

# Precious Lands Wildlife Area Draft Management Plan Executive Summary

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) has developed this management plan for the 15,325 acre Precious Lands Wildlife Management Area located in northern Wallowa County, Oregon and southern Asotin County, Washington (Figure 1 and Figure 2). This plan outlines the NPT's strategy for mitigating wildlife habitat losses incurred from installation of the four lower Snake River dams. The project was developed under the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-501), with funding from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA).

The purpose of this plan is to permanently mitigate and protect wildlife and wildlife habitat to address a portion of the mitigation goal identified in the Northwest Power Planning Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program (2000).

### **1.1 Project History**

In 1995, the NPT submitted the "Northeast Oregon Wildlife Project" (#96-80) to BPA for potential funding under the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program. The project was subjected to a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review (BPA and NPT 1996), which resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact (BPA 1996). Following the NEPA review, the proposal was funded and a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between NPT and BPA was signed in September 1996. The resultant contract (96 BI 97175) called for the purchase of approximately 16,500 acres of wildlife habitat using funding provided by BPA. The habitat units (HUs) protected under this contract will be credited to BPA for habitat permanently dedicated to wildlife and wildlife mitigation.

### **1.2 Current Land Ownership Patterns**

The Precious Lands Wildlife Area is bordered by private land in the north, east and west, and by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in the south (Figure 3). Both the Cottonwood and Joseph Planning Units are adjacent to or include additional Bureau of Land Management (BLM) inholdings. In the north and west, the Joseph Unit borders BLM property for 7.25 miles. The Cottonwood Planning Unit shares 2.5 miles of exterior boundary with the BLM. In addition, the Joseph Planning Unit largely surrounds 760 acres (in three tracts) of Oregon Division of State Lands property. Private land completely surrounds the Buford Planning Unit. There are no private in-holdings within the Precious Lands Wildlife Management Area.

## **2.0 AREA DESCRIPTION**

### **2.1 Climate**

Climate in this area is largely a function of the topography and elevational gradient of the major river canyons in the region. Elevations on Precious Lands range from a low of 1,540 feet along Joseph Creek in Township 6N, Range 46E, Section 19 to a high of 4,600 feet in the upper reaches of Tamarack Creek in Township 5N, Range 45E, Section 13. Lower elevation sites experience very mild winter temperatures of 20-40<sup>0</sup> F but hot daily maximum temperatures averaging 89<sup>0</sup> F in July and August.

