



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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Baldwin, MI 49304

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File Code: 1950
Date: January 9, 2008
Subject: Mast Lake Project Scoping Letter

Dear Forest Neighbor:

I am seeking your input on the proposed Mast Lake Project, on the Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger Districts of the Huron-Manistee National Forests. The United States Forest Service is proposing to manage stands of aspen, red pine, oak, and scotch pine. This project also includes improvement of wildlife openings, dry sand prairie restoration, evaluating recreational opportunities, trash removal, management of the transportation system, and the treatment of selected non-native invasive species within the Mast Lake Project Area. ***The purpose of this letter is to invite you to comment on this proposed project and help identify issues, concerns, or opportunities associated with this project.*** Your comments could result in different alternatives, the identification of potential effects from a proposed action, mitigation measures, or specific monitoring. In addition, please identify any possible impacts to individual's civil rights that are associated with this proposal.

A comment sheet has been provided for your written comments. If you would like to give input beyond the comment sheet, have questions regarding the proposal, or would like to receive further documents regarding this project, please contact Christopher Frederick, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at the Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger District [Telephone:(231) 745-4631 x3138, Fax: (231) 745-2345, or e-mail: cfrederick@fs.fed.us]. ***Alternatives to the proposed action will be developed during the next few months; therefore, we ask that you provide comments on the proposed actions by February 11, 2008.*** Comments will be accepted any time during the planning process.

All responses received (including names and addresses) will become part of the public file. This information will be made available to the public, upon request.

Sincerely,
/s/ Gregory D. Smith

Gregory D. Smith
Acting District Ranger

Mast Lake Project



Public Scoping Letter

Huron-Manistee National Forests
Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger District

Introduction

The Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger District of the Huron-Manistee National Forests is seeking your input on proposed management activities within the Mast Lake Project Area (Project Area). These activities include (acreages approximate):

- 140 acres of aspen management;
- 396 acres of red pine management;
- 123 acres of wildlife habitat improvement;
- 78 acres of shaded fuelbreak creation;
- 83 acres of dry sand prairie restoration;
- Removal of trash from dump sites;
- Rehabilitation of two sites damaged by ORVs;
- Necessary improvements would be made on existing roads needed for proposed activities. In addition, we are proposing to reduce the current road density of 6.4 miles of road/square mile to 3.3 miles of road/square mile; and
- 9 sites (-1.5 acres) of non-native invasive species treatment.

The proposed activities in the Project Area are located in:

- T14N, R11W, Sections 13, 14, 16, 21-23, and 25-36 of Goodwell Township, Newaygo County MI
- T13N, R11W, Sections 5-7, 17-20, 29, and 30 of Big Prairie Township, Newaygo County, MI

The attached maps show the approximate location of the proposed treatments.

Specific Resource Areas

The following information pertains to the specific resource areas being considered for this project. The Existing Condition reflects the current situation in the Mast Lake Project Area. The Desired Future Condition is what we would like to see in this area and is based on management direction found in the Huron-Manistee National Forests Management Plan (Forest Plan).

The Purpose and Need for a project is arrived at by addressing the differences between the Existing Condition and the Desired Future Condition. All management activities that occur within the Huron-Manistee National Forests are directed by the objectives of the Forest Plan. This plan identifies how different areas of the Forest are managed in different ways. The Mast Lake Project Area occurs in Management Areas 4.3 and 4.4.

Management Area 4.2 (Roaded Natural Sandy Plains and Hills) - According to the Forest Plan (pp III-4.2-2), management activities enhance and increase the variety of wildlife habitats with emphasis given to managing deer, grouse, wildlife, and Kirtland's warbler essential habitat. High volumes of timber are produced. Emphasis includes reducing life-threatening and property-damaging wildfire potential and providing a variety of recreational opportunities. Dry, sandy plains and low, dry, sandy hills that support red and jack pines, oak, and aspen typify this area.

Management Area 4.4 (Rural) - According to the Forest Plan (pp III-4.4-2), management activities provide recreational opportunities, sources of firewood close to users, and moderate to high volumes of softwood timber products. Emphasis includes reducing life-threatening and property-damaging wildfire potential. Wildlife management is coordinated with adjacent non-National Forest land management with emphasis on deer, grouse, and wildlife management. Some small blocks will be managed to protect isolated, essential areas for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species. This rural condition encompasses a broad spectrum of landforms that includes sandy plains, morainal hills, and riparian areas. This condition exists where National Forest ownership is scattered and human activities have altered the landscape.

Based on the determined Purpose and Need, the Interdisciplinary Team has developed the Proposed Actions. These actions are designed to serve as a means of moving the Mast Lake Project Area from the Existing Condition to the Desired Future Condition.

Timber Management

Aspen

Existing Condition: Some of the aspen stands within the Project Area are over-mature and are beginning to convert to other forest types. Early-successional (0-10 year) stands of aspen are limited throughout the Project Area.

Desired Future Condition: These stands will be maintained as aspen and the conversion to other forest types will not occur. Early-successional aspen habitat will be provided throughout the Project Area.

Purpose and Need: Maintain the aspen component in commercial forest stands and provide younger aspen age classes.

Proposed Action: Portions of existing aspen stands would be harvested to promote aspen regeneration, age-class diversity, and improve wildlife habitat for early-successional species. Approximately 140 acres of aspen would be clearcut. Individual clearcut areas would not exceed 40 acres. In some areas, the expansion of existing aspen stands would occur. In some stands that are not typed as aspen, but where pockets of aspen clones exist, clearcutting activities would occur to promote the continued presence of aspen inclusions in these areas. Expansion efforts would include portions of a 30 acre stand that is typed as red oak and an 8 acre portion of a 93 acre stand that is typed as mixed oak. In some lowland riparian areas, the aspen component

would be retained through non-commercial cutting. In these areas, the trees would be left on-site.

Red Pine

Existing Condition: In the past, red pine plantations were established as a means of land reclamation. In some areas, these trees were planted at high densities. In many areas, these plantations have not been thinned since the time of planting. In these areas, tree growth and diversity is limited due to the competition that exists for sunlight, water, and nutrients. The understory vegetation in many of these stands is limited or non-existent.

Desired Future Condition: The number of trees per acre will be reduced to a level that the previously degraded soils can adequately support. Individual tree growth in these stands will increase. The competition for sunlight, nutrients, and water will be reduced. Other vegetation, such as forbs and shrubs, will have the opportunity to become established in the understory.

