

<https://caltopo.com/m/D0R6VDL>

File Code: 1950/5150
Date: April 7, 2025

INVITATION FOR COMMENTS LOWER PORTNEUF COOPERATIVE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Dear Interested Party,

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest would like to know your concerns, questions, and suggestions regarding the activities being proposed under the Lower Portneuf Cooperative Vegetation Management Project (Lower Portneuf) on the Westside Ranger District. The proposed project area is located in southeastern Idaho, on the northern portion of the Bannock Range, just south of Pocatello, Idaho. It encompasses approximately 32,697 acres of National Forest System managed land with treatments proposed to occur on up to 12,185 acres. This project presents unique vegetation management opportunities to improve forest health and wildfire resilience (see attached maps).

The proposed project area is located within Bannock and Power counties incorporating multiple drainages that border the greater Pocatello area. The project area boundary lies along the Forest boundary with bordering jurisdictions of Idaho Department of Lands, Bureau of Land Management, Fort Hall Indian Reservation, City of Pocatello and other private interests. Within these bordering jurisdictions there are five cooperating municipal and volunteer fire departments, in addition to the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs and United States Forest Service, who provide mutual aid wildfire protection in the wildland urban interface surrounding Pocatello.

Background

Multiple agencies, jurisdictions, communities, neighborhoods, and citizens have been affected by wildfire in Bannock County since the Caribou National Forest was established in 1907. Since this time, Forest Service fire management has shifted from a direction of fire exclusion to a recognition that fire is a natural ecosystem process on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest that has shaped ecosystem species composition, structure, and function. It is important to find ways to promote and maintain resilient ecosystems, encourage fire adapted communities, and provide opportunities for effective, safe, and risk-based wildfire response for Pocatello and surrounding areas, as envisioned in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Purpose and Need: Why do we need to act?

The purpose of the Lower Portneuf Cooperative Vegetation Management project is to restore forest health, reduce hazardous fuels across the project area, and to address wildfire risks in the wildland urban interface (WUI) of Pocatello. Forest health refers to the resiliency of the forest and its ability to self-renew following drought, wildfire, insect outbreaks, and other forest



stresses and disturbances. The 2003 Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest provides the overall direction and guidance to manage for the longer-term landscape conditions and outcomes that provide ecological and social sustainability, including the ability to allow fire to play a natural role where appropriate and desirable to protect and promote values in the human environment.

In the absence of disturbance, unfavorable forested conditions have developed where naturally ignited fire has been suppressed over time. These conditions often consist of overly dense and homogeneous forested conifer stands as well as conifer species that are encroaching and displacing aspen stands on the landscape. Aspen ecosystems provide especially valuable habitat for a rich diversity of animal and plant species and generally lower fire intensity in comparison to associated coniferous forest types. Non-forested areas are also affected in a similar way in the absence of disturbance, with juniper and other woody species encroaching and replacing valuable sagebrush and grass forb communities. These conditions have an abundance of accumulated fuels which increase the risk of un-characteristic wildfire behavior, and influence where, how quickly, and how intense a wildfire burns. Some of these stands are in or near the WUI areas of Trail Creek, Johnny Creek, Gibson Jack, and Mink Creek.

To address these current conditions, there is a need to reduce vegetation densities where appropriate, reduce fuel accumulations in both forested and non-forested cover types to mimic a historic mixed severity wildfire regime, and maintain or increase aspen where it exists to promote plant and animal habitat. Within the WUI, there is a need to design vegetation treatments to reduce wildfire intensity, to create and maintain strategic fuel breaks along the Forest Boundary, and to promote fire-adapted human communities. The overall need for action is to promote a healthy and resilient forest and to reduce the risks and impacts of wildfire to communities and responders in the greater Pocatello area.

Proposed Action: What are we proposing to do?