Figure 1. Vicinity Map of the Precious Lands Project

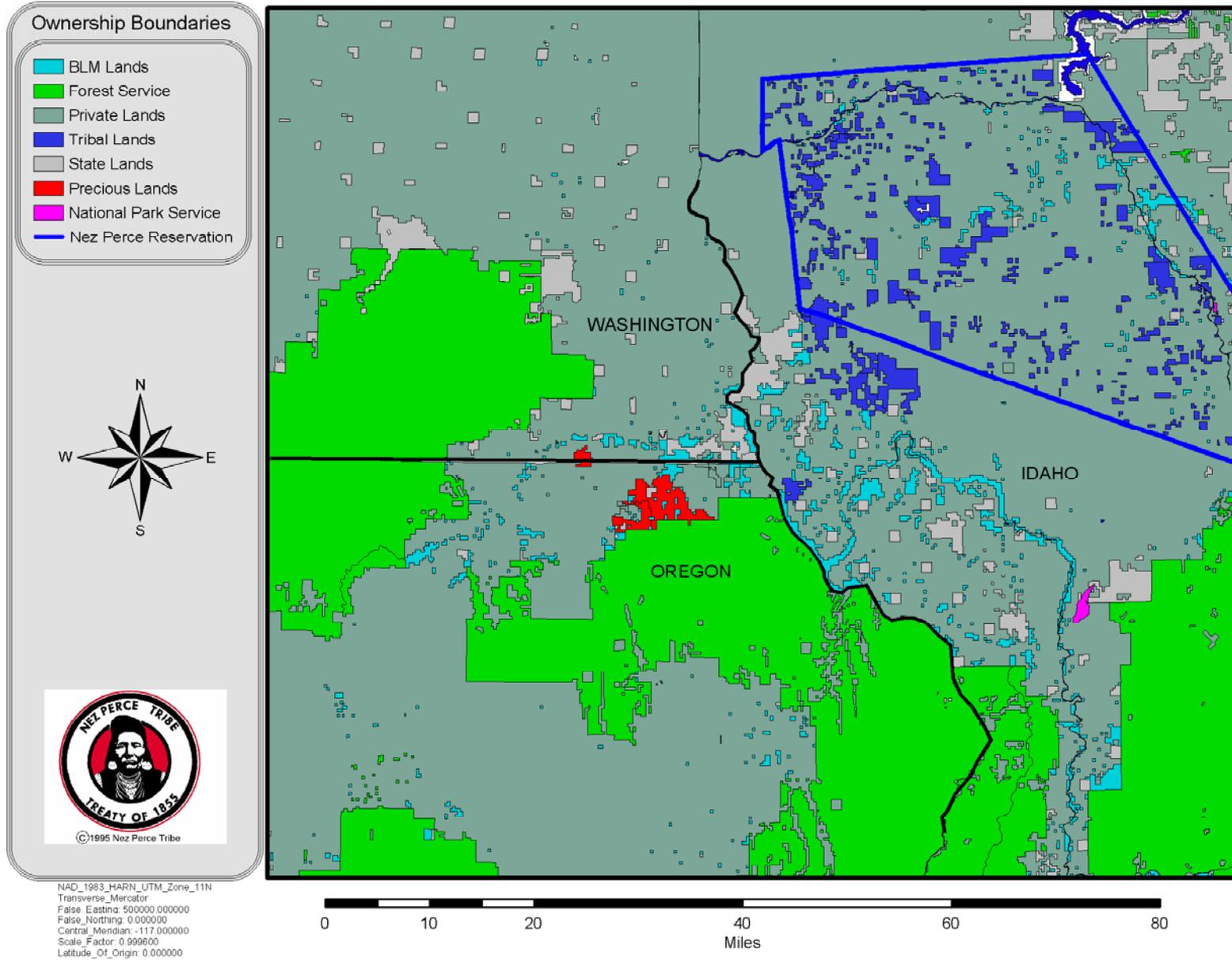
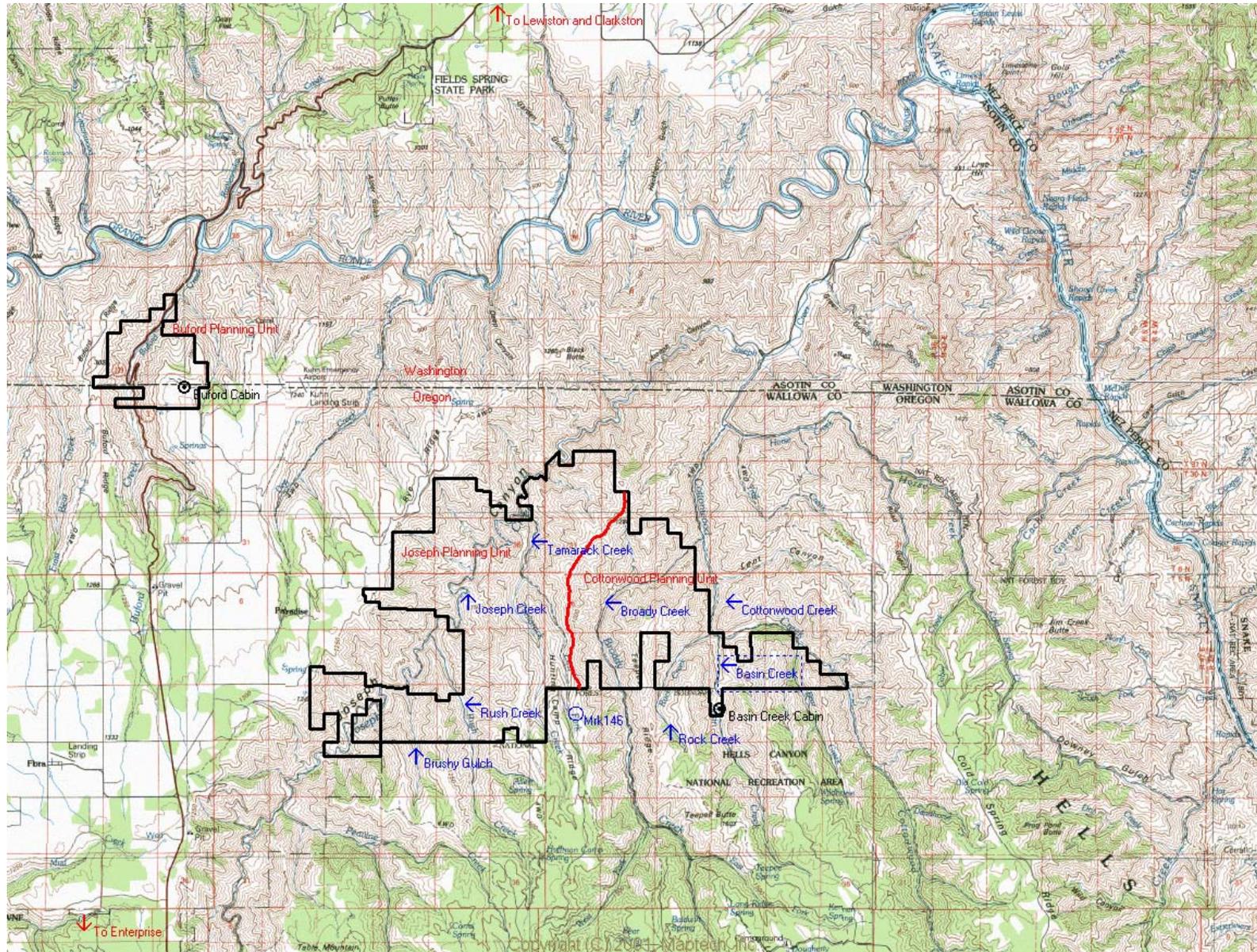
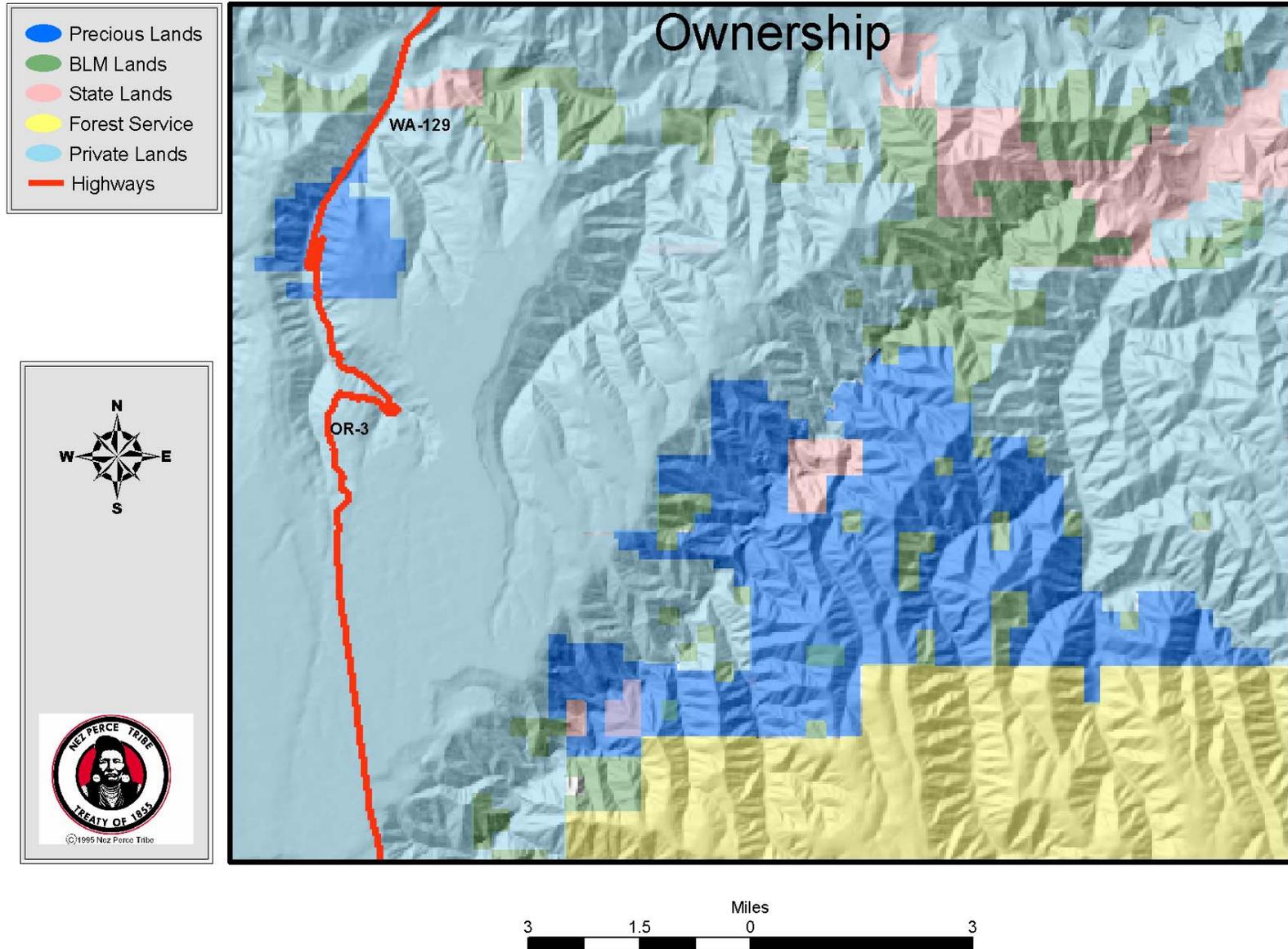