Purpose and Need: Sustain forest health and individual tree growth rates and increase vegetative diversity in red pine stands.

Proposed Action: Selected red pine plantations would be thinned to improve individual tree growth and stand diversity, while reducing the competition within these stands for sunlight, water, and soil nutrients. Approximately 396 acres of red pine would be treated.

Wildlife Management

Existing Condition: The Project Areas currently offers an array of wildlife habitats, ranging from early-successional to late-seral. Upland and lowland openings are present throughout the area. Some of the upland openings are being encroached upon by non-mast producing woody species and contain grasses and forbs that are of limited value to upland wildlife species. In portions of the Project Area, suitable habitat exists for interior species. There are scattered lowland openings within these areas, but the surrounding edge habitat is poor or lacking. There is a lack of suitable cavity/den trees and mast bearing shrubs and trees.

Desired Future Condition: The Project Area will continue to provide a diverse combination of forested and non-forested wildlife habitat capable of supporting a variety of upland and interior species. Cavity/den trees will exist throughout the Project Area.

Purpose and Need: Provide suitable habitat to maintain or increase wildlife diversity.

Proposed Action: Manage selected upland openings (through a combination of discing, seeding, fertilizing, hand-cutting, prescribed burning, and/or planting) to provide the blend of native grasses, forbs, mast-producing shrubs, and limited large woody vegetation that is necessary to support a variety of upland wildlife species. Manage and expand selected lowland openings (through a combination of snag and den tree creation, selective tree felling, and shrub planting) to encourage their use by a variety of lowland and interior species. These activities would occur on portions of 73 acres that are typed as openings and 50 acres that are typed as mixed oak.

Fuels Management

Existing Condition: Portions of the Project Area consist of conifer plantations (red pine, jack pine, and Scotch pine) which were historically planted at high densities in order to hold fragile and eroding soils in place. In some of the jack pine stands, there is increased fuel loading because of the high density of seedlings beneath the mature trees. In these conifer types, it is this regeneration which serves to carry fire into the crowns of the mature and over-mature trees that are still standing. In other areas (red pine, jack pine, and Scotch pine), the density of the tree planting has formed a closed canopy underlain with a thick bed of needles that have been shed over the years. The understory vegetation in these locations is virtually non-existent. In both of these areas, there is risk of a rapidly spreading wildfire.

Desired Future Condition: The density of the trees in the conifer plantations will be reduced to allow for the establishment of native understory species. Fire dependent tree species will be less dominant in these stands. The threat of escaped wildfires will be reduced.

Purpose and Need: Reduce the threat to adjacent landowners that is posed by the accumulation of hazardous fuels within portions of the Project Area.

Proposed Action: Shaded fuelbreaks would be created in portions of the Project Area. The stand densities in these areas would be reduced to a level that would discourage the regeneration of fire-dependent species, be variable by location and species composition, and promote the establishment of native understory vegetation. This would occur through a combination of commercial timber harvesting, selective non-commercial tree felling, and prescribed burning. This would occur on 72 acres of jack pine, 3 acres of red pine, and 3 acres of Scotch pine.

Dry Sand Prairie Restoration

Existing Condition: The Sparta soil series that historically supported native dry sand prairie habitat in this area now contains extensive conifer (red pine, jack pine, and Scotch pine) plantations. These were planted in an effort to control the erosion that was brought on through the conversion of the land to agriculture. While these plantations have been successful at holding the soil in place, no further efforts have been made to restore this habitat to dry sand prairie.

Desired Future Condition: The characteristics of dry sand prairie habitat will be enhanced in selected areas within the Project Area that contain the Sparta soil series.

Purpose and Need: Identify and develop selected areas having Sparta soils to determine candidate restoration sites and the preferred methods for conducting restoration activities.

Proposed Action: Preparation for restoration would vary across four sites.

Sites 1 and 2 (Compartment 570, Stands 1 and 2): This area is a combination of dense, two-layer canopied jack pine and Scotch pine. Initial treatments in these areas would be to develop a shaded fuelbreak (see Fuels Management). Following the fuel-load reduction treatments (harvesting and prescribed burning), warm season grasses would be planted to determine the ability of these species to stabilize the soil in these areas. If successful, a prairie seed mix would then be used to establish native plant populations that would provide the dry sand prairie habitat. Following the fuel-load reduction treatments, if the warm season grasses fail to stabilize the soil, there would be enough mature pine retained within the sites to be developed into strip windbreaks. Additional conifer planting may need to occur within these strips. Areas located between the strips would then be replanted with a combination of warm season grasses and low density pine. Approximately 75 acres would be available for this treatment.

Site 3 (Compartment 572, Stand 19): This is a small (1-2 acre) semi-open area located within dense pine plantations. The soils in this area are mostly exposed due to the passage of Off-Road Vehicles (ORV). There are sporadic conifers, sparse ground vegetation, and little to no binding topsoil. The proposal here would be to close this area off to ORVs, retain the woody vegetation, and plant the exposed areas to warm-season grasses to retain the exposed soil. If the warm season grasses are successful at retaining this soil, a gradual transition to the planting of prairie-mix species would occur. As the area is surrounded by dense pine plantation, there is a reduced concern for further losses to wind erosion than what has already occurred. As a result, if stabilization through the planting of warm-season grasses fails, the area would be allowed to revegetate naturally.

Site 4 (Compartment 572, Stand 29): This is a semi-open oak stand of 6 acres which currently has persistent ground vegetation. There are some locations where the soil is exposed. Site preparation would occur on this site through a combination of prescribed burning, handcutting, and mowing. Following these activities, warm-season grass seed would be drilled throughout the stand. If the warm-season grasses can successfully be established, then a follow-up planting would occur with a combination of warm-season grass seed and prairie mix seed. If the prairie-

mix seed is successful, then gradual canopy removal would occur. Conducting an activity would be dependent on the success of the previous activity.

Trash Dumping

Existing Condition: The combination of high road densities and fragmented land ownership throughout the Project Area are contributing to the dumping of trash on National Forest System lands. These dump sites are scattered throughout the Project Area and vary in size from isolated individual dumps to historic township dumps.

Desired Future Condition: The trash that has been dumped on National Forest System lands will be removed and properly disposed of. The potential for illegal dumping and illegal hunting stands will be reduced.

Purpose and Need: Reduce the quantity of trash currently located on National Forest System lands and reduce vehicle access to historic dumpsites.

Proposed Action: Identified trash dumps would be cleaned up and spur roads leading to these sites would be blocked.

