



Draft Environmental Assessment

FireCorps – Fire Mitigation and Education

Valley County, Idaho, University of Idaho

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Terms Used in This Document

Area of Potential Effect – the geographic area or areas within which an undertaking may cause changes in the character or use of historic properties, if such properties exist. The area of potential effects is influenced by the scale and nature of the undertaking.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) – innovative environmental protection practices applied to help ensure that projects are conducted in an environmentally responsible manner.

Crown Fire – fire that involves the tops of the canopy trees in the forest; can spread rapidly.

Fire Break – a gap in vegetation that acts as a barrier to slow or stop the progress of a wildfire. A firebreak may occur naturally where there is a lack of vegetation or "fuel", such as a river, lake or canyon. Firebreaks may also be man-made, and many also serve as roads.

Fuels Reduction – removal of excess fuels through thinning, limbing, or other methods to reduce the potential for severe wildfires.

Ladder Fuels – understory branches or shrubs that can allow a fire to ascend into the canopy.

Limbing – removal of large tree limbs to reduce fuel load and the potential for crown fires.

Prescribed Fire – any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written approved prescribed fire plan must be completed and appropriate National Environmental Policy Act requirements followed prior to ignition. This term replaces the term “management ignited prescribed fire.”

Slash – vegetative debris created by property clearing, right-of-way clearing and forest management activities.

Suppression – a response to wildland fire that results in curtailment of fire spread and elimination of all identified threats from the fire.

Thinning – removal of trees, branches, or shrubs to reduce fuel loads.

Wildfire – an unwanted wildland fire.

Wildland Fire – any non-structure fire, other than prescribed fire, that occurs in the wildland. This term encompasses fires previously referred to as both wildfires and prescribed natural fires.

Wildland/Urban Interface – line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with vegetative fuels in wildlands.

Acronyms Used in This Document

APE	Area of Potential Effect
BCR	Bird Conservation Regions
BHS	Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BMP	Best Management Practice
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EA	environmental assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ESA	Endangered Species Act
EO	Executive Order
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FGDC	Federal Geographic Data Committee
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
ICDC	Idaho Conservation Data Center
IDFG	Idaho Department of Fish and Game
IDVMD	Idaho Vertebrate Modeling Database
L-PDM	Legislative Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program
MOSS	McCall Outdoor Science School
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
OSU	Oregon State University
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
UI	University of Idaho
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USEPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION

The University of Idaho, College of Natural Resources applied to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Legislative Pre-Disaster Mitigation (L-PDM) program for funding assistance with a wildfire fuel load reduction project in central Idaho. The FireCorps project would reduce risk from fire to people and property on 3,165 acres of Valley County's wildland/urban interface.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Part 1500 through 1508) direct FEMA and other Federal agencies to fully understand and take into consideration the environmental consequences of proposed federally funded projects. Under NEPA, Congress authorizes and directs Federal agencies to carry out their regulations, policies, and programs as fully as possible in accordance with the statute's policies on environmental protection. NEPA requires Federal agencies to make a series of evaluations and decisions that anticipate significant effects on environmental resources. This requirement must be fulfilled whenever a Federal agency proposes an action, grants a permit, or agrees to fund or otherwise authorize any other entity to undertake an action that could possibly affect the human environment. In compliance with NEPA and its implementing regulations, FEMA prepared this draft environmental assessment (EA) to analyze the potential environmental impacts of the project alternatives.

SECTION TWO PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the FEMA L-PDM program is to provide funding to assist States and local governments (including Indian Tribal governments) in implementing cost-effective hazard mitigation activities that complement comprehensive mitigation programs and reduce injuries, loss of life, and damage and destruction of property. The purpose of this action is to provide L-PDM funding to the University of Idaho (UI) for wildfire mitigation activities in Valley County, Idaho.

Although the area surrounding McCall has a history of wildfires, in 2007 the forest fire season has shattered previous record years for acreage burned and money spent. Fires burned over 600,000 acres across Payette and Boise National Forests at the cost of over \$82.6 million. Areas surrounding McCall face particularly high-risk due to high development rates coupled with dense vegetation. Valley County is one of the fastest growing counties in Idaho and has experienced recent and rapid growth of homes in wildland/urban interface areas. The area is also a large tourist destination, with over 244,000 visitors each year to Ponderosa State Park and the UI McCall field campus.