Figure 2. Planning Unit Boundaries



**Figure 3. Land Ownership Map of the Precious Lands Area**



Annual precipitation is relatively low and ranges from 12-17” at lower elevations. Most of this moisture comes in the form of rain during September through June (USDA 1999).

Higher elevation sites experience lower winter temperatures and higher snowfall, but have more moderate summer temperatures. Annual precipitation is 19.4 inches with 32.4 inches coming as snow. The entire area usually experiences a 90-day drought period during the summer months, which is typical of a xeric climate.

## **2.2 Vegetation**

Climate, topography and elevation all significantly influence the type and extent of plant communities throughout the area. North aspects are dominated by mixed conifer stands, shrub fields and, in previously burned areas, open woodlands containing tall shrubs with limited conifer regeneration. Occasionally, an Idaho fescue, prairie junegrass community can be found on north aspects not currently dominated by trees or shrubs. South and west aspects are clearly dominated by bunchgrass communities, which is largely a function of moisture availability. Easterly aspects support all vegetation types found within the area. At higher elevations, east aspects tend to support more trees than at lower elevations where grasses predominate. Streamside vegetation consists primarily of black cottonwood or white alder with diverse understory shrubs and the occasional Douglas fir, larch or ponderosa pine. In a few sites, quaking aspen is a significant component of the riparian overstory. Moist draws, springs, and intermittent streams typically support dense thickets of black hawthorn.

Precious Lands is overwhelmingly dominated by canyon grassland communities. A full 74% (11,318 acres) of the total area is classified as some type of grass community, which is typical of the canyon areas of the Snake and Grande Ronde Rivers. Other cover types include mixed conifer forest 14% (2,131 acres), riparian areas 4% (609 acres), tall shrub 4% (598 acres), short shrub 3.5% (545 acres), and 124 acres of agricultural fields.

During the late 1980’s several large fires impacted forested stands within the wildlife management area. Most notably, the Teepee Butte and Joseph Creek Fires burned several hundred acres of conifer forest and returned them to early seral shrub stands. Parts of Bear Creek, Brushy Gulch, and Rush Creek all experience stand-replacing fires. The Teepee Butte fire also destroyed the riparian vegetation within the Bear Creek drainage. Severe flooding in 1996-7 also significantly impacted the overstory vegetation along Buford, Cottonwood and Joseph Creeks. Some of these areas may require active management to help restore them to a mature stand condition.

### **2.2.1 Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Plants**

The Precious Lands Area contains habitat for several special status plant species. Specifically, the area may provide habitat for the federally Threatened Macfarlane’s four-o’clock which is known to occur in Wallowa County in the Hell’s Canyon National Recreation Area. To date, however, no populations of this plant have been documented for the Grande Ronde River drainage where Precious Lands occurs. The area also contains habitat for the Threatened Spalding’s catchfly, which occurs on north-facing grasslands containing Idaho fescue and prairie junegrass. There are currently seven

known populations of this plant in Wallowa County (US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2001).

## **2.3 Wildlife and Fish Populations**

### **2.3.1 Threatened, Endangered and Special Status Animals**

The Precious Lands area currently provides habitat for two federally listed Threatened species: Snake River steelhead and bald eagle. Bald eagles have been documented on Precious Lands during the fall and winter months but there is no evidence of nesting activity.

Snake River steelhead are known to occur in Joseph, Cottonwood, and Broady Creeks. In 2001 and 2002 NPT field crews observed spawning adults in Cottonwood Creek. A report by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (Hardy, 1992) stated that 418 spawning adults were estimated in Joseph Creek in 1984. Habitat assessments within Lower Joseph Creek indicate that habitat diversity is low, pool numbers are less than optimal, large woody debris is lacking, stream shading is low, and water temperatures are too high (Hardy 1992, Stein 2000). All of these conditions result in lowered habitat quality for steelhead within the Joseph Creek drainage.

### **2.3.2 Culturally Important Species**

During plan development, several species were identified as having cultural significance to the Nez Perce People. Management actions have been designed to maintain or improve habitat conditions for those species to the extent possible without undue impacts to other native species or overall site diversity. Species or groups identified as culturally significant include bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, native grouse, golden eagle, red-tailed hawk, and steelhead.

## **3.0 HEP ANALYSIS**

Under the Northwest Power Planning Act, the Bonneville Power Administration was mandated to mitigate for wildlife habitat losses. In order to do that BPA must be able to measure the amount and quality of habitat lost and gained through their activities, including the Precious Lands project. The accounting system adopted by BPA is a habitat modeling strategy known as a Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS 1980a, 1980b). This procedure uses models to measure the quality of a specific habitat for target wildlife species. The models are based on key habitat parameters (ex. shrub height, snag density) and provide a measure of the habitat quality for that particular species. This accounting system is used to determine the amount of credit BPA receives for the land being protected.