Recreation

Existing Condition: The Project Area is mainly used for dispersed recreation activities (such as camping and hunting). In addition to these, ORV use occurs in the area and is the cause of extensive damage in two locations that are in close proximity to each other. Both of these areas are on light, sandy soils (Sparta Series) which were historically degraded and eroded prior to becoming part of the National Forest. There is little to no topsoil left at these locations and the vegetation is sparse to non-existent.

Desired Future Condition: The exposed soils will become stabilized and the continued erosion at these sites will cease. Native vegetation will become established. These areas will no longer be open for access to ORVs.

Purpose and Need: Rehabilitate the resource damage related to ORVs.

Proposed Action: These sites are located in Compartment 570 Stand 8 (Site 1) and Compartment 572 Stand 19 (Site 2) (see attached maps). In both locations, there are proposed red pine treatments that would occur in adjacent stands. A portion of the red pine from these stands would be used for barrier posts and erosion control structures within the damaged sites. Both areas would be seeded with native grasses. While follow-up tree planting would occur at Site 1, the focus of Site 2 would be the re-establishment of dry sand prairie species mix.

Road Management

Existing Condition: The current road density within the Project Area is 6.4 miles of public use road per square mile. The attached map shows the current roads within the Project Area. There are approximately 38.0 miles of roads within the Project Area. These include county roads (adjacent to National Forest System lands), classified Forest system roads, and unclassified roads.

Desired Future Condition: Road density will be between 3 and 3.5 miles of public road per square mile. This will provide a functional transportation system that maintains minimal road density, while minimizing resource damage. As a result of changes in the road system, there will be reduced potential for erosion and the expansion of user-developed roads associated with vehicle use, decreased impacts on wildlife, and reduced trash dumping.

Purpose and Need: Manage the Forest Service roads to bring the Project Area closer to the road density Standards and Guidelines of the Forest Plan (Forest Plan, pp II-39 and 40).

Proposed Action: Use temporary roads and/or re-open closed roads for access to the harvest units; these would be closed after harvesting is completed. Necessary improvements would be made on existing roads for proposed activities. Eliminate dead-end spur roads, roads that serve as duplicates (lead to the same location as another road), and roads that are no longer needed for

administrative purposes or are causing resource damage. This would reduce the current road density of 6.4 miles of road/square mile to 3.3 miles of road/square mile. There would be approximately 21.0 miles of road left open. This would include county roads, classified Forest system roads, and unclassified roads that become part of the Forest road system. The attached maps show the roads under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service that would be considered for closure and the roads that would be considered to become part of the transportation system in this area. Road/stream crossings would be upgraded as needed.

Control of Invasive Plant Species

Existing Condition: The non-native invasive plant species that have been identified within the Project Area include: garlic mustard (2 sites), Japanese barberry (4 sites), Scotch pine (3 sites), marsh thistle (1 site), autumn olive (1 site), honeysuckle (1 site) and leafy spurge (1 site). These plants occupy an area < 1.5 acres.

Desired Future Condition: Selected non-native plant species will be suppressed. Further spread of these species will not occur, or will be reduced, as a result of the management activities proposed in this project.

Purpose and Need: Prevent the spread of non-native invasive species caused by Forest Service activities.

Proposed Action: Treat identified areas of infestation of selected invasive species (i.e. garlic mustard, Japanese barberry, Scotch pine, exotic honeysuckle, autumn olive, marsh thistle, and leafy spurge). Treatment would include mechanical removal, spot burning, and/or systemic spot treatment with herbicide (glyphosate or picloram). Total treatments would occur on approximately 1.5 acres.

Analysis Process

There are additional stands within the Project Area; however, we have limited this project to the acres and volume that would be reasonable to complete in the next three to five years. **The Proposed Action is only one approach to meeting the objectives and Purpose and Need for this project. Utilizing the comments received from this document, we will develop additional alternatives to the one proposed.** This analysis will follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures and will be used to determine if there would be any significant environmental effects associated with the alternatives that will be developed through the course of the analysis. **The Baldwin-White Cloud District Ranger will use this analysis to decide whether or not to approve these activities on National Forest System lands or whether or not to prepare a more detailed Environmental Impact Statement.**

The following steps would be followed in the analysis process. The steps shown in *italics* are the formal opportunities for your involvement. The dates that are shown are estimations and may vary, depending on the number and type of comments received during the scoping period.

Step 1: Scoping January-February 2008

Public comment period. This is the time when people can comment on issues and concerns, and recommend opportunities and options to consider in the analysis. The Forest Service identifies issues based on comments from the public and develops alternatives based on those issues.

Step 2: Analysis February-April 2008

Forest Service analyzes the effects of alternatives and publishes the appropriate document.

Public Comment Period (30 days). This is the time when people can comment on the alternatives that have been developed through the analysis and as a result of the responses to scoping. Forest Service analyzes comments and responds (changes to the document may be based on comments).

Step 3: Decision June 2008

District Ranger makes Decision and notifies the public.

Formal 45-Day appeal period.

Step 4: Implementation 2008-2013

If the decision allows harvest activities to occur, timber sales would be prepared and sold over the next four to five years.

Step 5: Monitoring 2008 and beyond

Monitoring of project implementation and effectiveness would take place during and after the implementation stage.

PUBLIC COMMENT SHEET
Mast Lake Project
Huron-Manistee National Forests
Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger District

We invite you to comment on the specific proposed activities as they relate to the Mast Lake Project. Please take a few minutes to review the enclosed maps and make comments on our proposal. The interdisciplinary team will review all of the comments and incorporate them into the planning process. **If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call Christopher Frederick at 231-745-4631 ext 3138.**

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

Please indicate your interest by checking the appropriate box(s) below:

- Receive the forthcoming document (paper version) relating to this Project Area.
- Receive the forthcoming document (CD version) relating to this Project Area.
- Please remove my name from all mailing lists.

Please submit comments by February 11, 2008 so they may be used in the alternative development for this project. Attach additional sheets as necessary. If requested, a copy of all comments, including names and addresses, will be made available to the public.

Comments:

Comments received in response to this mailing, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request the agency withhold submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments be resubmitted with or without name and address within ten days.

Return address on back.

