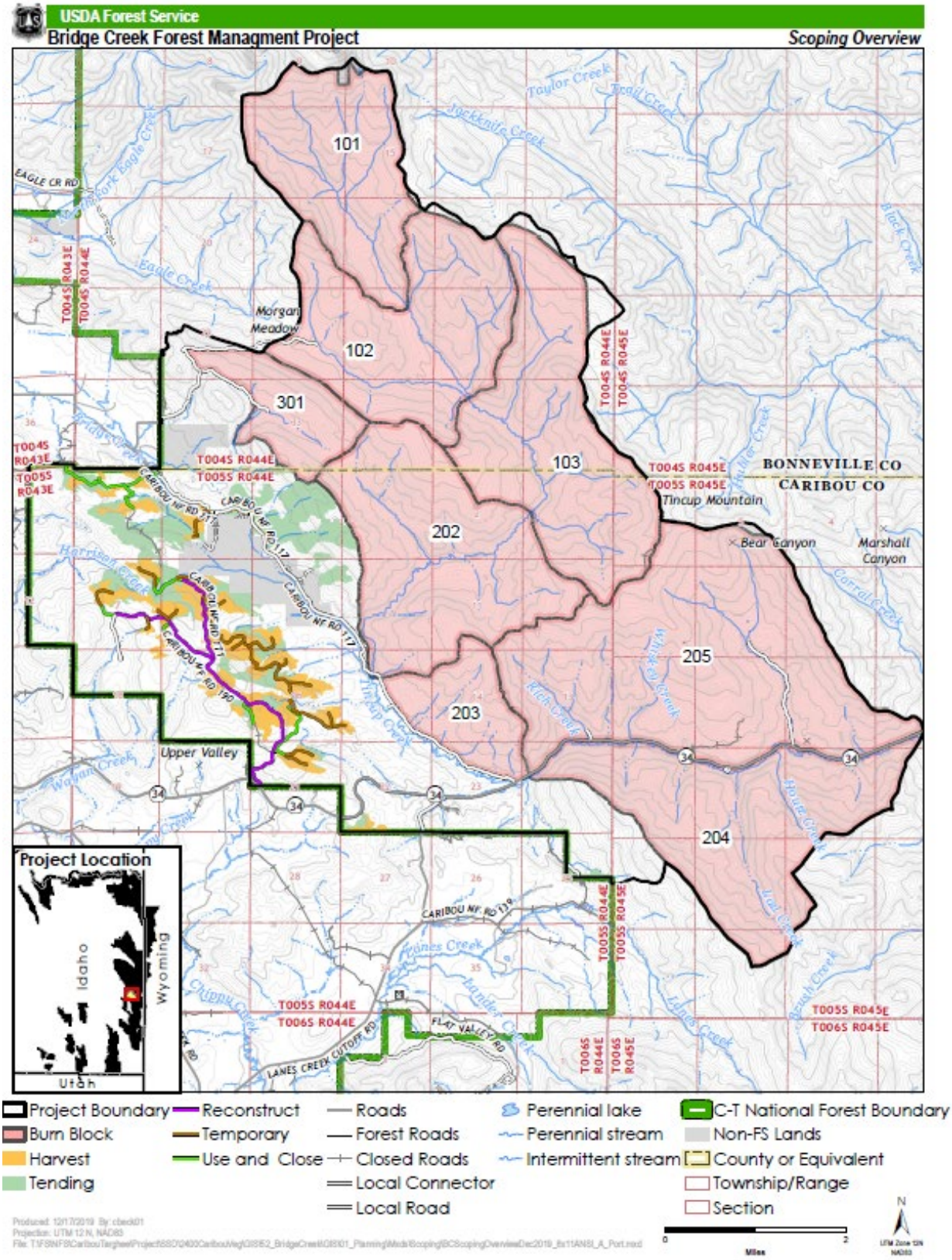

Figure 5 Proposed Action Overview. *This map shows the project area and proposed treatment units. For additional detail see also* ***Figure 6****.*

Administrative Review:

This project, which implements a land management plan, will be analyzed through an Environmental Assessment unless it is determined an Environmental Impact Statement is needed. The Soda Springs District Ranger will be the deciding officer on this project, and should the proposed action be approved, the District Ranger's decision will be documented in a Finding of No Significance and Decision Notice.

The proposed action is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and is subject to predecisional administrative review process (objection process) outlined in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. In order to be eligible to file an objection, timely specific written comments regarding the proposed action must be submitted during a designated opportunity for public comment. Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to establish individual eligibility to object to the project. Objections received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only. Names and addresses of those who comment and/or file objections will become part of the public record.