Target wildlife species identified for the Precious Lands Area HEP analysis are: downy woodpecker, song sparrow, yellow warbler, western meadowlark, mule deer, chukar, California quail, blue grouse, black-capped chickadee, and beaver. Originally, river otter was selected as a target species for riverine habitats but was replaced by beaver because of the lack of a suitable model for otter. The beaver model (Allen, 1983) provides a more detailed evaluation of riparian community condition compared to the relatively simple otter model used during the Lower Snake Assessment.

A baseline HEP analysis was initiated on the Precious Lands Area in 2000 with data collection occurring for the past three summers. The difficult terrain and limited access on the wildlife area has created logistical challenges for data collection that has resulted in a greater time commitment and smaller sample sizes than would be optimal. Field data collection has been completed, however, and a detailed HEP Report will be completed in December, 2002.

#### **4.0 MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

A management plan must respond to specific management issues in order to be effective. A key element in the planning process is determining the important issues and then developing management responses to address those issues. The contractual agreement between BPA and the NPT requires participation by state and federal agencies as well as members of the public in addressing management issues. This plan is closely tied to the concerns of local citizens and land management agencies.

##### **4.1 Agency Involvement**

In September 1999, the NPT formally initiated the management planning effort by requesting representatives from other government agencies to sit on the planning team or serve on an agency review team. The NPT recognized that many agencies might be interested in the contents of the management plan but would be unable to participate directly in plan development. Each agency was given the opportunity to decide on their own level of involvement based on available resources and potential impact to their programs or resources.

Member of the planning team actively assisted NPT wildlife staff in the development of this plan. Members of the agency review team have provided feedback on earlier drafts of the plan and their comments and concerns have been incorporated into the final document.

##### Precious Lands Planning Team:

Angela Sondena, Ph.D.	Nez Perce Tribe, Wildlife Program
Joe McCormack	Nez Perce Tribe, Fisheries Program
Victor Coggins	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Howard Strobel*	Oregon Department of Forestry
Ralph Anderson	Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
*Replaced by Andy White in 2001	

##### Precious Lands Agency Review Team:

John Andrews	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
June Davis	Wallowa County, Planning Office
Gregg Miller	Bureau of Land Management, Baker Field Office
Karst Riggers	Asotin County, Planning Office

##### **4.2 Public Involvement**

Before the planning team began work on this document, the NPT wildlife staff developed a list of potential management issues. That initial list included public access, hunting,

livestock grazing, facilities management, socio-economics, priority wildlife, noxious weeds, biodiversity, water quality, and fire. These potential issues were presented to the public at a series of six public meetings held throughout the local area.

The public was invited to comment on the issues and provide input on management strategies and projects. The public comments received at these meetings or through the mail were used to further refine the management issues that guided the planning team in developing the management direction of the property. From these comments, public access (particularly motorized access), livestock grazing, and noxious weeds were presented as the primary issues of concern. Other issues included hunting, cultural resources, mineral rights, and fire management. Management responses to these issues can be found in Section 5.0 below.

### **4.3 Protection of Treaty Rights**

The Precious Lands project in no way restricts or compromises Nez Perce Tribal treaty rights. Page 5 of the MOA between BPA and the NPT states “Fishing, hunting, gathering, and Tribal cultural and religious activities on the properties according to Tribal custom and law shall not be prohibited by this agreement.” The MOA further states on page 6 that “Nothing in this agreement limits the authority or ability of the Tribe to manage the properties for public safety and wildlife habitat conservation, or to preserve and protect cultural, historic, and religious sites, and to carry out and protect the federally guaranteed rights of the Tribe and its members. Nothing in this agreement limits or diminishes any treaty retained right or privilege of the Tribe or its members afforded under federal law as a result of the status of the Tribe or Tribal members, provided that treaty reserved rights will be exercised consistent with this agreement.”

## **5.0 POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION**

The following section provides an overview of the policies and guidelines that will govern the management of the Precious Lands Wildlife Management Area during this planning cycle. This overview is being provided to clarify the position of the NPT concerning key management issues, and inform the public of acceptable activities and applicable rules.

### **5.1 Access and Travel Management**

No new roads will be constructed. Existing roads will be maintained at current levels to allow motorized access of the property by NPT staff, fire crews, rescue personnel, and other approved parties. Members of the public will not be allowed to access the property using motorized vehicles. This restriction includes aircraft, full-size passenger vehicles, all terrain vehicles, and two-wheel motorcycles. Special use permits may be issued to groups and/or individuals for specific dates or activities but will require prior approval. A seasonal restriction from November 1 – May 1 will be imposed for all vehicles on the Tamarack Creek Road to minimize disturbance to wintering elk. Persons violating the access restrictions will be asked to leave the property immediately and may be charged with trespass.

People are encouraged to hike or ride horses onto the property. Bicycles may also be used on trails and roads. Two of the main access roads to the property pass through

private land so are not available for public use. The main points of public access are Forest Service Road 4655, Hwy 129 (Hwy 3), and Rye Ridge road (Figure 4). Persons on foot or horseback can access much of the property through National Forest land in the south. Where compatible with wildlife management objectives, trail access will be improved in the future. Management objectives include good trail access into each of the Planning Units.

## **5.2 Appropriate Public Uses**

Appropriate public uses include camping, hiking, bird watching, and other non-consumptive recreational activities. Open campfires are not allowed during the regular fire season (generally May 1 – October 31) or periods under special restriction due to extreme fire risk. There are no sanitation facilities on the project area so users are asked to dispose of their waste in a responsible manner. All trash must be packed out.

This is a wildlife management area so the privileges of human use are necessarily subordinate to wildlife protection needs. Harvest and removal of non-game wildlife and plant resources is strictly forbidden except for treaty-reserved gathering rights of enrolled Nez Perce tribal members. Firewood cutting is also restricted since standing dead and downed trees provide important wildlife habitat. Fallen wood on the ground may be gathered for campfires during open burning periods. Hunting and fishing are allowed subject to treaty harvest guidelines and state regulations. The use of helicopters to scout for, locate, pursue, or retrieve game animals is strictly forbidden. Landing a helicopter on the Precious Lands Wildlife Area is a violation of the motorized vehicle closure.

Recreational livestock owners are asked to practice a “leave no trace” philosophy when traveling or camping on the property. Establish camps well away from streams and avoid tying animals directly to trees. Wallowa County is a hay quarantine area. The use of locally grown or weed-free hay and feed is required. Approved recreational livestock include horses, mules, and llamas. Pack goats are not allowed due to the potential for disease transmission to wild bighorn sheep.