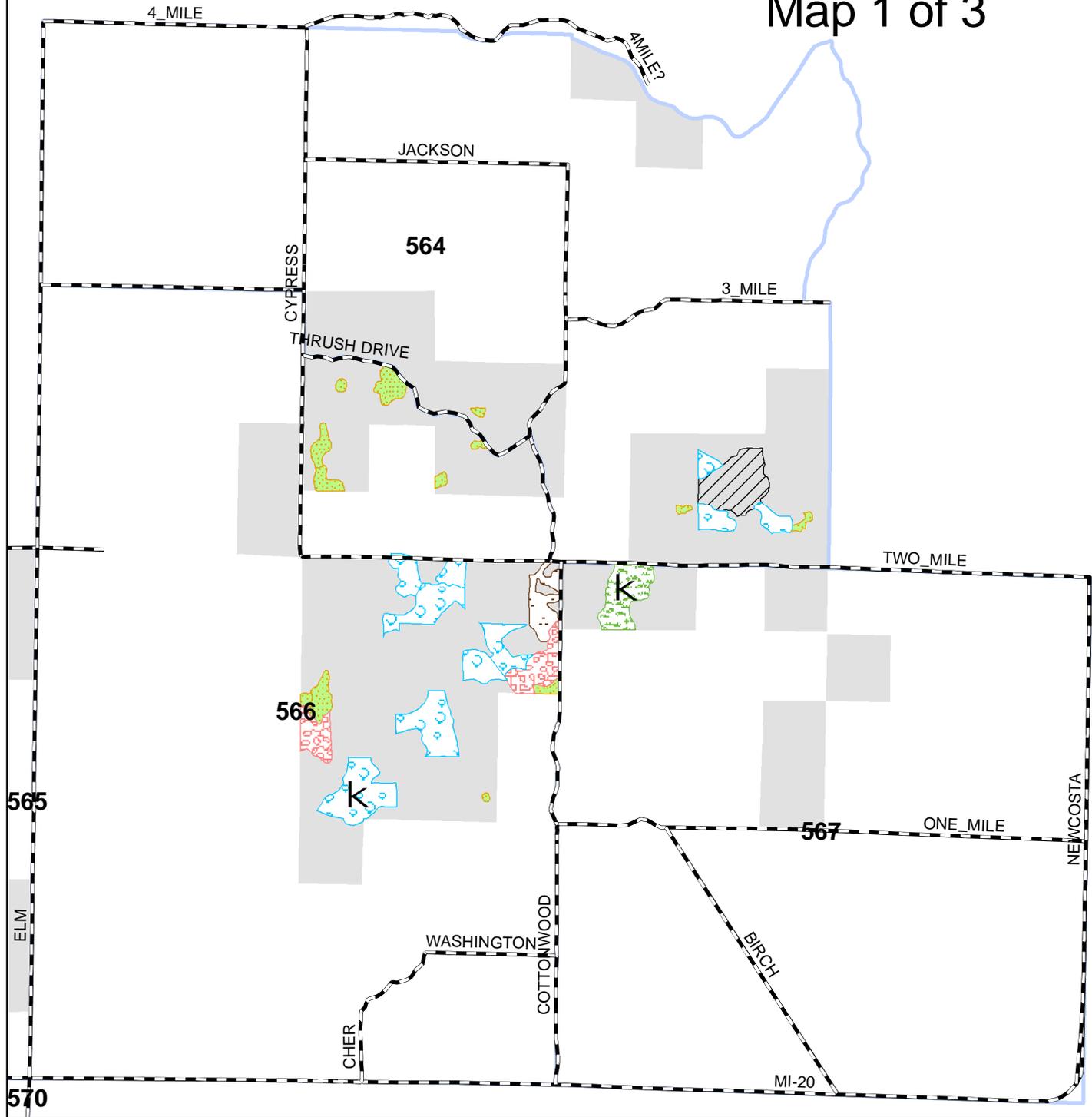
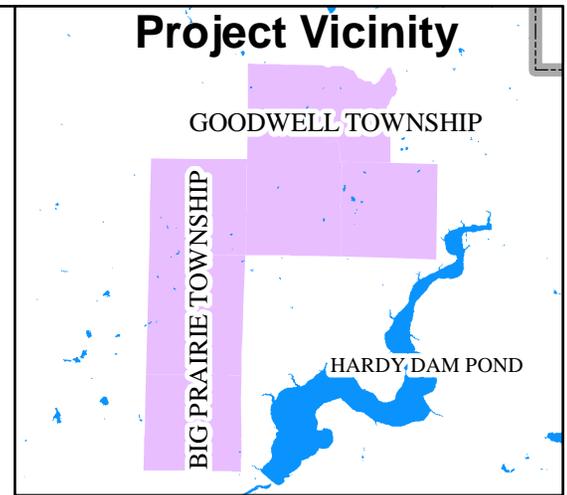
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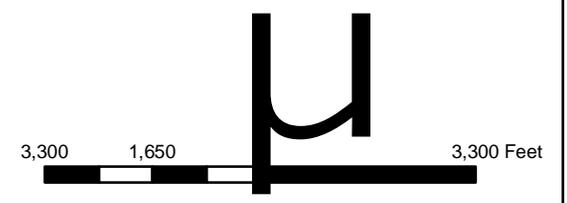
*TO: Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger Districts
Huron-Manistee National Forests
P.O. Box Drawer D
650 N. Michigan Ave
Baldwin, MI 49304*

Attention: Christopher Frederick

Compartments: 564, 566, 567 Mast Lake Project Map 1 of 3

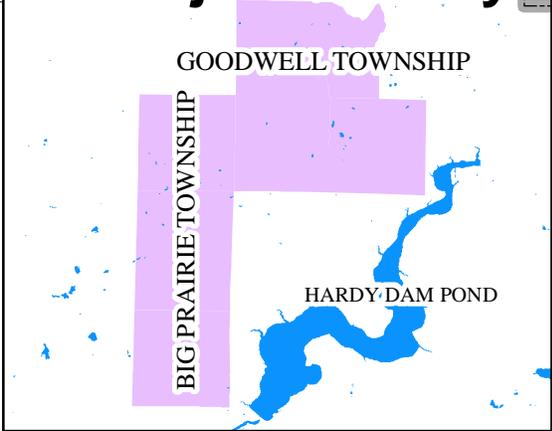


- County Roads
- Non-Native Invasive Species
- Aspen Clearcut
- Oak Shelterwood
- Aspen Non-commercial
- N. Red Oak Final Harvest
- Aspen Expansion
- Opening Maintenance
- FS Land
- Comp Boundary