Opportunity to Comment:

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the Idaho State Journal, the newspaper of record. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to: Bryan Fuell, Soda Springs District Ranger, 410 E Hooper Ave Soda Springs, ID 83276, 208-547-2235, comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee-soda-springs@usda.gov. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 AM- 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee-soda-springs@usda.gov. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Sincerely,

James Dawson -for-

BRYAN K. FUELL
Soda Springs District Ranger

Attachments:

Attachments include:

Maps

Design Features

Short Summary of RFP Direction

Proposed Action Harvest Detail

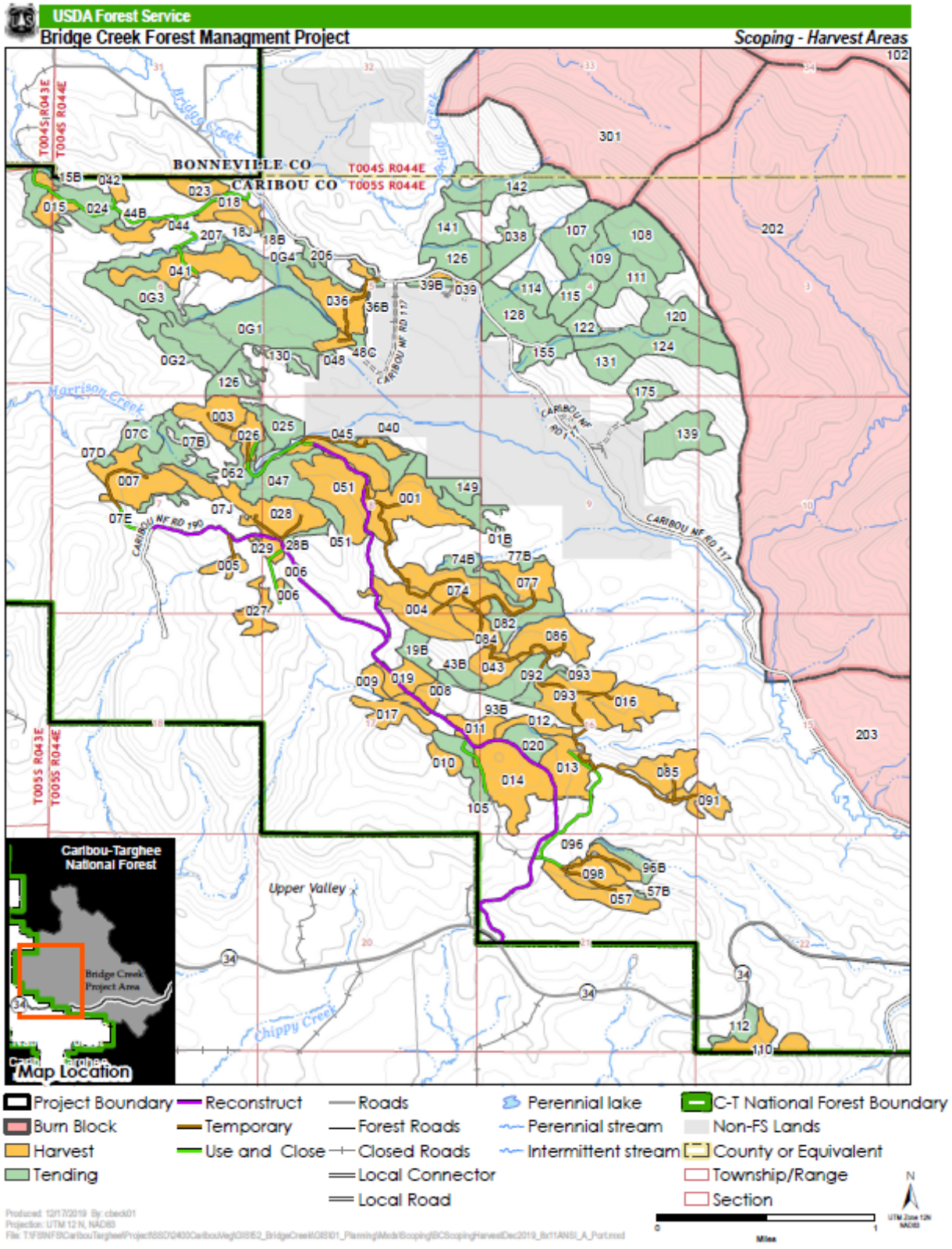

Figure 6 Proposed Action Harvest Detail. *This map shows the proposed harvest treatment units and associated road work with in more detail.*