## **5.3 Facility Use and Management**

The Precious Lands area contains three livable buildings and numerous outbuildings and barns. Due to public safety concerns most of these buildings are for administrative use only, including all barns and outbuildings. Exceptions include the Basin Creek Cabin and the Buford Ranch House. The Basin Creek Cabin is a small log cabin with a sleeping loft and wood stove. There is no electricity or potable water. When not being used by project staff, this cabin is available for public use on a first come basis. Patrons are asked to limit their stay to a maximum seven (7) days, clean up, remove trash, and replenish wood supplies before they leave.

The Buford Ranch house is a five-bedroom, two-story home with an unfinished basement. It has electricity, running water, and phone service. This facility may be reserved by non-profit groups for educational, scientific or cultural uses. All such uses are subject to prior approval and may require a fee.

#### **5.4 Fire Management**

The NPT has entered into a fire management agreement with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to provide wildland fire suppression activities on Precious Lands. The ODF will respond to all lightning or human-caused blazes, and cooperate with other fire suppression teams working on the fire.

Prescribed burning may be used as a habitat management tool to reduce fuel loads in conifer stands, rejuvenate decadent shrub fields, and provide improved forage conditions for big game animals on grassland sites.

#### **5.5 Livestock Grazing**

The NPT recognizes that livestock grazing can be an effective tool in manipulating vegetation to meet management objectives. As such, grazing animals need to be tightly controlled to ensure proper vegetative response without unacceptable impacts to other resources. Control of livestock often requires extensive fencing and/or very active involvement of human herders. The Precious Lands area lacks extensive pasture fences that could be used to contain livestock within defined areas. Because of these constraints, generalized season-long grazing will not be permitted on the Wildlife Area. Localized, high intensity, short-duration grazing may be used, however, as a tool to reduce cover of noxious weeds, remove older dead grass stems, or otherwise manipulate site-specific vegetation.

The Memorandum of Agreement between the NPT and BPA protects treaty-reserved rights of the Nez Perce with regards to the Precious Lands Project. Included in the Treaty of 1855 was language reserving grazing rights for tribal members. If a proposal were made to exercise treaty grazing on the wildlife area it would undergo an environmental analysis and be approved by NPTEC resolution. Any such grazing would also have to be compatible with the provisions set forth in the contract between the NPT and BPA.

The use of sheep or goats will not be allowed within the Joseph and Cottonwood Creek planning units because of potential disease transmission from domestic animals to wild bighorn sheep. Restrictions on sheep and goats extend to pack goats used by recreational users, which would not be allowed. Domestic sheep and goats may be used for short periods of time on the Buford Planning unit where bighorn sheep do not occur.

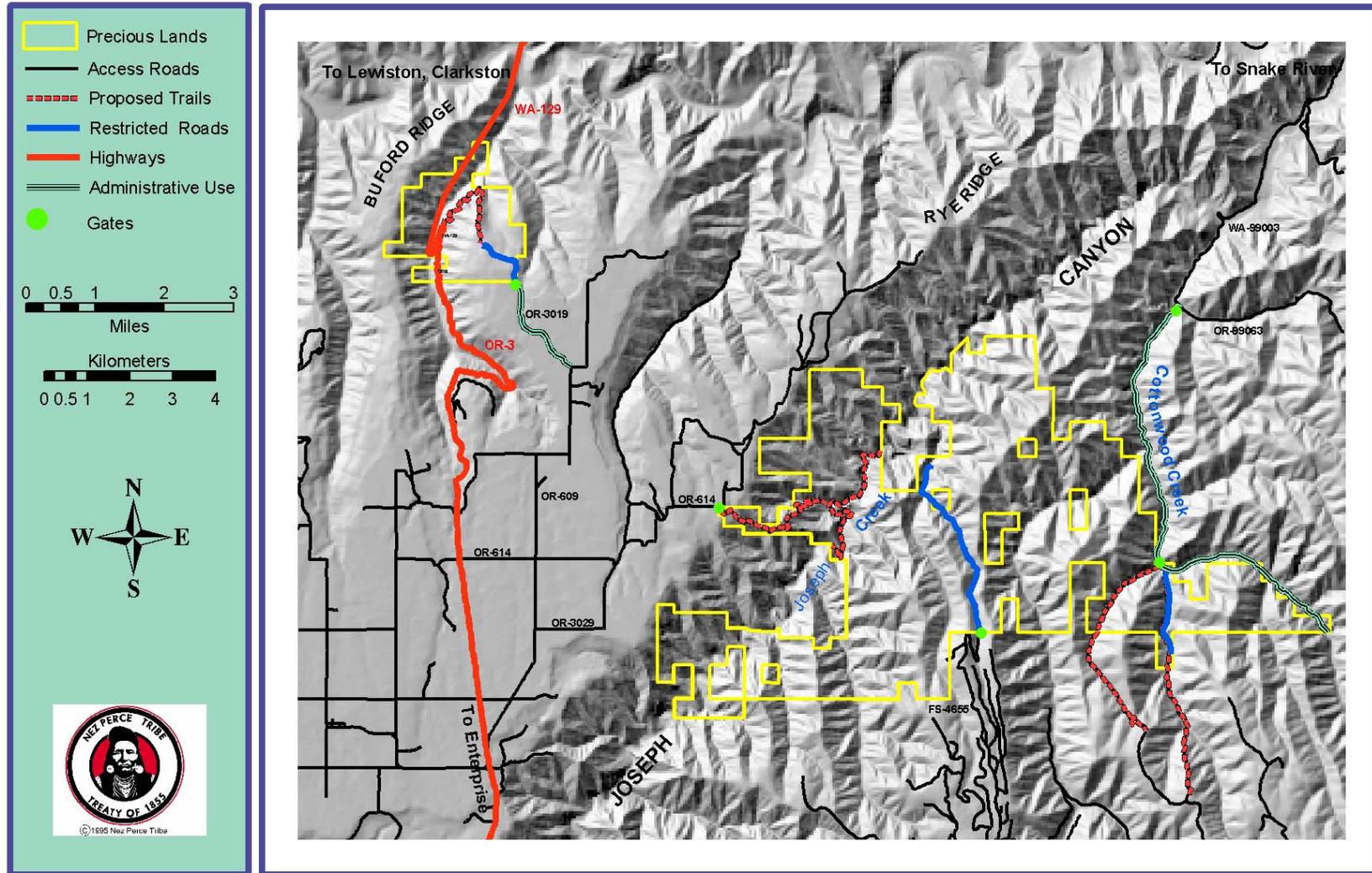
Some light grazing is anticipated by pack and riding stock (horses, mules, and llamas) of recreational users. Such use is expected to be light to moderate in intensity and of short duration. Animals used for administrative purposes may also graze portions of the management area as a supplement to regular hay and grain rations.

