

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Ottman/OZ Ranch AP
Proposed Implementation Date: August 2024
Proponents: Ottman Forestry Consultants, Inc., OZ Ranch, Missoula Unit, SWLO
Landowner: Potomac Corporation 2063 Foster Ave Wheeling, IL 60090
County: Missoula
HRA #:32-B-49451
Expiration Date: 08/2026

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Alternative Practice Action:

John Ottman/O-Z Ranch is proposing an Alternative Practice. The project is located 12 miles west of Lolo, MT (refer to Attachment's vicinity map A-1 and project map A-2) and includes the following sections: **S32, T12 N, R21W** located within the lower portion of the Tevis Creek, a Class 1 Stream, on the O-Z Ranch.

On July 27th, 2024, a major wind event having multiple microbursts throughout Missoula County caused extensive damage to trees and property. In the case of the OZ Ranch, a microburst occurred in the lower portion of the Tevis Creek drainage blowing down and uprooting approximately 4 acres of trees in and across Tevis Creek for roughly 1,000 feet, disrupting continuous stream flow in some places and inhibiting cattle grazing. The landowner's primary income is raising cattle, and this area was a useable pasture that is no longer accessible to cattle or ranching equipment. The proposed alternative practice would allow for clean-up of the area by removing a portion of the blowdown timber from Tevis Creek to reopen the area for grazing and travel of farm equipment while also readjusting the management objectives for the adjacent stand.

Objectives of the salvage project include:

- John Ottman/O-Z Ranch is requesting an Alternative Practice to:
 1. Operate equipment into the SMZ to harvest blowdown (Rule 2: 36.11.302).
 2. Retain less than 10-tree minimum per 100-foot segment, (Rule 5: 36.11.305).
 3. Remove a portion of the fallen trees across the stream (Rule 5: 36.11.305)
 4. All slash will be piled above the existing roads within the SMZ.

- Remove logs fully suspended with a slide boom across a Class 1 Stream, operate ground-based equipment to skid within 15 feet of Class 1 stream, and use an existing

excavated skid trail that lies within 35 feet of a Class 1 stream, in the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) of the Tevis Creek. Total linear extent along the streams is approximately 1,000 feet. If approved, this site-specific Alternative Practice would allow the aforementioned activity to occur in the SMZ (ARM 36.11.310).

- According to MCA 77-5-301 through 307, DNRC is authorized to administer and enforce the provisions of the SMZ Law. This Law was developed to protect the public interest of water quality and quantity within forested areas; provide for standards, oversights and penalties to ensure forest practices conserve the integrity of SMZ's; provide guidelines for wildlife management within SMZ's; and allow operators necessary flexibility to use practices appropriate to site-specific conditions in the SMZ. ARM 36.11.301 through 313 further specify the design of SMZ boundaries, allowable activities, and prohibitions within the SMZ, penalties and other related provisions.
- According to MCA 77-5-304 and ARM 36.11.310, DNRC *may* approve alternative practices that are different from practices required by the SMZ Law only if such practices would be otherwise lawful and continue to conserve or not significantly diminish the integrity and function of the SMZ.
- Allowances of this request would include:
 1. *The operation of equipment through portions of the SMZ, an exception to Rule 4 (36.111.304) Operation of Equipment in the Montana Guide to the Streamside Management Zone Law and Rule 2006 book.*
 2. *Would allow operation of a boom delimeter to operate within the SMZ from below the existing road, along the East and West side of Tevis Creek, and would allow trees to be picked up and fully suspended over a Class 1 Stream segment.*
 3. *Allow for less than 10 standing trees per 100-foot segment to be left and alternatively leaving 10 pieces remaining, this could consist of topped trees, blown down, or existing and damaged deciduous trees.*

Mitigation measures associated with this AP would include:

1. *Ground conditions would be dry to less than 20% moisture content or frozen conditions.*
2. *Placing an effective slash filter windrow below the already existing road in the SMZ on both sides as per Montana's Forestry BMP's.*
3. *Grass seeding ALL disturbed areas within SMZ, completed within 1 week at the end of use.*
4. *Any new slash deposited in Tevis Creek from harvesting activities would be removed immediately and daily.*

Proposed activities include:

Rule	Action	Quantity
	Proposed Alternative Practices	
36.11.302	Operation of Equipment in SMZ	600 feet
36.11.303	Clearcutting and Tree Retention (rare to some segments). Class 1 Salvage	Up to 500 feet

Rule	Action	Quantity
36.11.304	Road construction (existing on each side)	2000 feet
Duration of Activities:		Fall
Implementation Period:		09/2024-12/2024