Forest Plan Prescription Areas

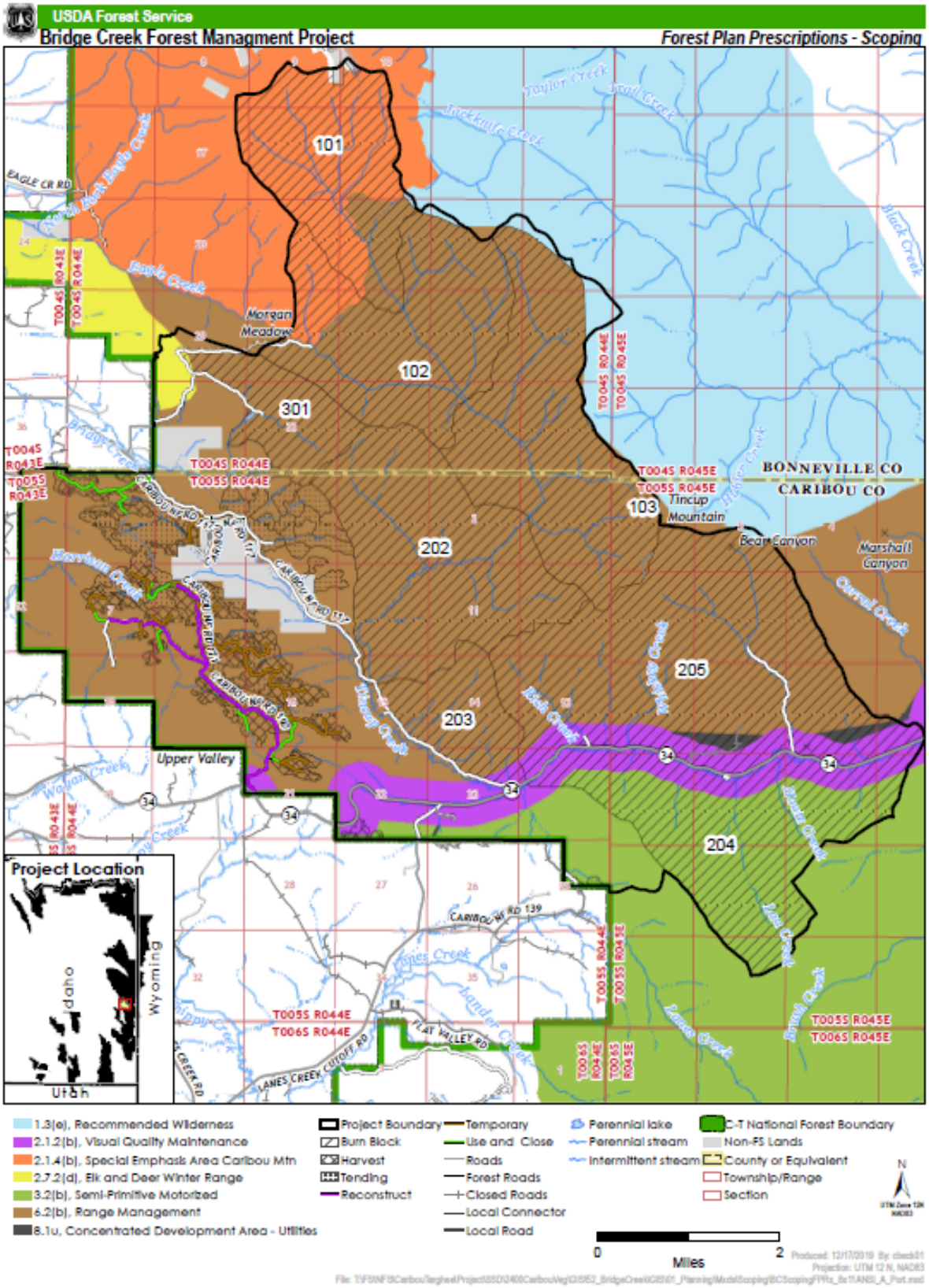

Figure 7 Revised Forest Plan Prescription Areas. *This map show the RFP prescription areas relative to proposed treatments.*