#### **5.6 Vegetation Management**

A wide variety of vegetation management tools will be employed to create or promote more desirable conditions for target species. For example, noxious weeds may be controlled by mowing, hand pulling, herbicide application, selective grazing, or plowing. Following weed removal, seeding, or planting nursery stock may be used to rehabilitate

Figure 4. Roads, Gates, and Proposed Trails

# Precious Lands Access



native vegetation. Agricultural fields will be planted with native grass seed followed by weed control, and shrub and tree planting where appropriate. Whenever possible, site-specific seed or propagules will be used in rehabilitation efforts.

Forest and overstory development in riparian areas and conifer stands has been identified as a management objective. Past fire and flooding events have negatively impacted the overstory trees in some areas. Structural conditions within riparian and forest communities may require active management to reach desired conditions. In all cases, treatments will be site-specific depending on the current conditions, ease of access, project costs, and probability of success.

### **5.7 Priority Wildlife**

While some wildlife species have been highlighted as being of management priority, the overall goal of this project is to promote biological diversity. Of particular importance is maintenance of any at-risk, rare or sensitive species that may be present. Species having particular cultural, subsistence or spiritual value to the Nez Perce People will also be emphasized. Such species would include steelhead, elk, bighorn sheep, golden eagle, red-tailed hawk, mule deer, and native grouse.

### **5.8 Cultural Resources**

Federal law and NPT Code protect all cultural resource sites located on Precious Lands. Information on the nature and location of cultural sites is, however, lacking for this area. A comprehensive cultural resource inventory needs to be conducted by the NPT Cultural Resources Program so that adequate protection and management planning can be developed. Funds will be requested from BPA to conduct such an inventory.

### **5.9 Other Management Directions**

Commercial, residential, or industrial uses of the property are not permitted under the MOA between the NPT and BPA. All such activities would need to be compatible with the overall objectives of this Plan and the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program, and would require approval by NPTEC resolution. Commercial outfitting and guiding, agricultural production, and plant or mushroom harvesting, are all examples of commercial activities requiring formal review and approval.

It is the desire of the NPT to transfer properties contained in the Precious Lands project into Trust status with the federal government. The agreement between the NPT and Wallowa County recognized this desire and states in part, "The County agrees to support an application by the Tribe to have the project lands placed in trust by the federal government, so long as payments in lieu of taxes are agreed to be paid." Trust status would allow for cost-share funding from the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for special projects, and would further safeguard treaty rights of tribal members.

## **6.0 MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Precious Lands Project is to permanently protect, mitigate, and enhance desirable wildlife and wildlife habitat as compensation for the inundation of

habitat behind the lower four Snake River dams. This project will also promote and restore biological diversity, ecological processes, and watershed health.

### **6.1 Desired Future Condition**

The desired future condition (DFC) for Precious Lands is one where the area supports a mixture of grasslands (74%), shrub fields (8%), mixed conifer forest (14%), and hardwood riparian areas (4%). Grasslands and shrub fields are maintained in a mid to late seral condition, with early seral (often weedy) grassland areas declining in extent. Riparian areas are moving toward a climax condition with a minimum 60% canopy closure across the entire area. Conifer forests are expanding in extent as open woodland areas develop into more closed canopy conditions. Agricultural fields have been re-planted to native bunchgrasses, forbs, shrubs, and where possible, trees. Populations of existing noxious weed species are stable or declining with new invaders eradicated.

Wildlife populations on the whole are stable or increasing. Specifically, the desire is to have increasing populations of bighorn sheep, mountain quail, blue and ruffed grouse, neotropical migrant landbirds, and snake river steelhead. Populations of culturally important and target species are stable or increasing. Elk and mule deer numbers are stable or increasing.

Natural processes have been returned to historic levels of intensity and frequency. The hydrology of all streams has been restored as much as possible considering upstream impacts over which we have no control.

#### Grassland community DFC:

- 60-75% herbaceous cover
- < 30% cheatgrass
- 30-35 cm average herbaceous height

Herbaceous cover within a healthy bunchgrass community will have established grass hummocks with interspaces that are free of cheatgrass or other weedy species.

Cheatgrass is typically shorter than bunchgrass; therefore the height of the community may be an indicator of weedy species and quality nesting or hiding cover.

#### Shrub community DFC:

- A mosaic of seral stages with the majority in the mature class
- 40-65% shrub canopy cover, on average
- 50-75% herbaceous cover

For the entire project area, the goal for shrub communities is to have a mosaic of seral stages across the project area. Specifically, 60% of the shrub communities support 60-75% canopy cover, 20% have >75% canopy cover, and 20% have <60% canopy cover. The species used to develop shrub community desired conditions are: mule deer, western meadowlark, blue grouse, California quail, and song sparrow.

#### Conifer community DFC:

- 50-80% tree canopy cover
- 25-45% shrub canopy cover
- $\geq 2$  snags 4-10" dbh per acre

- $\geq 0.5$  snags  $\geq 20$ " dbh per acre

The forested communities offer cover in all seasons and fill many life requisites for wildlife. Because use varies so greatly among species, the DFC range was left broad to accommodate differing sites and wildlife needs. Some conifer patches may be maintained at either the higher end of the range or the lower, depending on site-specific goals and funding. Mule deer, blue grouse, and black-capped chickadee are used to develop conifer community desired conditions.

Riparian community DFC:

- 40-70% tree canopy cover
- 35-65% shrub canopy cover
- $\geq 3.5$  snags 6-10" dbh per acre

Riparian communities are not easily characterized due to fluctuating water supplies, extreme elevation changes, and natural catastrophic events of the past. This cover type was given a broad DFC range to allow for the extremely different community conditions while still maintaining a standard for management practices. More site-specific considerations will be taken into account depending on the target wildlife needs and the goal of the individual project. Mule deer, blue grouse, song sparrow, downy woodpecker, beaver, yellow warbler, and black-capped chickadee were used to develop DFC's in riparian communities.

