Trinity Roadside Hazard Removal
Project Proposal

Shasta-Trinity National Forest
Trinity River and South Fork Management Units

January 2009

I. Background

Numerous wildfires were initiated by lightning during the summer of 2007 and 2008 on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest (Forest). Many of these fires burned together forming large wildfire complexes ultimately affecting more than 200,000 acres, predominately on National Forest-administered lands within Trinity County. Enormous public resources were expended during fire suppression efforts to protect life, property, and natural resources over a period of months. In the aftermath of the 2008 fires, the Forest Service is focused on minimizing hazards associated with these wildfires and improving the effectiveness of fire suppression and control for future wildfire events.

The purpose for the Trinity Roadside Hazard Removal Project is to reduce threats to public safety by felling and/or removing dead trees that were created by recent wildfires and exist along roads open to public travel. The road segments identified in this proposal are within the perimeters of the Lime, Wallow, Trough, Telephone, Eagle, and Cedar wildfires, and have been identified as having concentrations of fire-killed trees that threaten safe use of travelways. Without management action, the probability of injury or closure of the roadways will continue to increase over time.

The Forest is also proposing to expand and/or maintain strategically located control lines in key areas along existing roads within the fire boundaries. These improved control lines would provide relatively safe and effective areas for managing future fires, both wildland and prescribed. These control lines were established along existing roads during fire suppression efforts in the 2007 and 2008 fire seasons. These are places where understory vegetation and surface fuels were removed and counter-firing operations initiated.

An environmental analysis (EA) will be prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations.

Where is this project in the Forest Service NEPA process?

NEPA (short for the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969) is the Forest Service decision-making process that provides opportunities for interested parties to give their ideas and opinions about resource management. This input is important to help the Forest Service identify resource needs, which will shape the alternatives evaluated and lead to the formation of a decision.

The following explains the steps of the NEPA process, and where the proposal is in that process.

☑ **Step One–Need for a Project.** The Forest Service or some other entity may identify the need for a project. YOU may bring the need for a project to the attention of the Forest Service.

☑ **Step Two–Develop Project Proposal.** The Forest Service or a project proponent develops detailed, site-specific proposal. YOU may be a proponent who develops a proposal or YOU can share input and ideas.

☑ **Step Three–Scoping (Public Input).** The Forest Service solicits public input on the site-specific proposal to define the scope of environmental analysis and range of alternatives to be considered. YOU provide site-specific input on issues, alternatives, and mitigation measures.

☐ **Step Four–Develop Reasonable Range of Alternatives.** If scoping determines need for an EA or EIS, the Forest Service develops alternatives. YOU suggest alternatives to the proposed action during the scoping process.

☐ **Step Five–Information for Formal Public Comment Period.** The Forest Service performs an analysis of environmental effects, identifies a preferred alternative, and solicits formal public comment. YOU provide timely comments on the analysis during the comment period.

☐ **Step Six–Environmental Analysis & Decision.** The Forest Service finalizes the EA and makes a decision to implement one of the alternatives. YOU can review the decision; you can appeal if you disagree, and you have "standing."

☐ **Step Seven–Appeal.** The Forest Service allows the public 45 days following a legal notice of decision to appeal. YOU may file a formal Notice of Appeal.

☐ **Step Eight–Implementation.** The Forest Service implements the project. YOU may contribute labor, equipment, or funding to implement the project.

☐ **Step Nine–Monitor and Evaluate.** The Forest Service monitors and evaluates project results. YOU provide feedback on the project to the Forest Service.

II. Purpose and Need for Action

The overall goal of this project is to assist in the continual implementation of the Shasta-Trinity NF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) issued in 1995. This plan provides programmatic management direction for site-specific projects. Directions from the Forest Plan along with results of data collection, analysis, and field review in the assessment area were used to develop the proposed action.

Designing the project to be consistent with standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan ensures that project objectives are achieved in the context of sustainable ecosystem management including compliance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). No plan amendments will be required. Best management practices and all water quality guidelines will be followed. No new roads will be constructed.

Specifically, **the purpose for this project is to reduce threats to public safety by felling and/or removing dead trees impacted by recent wildfires along roads open to public travel.** The road segments identified in this proposal are within the perimeters of recent wildfires and have been identified as having concentrations of trees killed by fire, which threaten safe use of travelways. Without management action, the probability of injury or closure of the roadways will continue to increase over time.

The Forest is also proposing to reduce levels of forest fuels and improve our ability to safely and effectively suppress fires on key roads. During efforts to suppress the recent wildfires, indirect 'control lines' were constructed to act as fuelbreaks. Established primarily along existing roads and defensible ridgelines, they were places where understory vegetation and surface fuels were removed and counter-firing operations initiated. One of the goals of this project is to expand and/or maintain these strategically located control lines in key locations along existing roads. These improved control lines would provide relatively safe and effective areas for managing future fires, both wildland and prescribed.