Roadless

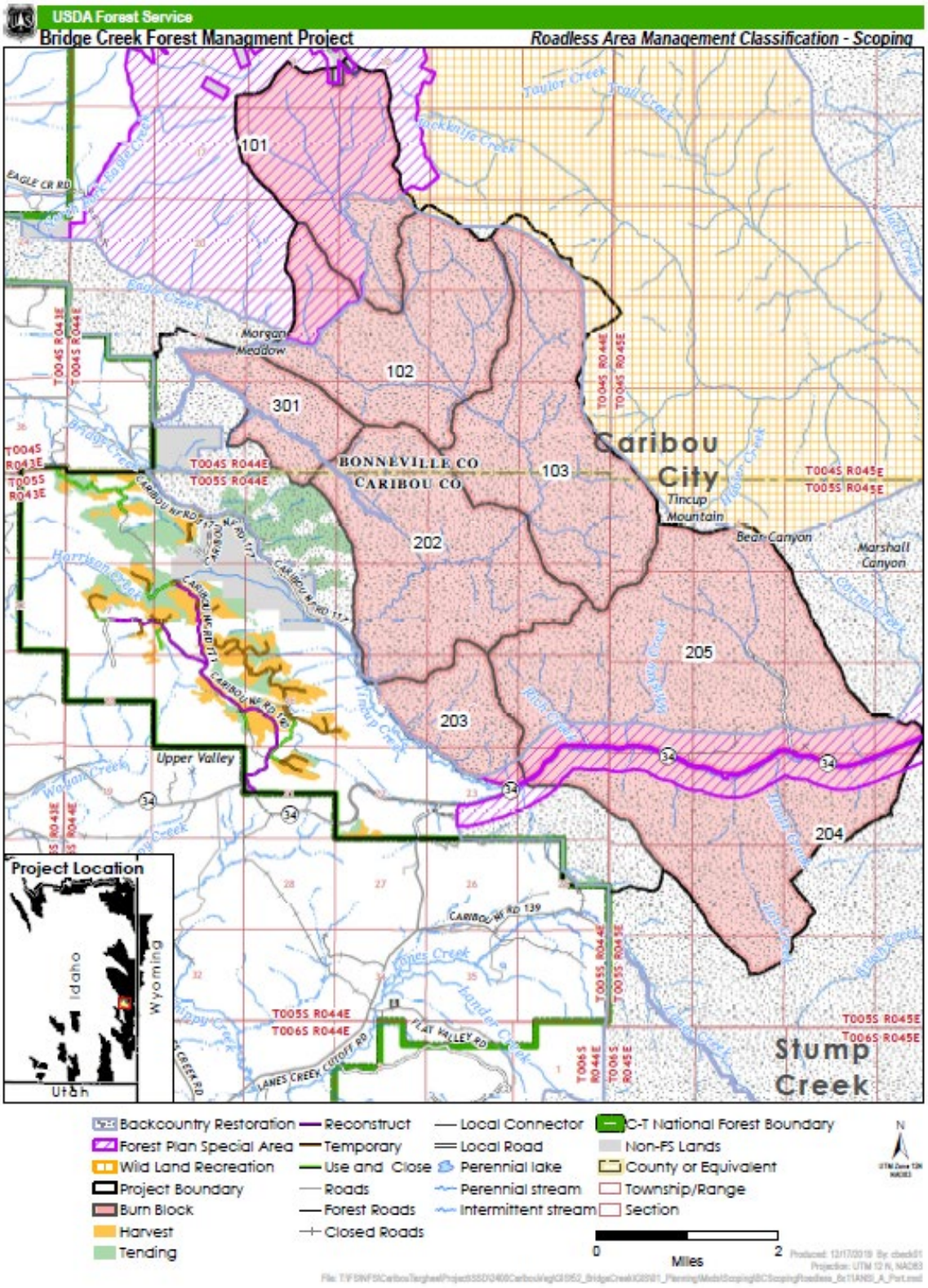

Figure 8 Roadless areas by theme. *This map shows Roadless areas clipped to the project area and symbolizes the Idaho Roadless Rule themes that guides management. Only tending and prescribed fire treatments are in Roadless. There is no harvest proposed in Roadless.*

Design Features

This section outlines the design features that the SSRD is planning to include in proposed action. Design features are actions or management direction to be implemented, that have been identified by the IDT, to be implemented with the action alternatives to avoid or minimize potential adverse effects, and or improve the project outcomes.

Timber Sale:

- A 2400-6T Timber Sale Contract (or equivalent) will be used to control timber sale harvest operations. This contract has standard contract provisions referred to as B provisions. The B5 section refers to transportation facilities. The B6 section refers to sale operations, and the B7 section refers to fire precaution and control. There are other sections of the B portion of the contract, but the ones listed above are the sections that relate to effects and the design of this project. Each section of the contract has numerous provisions. For example, under the operations section (BT6.0) there is a provision called BT6.422 titled "Skidding and Yarding" and one called BT 6.6 "Erosion Prevention and Control." The intent here is not to repeat all of the contract provisions but to inform the reader that a detailed contract will be used. Some of the design features listed below are addressed by the standard B provisions of a timber sale contract. The timber sale contract also has C provisions. These provisions provide more specific requirements and are tiered off the corresponding B provision. The C provisions that will be added to the timber sale contract are listed as design features.

Forested Vegetation

- A silvicultural prescription will be developed for each stand or treatment block that details the objectives of each stand and the treatments that will be used. The prescription may be refined and updated as needed.
- Stands planned for harvest treatments would be marked prior to sale. Stands would be marked in two ways. Some stands would have leave trees marked with orange paint and some would have cut trees marked with blue paint. Aspen will not be marked in either case and will not be included timber in the contract other than those that must be cut for skid trails and landings.
- The trees planned to be retained in stand after harvest will be considered leave trees. The leave trees will be arranged as individuals and/or groups of varying sizes and shapes irregularly arranged across the harvest units to provide protection and seed for natural regeneration. They would also function as green tree replacement snags, a reservoir for future large down woody material, vertical and visual diversity. The intent is to mimic the patch sizes and shapes that would be left unburned after a natural fire, for a given cover type and site.
- Natural regeneration will be the primary means for creating the new age-class. No planting is planned, but may be used if monitoring indicates a need.
    - In harvest units the logging operation should provide the necessary site preparation needed for regeneration while the reserve trees and the harvest unit edges would provide the seed sources for natural regeneration of conifers. Aspen regeneration would be from the existing root systems.
    - In burn units fire will provide the site preparation needed for regeneration, green unburned trees, root stock (aspen) and seed stored on site will provide for recovery.

    - Some portions of harvest stands may require jackpot burning to reduce fuels and expose enough soil to get regeneration, this will be determined after harvest.
    - If harvest and prescribed fire fail to produce adequate site preparation, scarification would be augmented by mechanical means (e.g. dozer with brush blade).
- All commercial logging units will be yarded with ground based equipment such as tractors or rubber tired skidders.
- Firewood, posts, and poles will be made available from the residue created by treatment activities. These will be made available only where practical, and to those with valid permits.
- Monitoring for tree regeneration, species composition, and population numbers will be conducted with stand exams at a minimum of the third, and fifth years following treatment.
- Fencing would be an acceptable means to protect seedlings from herbivory if monitoring shows a need.
- Harvest treatment units will be monitored for a minimum of five years following implementation. This monitoring would include, but is not limited to: tree regeneration surveys, tree condition, herbivory by ungulates, firewood/post/pole gathering, motorized violations, noxious weeds, livestock utilization and natural events such as insect outbreaks.
- Burn treatment units will be monitored at a minimum the first, third and fifth years following treatment. This monitoring will include: tree regeneration surveys, tree condition survival/mortality, herbivory by ungulates, motorized violations, noxious weeds, livestock utilization and natural events such as insect outbreaks.