The geographic areas near the community of McCall targeted for wildfire vegetation management under the proposed action were identified as high risk in the *Valley County Wildland/Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan*, the *Valley County All Hazard Mitigation Plan*, and is listed in the Federal Register as an Wildland/Urban Interface Community within the vicinity of Federal Lands that is at high risk from wildfires.

Past timber harvest operations have exacerbated wildfire risk. The fire risk associated with these activities is highly variable depending on many factors, including the amount of timber volume removed, treatment of slash post-harvest, time since last thinning, reforestation success, use of equipment, and many site specific factors such as aspect and slope. Generally, treatment of slash by prescribed burning or pile burning can significantly reduce the risk of intense wildfire by removing hazardous fuels in the understory (Valley County, 2004).

Although infrequent, fires in Valley County have the potential to result in large, intense and damaging fires such as the 1994 Corral Fire, 1994 Blackwell Fire, and the 2000 Burgdorf Junction Fire. Due to a rapid rise in population and expanding development, many people are now living within high wildfire risk areas of the wildland/urban interface, in the forests between and around primary population centers. There is little differentiation between forest and urban fuels in many areas, creating conditions in which homes essentially become a component of the wildland fuel complex.

The need for this action is to reduce or eliminate the risk to people and to property from wildfires in Valley County. From this need, Valley County identified the preferred alternative (vegetative fuel management and removal) as a high priority in the *Valley County All Hazard Mitigation Plan*.

SECTION THREE ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

This section discusses the two alternatives considered in this EA: (1) the No Action Alternative and (2) the Proposed Action Alternative, to which FEMA funding would contribute.

3.1 ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildfire fuel loads in the target areas of Valley County's wildland/urban interface. Existing conditions would continue to deteriorate. People and nearby structures would continue to be at a higher risk from catastrophic fire events. Current and ongoing activities to protect the open spaces and wildland/urban interface would continue, but not to the degree needed or anticipated if funding is appropriated. This alternative would not meet the project nor the county's goals and objectives identified in the *Valley County All Hazard Mitigation Plan*.

3.2 ALTERNATIVE 2 – PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action would remove excessive vegetation through hand sawing, pruning, chainsaws, and brush cutting by private contractors on approximately 3,165 acres of publicly-owned lands (Appendix A – Figures 1-3). The geographic areas targeted for wildfire vegetation management include the UI McCall field campus (14 acres), Ponderosa State Park (1,515 acres), and the Herald Nokes Family Experimental Forest (1,650 acres). The vegetation to be removed would be live, dead, or dying true firs and all dead/downed vegetation. Vegetation removal would occur mostly in the summer and would be accessed through existing roads. Essential equipment includes power chainsaws, power brush saws, power and hand pruning saws, hand loppers, a wheel tractor with a front-end loader, and a power chipper. Vegetation removal activities would not occur within 100 feet of wetlands or water resources.

All true firs within the UI McCall field campus would be removed. The remaining trees (grand fir, Douglas fir, and Ponderosa pine) would have branches pruned to a height of 12 feet above the ground. Throughout Ponderosa State Park and the Herald Nokes Family Experimental Forest (Nokes Forest), all true firs contributing to ladder fuels would be felled. Ponderosa pines and Douglas firs would be branch pruned within 12 feet from the ground on trees with a diameter at breast height (DBH) of 14 inches or greater. The UI McCall field campus would work with the Nokes Forest and Ponderosa State Park to hire private crews to manage vegetation and reduce fuels for the 2 year project. The Nokes Forest would manage the work of crews on University of Idaho property, while Ponderosa State Park would manage the work of crews on park property. Work would initially be concentrated along property boundaries in locations to optimize hazard reduction relative to nearby home concentrations. Estimates from the Nokes Forest and Ponderosa State Park report that approximately 5 weeks would be spent on the Nokes property each year and 5 weeks would be spent at Ponderosa State Park each year. Large debris may be used as firewood or milling for buildings, and chipped debris may be used as pathways or compost at the UI McCall field campus. Disposal of vegetative debris removed from Ponderosa State Park would be by burning at the previously approved and permitted burning site within the Park. Debris would be chipped and left as ground cover at the Nokes Forest.