Although the fires consumed an enormous amount of fuel, they also created conditions that may give rise to increased hazardous fuel conditions in the future. Large areas of snags were created by the fires. These snags will soon be surrounded by dense brush and saplings. This increase in available fuel sets the stage for another large fire. Values at risks include damage to communities, structures, improvements, and private land within the wildland-urban interface; decrease in fire resilience of old growth stands; Late-Successional Reserves, special habitat areas, timber investments, heritage sites and recreation areas, and damage to forest resources.

The existing conditions vary from the desired conditions (Table 1). With this proposed project, the Forest looks to move toward the desired condition on Forest Lands. In order to achieve that, the specific management objectives for this project's purpose and need have been identified below.

Table 1. Comparison of the existing and desired conditions associated with the Trinity Roadside Hazard Project on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest

Existing Condition	Within the fire perimeter there are large areas of dead trees along segments of the road system that have created a hazard to human life and property. As these dead trees fall and fuel accumulates, future fires will be even more severe over time.
Desired Condition	A reduction of threats to public safety from falling trees will provide a safe transportation system within the perimeter of the fire. A reduction of forest fuels will improve fire suppression control along key road segments within the fire perimeter.

1. Ensure public and forest worker safety – Reduce the risk of persons or property being struck by falling trees and keep travel corridors open with adequate clearance for a combination of traditional firefighting equipment, recreational vehicles, and automobiles. The combination of such vehicles is typical during an emerging fire emergency when fire resources are arriving and the public is evacuating.

This purpose and need moves the Forest in the direction of accomplishing Goals 8 and 9 of the Forest Plan. Goal 8 states, *"Manage the Forests' transportation system to ' facilitate resource management activities, protect wildlife, meet water quality objectives, and*

provide recreational access." Goal 9 instructs, *"Provide and maintain those administrative facilities that effectively and safely serve the public and Forest Service work force."* (page 4-4)

2. Reduce fuel loading and improve fire suppression and control on key travelways within already existing control lines – Minimize the contribution of hazardous fuel loading from dead trees adjacent to roads that may be used for suppression and control of wildfires. Abate the extreme hazard to firefighters posed by snags during fire suppression activities (personnel being struck by burning snags, exploding snags, difficulty falling decayed snags, propensity of snags to torch and facilitate spot fires). The improvement of the control lines would provide relatively safe and effective areas for managing future fires, both wildland and prescribed.

This purpose and need helps us to move toward accomplishing Goal 11 in the Forest Plan: *"Achieve a balance of fire suppression capability and fuels management investments that are cost effective and able to meet ecosystem objectives and protection responsibilities."* (page 4-4)

III. Proposed Action

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) has established several 'land allocations', across the Forest. This proposed project area is scattered across the west side of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest and crosses four different, specific land allocations. They include Adaptive Management Areas, Matrix, Riparian Reserves, and Late-Successional Reserves. This project would incorporate design criteria to protect sensitive areas and meet land management objectives for these land allocations in accordance with the Forest Plan.

Figure 1. Burned trees along road segments

Removal of Hazardous Trees

The Forest is proposing to cut down and remove hazardous trees that are within 1½ tree heights (approximately 150 feet) of the centerline of National Forest System roads open to public travel.

Hazardous trees along roads (Figure 1) have been identified within the perimeters of the Lime, Wallow, Trough, Telephone, Eagle, and Cedar fires (Map 1). Healthy live trees (e.g., Douglas fir, incense cedar, and ponderosa pine), and groups of seedlings and saplings, would be retained unless the trees pose a safety hazard in the cut and removal operation. There are approximately 940 acres

of trees scattered along segments of existing roads (which equal about 26 miles) within the project area that have experienced high to moderate burn intensity. These trees appear black or brown and are obviously dead (as seen in Figure 1). These stands of trees (within 150 feet on either side of the road) would be entirely removed to prevent them from falling into roadways, damaging property, and endangering lives.

Figure 2. Trees that are dying along the road from lower burn severity

Along 58 miles of road within the project area (approximately 2,006 acres), there are areas where the burn severity was low to none. In these areas, a few of the individual trees are brown and dying, but others are green and viable (as illustrated by Figure 2). Here, individual trees (within 150 feet of either side of the road), would be removed to prevent injury to property or lives.

Slash disposal and fuel treatments associated with hazard tree cutting and removal would consist of whole tree removal, disposal as fuelwood, sectioning and scattering, hand piling and burning, chipping and mastication. These treatments will help maintain or improve forest health, reduce the risk of effects from insect and disease infestations, and minimize or reduce the potential for high severity**,** stand-replacement wildfires. Summary of the proposed actions are displayed in Table 2.

The analysis area for this project will include National Forest System lands in Trinity County administered by the South Fork Management Unit and Trinity River Management Unit.

Roadside Control Line Improvements

The Forest is also proposing to expand and/or maintain strategically located control lines in key areas along existing roads within the fire boundaries. These improved control lines would provide relatively safe and effective areas for managing future fires, both wildland and prescribed. These control lines were established along existing roads during fire suppression efforts in the 2007 and 2008 fire seasons. These are places where understory vegetation and surface fuels were removed and counter-firing operations initiated (as shown in Figure 3.).