Air Quality:

- To meet air quality standards, burn plan(s) will be developed to comply with air quality regulations, and each firing operation will be approved by the Montana/Idaho Airshed Management System.

Noxious Weeds

- To minimize the spread of noxious weeds, the purchaser would be required under standard contract provision, BT 6.35 Equipment Cleaning, to clean all logging and construction equipment that operates off-road prior to entry on the sale area.
- Weed-free straw or mulch will be required, if needed.
- All seed used shall be certified free of noxious weed seeds from weeds listed on the current *All states Noxious Weeds List*.
- Gravel/borrow material sources shall be monitored for noxious weeds and other invasive species, off forest sources shall be certified as noxious weed free.
- Monitoring and treating noxious weed populations will be given a high priority when developing KV plans.
- Forest best management practices and standard operating procedures will be used to treat weeds in the area as funds are available.
- Known populations of noxious weeds will be reviewed, and where present within reasonable proximity to treatment, will be treated aggressively.

Soil and Water

The following BMPs/design features follow guidance from the Idaho Forestry BMP Field Guide (2015), Caribou RFP (2003), FSH 2509.22 (1988), and National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands Volume 1: National Core BMP Technical Guide (2012).

- Leave coarse woody debris (CWD) (pieces of wood larger than 3" diameter) at 10-20 tons/acre in the timber harvest units. The minimum CWD for the forested habitat types present in the area is 10 tons/acre.

- Limit tractor skidding to slopes less than 40 percent (Guideline) (RFP 3-45). Also addressed in Idaho Forestry BMP Field Guide p. 101, and FSH2509.22 Practice 13.02 and 14.07.

- Yarding operations should not take place when ground conditions are wet enough that there is a risk of rutting and compaction as determined by the sale administrator (Guideline) (RFP 3-45). Also, detrimental soil disturbances such as compaction and puddling should be limited or mitigated to meet long-term soil productivity goals (Guideline) (RFP 3-6). Also supported by FSH 2509.22 Practice 13.06, and 14.12. Apply recommended voluntary Idaho Forestry Best Management Practices by harvest unit based on soil texture (Idaho Forestry Best Management Practices Field Guide p. 40, 2015). *Units 008, 009, 019, and 028 are coarse-textured soils; units 007, 011, and 023 are loamy textured soils (Even mix of coarse and fine particles); the rest of the units (about 40 units) have a high load-bearing capacity when dry but are more susceptible to compaction when moist/wet.*

- Minimize skid trails and temporary roads during logging operations. Identify skid trails and temporary roads requiring construction in the sale planning process and assure appropriate rehabilitation of these trails by the purchaser or in post-sale activities (Guideline) (RFP 3-46). Identify log landing locations and USFS and purchaser agree prior to construction (FSH 2509.22 Practice 14.10). Also, "detrimental soil disturbances such as compaction, puddling, displacement…should be limited or mitigated to meet long-term soil productivity goals" (Guideline) (RFP 3-6). Skid trails and temp roads will be designed to avoid concentrating water.

- Appropriate drainage features should be installed prior to the end of the season on temporary roads needed for more than one operating year. As the temporary roads are no longer needed, reclaim the disturbance by reducing compaction, pulling back any displaced material to approximate original contour and placing slash materials over bare soil (about 60% cover of logging slash). Reclaim landings and pile burn scars larger than 16' diameter using similar techniques. Seed as recommended by the Forest Botanist.

- As practical, aim to keep the forest floor intact and minimize displacement of topsoil. This will help meet soil guidelines on pages RFP 3-6 through 3-7, and Idaho Forestry Best Management Practices Field Guide recommendations p.40-41.

- Keep tractors out of wetlands and wet meadows (FSH 2509.22 Practice 13.03).

- Road re-alignment design, construction and maintenance will follow applicable FSH 2509.22 practices, Idaho Forestry Best Management Practices Field Guide, USDA FS National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands Volume 1, and Caribou Revised Forest Plan standards and guidelines.
- Acquire required Clean Water Act and Idaho state permits if needed.
- Consider the ecological state of the existing vegetation as it relates to resiliency of native plant communities and adjust size, intensity and timing of treatment(s) accordingly.
- Plan prescribed fires for mostly low and moderate soil burn severity, as described in Parsons et al, 2010.
- On the potentially unstable landforms present throughout the prescribed burning units, consider proximity to infrastructure or other resources and adjust size, intensity, and timing of treatment(s) accordingly using what has been observed and learned about post-fire landform response to wildfire in the vicinity of the analysis area (Tincup Fire 2016, Tincup Fire 2019).
- Consider soil moisture, along with fuel moisture, before ignition.
- "Livestock grazing shall be restricted following prescribed or natural fire…before seed set of the second growing season, or until objectives of the treatment are achieved" (RFP 3-42).
- Piling and burning slash in Aquatic Influence Zones (AIZs) will be avoided to the extent practical.
- Piling and scattering of slash in otherwise undisturbed draws, ephemeral and intermittent drainages will be avoided to the extent practical.
- Prescribed fire will be ignited to minimize the severity of fire in AIZs, draws, ephemeral and intermittent drainages with a targeted burn of 50% or less of these areas.
- Fire lines (if necessary) will be built with rolling grades and appropriate waterbars will be constructed.
- If fire lines are constructed they will be rehabilitated. Organic debris will be used to facilitate recovery of fire lines.
- Water pumps and other such equipment will be drained and washed prior to and after use. Intake hoses drawing from fish bearing streams will have a screen size no larger than 3/32 inches.