The McCall Outdoor Science School (MOSS) would work with sub-contractors to firewise existing UI McCall field campus facilities. Structural and non-structural retrofitting would be

accomplished so that facilities would meet or exceed current building codes. Improvements at the UI McCall field campus would include: replacing all cedar shake roofs with metal (including the dining lodge, discussed in Section 4.6 and Appendix C); replacing remaining single pane windows, vent screens, and wood doors with firewise materials such as metal grates and window frames, double pane glass, and metal/fiberglass doors; repairing and replacing hydrants and fire hoses; and installing landscaping and an irrigation system.

Limited ground disturbance is planned for installation of the irrigation system. The irrigation system would be in the open area around the Administration building, student living units, and the faculty/family units. Contractors would dig shallow, narrow trenches (approximately 3 inches wide by 8 inches deep) and bury automated irrigation lines. Contractors would augment and improve the remaining soil and seed with native vegetation throughout the 3 acres and install turf grass in high impact areas. Turf placement would be on approximately 1/3 acre.

Members of the general public would have the opportunity to observe the results of the vegetation removal activities, as well as to learn the rationale behind it. MOSS program staff would be primarily responsible for educational interfaces and educational programs that communicate the purposes, goals, and techniques used in mitigation, and show the public how to implement these lessons onto their property.

Implementation of the proposed action would also use grant funds and Idaho State Permanent Building funds to accomplish the following activities over a 2-year period:

1. decrease the risk from wildfire to over 70 structures on the UI McCall field campus and Ponderosa State Park through structural and non-structural retrofitting and vegetation management
2. reduce fuels and manage vegetation on 3,165 acres of Valley County's urban-wildland interface and consequently decrease risk to project area, nearby developments, and over 240,000 annual visitors to Ponderosa State Park and UI McCall field campus
3. preserve old-growth Ponderosa pines and Douglas firs by removing true firs that act as ladder fuels
4. increase knowledge, awareness and skills associated with fire mitigation for 200 Idaho residents each year through mitigation outreach workshops that showcase this successful project while providing the guidance necessary to spread mitigation practices throughout the region

The proposed tasks are consistent with the *Valley County All Hazard Mitigation Plan*, the *Valley County Wildland/Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan*, and the *State of Idaho Hazard Mitigation Plan*.

3.3 OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

There are no other viable alternatives identified that would effectively reduce or remove the inherent risks of wildfire. The only alternative considered would be to firewise only human inhabited areas by treating fuels near campgrounds and buildings. In the case of a catastrophic fire event, this would not be sufficient to assure human safety. This approach could also result in the loss of the large old-growth trees due to a catastrophic fire that the University of Idaho is trying to preserve in the project areas.

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SECTION FOUR AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section discusses the existing conditions, by resource and the potential effects, of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives.

For each resource category, the impact analysis follows the same general approach. When possible, quantitative information is provided to establish impacts. Qualitatively, these impacts will be measured based on small, moderate, or large impacts as outlined in the chart below.

Impact Scale	Criteria
Small	Environmental effects would not be detectable or would be so minor that they would neither destabilize nor noticeably alter any important attribute of the resource.
Moderate	Environmental effects would be sufficient to alter noticeably, but not to destabilize, important attributes of the resource.
Large	Environmental effects would be clearly noticeable and would be sufficient to destabilize important attributes of the resource.

Impacts are disclosed based on the amount of change or loss of the resource from the baseline conditions. Impacts may be direct or indirect. Direct impacts are caused by an action and occur at the same time and place as the action. Indirect impacts are caused by the action and occur later in time or are farther removed from the area, but are still reasonably foreseeable (40 CFR Part 1508). Cumulative impacts are discussed in Section 5.

Resources that were not analyzed in detail include visual resources. No visual impacts are anticipated due to the removal of shorter ladder fuels, pruning of limbs and small amounts of ground disturbance. These resources will not be analyzed to any further extent.

4.1 CLIMATE, GEOLOGY, AND SOILS

4.1.1 Climate

Generally, the climate in Valley County can be described as cold with substantial snowfall in the winter, and hot dry summers. The average precipitation is approximately 27 inches of rain and approximately 138 inches of snowfall annually. Storms are frequent during the summer months, and lightning strikes account for almost twice as many wildfires as other ignition causes (Northwest 2004).