There are approximately 23 miles of road (about 820 acres) scattered throughout the project area where the established control lines and existing roads overlap. Those 23 miles are where treatments to improve those control lines would occur. Treatments in these areas could include all of or any combination of the following: 1) hand piling and burning or underburning of remaining smaller surface fuels, 2) cutting, piling and burning or broadcast/underburning dead understory trees to reduce fuel loading, 3) thinning selected residual green understory, pruning lower branches, and treatment of surface fuels reduce ladder fuels and crown fire potential.

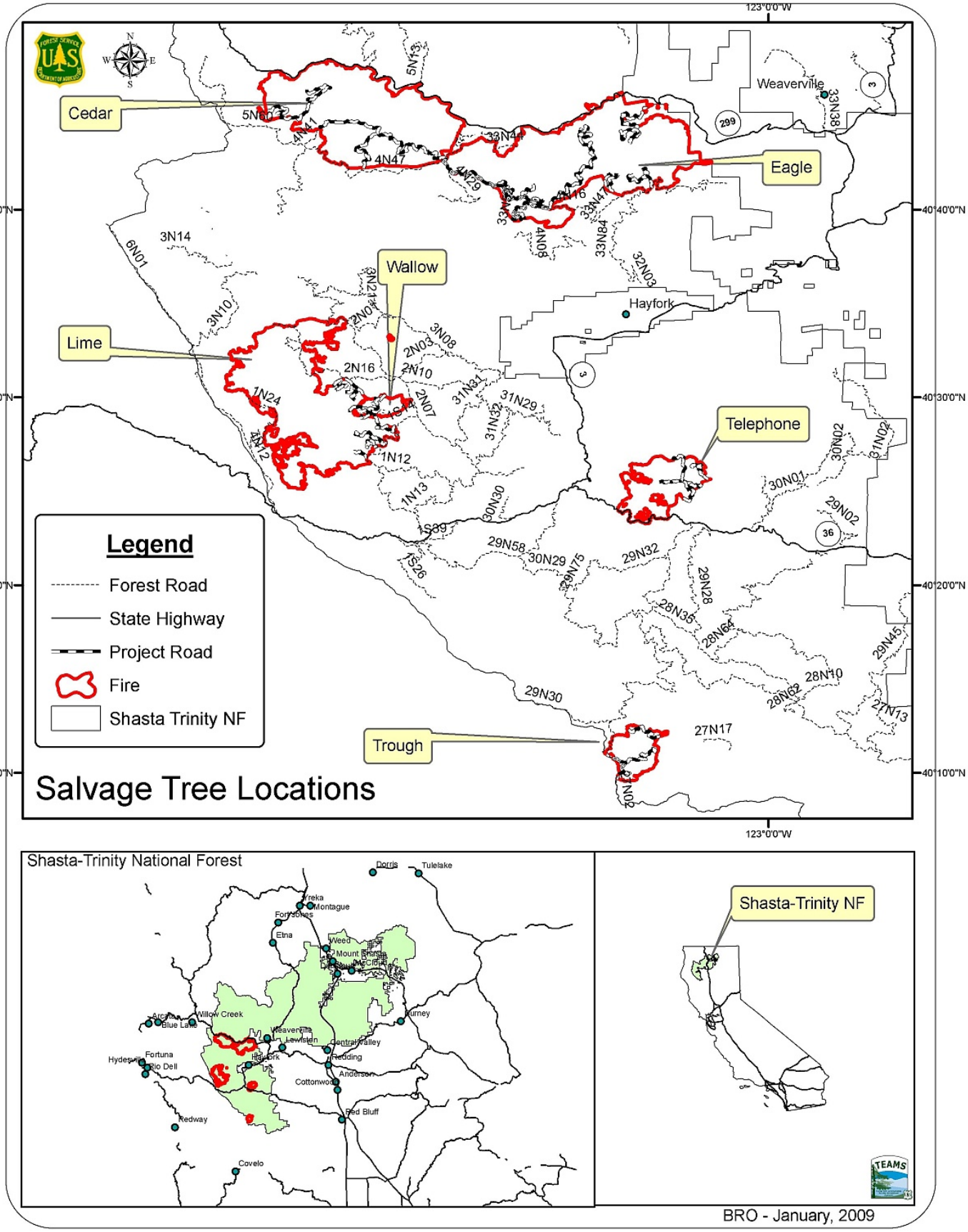
Figure 3. Control line areas where understory vegetation and surface fuels were removed

Treatment of activity-generated fuels would consist primarily of hand piling and burning, slashing, and/or whole-tree yarding. No new permanent system or temporary roads would be constructed as part of this project. This project excludes inventoried roadless and wilderness areas.

