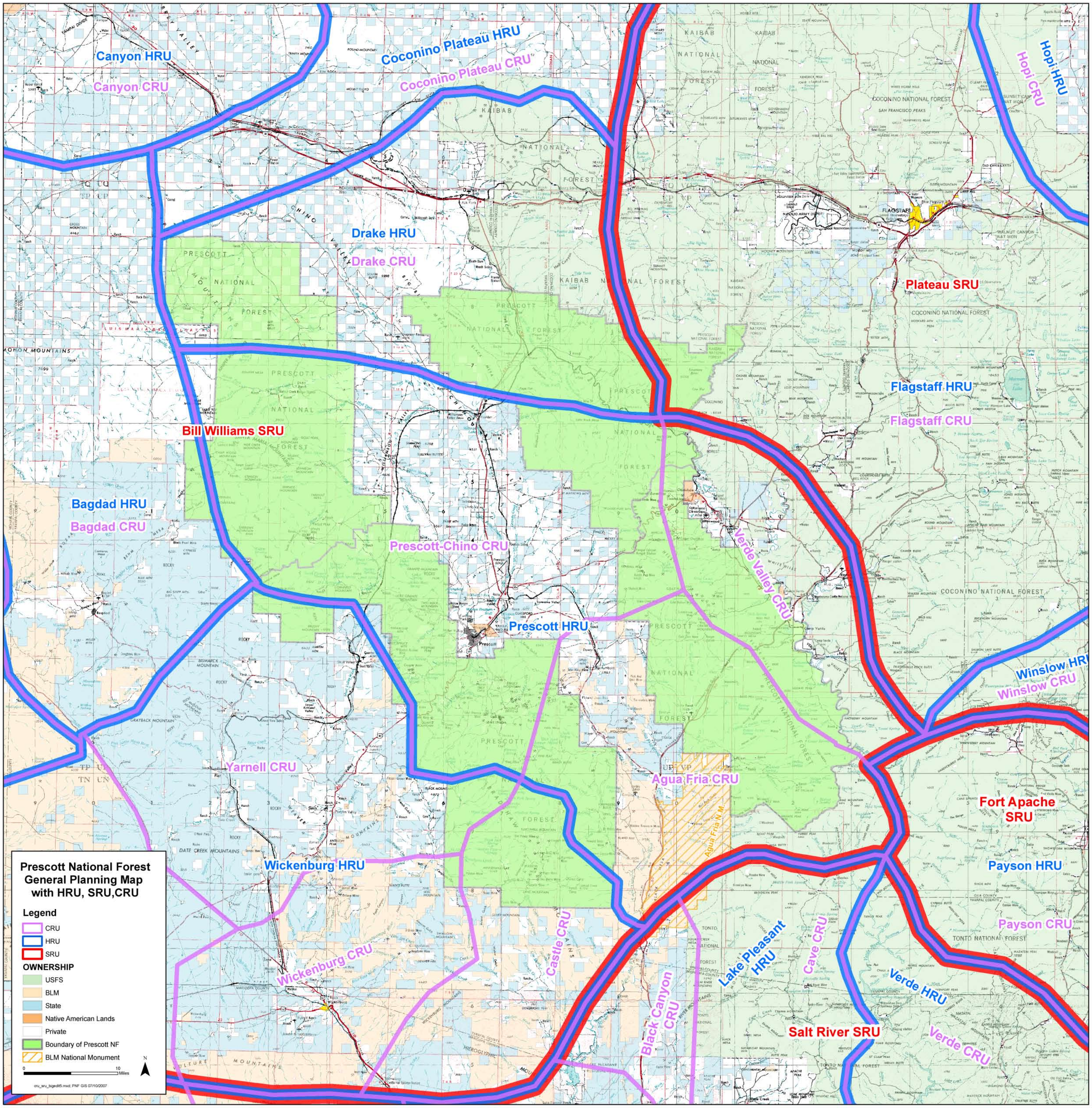

Natural Borders

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

JAMES KENT ASSOCIATES Global Cultural Analysis

WHY HUMAN GEOGRAPHIC MAPPING? People everywhere develop an attachment to a geographic place, characterized by a set of natural boundaries created by physical, biological, social, cultural and economic systems. This is called a Bio-Social Ecosystem. The term was created in 1991 by James Kent and Dan Beherov to integrate social ecology and biology in addressing watershed issues with people being a recognized part of the landscape. Unique beliefs, traditions, and stories tie people to a specific place, to the land, and to social/kinship networks, the reflection and function of which is called culture.