Temperatures range from highs in the 80s in the summer to the 30s in winter, and lows of 40s in the summer to the teens for the winter. Humidity is generally greatest in winter months (60-80 percent) and lower during the summer (20-40 percent).

Over the next century, climate in Idaho may experience additional changes. By 2100 temperatures in Idaho could increase by 5°F (with a range of 2-9°F) in winter and summer and 4°F (with a range of 2-7°F) in spring and fall. Precipitation is estimated to change little in summer, to increase by 10 percent in spring and fall (with a range of 5-20 percent), and to increase by 20 percent in winter (with a range of 10-40 percent). The amount of precipitation on extreme wet or snowy days in winter is likely to increase. The frequency of extreme hot days in

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summer would increase. An increase in the frequency and intensity of winter storms is possible (USEPA 1998).

4.1.2 Geology and Soils

McCall is at the end of Long Valley, a major tectonic and structural feature in central Idaho. Long Valley is part of a group of linear north-south ranges and valleys formed by block faulting during the late Tertiary and Quaternary eras. As Long Valley subsided, as much as 7,000 feet of alluvium accumulated in the valley. The project area is underlain by granite of the Idaho batholith, flood-basalt flows of the Columbia River Basalt Group, and metamorphosed island-arc sedimentary and volcanic rocks of the Seven Devils Group (Northwest 2004). There are no faults within 25 miles of the project areas. The closest faults are the Cuddy Mountain-Lick Creek fault (27 miles away) and the Rush Peak fault (28 miles away). Both faults have the potential for a 6.5 to 6.8 magnitude earthquake (USGS 2008).

Valley County has altitudes ranging from 2,850 feet to nearly 9,700 feet. The topography is extremely varied, from high elevation meadows to steep mountainous terrain. The project area is also varied, with steep slopes in portions of Ponderosa State Park and the Nokes Forest.

Soils in the project area are predominantly sedimentary in origin, overlaying basalt bedrock with a volcanic origin. Soils are mostly referred to as loam, well-drained sediments transmitted downslope through gravity and water processes. This type of soil is vulnerable to accelerated erosion caused by disturbance of natural conditions through burning, excessive grazing, or tillage. These disturbances increase the potential for erosion by wind and water. A combination of wind and water typically present the greatest source of erosion within the project areas. The soil in the project areas is very cobbly sandy loam (USDA 2008).

4.1.3 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Valley County's wildland/urban interface. No impacts to climate or geology would occur. No impacts to soil resources within the project area would be expected, except for impacts associated with a catastrophic fire. These impacts may include de-vegetation caused by uncontrolled fire and subsequent soil erosion. The impact scale would range from small to large, depending on the size of the wildfire.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

No effect on climate and geology would be expected based on the scale of the project and limited ground-disturbing activities. The impact scale would be small. Future natural fires of varying intensities may alter the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the soil as a result of vegetation removal, organic consumption, and increased temperatures. In addition, the lack of fire may alter the soil properties as a result of limited nutrient cycling in fire-maintained habitat areas.

No environmental consequences to soils are expected from fuels reduction activities in the project area because the activities would not require leveling of the soil. The impact scale would

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be moderate. Mechanical removal activities would include the use of tractors to haul downed vegetation. Burning would only occur in the permitted burning site in Ponderosa State Park. While individual trees may be removed, vegetation removal in overly large areas at a given time would be avoided and best management practices (BMPs) for erosion control would be employed.

Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soil productivity, fertility, stability, or infiltration capacity would be at or below the level of detection. Any effects on soil productivity or fertility would be slight, and no long-term effects to soils would occur. Installation of the irrigation system on 3 acres of the UI McCall field campus would temporarily disturb soil by creating shallow, narrow trenches approximately 3 inches wide by 8 inches deep. However, this area is currently bare of vegetation and seeding and planting of vegetation would help stabilize the soils and be beneficial in the long-term.

4.2 FLOODPLAINS

The project actions would not occur within or adjacent to floodplains according to the Flood Insurance Rate Map #1602200325A.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Valley County's wildland/urban interface. The impact scale would range from small to large, depending on the size of the wildfire.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

No environmental consequences related to floodplains are expected from fuels reduction activities because the activities would not occur within or adjacent to any designated floodplains or riparian areas. The impact scale would be small. No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to floodplains nor impacts from flooding are anticipated.