To reintroduce disturbance into the ecosystem and to accomplish the purpose and need for the Lower Portneuf project, the Westside Ranger District proposes to treat up to 12,185 acres of vegetation within the identified project area (see attached maps). Treatments would include harvest as well as mechanical and prescribed fire methods to diversify species composition and the age class structure of vegetation. The focus of treatments is to attain more resilient conditions in the face of future disturbance, providing for a safe and effective wildfire response, and helping to promote more fire adapted communities.

The Westside Ranger District proposes to:

- **Treat approximately 2,959 acres with prescribed fire** through broadcast burning, pile burning, tree well burning and jackpot burning (i.e. burning concentrations of fuel). Pre-treatment actions (slashing, hand thinning/piling and mastication) would be implemented along edges and control lines to aid in conducting any prescribed fire portion of this project to ensure success outside of the traditional fire season (May-September) found in Eastern Idaho.

- **Treat approximately 8,184 acres with a combinations of mechanical treatments mixed with prescribed fire techniques.** Actions within these areas could include chainsaw thinning, tracked based mastication, as well as light intensity under burning (where possible), tree well burning, pile burning, and jackpot burning as needed. Some opportunities to generate removable firewood under a personal use fuelwood permit may also be utilized where appropriate along open roads following these treatments. The use of these mechanical and prescribed fire activities could vary across these acres (some areas may not be treated while other areas may receive multiple treatments as needed to create desirable conditions).
- **Treat approximately 554 forested acres with harvest and stand tending techniques, including the use of prescribed fire.** This treatment would occur in specifically identified areas, including in and around the Scout Mountain Campground as well as approximately 22 acres identified within the municipal watershed near Elk Meadows. Actions within these treatment areas could include ground-based timber harvest and whole tree skidding methods. These actions could vary across the harvest acres to promote desirable stand conditions (some areas may not be treated while other areas may receive multiple treatments). Work in these areas can also include:
 - Approximately 6-8 miles of temporary roads would be built to facilitate this treatment in the identified harvest stands. The location of these temporary roads would be located in non-roadless areas, Special Forest Plan Emphasis Areas compatible with temporary roads, or the General Forest, Rangeland, and Grassland theme of the Idaho Roadless Area within the Scout Mountain and West Mink Inventoried Roadless Area (36 CFR 294.23 (c)).
 - Any crossing or utilization of pre-existing travel corridors impacted by potential temporary roads (permanent roads, ATV routes, trail crossings) would be repaired and restored to previous designations at completion of project implementation. Any temporary roads created with this project and not associated with current travel management designation would be closed and re-habilitated upon harvest and project completion.
- **Treat up to 488 acres (23 additional miles) of land adjacent to motorized and non-motorized trails and selected roadsides** to create an un-even aged shaded fuel break to help limit wildfire spread within and into the WUI as well as other Forest Service values and infrastructure. This adds approximately 488 acres outside of the treatments listed above and would consist of understory fuels limbed, thinned, and removed to create an un-even aged appearance in forested, and woodland vegetation (up to 300 feet each side) and trailside mowing/maintenance in brush dominated cover types (mowed 5-6 feet each side) where needed to help limit fire spread potential. Trails and roads where this work would occur are:
 - Gibson Jack Motorized Trail #015
 - Slate Mountain Motorized Trail #018
 - Gibson Jack Non-Motorized Trail #014
 - Sterling Justice Non-motorized Trail #505
 - Cusick Creek Motorized Trail #010
 - Kinney Creek Non-motorized Trail #292
 - Lead Draw Motorized Trail #'s 109, 110, 133
 - East Wild Horse Mountain Motorized Trail #004

- Midnight Creek Motorized Trail #058
- Elk Meadows Motorized Trail #'s 022 and 044
- Pole Canyon Motorized Trail # 029
- Microwave-Midnight/Outlaw Spring Road #'s 276 and 282
- Clifton Creek Road #006
- Scout Mountain Road #001
- Camp Taylor/Lower Tendoy Loop Road #'s 002 and 890

Implementation Timing

The proposed action is intended to be implemented over a period of 10 to 12 years. Work would be dependent on site and weather conditions which vary from year to year. Proposed activities could be implemented as early as Spring of 2026.