Table 2. Summary of proposed actions

Project Treatment	Total Miles	Total Acres
Treatment of Existing Control Lines along roads	23	820
Removal of Hazard Trees in high to moderate burn severity areas	26	940
Select/individual removal of Hazard Trees in low to no burn severity areas	58	2,006
Total Project area	**107**	**3,766**

Map 1 shows the overall view of the project area as contained by fire perimeters. For a more detailed look at the individual roads identified for proposed treatments, please refer to the maps in the attached Appendix.



Map 1. Vicinity map showing roads identified for hazard tree abatement in the 2007-2008 fire perimeters within the proposed project area

IV. Request for Comments

Invitation for Issues, Concerns, and Comments

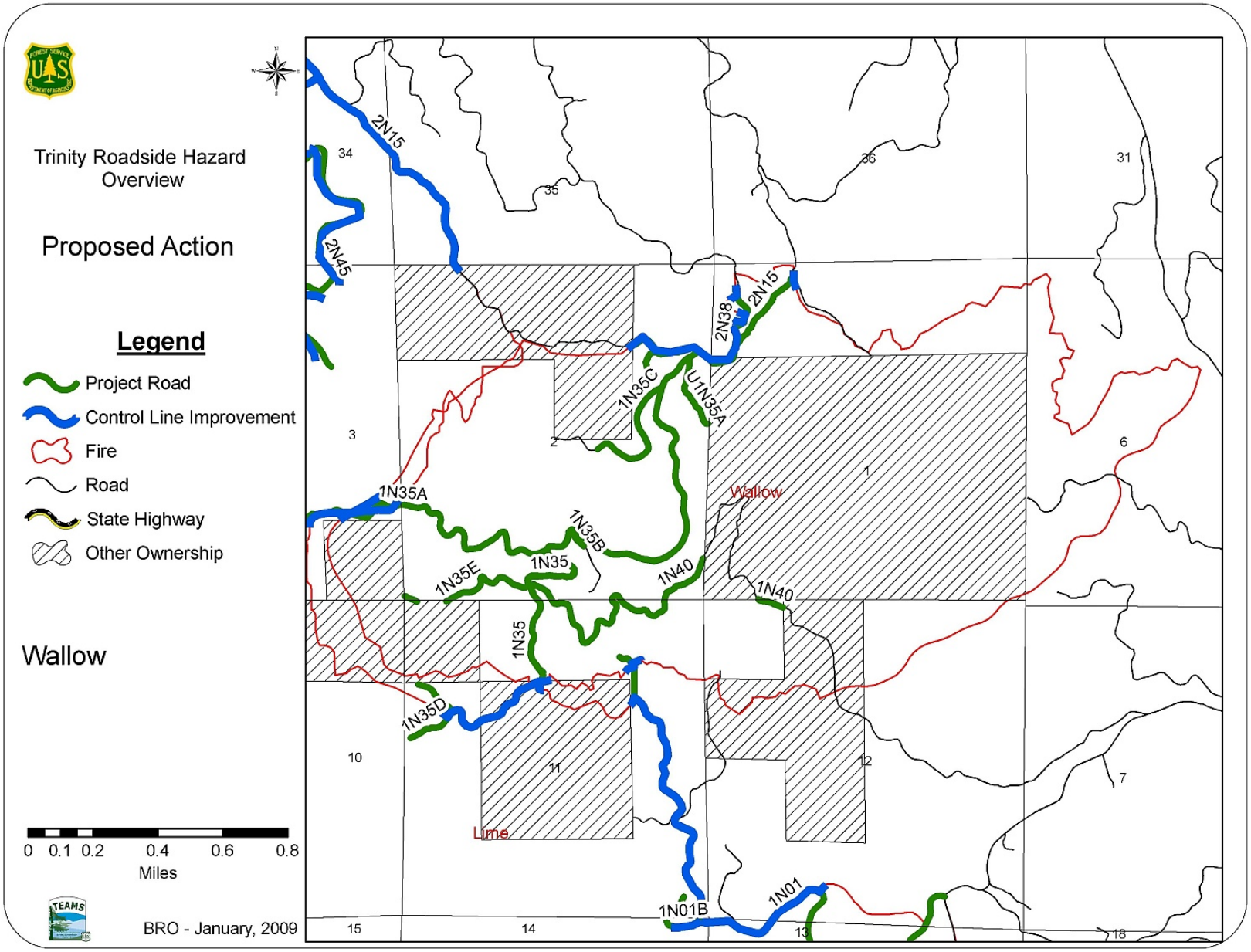
I invite you to submit your issues, concerns and comments specific to this proposal so that they may be considered early in the analysis. Comments that are site specific, or are based on your knowledge of the area will better help us develop and evaluate alternatives to the proposed action. Although comments are welcome throughout the planning process, providing comments by March 2, 2009[1], will allow time for your input to be considered during alternative development and analysis. Comments are a matter of public record and as such may be provided to interested parties upon request. Questions about this proposal should be directed to Cristi Corey-Luse, project team leader, 715-362-1185.