Heritage Resources

- Known historic (National Register of Historic Places (HRHP) Eligible/historically significant) properties or sites will be avoided or protected during project implementation.
- Ground-disturbing activities will be halted if cultural resources are discovered until an Archaeologist can properly evaluate the resources in compliance with 36 CFR 800.

Recreation Resources

- Trails Marked as open on the Forest Service travel map used as temp roads will be returned to the 50 inch standard upon completion of project.
- Trail Closures will be done by Rocks, Kelly Hump, Metal Gate or panel, and monitored for effectiveness

Operating Season

- Logging operations will occur when the soils are frozen or there is sufficient snow cover, or during the dry season when soils are not saturated to avoid adverse soil compaction (RFP 3-45).
- Felling and skidding operation will not begin before July 5 unless otherwise agreed to in writing.
- Operations will be restricted in stands within active goshawk nesting and post-fledging areas as outlined in the RFP. Operations would be restricted until after September 1, if the site is occupied. Contract provisions CT6.411# and CT6.42# or similar will be used.
- Hauling on weekends will be discouraged to reduce conflicts with other Forest users.
- Hauling on holidays and opening day of general deer and elk season will be prohibited unless otherwise agreed in writing. CT6.312#

Wildlife

- Prior to project implementation surveys will be conducted for sensitive species, including, northern goshawk, three-toed woodpecker, boreal owl, great gray owl and flammulated owl in suitable habitat, as per forest plan direction (RFP 3-25). If active territories or nests are located, forest plan direction will be followed as well as current policy for vegetation management and appropriate protection area as outlined in the forest plan (RFP-27 through RFP 3-33).
- During project implementation, project personnel will report any nest found that may be active to the district wildlife biologist who would then review the status of the nest and, in coordination with the project leader, determine the most appropriate course of action to protect the nest (expected to consist of delayed project implementation).
- Snags within the units will be retained to the extent safety and feasibility will permit. If extensive mortality occurs in the future dead trees will only be cut if RFP snag requirements are being met within the unit. Hard snag densities will be left based on forest type and woodpecker biological potential as per forest plan direction (RFP 3-27).
- An average of 11 logs per acre in decomposition classes 1, 2 and 3 will be left on the ground as per forest plan direction (RFP 3-26).

Fuels/Prescribed Fire (Prescribed Burning)

- Prior to burning activities, a burn plan would be prepared and authorized by the District Ranger. This plan discusses lighting and holding strategies, contingency plans, equipment needs, personnel requirements, fire behavior predictions, a smoke prediction model, wild land fuel loads and models, and a range of weather conditions that guide the timing of the prescribed burn. Although the District Ranger has final approval authority for the burn plan, the Prescribed Fire Burn Boss has the responsibility to make the on-site, tactical, and the "go, no-go" decision. The Burn Boss ensures that all prescription, staffing, equipment, and other plan specifications are met before, during, and after the burn. Prescribed fire plans cannot be implemented when prescriptive elements have been exceeded.
- In order to meet air quality standards, the burn plan would be developed to comply with air quality regulations, and each firing operation must be approved by the Montana/Idaho Smoke Monitoring Unit to insure compliance and mitigate cumulative effects.
- Existing roads, trails and natural fuel breaks would be used as control lines where possible. Constructed firelines, if needed, would have erosion control structures (waterbars), constructed as needed. Firelines that could create motorized access would either be obliterated or made impassable after burning is completed.
- Fireline construction if needed would be accomplished with the smallest feasible equipment. Very little line construction is expected.
- Design prescribed fires to prevent excessive temperatures and loss of nutrients from volatilization (Region 1/Region 4 Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook, FSH 2509.22, 5/88, Practice 18.03).

Roads

- Roads will be designed and constructed to Forest Service standards for the road type.
- The sale administrator or engineer will oversee all purchaser road work.
- Signs will be posted to warn public of construction work in the area.
- Signs will be posted to warn public logging traffic is using roads in the area.

Livestock Grazing

- Livestock grazing will be restricted in treatment units until silvicultural objectives have been met. This will be accomplished by a combination of rest/rotation and AOI (annual operating instruction) modifications. Site specific monitoring will be conducted to assure silvicultural objectives are met and to determine if any adaptive management strategies are required. (RFP 3-42).