In-Stream habitat DFC:

- 60-100% shading of water surface
- Maximum daily summer temperatures  $\leq 68^{\circ}$  F
- $\geq 20$  pools per stream mile
- $\geq 60$  pieces of woody debris  $\geq 12$ " diameter and 30' long per stream mile

Existing in-stream habitat quality for the Precious Lands Area is currently poorly understood. Survey work performed in Joseph Creek above and below the project area (Hardy 1992, Stein 2000) indicate that this stream does not currently meet water quality objectives for stream temperatures, or optimal habitat characteristics for pool:riffle ratios, woody debris, or stream shading. Comprehensive habitat surveys need to be completed for fish-bearing streams to evaluate current condition and develop management strategies to meet the DFC's described above. Steelhead were used to develop desired conditions in stream habitats.

## 7.0 MANAGEMENT GOALS

**Goal 1:** Maintain or improve native plant communities and other desirable species to benefit fish and wildlife, and provide traditional gathering and cultural opportunities for tribal members.

- Objective 1: Reduce noxious weed infestations to acceptable levels by use of prevention and control strategies.
- Objective 2: Restore all agricultural areas to desirable plant communities.
- Objective 3: Protect and enhance riparian area plant communities to improve or maintain canopy cover, and species diversity.

- Objective 4: Encourage traditional, cultural activities on Precious Lands.

**Goal 2:** Maintain or enhance fish and wildlife populations.

- Objective 1: Maintain the area as a refugia protected from major human disturbance.
- Objective 2: Emphasize management of target wildlife species or groups.
- Objective 3: Improve or maintain forage conditions and thermal cover on big game winter range.
- Objective 4: Improve water quality to benefit listed fish.
- Objective 5: Increase in-stream habitat quality and complexity in fish-bearing streams.

**Goal 3:** Provide public access for activities compatible with maintaining high quality wildlife populations and habitat.

- Objective 1: Provide high-quality, low-impact recreational opportunities.
- Objective 2: To the extent possible, promote Nez Perce cultural use of the area.
- Objective 3: Encourage use of the area for scientific research on biological systems and processes.

**Goal 4:** Foster productive, interactive relationships with neighboring landowners, including private individuals and state and federal agencies.

- Objective 1: Work with neighbors to cooperatively control noxious weeds and construct and maintain fences.
- Objective 2: Continue information sharing with state and federal agencies through meetings and cooperative projects.

**Goal 5:** Conduct Monitoring and Evaluation activities to ensure that management actions are providing the desired response and/or benefit.

- Objective 1: Conduct baseline population monitoring of selected wildlife species or groups.
- Objective 2: Monitor vegetative communities to evaluate seral stage, ecological condition, and wildlife habitat values.
- Objective 3: Conduct project-specific monitoring to ensure project goals are being met.
- Objective 4: Document human activities to evaluate impacts to natural resources.

## **8.0 PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

This section outlines the management activities that the NPT believes are necessary to provide high quality wildlife habitat and protect biodiversity on the Precious Lands Area. These recommendations are necessarily general but wherever possible, specific sites are mentioned in the text.

## **8.1 Operations and Maintenance**

Management of any large land holding requires certain day-to-day activities to maintain facilities, control boundaries, and ensure public safety. The Precious Lands Area is quite large with irregular boundaries (approximately 40 miles of external property line) so a large part of on-going O&M activities is related to posting and controlling external property lines. Because the Precious Lands Area is open for public use, human trespass onto adjacent private property is a management concern. Also of concern is livestock trespass onto the Wildlife Area. In addition to access management activities, NPT staff also has the responsibility of maintaining living quarters and outbuildings acquired with the property.

### **Fence Construction and Maintenance**

It is currently estimated that 8.7 miles of good condition fence exists with another 6.9 miles in moderate condition. Over the next five years, approximately 5.6 miles of new construction needs to occur with an additional 2.9 miles of old fence replaced. Obsolete, dilapidated fences need to be removed on 10.7 miles

- Construct new livestock fences in areas experiencing trespass problems
- Maintain existing fences in good condition
- Replace old, unsuitable fences where needed to control neighboring livestock
- Cooperate with neighbors to identify and construct / maintain fences
- Remove unnecessary fencing that poses a threat to wildlife, recreational livestock, or people
- Post all exterior fence lines with signs indicating tribal ownership

### **Weed Control**

- Identify and map new weed populations
- Prioritize weed populations for treatment
- Control weeds using herbicides, mechanical treatments, and biological control agents
- Prevent new weed locations by minimizing disturbance, cleaning equipment and using weed-free feed and seed

### **Facilities Maintenance**

General Maintenance:

- Construct and / or maintain gates at all motorized access points
- Perform routine road maintenance, including brush removal
- Perform basic maintenance on buildings including painting, plumbing, electrical, and carpentry
- Remove deteriorated buildings that pose a risk to public safety
- Maintain informational signs at main access points

Specific Projects:

- Establish disputed property lines and corners through a land survey
- Finish walls and lighting in basement bathroom at Buford House
- Replace cedar shake roof on Basin Cabin with fire resistant metal
- Repair spring water system at Basin Cabin

- Stabilize bridge footing on Cottonwood Creek
- Establish permanent crossing over Cottonwood Creek at mouth of Basin Creek
- Build corrals at Basin and Tamarack cabins to replace rotten ones

## **8.2 Habitat Improvement Projects**

Through the HEP analysis and other inventory work, several habitat improvement opportunities have presented themselves. Most work will focus on restoration of plant communities damaged as a result of past agricultural practices, timber harvest, grazing, flood events, or fires. In particular, restoration of the agricultural fields in the Buford Planning Unit is seen as a priority project.

### **Agricultural Field Restoration**

Currently, approximately 124 acres of rolling benches is under cultivation for wheat and hay production. Those areas will be seeded with native bunchgrasses, forbs, shrub seedlings, and ponderosa pine trees (where soils are deep enough). As much as possible, only native seed stock will be used since natives are often pre-adapted to local site conditions and the resultant community will more closely resemble the habitats lost through past management activities. Where feasible, seed will be gathered on-site and propagated by a commercial grower. This is a multi-year project that will be implemented in phases to spread out the workload and ensure greater success. Hay fields (12.4 acres) are not scheduled for planting to native species at this time. They will be maintained as grass hay fields for the life of this plan, unless they can be enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

### **Forest Communities**

Depending on existing conditions, the following treatments may be applied to forested communities on Precious Lands.