Comments may be submitted by e-mail, fax, or U.S. Mail. Please provide any issues, concerns, suggestions or additional information you may have regarding this project to: Cristi Corey-Luse, TEAMS USFS Enterprise Unit, Northern Research Station, 5985 Highway K, Rhinelander, WI 54501; Fax: 715-362-1166. Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-pacificsouthwest-shasta-trinity@fs.fed.us, please indicate "Roadside Hazard" in the subject line.

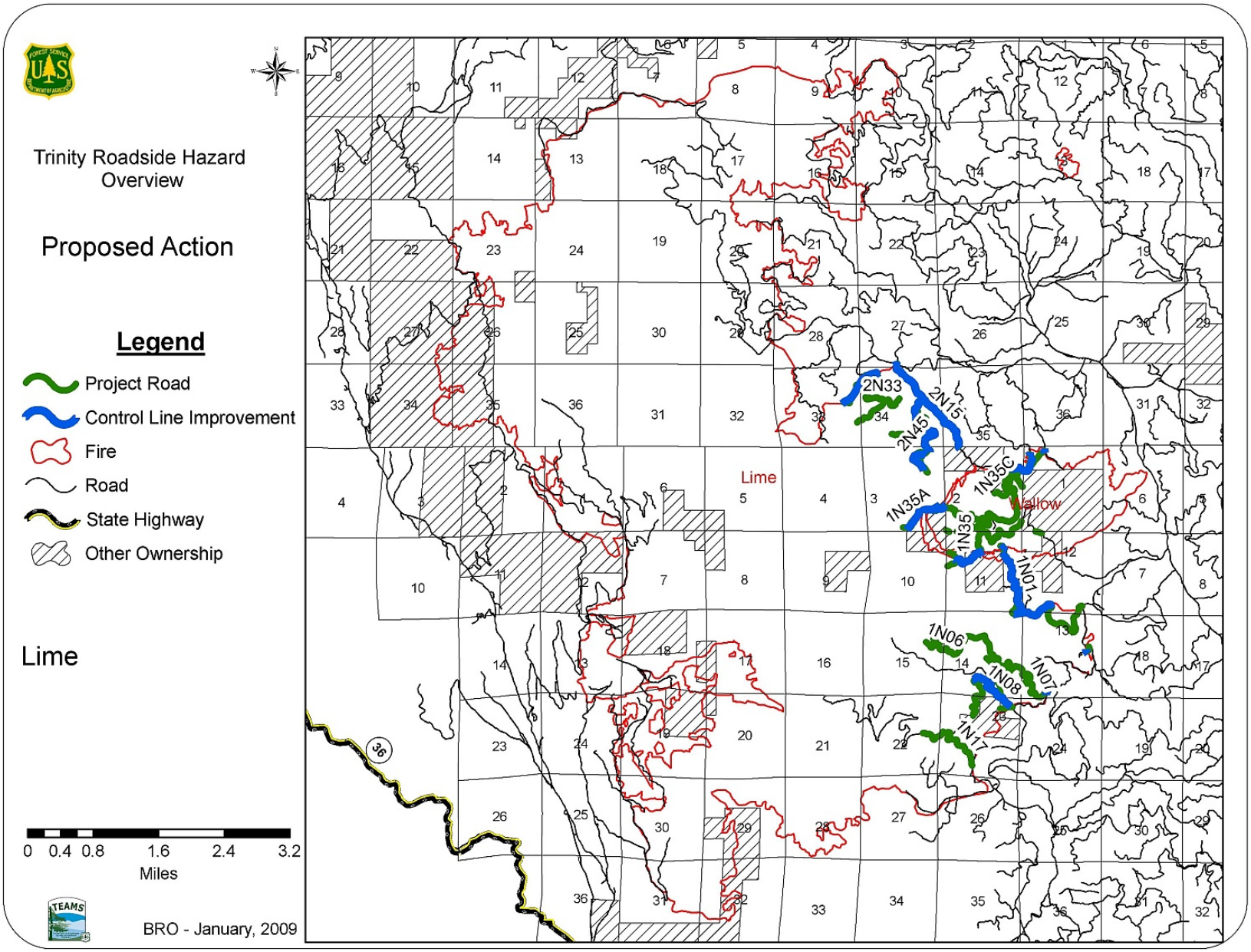
You must respond to this invitation in order to be placed on the public involvement list for this project and to receive any further project notifications. All parties responding to this initial scoping that include sufficient contact information will be notified of the 30-day comment opportunity prior to a decision.

[1]Corrected from original which had an incorrect date of February 31, 2009.