For the first time in United States history, social and cultural systems have been mapped by the JKA Group. The first Human Geographic Maps (HGMs) came into existence in the late 1970s and early 1980s as part of JKA's work with the Forest Planning process of the U.S. Forest Service, Region 2. The USFS was looking for new and creative ways to empower citizens as part of the Forest Plans. The HGMs were published as an integral part of the Forest Plan implementation. This was followed in 1986 by a contract with the US West (now Qwest) Corporation to map the 14 states that made up their service area in order to launch their cell phone business based on cultural word-of-mouth and natural boundary systems. Subsequently the HGMs have been used by communities, businesses, corporations, governments and citizens to improve relationships, make trend projections, develop market segments, and to understand emerging patterns in order to change the way government and business is conducted. In 2000, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of the Department of Interior, entered into a license agreement with JKA to digitally produce the Human Geographic Maps and to use them in planning and management within BLM district offices.

Operating at the proper scale brings optimum efficiency and productivity to projects, programs, marketing, policy formation and other actions by working within the appropriate social and cultural context. Six different scales of cultural or human geography have been discovered which have been successfully applied to program and policy development:

1. Neighborhood Resource Unit ——— (NRU)
2. Community Resource Unit ——— (CRU)
3. Human Resource Unit ——— (HRU)
4. Social Resource Unit ——— (SRU)
5. Cultural Resource Unit ——— (CuRU)
6. Global Resource Unit ——— (GRU)

The HGMs represent the culture of a geographic area, especially the informal systems through which people adapt to changes in their environment, take care of each other, and sustain their values and lifestyles. The HGMs represent the boundaries within which people already mobilize to meet life's challenges. Hence, their experiences are used through their participation as place-based knowledge to create ownership in issue resolution, project planning and implementation, public participation, and public policy development.

The JKA Group employs human geographic mapping to foster and support productive harmony between human and physical environments. By "entering the routines" of the community (The Discovery Process™), the actual functioning of the culture, and its resilience and absorption capacity is described, including the geographic features that distinguish one population from another. Efforts to mobilize people in their environment, and to foster empowerment in dealing with change, are called Human Geographic Issue Management Systems (HGIMS)™. When cultural alignment is achieved, that is, when citizen issues in the community are integrated with the management concerns of institutions, the capacity of both is enhanced in creating a healthy environment. HGMs are a key tool with which to accomplish integrated resource management. Essential to sustainable bio-social ecosystems is the ability to grow indigenous processes of empowerment and governance based on management of human and physical issues within natural boundaries. HGMs provide the natural boundaries necessary for freeing the energy and creativity of a place-based culture to collaborate on its future...

This map of Human Geographic Units displays three scales from the above six scales of human geography: the CRU, HRU and SRU.

Community Resource Units (CRUs) are the aggregation of Neighborhood Resource Units in which face-to-face relationships and strong caretaking systems are most evident. The CRU shows the "catchment" area of a community, or its zone of influence, beyond which people relate to another community. Geographic features and settlement patterns are two of the Cultural Descriptors that often strongly influence these boundaries. In rural areas, the CRU captures the perception of local residents that certain areas outside of town are part of the town. In urban areas, it reflects the perception that there are sections of the city with unique identities and patterns that can be distinguished from other sections of the same city. CRUs are most useful at the project level in which personal citizen involvement is important.

Human Resource Units (HRUs) are roughly equivalent in size to a county but seldom correspond to county boundaries. HRU boundaries are derived from seven Cultural Descriptors: settlement patterns, publics, networks, work routines, support services, recreational activities and geographic features.

HRUs are characterized by frequent and customary interaction. Face-to-face human society is also important at this scale of human geography, within which people have personal knowledge of each other and well-developed caretaking systems sustained through informal network relationships.

People's daily activities occur primarily within their HRU including work, school, shopping, social activities and recreation. Health, education, welfare and other public service activities are highly organized at this level with a town or community almost always as its focal point. HRUs are most useful at the program level as they reveal widespread human routines that can easily be responded to in program development.

Social Resource Units (SRUs) are the aggregation of HRUs on the basis of geographic features of the landscape, often a river basin, for example, and are the basis of shared history, lifestyle, livelihood, and outlook. At this scale, face-to-face knowledge is much reduced. Rather, social ties are created by action around issues that transcend the smaller HRUs and by invoking common values ("We love the high desert.").

SRUs are characterized by a sense of belonging. These are rather large areas and one's perception as to the Unit's boundary is that when you cross the SRU boundary you are in an entirely different culture. There is a general feeling of "oneness" as being a part of this regional Unit. There is a general understanding and agreement on beliefs, traditions, stories and the attributes of being a part of the Unit. SRUs are useful at the policy level because of their regional orientation.