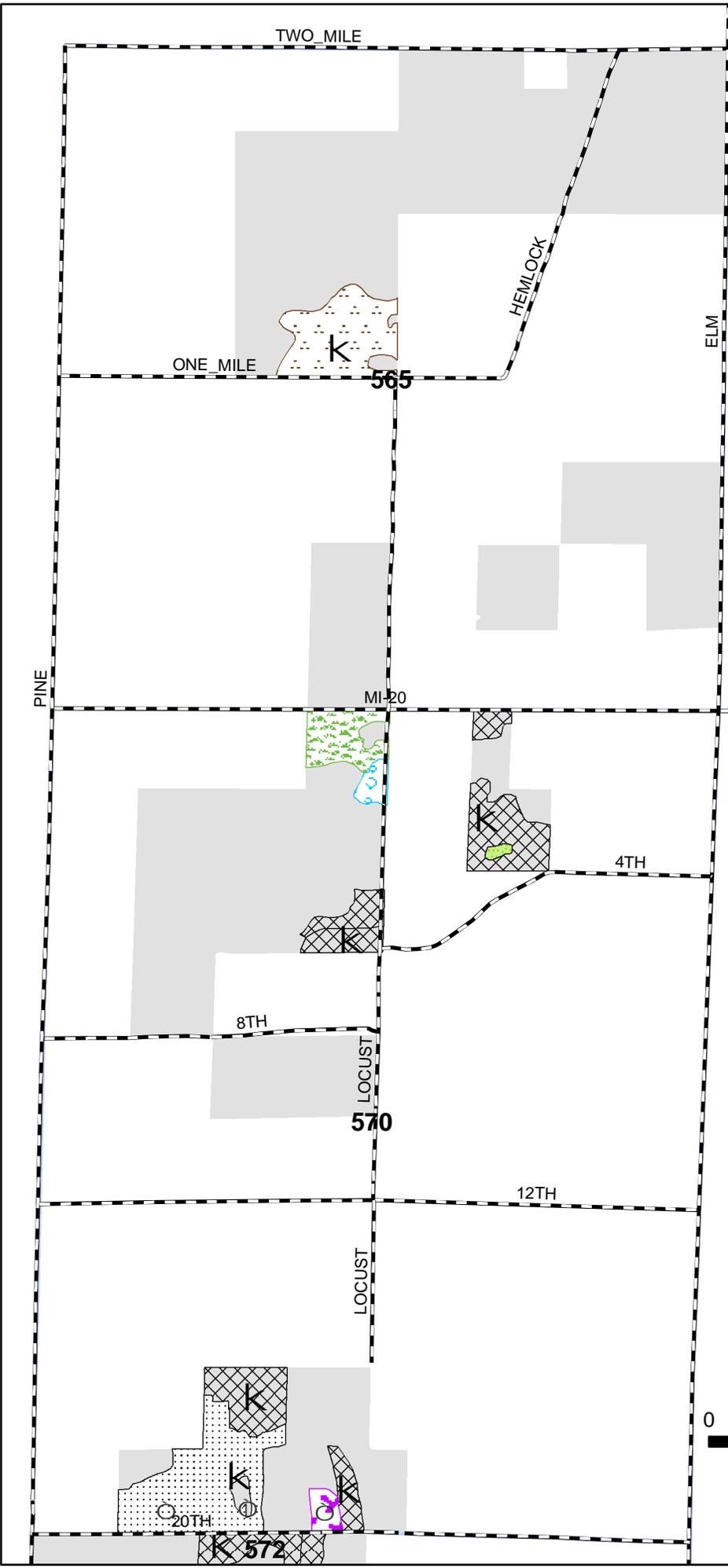
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Project Vicinity

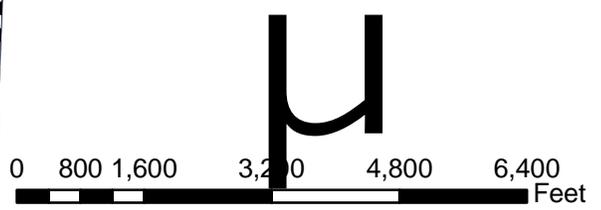


Mast Lake Project Map 2 of 3

Compartments: 565 & 570



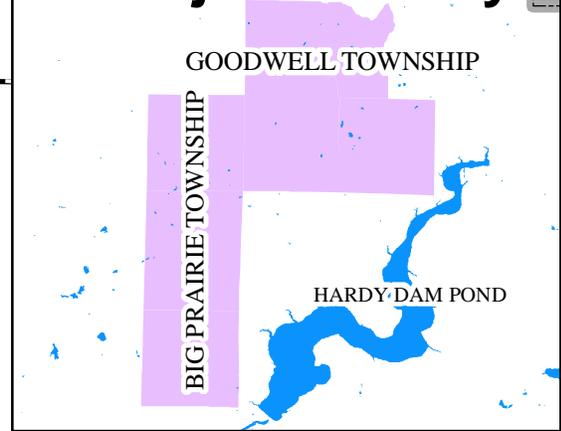
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- Prescribe Burn
- Jack Pine Removal
- Aspen Clearcut
- Scotch Pine Removal
- Aspen Expansion
- Aspen Non-Commercial
- Red Pine Thinning
- Opening Maintenance
- FS Land
- Comp. Boundary
- Non-Native Invasive Species