4.3 WETLANDS AND WATER RESOURCES

According to the National Wetlands Inventory, there are several wetlands within the project areas (see Figures 4 and 5). Project areas are located adjacent to Payette Lake, Little Payette Lake, Cruickshank Reservoir, Lake Fork Creek, and the Lake Irrigation District Canal.

Alternative 1 – No Action

No vegetation management activities would be conducted. The impact scale would range from small to large, depending on the size of the wildfire.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Vegetation removal activities would not occur within 100 feet of wetland or water resources. The impact scale would be small. No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to wetlands or water resources are anticipated.

4.4 VEGETATION

Vegetation in Valley County is a mix of forestland and rangeland ecosystems. While vegetation can vary somewhat from one specific location to the next, the region generally features a mixture of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), subalpine and dry xeric forest. The project area contains mainly Douglas fir, Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), grand fir (*Abies grandis*), true firs (*Abies*), shrubs, and grasses. See Figures 6a to 6c for photographs of the UI McCall Field Campus.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Without vegetation removal activities, the high risk of vegetation loss from wildfires would continue. Factors contributing to the highest fire risk include a disruption of the natural wildland fire frequency through decades of fire suppression and buildings lacking adequate fireproofing. Increased levels of diseased and invasive species creating a greater fuel load would be expected. The impact scale would range from small to large, depending on the size of the wildfire.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The impact scale to vegetation would be moderate. Integrating thinning and manual/mechanical vegetative treatment could result in a small loss of individual native plants. However, in these habitat types thinning is generally desirable and promotes reduction of overstocked understory trees and shrubs. All true firs within the UI McCall field campus would be removed. The remaining trees (grand fir, Douglas fir, and Ponderosa pine) would have branches pruned within 12 feet of the ground. Throughout Ponderosa State Park and the Nokes Forest, all true firs contributing to ladder fuels would be felled. Ponderosa pines and Douglas firs would be branch pruned within 12 feet from the ground on trees with a diameter at breast height (DBH) of 14 inches or greater.

Changes in the size or viability of the vegetative community would be minor, with small and localized effects to a relatively minor proportion of any native species population. Many of these species are ecologically dependent on fire and fire cycles, and the effects are considered small in the short term and beneficial in the long term.

4.5 FISH AND WILDLIFE

Data from the Idaho Conservation Data Center (ICDC) was requested for known special-status species at and near the Highlands Estates Wildfire Mitigation project site (ICDC 2009). The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) was consulted for potential Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species in Valley County (IDFG 2009).

4.5.1 Federally Listed Species and Critical Habitat

Five listed, proposed, or candidate species under the ESA are known to occur in Valley County: Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and northern Idaho ground squirrel (*Spermophilus brunneus brunneus*).

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There would be no work within 100 feet of the shoreline of the lakes or the rivers; therefore fish species will not be discussed further.

4.6.1.1 Canada Lynx

The Canada lynx is a Federal and Idaho State listed species. The Canada lynx is listed as Threatened under the ESA and is considered Critically Imperiled by Idaho State. In Idaho, critical habitat for lynx has only been designated in the extreme northeast corner of the State.

The Canada lynx occurs throughout Canada and Alaska, in the extreme northeastern and north-central United States, and in the northern and central Rocky Mountains. Within Idaho, populations exist north of the Salmon River in the west and north of the Caribou Range in the east. The total population size in Idaho is unknown, but it is thought to be less than 100 individuals (IDFG 2005).

In Idaho, the Canada lynx inhabits montane and subalpine coniferous forests typically above 4,000 feet. Habitat used during foraging is usually early successional forest. Dens are usually in mature forests. Individuals are wide-ranging and require large tracts of forest. The Canada lynx preys on the snowshoe hare, particularly during the winter, as well as variety of birds and other small mammals (IDFG 2005).

Gap analysis originated in Idaho in the late 1980s as a system for assessing the distribution of native plant and animal distributions in relation to land stewardship. The Gap analysis data was assessed for the predicted distribution of both Canada lynx and snowshoe hare in the vicinity of the project site (IDVMD 2009). This information was cross-referenced with species observations from the Idaho Conservation Data Center (IDFG 2005).