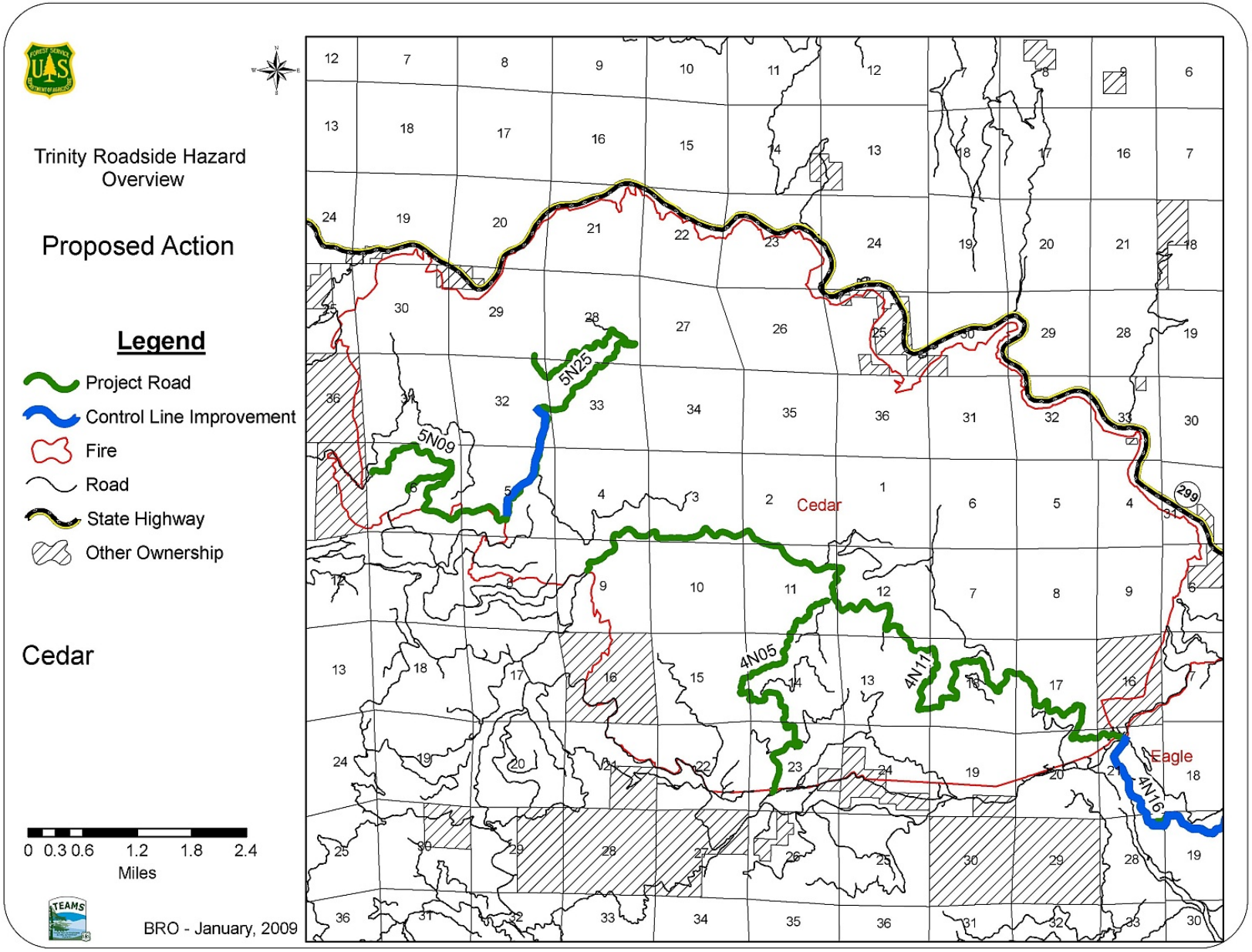
Appendix - Detailed Project Area Maps



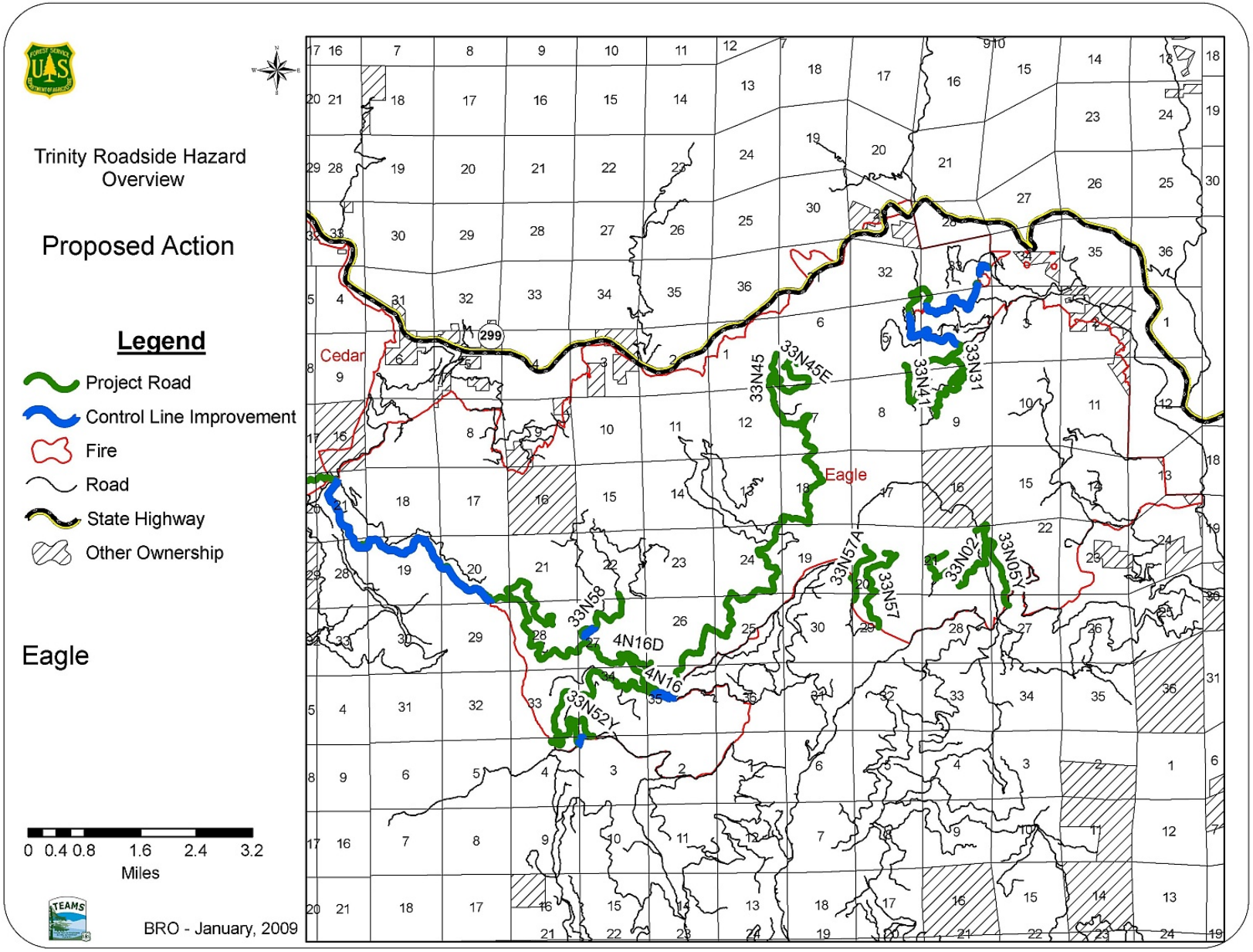