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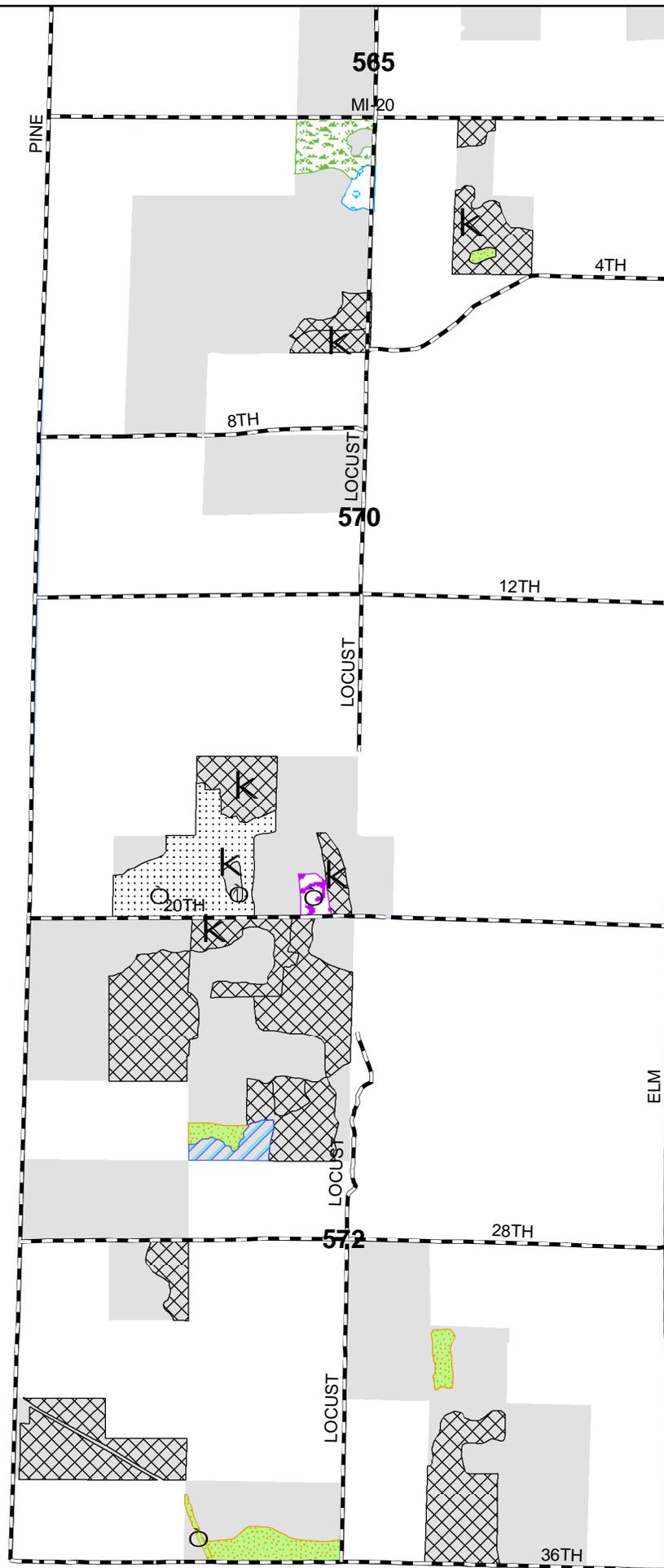
Map developed by: M. Branch

Project Vicinity

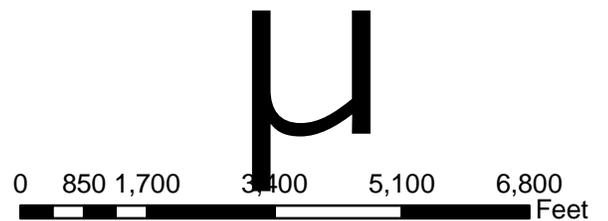


Mast Lake Project Map 3 of 3

Compartments: 570 & 572



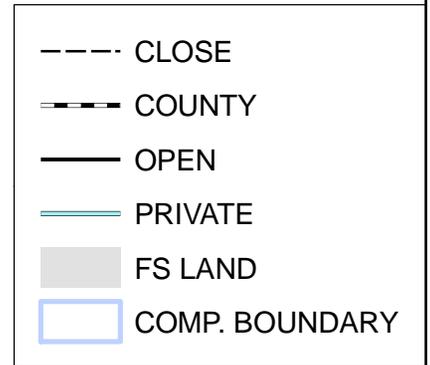
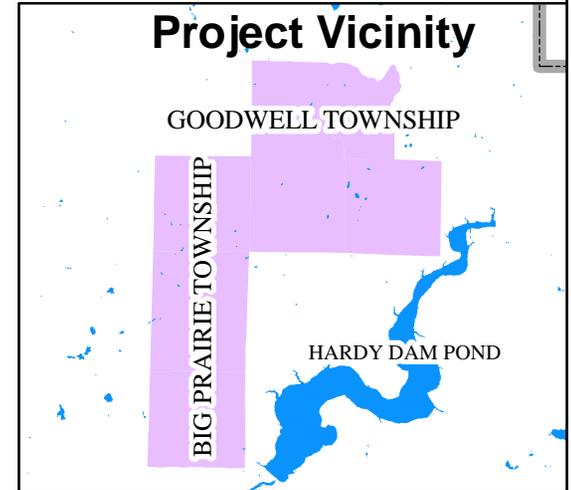
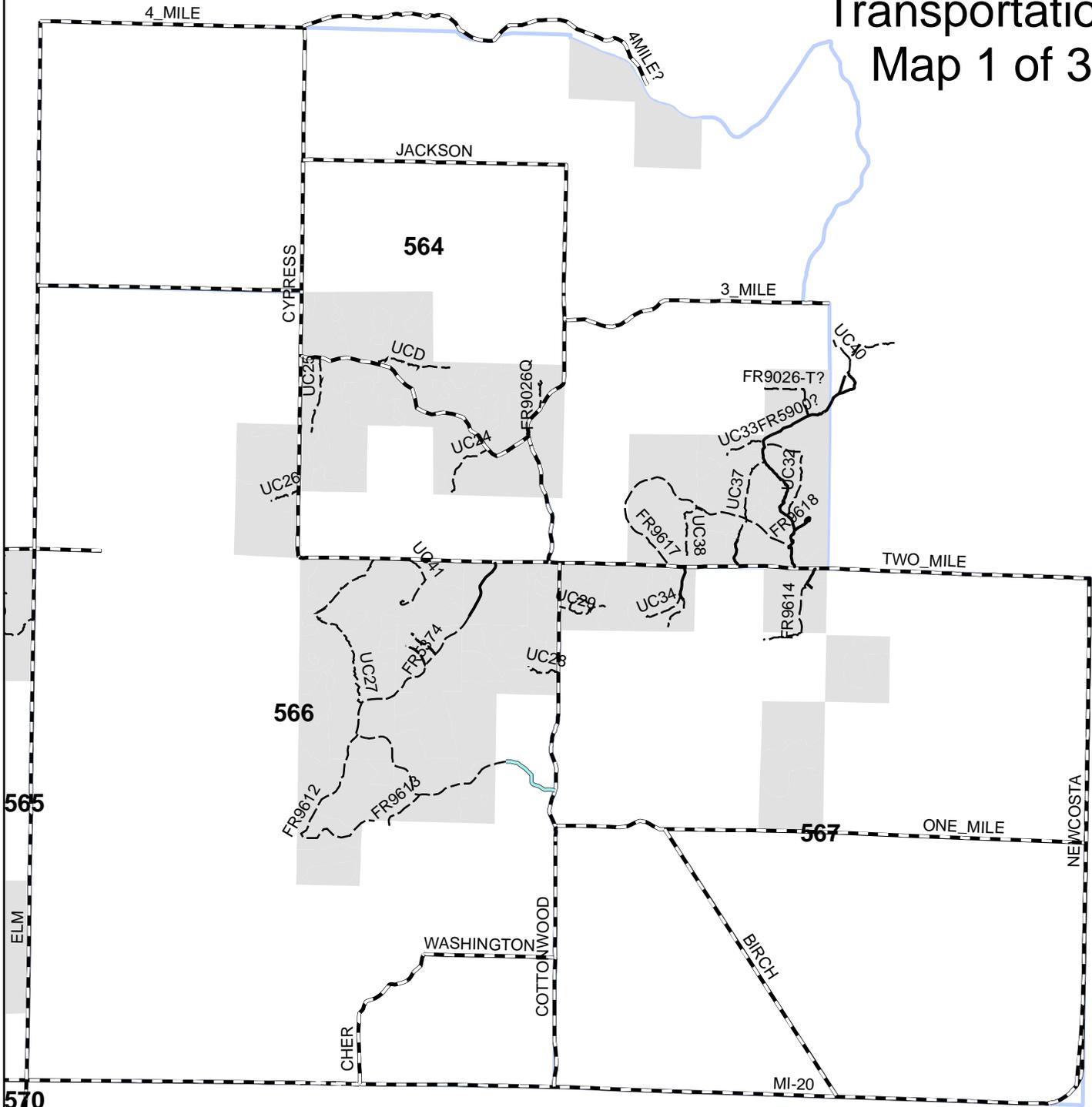
- K** Non-Native Invasive Species
- O** Prescribe Burn
- County Roads
- Scotch Pine Girdle
- Jack Pine Removal
- Aspen Clearcut
- Scotch Pine Removal
- Aspen Expansion
- Red Pine Thinning
- Opening Maintenance
- FS Land
- Comp Boundary