The MT-DNRC’s implementation of the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) law and rules protects and maintains the functions of a SMZ. The six functions of an SMZ, as identified in the SMZ law (77-5-301[1] MCA), are:

- Acts as an effective sediment filter to maintain water quality.
- Provides shade to regulate stream temperature.
- Supports diverse and productive aquatic and terrestrial riparian habitats.
- Protects the stream channel and banks.
- Provide large woody debris that is eventually recruited into a stream to maintain riffles, pools, and other elements of channel structure.
- Promotes floodplain stability.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative: No skid trails would be used in the SMZ of the Class 1 Stream. No boom yarding across Class 1 Stream would occur. Harvest would still occur in areas where no Alternative Practice is required.

Action Alternative: The action alternative would allow fully suspended harvest with a slide boom machine over a Class 1 Stream. Operate ground-based equipment to skid within 15 feet of the Class 1 Stream and use of an existing excavated road within 35 feet of the stream. The Class 1 SMZ retention would be below the 10 trees per 100-foot segment if approved.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

VEGETATION: Forest type is categorized as a Rocky Mountain Mesic Montane Mixed Conifer Forest. Site is dominated by western larch and Douglas-fir. Also present in the stand is lodgepole pine and Engleman Spruce. Site is fully stocked.

Insects and Diseases: No major I&D attacks at the moment.

Vegetation Mitigations: All standing trees (conifer or deciduous) would remain. Sub-merchantable trees and shrubs would be protected to the fullest extent possible.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions: The soil on this site is a gravelly sandy loam that is moderately well-draining. This allows for water to travel intermittently above ground and then disappear below ground. The draw bottom has evidence of abandoned irrigation channels that may have not had any water since the mid-1980'S.

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative				
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	
No-Action													
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	X				X					X			
Erosion	X				X				X				
Slope Stability	X				X				X				
Action													
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)		X				X				X			Y
Erosion		X				X				X			Y
Slope Stability		X				X				X			Y

Soil Mitigations: Soil conditions would be dry (less than 20% moisture content). Slash filter windrow would be placed below the excavated skid trail to reduce erosion potential.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions: Proposed action would take place along approximately 1000 feet of Class 1 Tevis Creek. Water quality will not be affected, if so, it would be temporary during activity where limbs may accidentally hit the stream bank of which will be removed immediately.

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative				
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	
No-Action													
Water Quality	X				X					X			
Action													
Water Quality		X				X				X			Y

Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations: Class 1 Stream will have some slash-filter windrows in place and will be placed below the excavated skid trail to reduce erosion potential. Grass seeding all trails in SMZ would occur immediately upon completion of harvesting activities. All standing trees would be required to remain on site to provide shade for the stream. While some blowdown would be removed, many of the blown over trees across the stream would be retained for recruitment to provide for stream function and aquatic habitat.

FISHERIES:

No fish can reach the stream segment in the project area due to the stream being blocked by a pipe and a pond. Any fish that travel within this segment would only be able to go from the ponds on the ranch up Tevis Creek. This segment of Tevis Creek is likely non-fish bearing due to the irrigation structures. Any impacts to fisheries would be limited to temporary sediment carried downstream. This would have a very low risk of measurable impacts due to low flow and dams.

WILDLIFE:

No impacts anticipated. Action Alternative 1 will likely have no impact on any threatened or endangered species.

AIR QUALITY:

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Smoke		X				X					X			Y
Dust		X				X					X			Y
Action														
Smoke		X				X					X			Y
Dust		X				X					X			Y

Comments: The action alternative would result in a minimal increase in slash burning. Dust levels may also increase minimally.

Air Quality Mitigations: No significant impacts are anticipated.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative				
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	
No-Action													
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				X				
Aesthetics	X				X				X				
Action													
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				X				
Aesthetics	X				X				X				

Comments: No historic or Archeological sites identified. Aesthetics would not be affected; site is barely visible from public road.

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: *List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*
 None

Impacts on the Human Population

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts on the Human Population.

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Health and Human Safety	X				X				X					
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	X				X				X					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	X				X				X					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	X				X				X					
Demand for Government Services	X				X				X					

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number	
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative						
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High			
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X				X				X						
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X				X				X						
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X						
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X						
Action															
Health and Human Safety	X				X				X						
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production		X				X				X					#1
Quantity and Distribution of Employment		X				X				X					#2
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues		X				X				X					#3
Demand for Government Services		X				X				X					#4
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X				X				X						
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X				X				X						
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X						
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X						

Comment #1: Timber harvest would provide minimal continuing industrial production in the Western Montana area.