Map 2. Wallow Fire



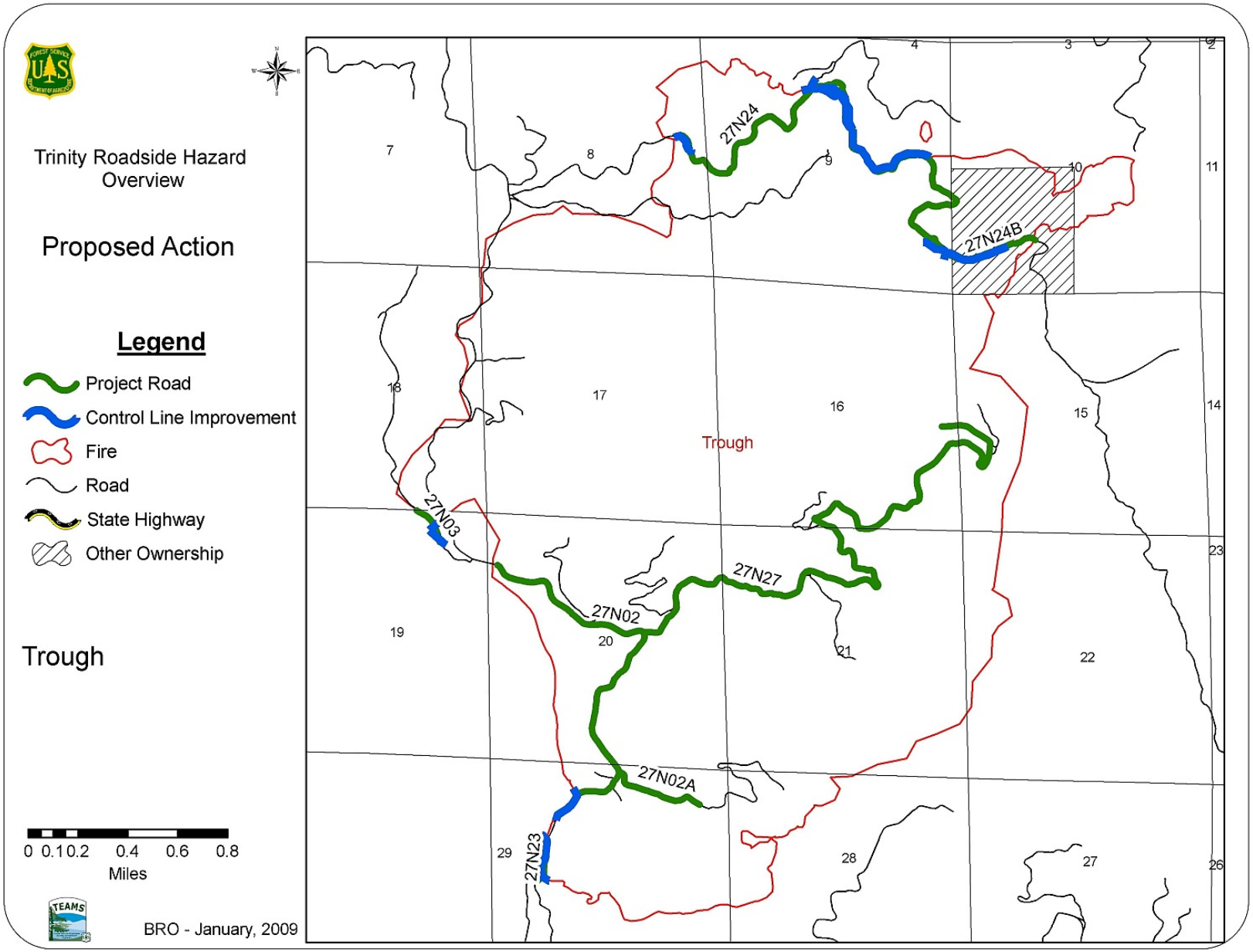
Map 3. Lime Fire