Administrative Review

We anticipate that this project will be analyzed under an Environmental Assessment (EA) unless it is determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is needed. The Westside District Ranger will be the deciding officer on this project and should the proposed action be approved, the District Ranger's decision will be documented in a Finding of No Significant Impacts and Decision Notice. This project will be subject to the pre-decisional administrative review process (objection process) outlined in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. In order to be eligible to file an objection, timely specific written comments regarding the proposed action must be submitted during a designated opportunity for public comment. Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to establish individual eligibility to object to the project. Objections received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only. Names and addresses of those who comment and/or file objections will become part of the public record.

Opportunity to Comment

Electronic, written, and hand-delivered comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days ending on May 8, 2025.

Information on how to comment can be found on the project page at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=67104>. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Written comments must be submitted to: Responsible Official, Lower Portneuf Cooperative Vegetation Management Project, Westside Ranger District, 4350 S Cliffs Drive, Pocatello, Idaho, 83204. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a

comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. See project web page for details on how to comment <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/ctnf/?project=67104>.

During this scoping phase of the NEPA process, we are interested in any issues, concerns, or opportunities that you think need to be considered in the development of this project. Public scoping will provide further information for the deciding officer to determine if the proposed project would lead to any significant impacts.

As disturbances continue to occur and vegetation conditions in the Greater Pocatello area continue to change, the Forest Service and local cooperators are striving to prioritize resilience of vegetation to disturbance (wildfire, insects and disease, etc) as well as safety of fire responders and the community with vegetation restoration treatments. Thank you for input on this project.

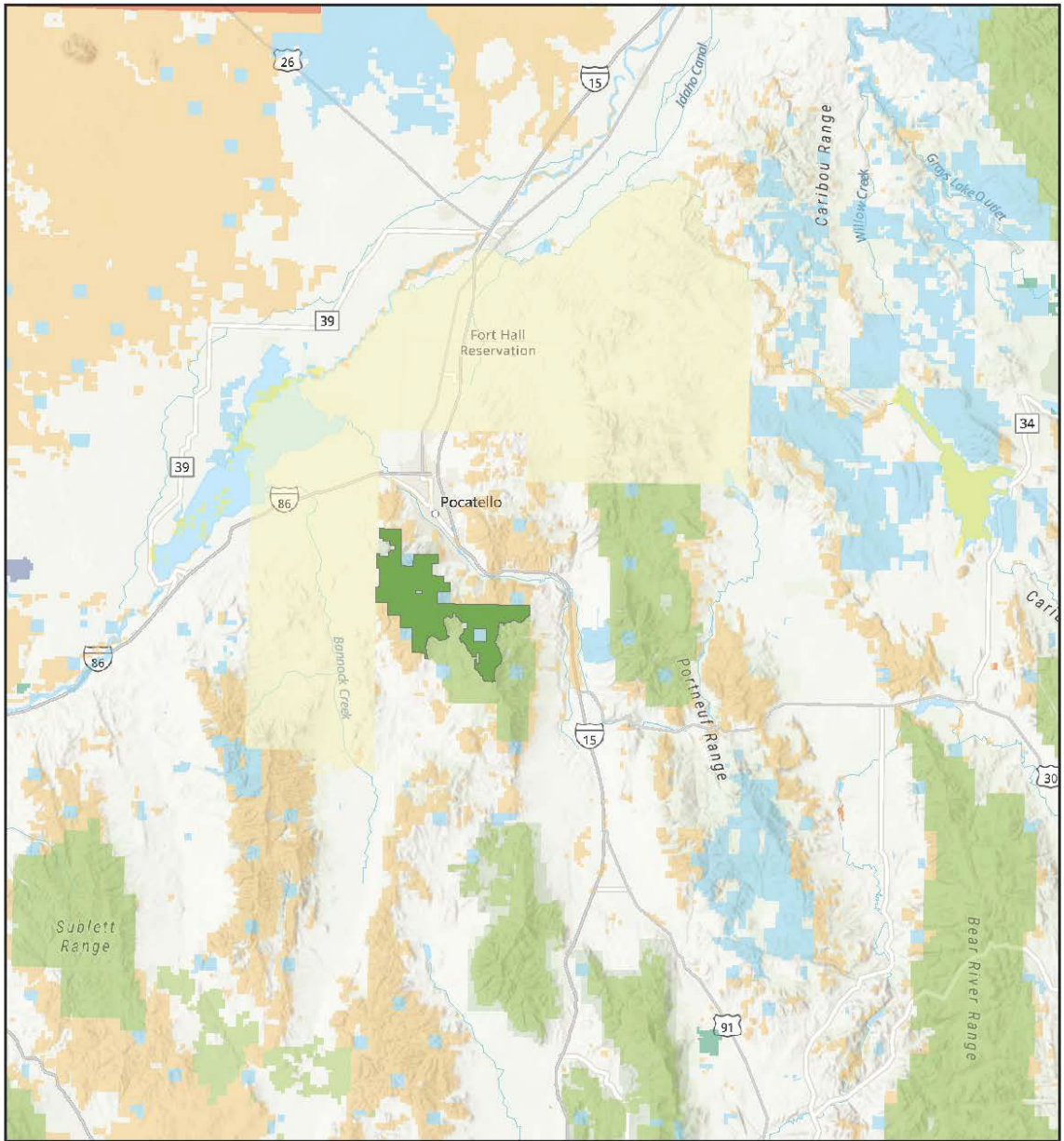
For more project information please contact:

Arik Jorgensen, Project Lead
phone: 208-236-7500

Sincerely,

KIM OBELE
District Ranger

USDA **Forest Service**
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Vicinity Map **Lower Portneuf Vegetation Management Project**



| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| LowerPortneufProjectBoundary | Army Corps of Engineers | Forest Service |
| BoundaryTribal_AmIndian_FortHall_EDW | Bureau of Land Management | National Park Service |
| Manager Name | Bureau of Reclamation | Non-Governmental Organization |
| Bureau of Indian Affairs; American Indian Areas | Department of Defense | State Lands |
| Department of Energy | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | |

Prepared by: Caribou-Targhee National Forest
 Idaho Falls, Idaho
 Produced: 2/12/2025 By: aljorgensen
 Projection: UTM12 N, NAD83

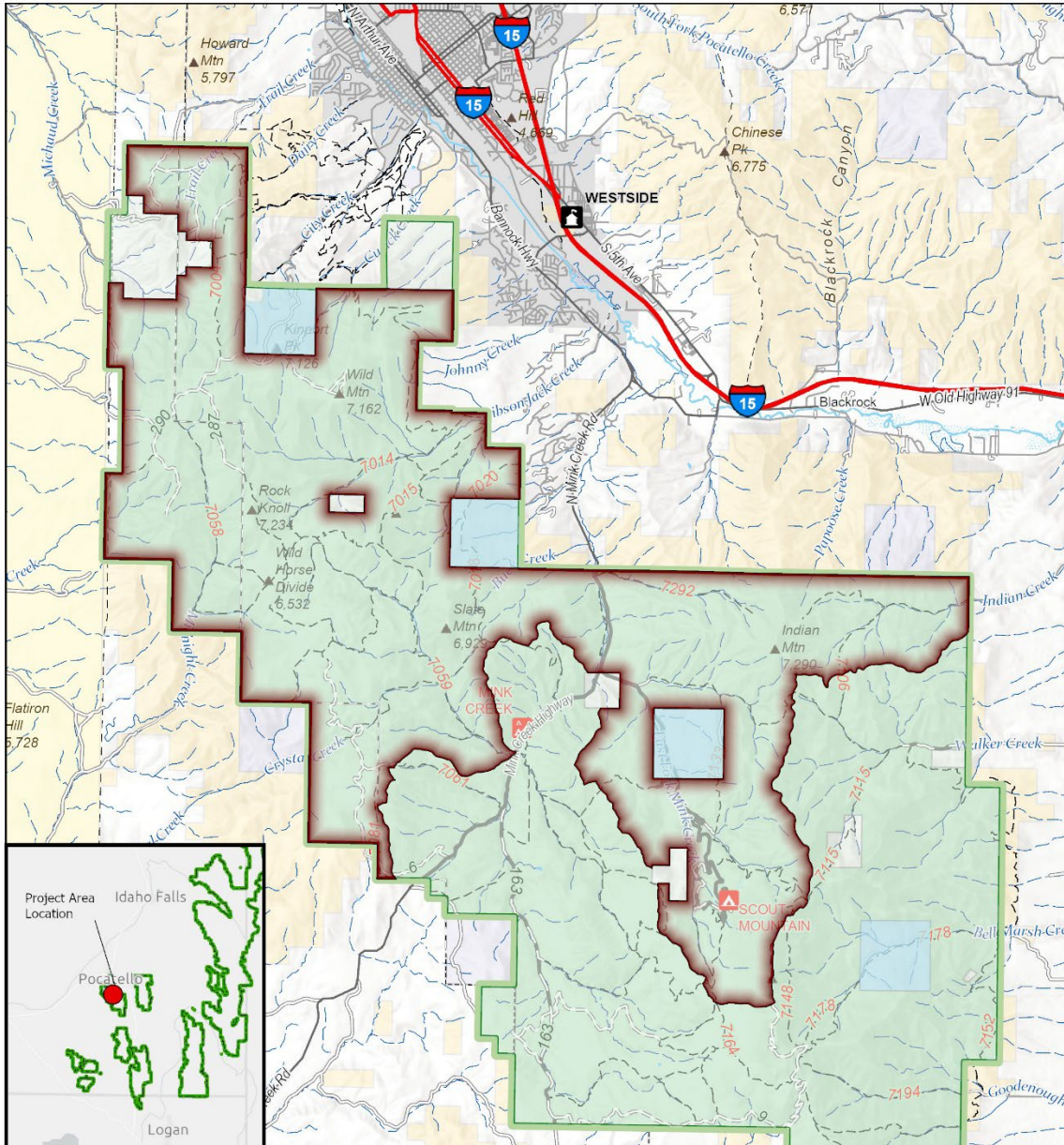
File: T:\FS\NF\SI\CaribouTarghee\Project\WES\TD\6150\Lower Portneuf_EA\GIS\01_Planning\Workspace\Fire-Fuels\Lower Portneuf Project.aprx



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Project Area

Lower Portneuf Vegetation Management Project



- Lower Portneuf Project Boundary
- Forest Boundary

- U.S. Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- State Lands
- Fort Hall Reservation



Prepared by: Caribou-Targhee National Forest
Idaho Falls, Idaho
Produced: 1/16/2025 By: cbeck01
Projection: UTM 12 N, NAD83