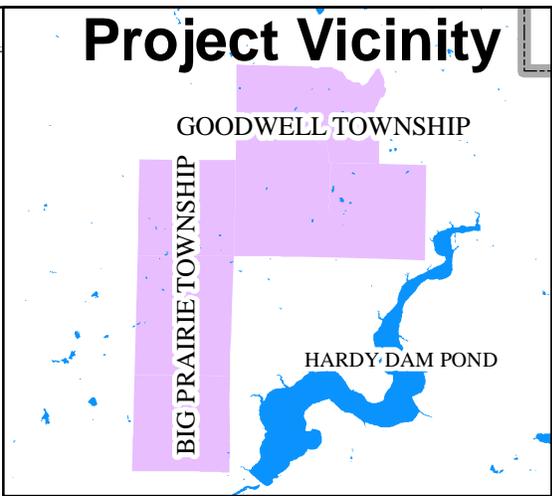
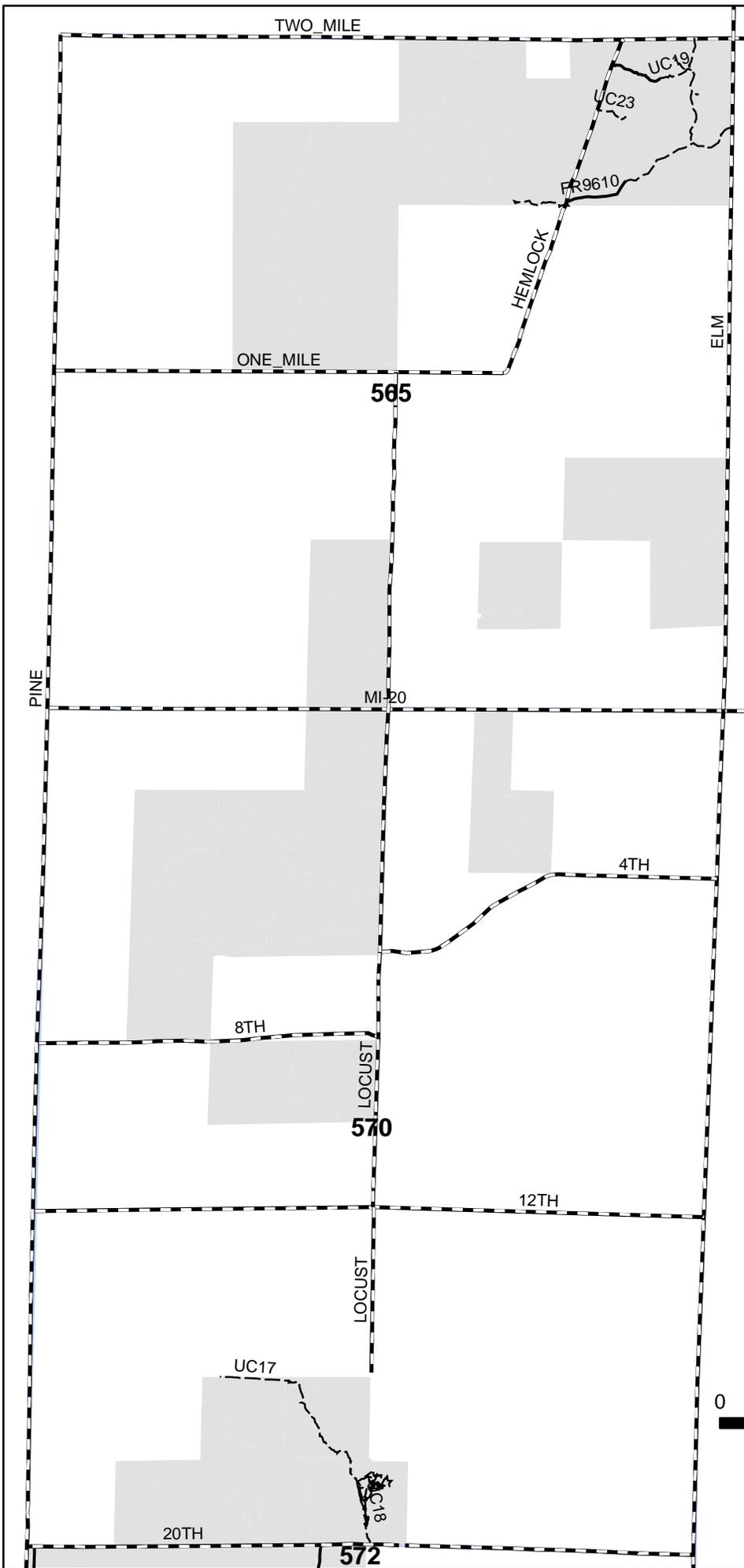
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Compartments: 564, 566, 567