- Understory burning to reduce shrub cover and improve fire resiliency
- Shrub removal by mechanical means
- Girdle trees to create snags
- Thin young ponderosa pine stands to increase spacing to 10-15 ft between trees
- Plant ponderosa pine on burned areas that are not regenerating naturally (312 ac)
- Plant ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and larch on select agricultural fields

### **Riparian Communities**

Depending on existing conditions, the following treatments may be applied to riparian communities on Precious Lands.

- Maintain existing stands of aspen
- Plant aspen in appropriate locations to increase species diversity
- In areas with <40% canopy cover plant site-appropriate trees
- Plant hydrophytic shrubs in disturbed or degraded areas
- In areas with >70% canopy cover create snags by girdling
- Treat noxious weed infestations, particularly diffuse knapweed, Himalayan blackberry, and poison hemlock
- Stabilize stream banks
- Re-open braided stream channels to diffuse flows during flood events
- Stabilize access road along Cottonwood Creek

### **Grasslands**

Depending on existing conditions, the following treatments may be applied to grassland communities on Precious Lands.

- Treat noxious weeds with herbicides, bio-control agents, and mechanical means
- Utilize livestock on localized areas as a tool in weed reduction activities
- Re-seed or re-plant treated weed sites to restore bunchgrasses and native forbs
- Minimize ground disturbance
- Promote development of microbiotic crusts
- Utilize prescribed fire or controlled grazing to reduce fuels and condition grasses for better forage quality

### **Shrub Communities**

Depending on existing conditions, the following treatments may be applied to shrub communities on Precious Lands.

- Use prescribed burning or mechanical treatments to create a mosaic of successional stages across the project area
- Pile shrub cuttings to provide cover for quail and grouse

Many of the shrub fields on Precious Lands are in the mature to decadent seral stage (>60% canopy cover) so will require some type of treatment to meet the goal of 20% of the area with <60% canopy cover. Treatments will consist of mechanical removal of shrubs using chainsaws and hand tools, or prescribed fire. Early seral conditions will also be created in some forested stands that undergo fuels-reduction treatments.

### **Springs, Seeps and Ponds**

Depending on existing conditions, the following treatments may be applied to seep, spring and pond habitats on Precious Lands.

- Increase emergent vegetation along pond margins
- Improve water retention in ponds
- Where possible, develop new ponds
- Develop drinking water sources at select springs
- Maintain currently developed water sources
- Promote the development of overstory trees along seeps and spring margins

### **In-Stream Habitat**

Until comprehensive stream surveys have been completed, site-specific recommendations for in-stream habitat improvements can not be made. However, based on existing knowledge of limiting factors within the Joseph Creek watershed the following management activities may be utilized.

- Plant trees and shrubs in riparian areas to improve stream shading
- Promote overstory development to increase woody debris recruitment
- Stabilize stream banks
- Re-open braided stream channels to diffuse flows during flood events
- Stabilize access road along Cottonwood Creek
- Control noxious weeds in floodplain areas

### 8.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

The following activities will be performed annually on the Precious Land Area to ensure that management activities are having the desired outcome.

- Breeding bird surveys
- Pond amphibian monitoring
- Noxious weed monitoring and mapping
- Winter elk counts
- Rare species population monitoring (as needed)
- Restoration project monitoring (agricultural fields, tree plantings, etc.)

Additional specialized monitoring or survey projects may be initiated as needed.

- Fish population and habitat quality inventory (FY 2004 & 3-yr intervals)
- HEP transects (5-yr intervals)
- Bat population sampling (5-yr intervals)

### 8.4 Literature Cited

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## 8.5 Five Year Budget Projection

<b>Table 1 . Precious Lands Wildlife Area Projected 5-Year Budget</b>					
	<b>FY03</b>	<b>FY04</b>	<b>FY05</b>	<b>FY06</b>	<b>FY07</b>
<b>SALARIES</b> 5.4 FTE					
Project Leader, field technicians, wildlife aides, etc.	\$178,381	\$183,898	\$189,585	\$195,449	\$201,493
<b>FRINGE BENEFITS</b>					
Insurance, FICA, Worker's Comp, etc. (~33.5%)	\$59,758	\$61,605	\$63,510	\$65,475	\$67,500
<b>TRAVEL &amp; VEHICLES</b>					
Training, per diem, vehicle leases & repairs, mileage	\$30,460	\$30,560	\$30,660	\$30,760	\$30,860
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>					
Cell Phones, radios, long distance	\$2,160	\$2,160	\$2,230	\$2,230	\$2,230
<b>UTILITIES</b>					
Power at Buford Ranch	\$2,000	\$2,200	\$2,400	\$2,600	\$2,800
<b>SUPPLIES &amp; SERVICES</b>					
Field equipment, office supplies, computer rental, tool repairs, building maintenance	\$21,100	\$21,050	\$22,160	\$23,330	\$24,560
<b>MATERIALS</b>					
Fence posts and wire, trees, seed, data layers, lumber, herbicide, signs	\$23,900	\$35,000 <sup>3</sup>	\$35,000 <sup>3</sup>	\$26,000	\$27,400
<b>INDIRECT (22.6%)</b>					
	\$71,813	\$76,042	\$78,093	\$78,160	\$80,646
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>					
GPS unit(s)	\$12,000				
Tractor cost-share		\$15,000			
Tractor implements			\$5,000		
Replacement ATV				\$5,500	
<b>SUBCONTRACTS</b>					
Fire control agreement	~ <sup>1</sup>	\$11,600	\$11,600	\$11,600	\$11,600
Water quality monitoring	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,600	\$2,600	\$2,600
Helicopter weed spraying	~ <sup>2</sup>	\$11,000		\$11,000	
Property boundary land surveys	\$6,000				
Horse packing	~ <sup>1</sup>	\$5,300			
Fish Habitat Survey		\$25,000			
Cultural Resource Inventory			\$10,000		
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	\$410,072	\$482,915	\$452,838	\$454,704	\$451,689

<sup>1</sup>Carryover funding from FY '02 will be used to accomplish this task in FY '03

<sup>2</sup>Only required every second year due to residual herbicide activity.

<sup>3</sup>Increases in materials costs in FY 04 and 05 are associated with seeding and planting agricultural areas and burnt conifer sites.