#2: People are currently employed in the wood products industry in this region. Due to the relatively small size of this project, there will be no measurable cumulative impact from this proposed action on employment.

#3 People are currently employed in the wood products industry in this region. Due to the relatively small size of this project, there will be no measurable cumulative impact from this proposed action on employment.

#4 Log trucks hauling to the mill would result in temporary increases in traffic on Highway 12. This increase is a normal contributor to the activities of the local community and industrial base and cannot be considered a new or increased source.

Locally Adopted Environmental Plans and Goals: *List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*
None

Finding

Alternative Selected

The Action 1 Alternative is selected for implementation.

Significance of Potential Impacts

N/A.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

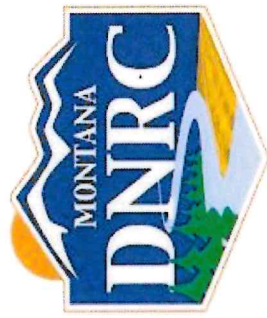
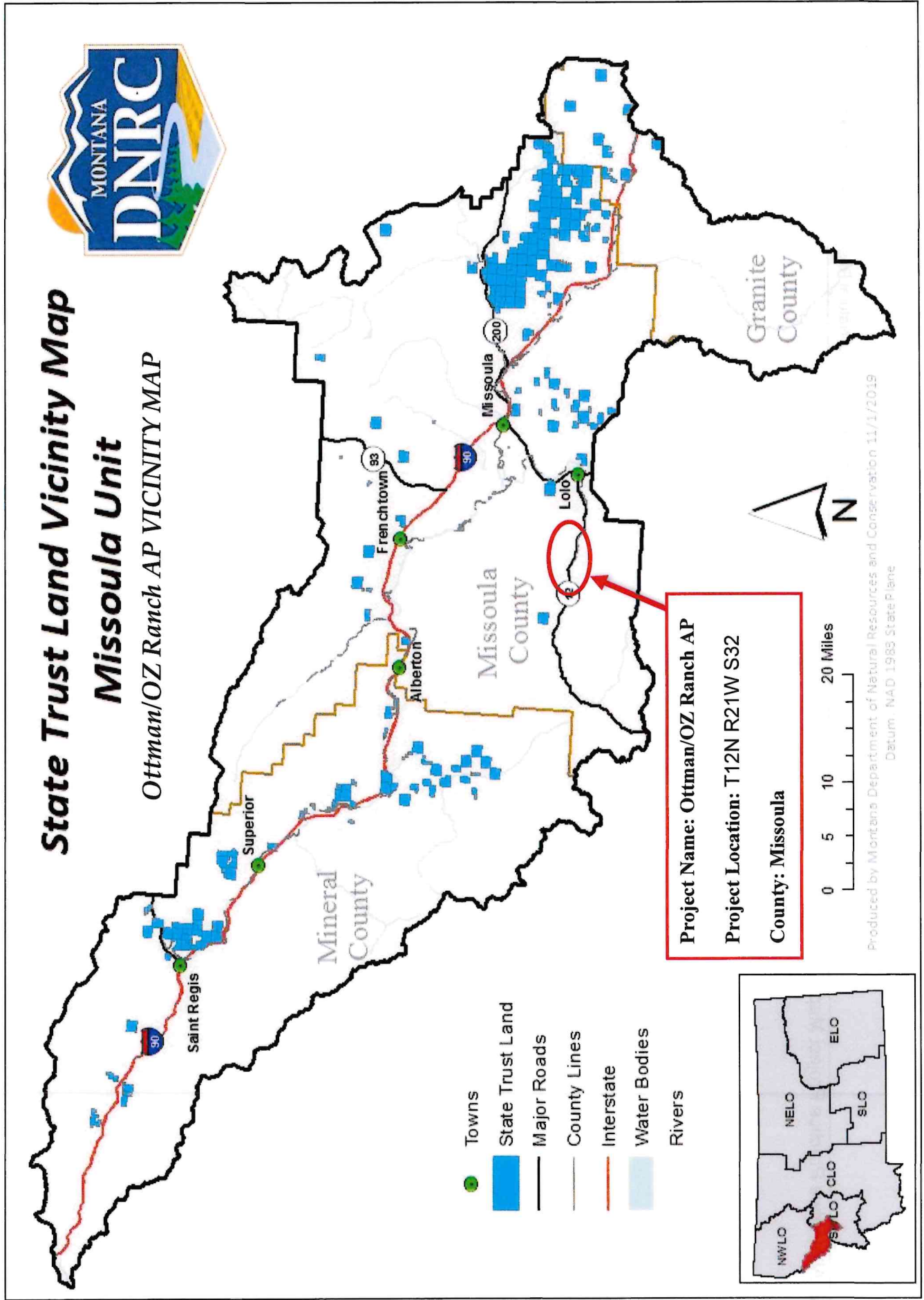
Name: Amy Helena
Title: Missoula Unit Manager
Date: September 24, 2024