In addition, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction project was reviewed (USDA 2007). This document shows occupied lynx habitat as well as core areas, secondary areas, and peripheral areas. Core areas have persistent, verified records of lynx occurrence over time, and recent evidence of reproduction. Secondary areas have historical records of lynx presence with no record of reproduction, or with historical records and no recent population surveys. These areas may contribute to lynx persistency by providing habitat to support lynx during dispersal movements or other periods, allowing them to return to core areas. Peripheral areas have no evidence of long-term presence or reproduction, but may contain habitat that enables the sufficient dispersal of lynx between populations or subpopulations. Linkage areas are areas of movement opportunities. They are not “corridors,” which imply only a travel route; they are broad areas of habitat where animals can find food, shelter, and security (USDI 2005).

The project site is within 0.5 mile of predicted habitat according to Idaho Gap Analysis data. In addition, the project site is within snowshoe hare habitat. According to the Final EIS, the project area is outside of all known occupied habitats, but is within 10 miles of secondary areas and within 10 miles of linkages areas. According to the Idaho Conservation Data Center information, two Canada lynx have been observed within 10 miles of the project area. While historical observations and potential habitat occur within 10 miles of the project area, the project area is outside of all predicted lynx use areas. The likelihood of the project area being utilized by Canada lynx is low.

4.6.1.2 Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel

The northern Idaho ground squirrel is a Federal and Idaho State listed species. The northern Idaho ground squirrel is listed as Threatened under the ESA and is considered Critically Imperiled by Idaho State. No critical habitat has been designated for the northern Idaho ground squirrel. The northern Idaho ground squirrel is endemic to Adams and Valley counties in Idaho. Fewer than 40 colonies exist, and more than half of these colonies contain fewer than 20 individuals. The total population is estimated to be about 850 individuals.

The northern Idaho ground squirrel occupies dry montane meadows at elevations between 3,280 and 5,600 feet. Typical habitat includes meadows of grasses and forbs, and to a lesser extent, sagebrush, surrounded by ponderosa pine or Douglas-fir forest. Most sites have a mixture of shallow and deeper soils to accommodate nest burrows.

The ICDC does not have any recorded observations of northern Idaho ground squirrel within several miles of the project site. The nearest known location of northern Idaho ground squirrel is over 10 miles away.

4.6.1.3 Migratory Birds

The project areas provide habitat for a variety of migratory birds, including songbirds and birds of prey. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Office of Migratory Bird Management maintains a list of migratory birds (50 CFR 10.13). The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended, provides Federal protections for migratory birds, their nests, eggs, and body parts from harm, sale, or other injurious actions. The act includes a “no take” provision.

A remote habitat analysis was performed to determine potential for occurrence of migratory birds within the project areas. Geographic information systems (GIS) data, aerial photos, and species descriptions were used to identify potential migratory bird occurrence. Migratory birds identified include those that are known to breed within Idaho and those that are included within the USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern (USFWS 2008) and the Idaho Bird Conservation Plan (Ritter 2000).

In the USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern, species are associated with Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs). BCRs are endorsed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative as the basic units within which all bird conservation efforts will be planned and evaluated (USFWS 2008). The project areas lie within BCR 10. Idaho breeding bird species listed in BCR 10 are analyzed in this EA (USFWS 2008). In the Idaho Bird Conservation Plan, North America is divided into planning units based on physiographic areas, which in turn were based on biotic communities. The project areas are located within physiographic area 64, the Central Rocky Mountains. High priority breeding bird species that occur in Idaho (Ritter 2000) within physiographic area 64 will also be analyzed in this EA.

The project area is comprised of mixed conifer forests, meadow habitats, Ponderosa pine forests, lodgepole pine forests, spruce-fir forests, grasslands, shrublands, and marshes (OSU 2007). The project area also contains numerous riparian features. See Appendix B for specific Regional Gap habitat classifications. The migratory bird species of conservation concern were evaluated for their habitat usages and determined whether or not to potentially occur within the project areas. The predicted distribution of each species as modeled by the Idaho Vertebrate Modeling

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Database (IDVMD 2009) was also used in species consideration. Avian species listed in Appendix B have the potential to either nest or forage within the project area.