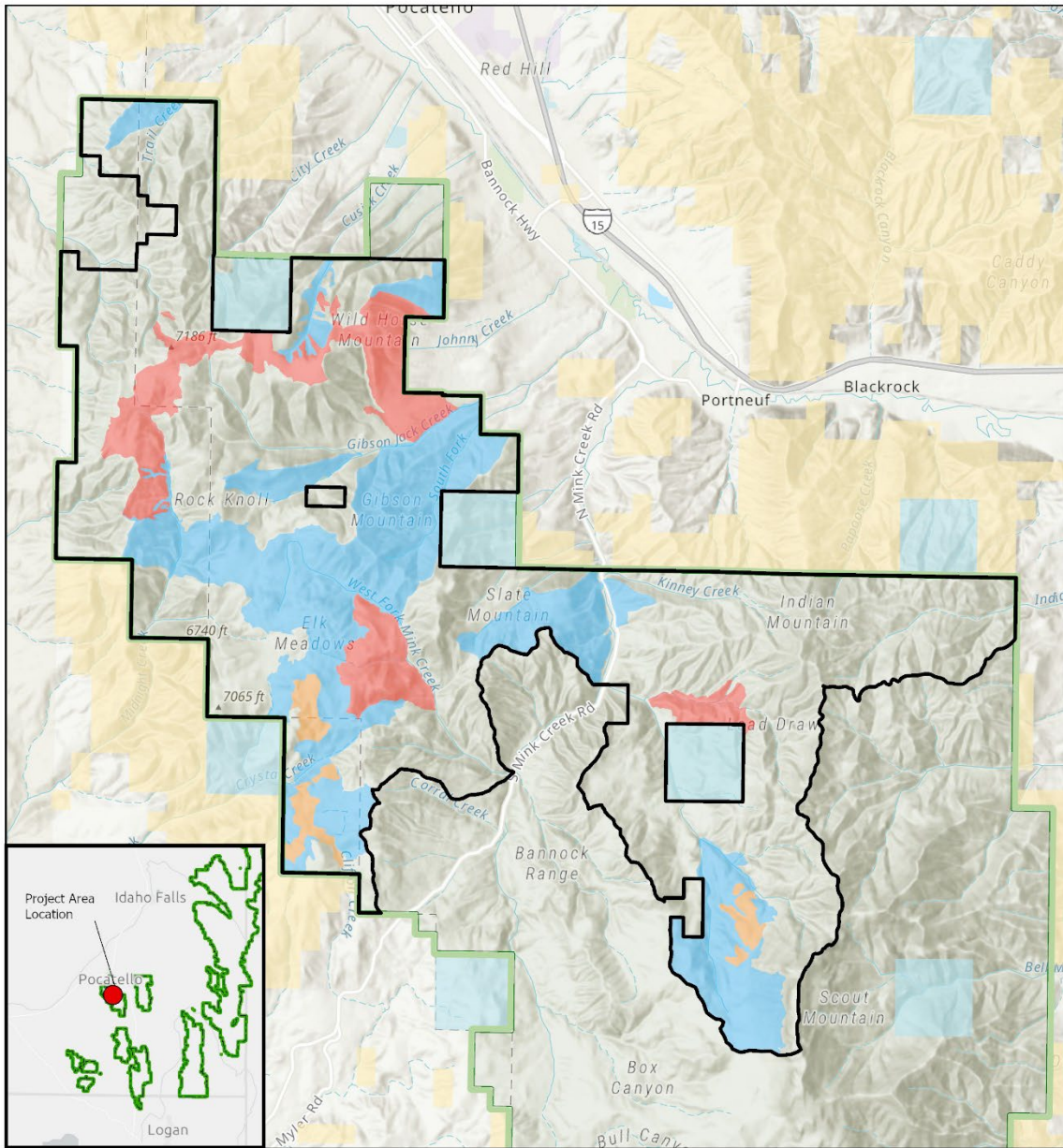
File: T:\FS\NFS\CaribouTarghee\Project\WEST05150LowerPortneuf_EA\GIS\01_Planning\APR\EA\LP_EA_TreatmentAreas\LP_EA_TreatmentAreas.aprx



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Treatment Areas

Lower Portneuf Vegetation Management Project



Treatment Areas

- Prescribed Fire
- Prescribed Fire + Stand Tending/Harvest
- Prescribed Fire + Mechanical

- Lower Portneuf Project Boundary
- Forest Boundary
- Bureau of Land Management
- State Lands



Prepared by: Caribou-Targhee National Forest
Idaho Falls, Idaho
Produced: 1/16/2025 By: cbeck01
Projection: UTM 12 N, NAD83

File: T:\FS\NFS\CaribouTarghee\Project\WEST05150LowerPortneuf_EA\GIS\01_Planning\APR\EA\LP_EA_TreatmentAreas\LP_EA_TreatmentAreas.aprx