X

Amy Helena
Missoula Unit Manager

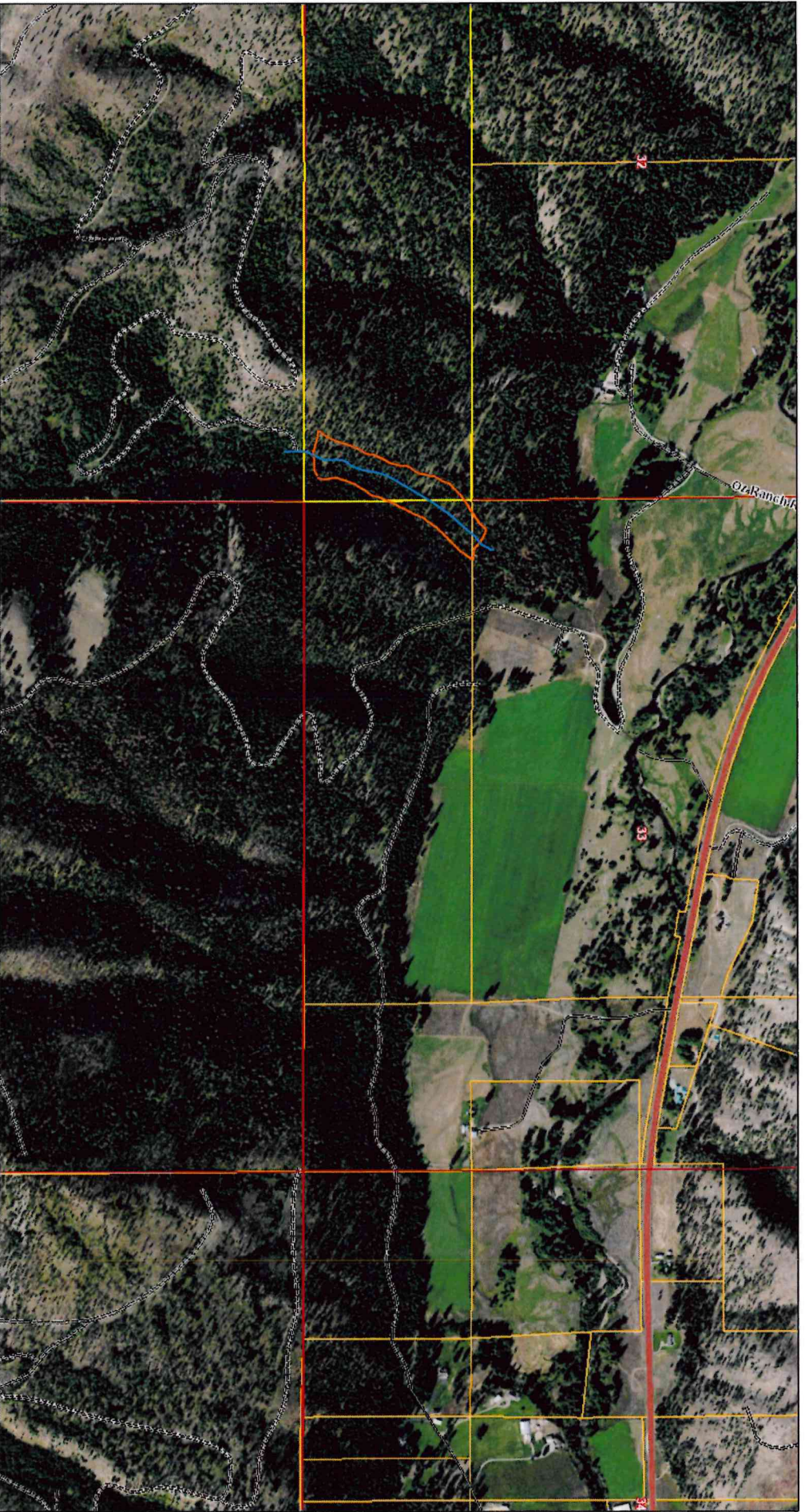
Signature: _____

A-1: Timber Sale Vicinity Map



A-2: Alternative Practice Project Map

ArcGIS Web Map



9/20/2024, 11:24:51 AM