4.5.2 Special Status Species

No special status plant species have been recorded on the project site. However, two special status bird species have been observed on or near the site: common loon (*Gavia immer*) and bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). These species have either been observed on or near the shores of Payette Lake and Little Payette Lake (ICDC 2009).

4.5.3 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, no vegetation management activities would be conducted. As a result, no direct affects to either ESA listed species or non-listed species in the project area are expected. However, the potential for losses of listed and non-listed species due to wildfire would remain. The impact scale would range from small to large, depending on the size of the wildfire. Future uncontrolled wildfires could result in adverse impacts to wildlife through the loss of habitat or the mortality of individuals.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, wildfire fuel reduction activities would not affect Federal and State listed species. There have been no documented northern Idaho ground squirrel observations and the nearest site is over 10 miles away. Since the project site is outside of known and predicted Canada lynx habitat, it is unlikely that lynx reside or roam within the project area. If any of these species are found within the project area, consultation with IDFG and USFWS would occur. The University of Idaho would comply with all mitigation measures required by IDFG and USFWS.

Impacts to non-listed wildlife could occur from vegetation removal. Various factors including changes in food sources, shelter, population density, and dispersal effort would determine the severity of impacts to non-listed wildlife. These impacts would dissipate as displaced individuals either establish new home ranges or are outcompeted. These effects would not be expected to exceed the natural range of variability or have long-term effects on the natural processes sustaining these populations. The impact scale would be small. It is recommended that work on the trees occur outside of the nesting season.

4.6 HISTORIC, ARCHAEOLOGICAL, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resources consist of locations of human activity, occupation, or use identified through field inventory, historic documentation, or oral evidence. The term includes archaeological, historic, and architectural properties and sites or places of traditional cultural or religious importance to Native American tribes or other social or cultural groups. Management of Idaho's cultural resources falls under the jurisdiction and control of the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) according to their relative importance. Management objectives include protecting

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against impairment, destruction, inadvertent loss, and accommodating uses determined appropriate through consultation and planning.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) holds that activities occurring on Federal lands, or those that require Federal permits or use Federal funds, undergo a review process to protect cultural resources that are or may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The Area of Potential Effect (APE) for archaeological and cultural resources includes all those areas proposed for vegetative fuel removal in the University of Idaho McCall field campus and Ponderosa State Park (1,515 acres), and the Nokes Forest (1,650 acres), near McCall, Idaho. Understory true firs would be removed. The method of vegetation removal includes chainsaws, tractors, pruning, thinning and hand-sawing.

The APE for the planned irrigation system installation on the UI McCall field campus would be approximately 3 acres in the open area around the Administration building, student living units, and the faculty/family units. See the Section 106 documentation for more details (Appendix C).

4.6.1 Historic Resources

Types of cultural properties expected include cabins, residences, sheds, garages, dining halls, meeting halls, restrooms, boat ramps and docks, classrooms, and outhouses. Historic resources in the 1,515-acre UI McCall field campus/Ponderosa State Park APE include the UI McCall field campus Dining Lodge (“Dining Lodge”) and the former Nazarene Church Camp (a private camp complex now incorporated into Ponderosa State Park). There are no documented historic structures or buildings in the 1,650-acre Nokes Forest APE.

The former Nazarene Camp, the only recorded historic resource in Ponderosa State Park, consists of wooden buildings constructed mostly in 1946. The original structures and buildings include a baseball backstop, a well house, sheds, a nurse’s cabin and multiple other cabins, a craft shed, and restrooms. The camp was incorporated into Ponderosa State Park in the 1990s. In 2004, the Idaho SHPO formally determined the camp complex eligible for the National Register after the historic survey was completed in 2003.

The Dining Lodge is potentially eligible for registration due to its association with the development and expansion of the university’s forestry and natural resources curriculum and outreach programs during the last few years of the Great Depression. Built in 1939 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the building represents one of the first facilities constructed for use by the university’s College of Natural Resources as an outdoor classroom facility for forestry students. The Dining Lodge also represents the far-reaching types of projects undertaken by the CCC through President Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation.