Management Direction Relative to the Analysis Area

This project will tier to the RFP for the Caribou National Forest Final Environmental Impact Statement, Appendices and Amendments. The Caribou National Forest (RFP) provides guidance and direction for forest management decisions and allocates uses across forest landscapes. The RFP was derived from an interdisciplinary process with public and community involvement. The RFP uses prescription areas to allocate uses and emphasize resource priorities. Specific Forest-wide plan direction for resources and uses and management prescription area direction relative to this project area and Proposed Action are listed below. This is not a complete list for more information refer to the RFP and associated documents.

Forest-Wide Guidance

Ecological Processes and Patterns (RFP 3-3 to 3-4)

- Ecological systems and their components are maintained to be dynamic and resilient to disturbances. Vegetation structure, compositions, and densities are appropriate for maintaining physical and biological processes at any temporal or spatial scale. Ecosystems are not at risk of disturbance beyond the point of resiliency and sustainability. (DFC)

Vegetation (RFP 3-17 to 3-20)

- Forest habitats display a diversity of structure and composition. Productive and diverse population of plants are maintained or restored. (DFC)
- In conifers, a range of structural stages exists where 30 to 40% of the acres are in mature and late seral (old) age classes. Early successional stages are maintained through endemic insect and disease disturbance, vegetation management and fire. Patterns are with historical ranges of variability with functional corridors present. (DFC)
- Conifer types are maintained and disturbance processes are restored through vegetation management, endemic insect and disease disturbances, and fire. (DFC)
- Quaking aspen communities are moving towards historical ranges with fire and other practices influencing structural class distribution and patterns across the landscape. Aspen forests are managed to achieve desired vegetative conditions with 20 to 30% in mature and late seral (old) classes, and to reduce the decline of aspen acres due to succession of aspen to conifer. (DFC)
- In each 5th code HUC which has the ecological capability to produce forested vegetation, the combination of mature and late seral (old) age classes (including old growth) shall be at least 20% of the forested acres. At least 15% of all the forested acres in the HUC are to meet or be actively managed to attain old growth characteristics. (Standard)
- The definition of old-growth characteristics by forest type found in "Characteristics of Old-growth Forests in the Intermountain Region" (USDA Forest Service 1993) shall be used unless more current direction is developed. (Standard)
- Silvicultural prescriptions shall be completed for all forested vegetation treatments. (Standard)
- Manage to reduce the decline of aspen and promote aspen regeneration and establishment. Provide protection from grazing where needed and consistent with management objectives. (Guideline)
- Focus treatments on aspen clones, which are at the greatest risk of conversion to conifer. (Guideline)
- For aspen and conifer types, acres classified as mature and late seral (old) should be in

blocks over 200 acres in size unless the natural patch size is smaller. (A block can consist of a combination of mature, late seral and old-growth forest types). Within these blocks: (Guideline)
    - Maintain the dead and down woody material Guidelines for wildlife.
    - Silvicultural techniques may be used to maintain or improve old growth and mature forest characteristics.
    - If a catastrophic event (such as fire) reduces the acres of old-growth, late seral, and mature forest below 20% of the forested acres in a principal watershed, identify replacement forested acres. When necessary, use silvicultural techniques to promote desired characteristics in the replacement acres.
- When delineating late seral (old) forests, use the definitions of late seral stages by forest type as shown in RFP table 3.2. These are Guidelines and site-specific stand structure should determine delineation of late seral stands. (Guideline)
- Use methods of vegetation treatment that emulate natural disturbance and successional processes. (Guideline)
- Forest vegetation manipulation is allowed on unsuitable timberlands to accomplish individual management prescriptions, other than resource benefits or for reduction of hazardous fuels in urban interface zones. Production of wood products should not be the primary consideration. (Guideline)
- Vegetation manipulation may include mechanical treatments, chemical treatments, commercial or non-commercial timber harvest of wood products, prescribed fire, wildfire for resource benefit, or other appropriate methods. Manipulations should emphasize ecological and multiple-use outcomes over being "above cost". (Guideline)
- Wood fiber should be utilized consistent with ecosystem management and multiple use goals. (Guideline)
- Give priority to vegetation treatments in private land interface zones or those vegetation types identified as having a high degree of departure from HRV. (Guideline)

Plant Species Diversity (RFP 3-21 & 22)

- Forest-wide vegetation communities have the necessary structure and composition, ecological processes and function to maintain native plant species. (DFC)

Wildlife Resources (RFP 3-24 to 3-33)

- The Forest provides habitat that contributes to state wildlife management plans. (DFC)
- Following forested vegetation treatments, an average of 11 logs per acre should be left consisting of logs in decomposition classes 1, 2 and/or 3 (where they exist). (Guideline)
    - In specific areas where fuel loading and fire hazard are a concern (i.e. urban areas), the number of logs per acre can be reduced to meet acceptable fuel loading standards.
    - This guideline does not apply within 300 feet of an open designated route.
    - These requirements can be achieved, in part with the down woody debris requirements for soils; they are interrelated and are not cumulative.
    - Logs do not need to be evenly distributed over the forested acres. Some acres may have no logs, while others may have many more than 11 logs per acre. The Guideline is to have an average of 11 logs per acre on at least 60 percent of the forested acres of each analysis area.
- Snags with existing cavities or nests shall be the priority for retention. (Standard)