Mast Lake Project Map 1 of 3

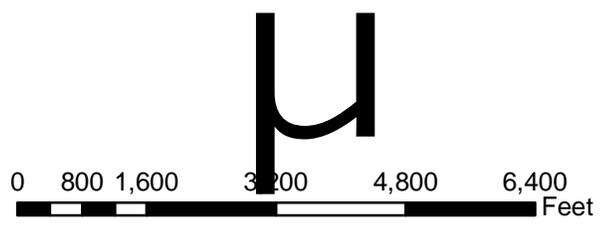
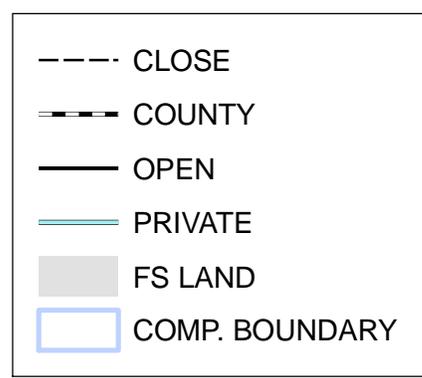


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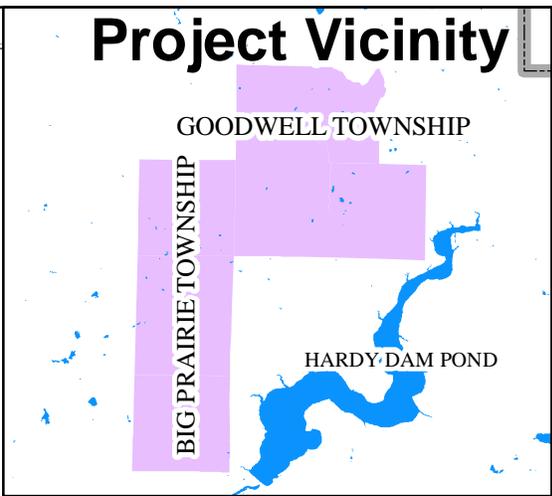
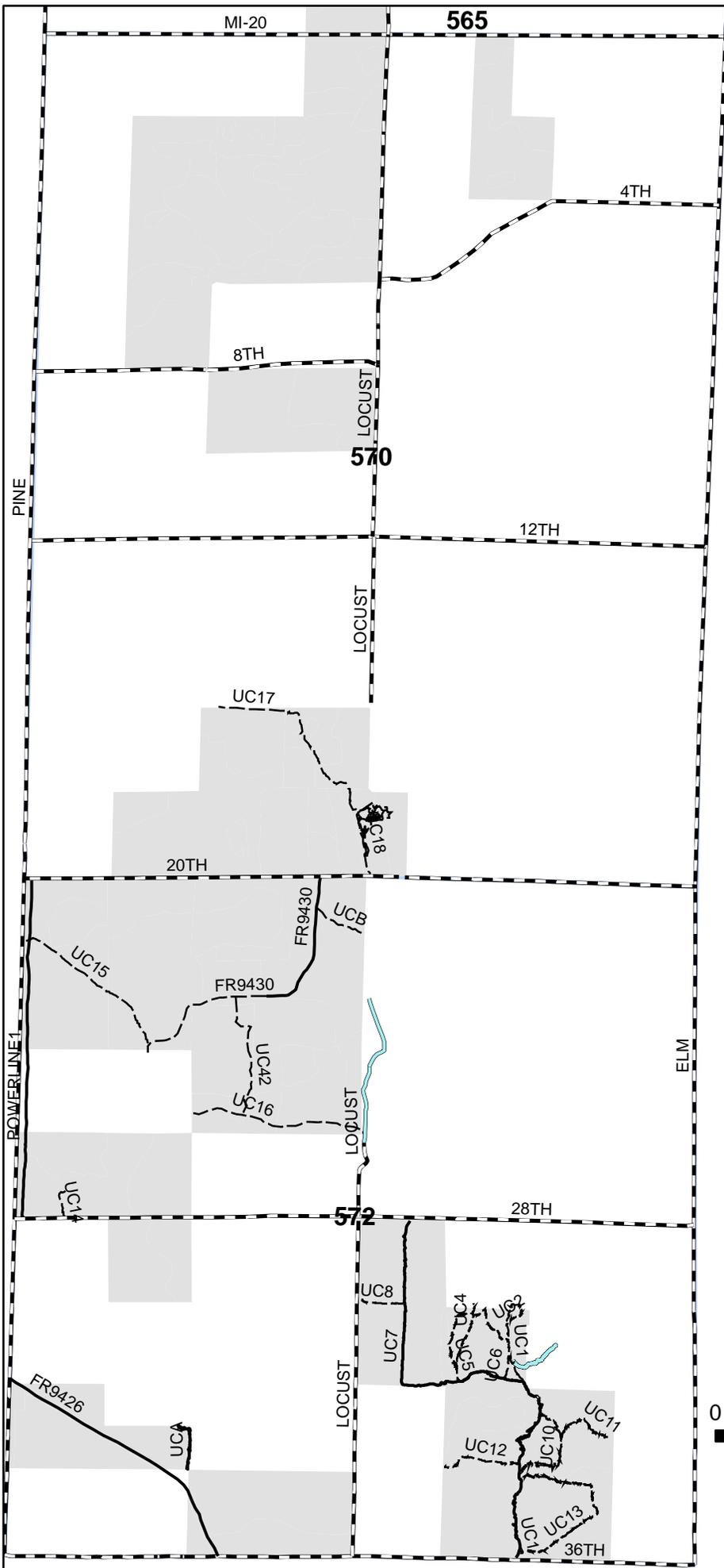


Mast Lake Project Transportation Map 2 of 3

Compartments: 565 & 570

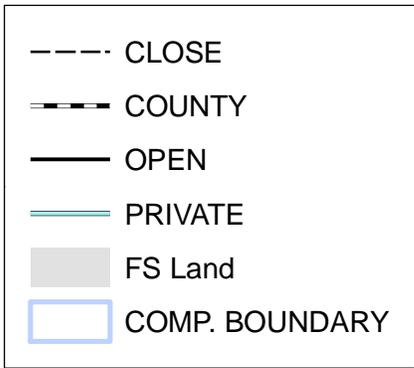


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MastLake Project Transportation Map 3 of 3

Compartments: 570 & 572



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