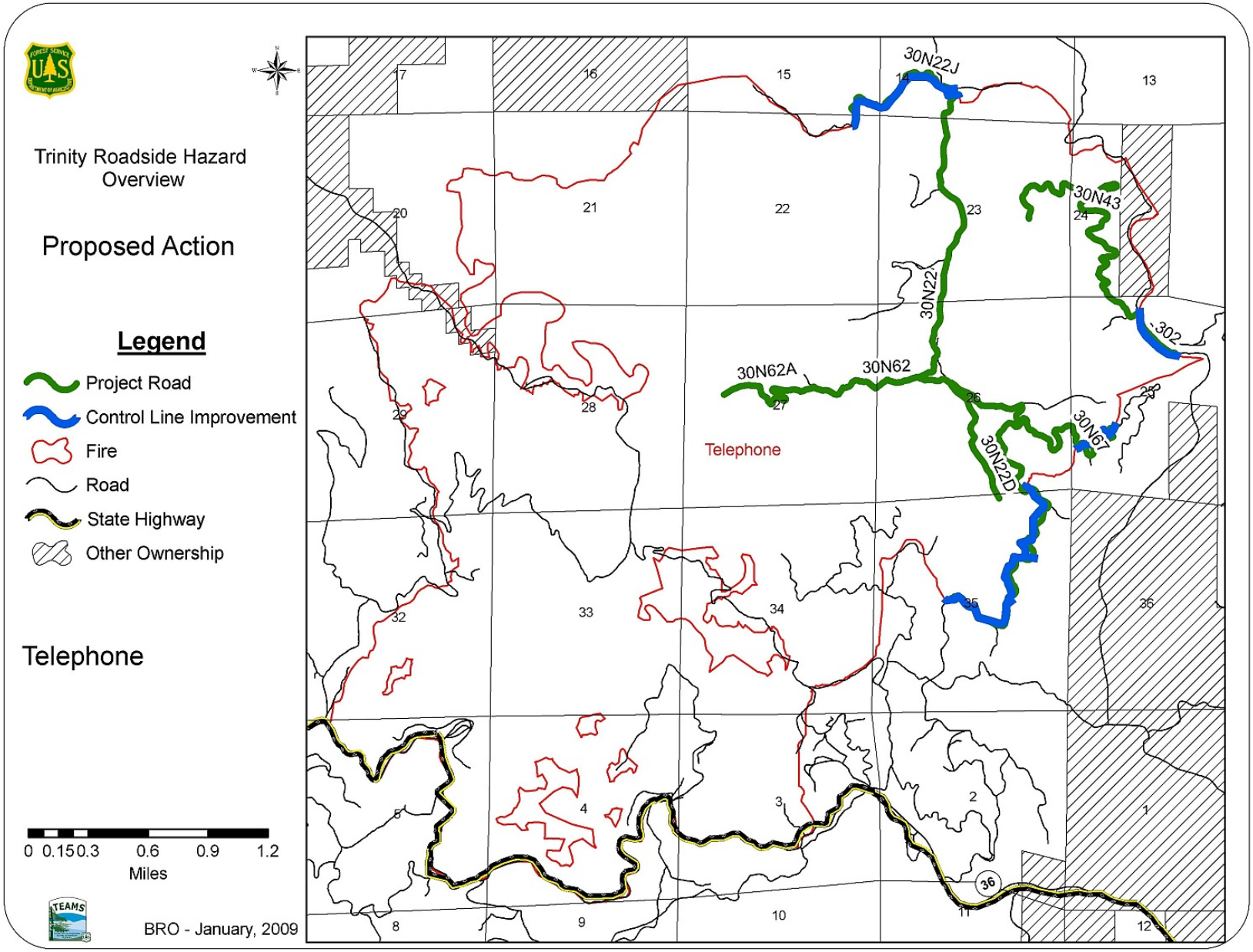
Map 4. Cedar Fire



Map 5. Eagle Fire



Map 6. Trough Fire



Map 7. Telephone Fire