- Snag height shall be 15 feet or greater for all forest types. (Standard)
- Snags ≥ 12 inches diameter breast height (DBH) or the largest diameter for the stand should be retained in clusters, where possible. (Guideline)
- Hard-snag densities for various biological potentials (see Table 3.3 in RFP) should be maintained. The analysis area for calculating biological potential for woodpeckers should usually be the specific management prescription area polygon. Smaller analysis areas can be used when identified for site-specific projects. (Guideline)
- Retain live trees for future snag recruitment following Guidelines for various biological potentials. (Table 3.4 of the RFP)
- If existing snag levels are below the biological potential for woodpeckers that is identified for a prescription area, no dead standing trees should be harvested. Snag creation should only occur if specified as mitigation in a project level analysis. (Guideline)
- Strive not to disturb or destroy existing nests, whether active or inactive. (Guideline)
- The management standards and Guidelines in Table 3.5 in the RFP apply to all forest types within active and historic goshawk nesting territories. (Standard and Guideline)
- Do not allow timber harvest activities within a 30-acre area around all known flammulated owl nest sites. (Guideline)
- Within a 3,600-acre area around all known boreal owl nest sites, maintain over 40% of the forested acres in mature and late seral (old) age classes. (Guideline)
- Within a 1,600-acre area around all known great gray owl nest sites, maintain over 40% of the forested acres in mature and late seral (old) age classes. (Guideline)
- Provide for vegetation buffers of at least one sight distance around big game concentration/use areas such as wallows and mineral licks. Sight distance is the distance at which 90% of a deer or elk is hidden from an observer. (Guideline)
- Provide for security or travel corridors near created openings. (Guideline)

Heritage Resources and Tribal Treaty Rights (RFP 3-41)

- Historic and archaeological resources are properly managed to provide for preservation of these non-renewable resource for current and future generations. Significant sites are inventoried, protected, and, if warranted, nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors to the Forest find opportunities to learn about and enjoy their cultural heritage (DFC).
- Cultural resource inventories shall be conducted in consultation with the Idaho State Historical Preservation Office, local Native American Tribes, and interested individuals or organizations likely to have knowledge or interest in the historic properties in the area. (Standard)

Grazing Management (RFP 3-42 to 3-43)

- Livestock grazing shall be restricted following prescribed or natural fire and/or rangeland planting or seeding before seed set of the second growing season, or until the objectives of the treatment are achieved. (Standard)

Timber Management (RFP 3-44 to 3-46)

- Provide wood fiber while maintaining a healthy and sustainable forest (DFC).
- Management prescriptions preserve and enhance the diversity of plant and animal communities over time, including endemic and desirable naturalized plants an animal species (DFC).

- All commercial sales, including sawtimber, convertible products, select material, and commercial firewood, shall be advertised and sold on a bid basis, unless demand can be met and "sale on demand" sales can be justified. (Standard)
- The maximum size of limit for forested vegetation openings created in one harvest operation by an even-aged silvicultural system shall normally be 40 acres. Openings may exceed 40 acres in aspen and lodgepole types contingent on Regional Forester approval, or as a result of natural catastrophic conditions such as fire, insect and disease, or windstorm. (Standard)
- A harvested area of commercial forestland shall not be considered a created opening for silvicultural purposes when stocking surveys indicate the minimum stocking is achieved and average tree height equals or exceeds seven feet. When other resource management considerations prevail, a created opening shall no longer be considered an opening when the vegetation meets a particular management objective stated in the applicable management prescription. (Standard)
- Suitability shall be verified at the site-specific level. (Standard)
- Design timber management projects to simulate natural patch sizes and shapes, connectivity, species composition, and age-class diversity in accordance with silvicultural prescriptions. (Guideline)
- The silvicultural system used on managed timberlands should allow for control of pests, animal damage, including livestock, and vegetation competition to promote regeneration and tree growth at optimum levels. (Guideline)
- When feasible and appropriate, use prescribed burning to dispose of slash to reduce fire hazard and to promote seedbeds for natural regeneration. (Guideline)
- A full complement of harvest systems and techniques may be used across the Forest unless specifically prohibited or limited by individual prescription direction. (Guideline)
- Minimum stocking levels for regeneration treatments by vegetation type are: 170 trees/acre for lodgepole, 140 trees/acre for Doulas-fir, 200 trees/acre for mixed conifer and 5,000 trees/acre for aspen stands on at least 70% of the stand (unless specified differently in the site specific prescription). (Guideline)
- Limit tractor skidding to slopes less than 40% and generally prohibit logging on slopes over 60%. (Guideline)
- Yarding operations should not take place when ground conditions are wet enough that there is a risk of rutting and compaction as determined by the sale administrator. (Guideline)
- Minimize skid trails and temporary roads during logging operations. Identify skid trails and temporary roads requiring construction in the sale planning process, and assure appropriate rehabilitation of these trails by the purchaser or in post-sale activities. (Guideline)
- Commercial sales of forest products should be offered in a variety of sale-size packages to meet the needs of small and large operations. (Guideline)