Although the architectural integrity has been somewhat compromised by the installation of the stage, wheel chair ramp and double doors on the north facade; replacement of the windows; and the small addition on the rear, the Dining Lodge still retains sufficient integrity to meet the National Register criteria of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The historic contexts of Agriculture and Education are represented. The other buildings and structures on campus were built after 1960 and are not considered historic resources.

There are 19 other historic sites that have been previously recorded in the project vicinity but not within the APE. Some of these properties have been formally evaluated. These properties are not further discussed, as no impacts would occur.

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4.6.2 Archaeological and Cultural Resources

Prehistorically, diagnostic projectile points, lithic scatters and associated lithic artifacts are the most common type of site found within the project areas. The lithic debitage, or processed stone flakes, represent activity areas of past cultures. These sites also contain stone tools, projectile points, or solely lithic debitage waste flakes produced during the manufacture or maintenance of stone tools. Evidence left behind in the archaeological context is indicative of specific types of activities or sites. Examples include; short-term hunting camps, butchering sites, tool quarry, manufacturing, or repair locations. Other site types can include; a variety of habitation or campsites, fishing locations, hunting blinds, rock alignments, cairns, ceremonial and rock art sites, and burials. As both the ethnographic and the archaeological record of the region conclude, although dependent on environmental variability, prehistoric lifeways saw a relative high resource abundance of both vegetative plants and game for subsistence (Plew 2008, Steward 1970).

According to data received from the Idaho SHPO, 16 surveys have been conducted since 1989; and 3 archaeological sites (10-VY-545, 10-VY-884, and 10-VY-1219) have been discovered within the project APE. According to available site record data for 10-VY-884, the archaeological context has been negatively affected by high water inundation due to the seasonal rise and fall of Little Payette Lake, exposing the site at low water levels and completely inundating it at high water levels (Kingsbury 1992). Site 10-VY-1219 is partially buried in the bank of Lake Fork Creek and is exposed to seasonal drainages from Little Payette Lake irrigation run-off. Previously discovered artifacts from both sites have been catalogued, collected, and submitted to regional repositories (Sellars 2002). Records for 10-VY-545 are incomplete and offered no description or location data. Due to their location, these archaeological sites would not be impacted by the proposed project. No other archaeological properties exist within the project area boundaries.

Report No.	Title	Author	Year	Agency Name	Project No.	Survey Acres
2001/850	McCall Water Treatment Plant Archaeological Survey, Valley County, Idaho. AMEC Earth & Environmental, Boise, ID.	Mitchell, K.	2001	Environmental Protection Agency	—	3
1992/1010	Archaeological and Historical Survey of the Spring Mountain Ranch McCall, Valley County, Idaho. Toothman-Orton Engineering Company.	Statham, William P.	1992	Toothman-Orton Engineering Co.	—	82
1989/5250	Antiquities Assessment of the Proposed Payette Lakes Water and Sewer Project. Boise State University.	Pavesic, Max	1976	Boise State University	—	0
2001/352	Debco Construction Council-Cuprum Road Improvement Project. Federal Highway Administration.	Turnipseed, D.	2001	Federal Highway Administration	IA-2001-01	37
1996/649	Segments A, B and C of the City of McCall South Loop Water System Project.	Plew, Mark	1996	Mark Plew	—	2

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Report No.	Title	Author	Year	Agency Name	Project No.	Survey Acres
1989/1992	Annual Report of Archeological Investigations. Idaho Transportation Department, Boise, March, 1982.	Gaston, Jenna	1982	Idaho Transportation Department.	—	0
1989/694	CRSRF, Smokejumper LEX, Acquired Land. Payette National Forest.	Bennett, Lee	1983	Payette National Forest	—	0
1996/866	City of McCall Wastewater Facility Pipeline Survey #1 Valley County, Idaho.	Druss, Claudia	1995	Claudia Druss	—	125
1996/141	Payette Lake Trail Pathways and McCall Bike Trail. Idaho Transportation Department.	Statham, William	1995	Idaho Transportation Department.	STP-3906(100)	30
2008/269	Undeveloped 4.6 Acre Land Conveyance. Payette N.F. ¹	Kingsbury, L.	2007	Payette N.F. ¹	PY2007-2047	5
1996/866	City of McCall Wastewater Facility Pipeline Survey #1 Valley County, Idaho.	Druss, Claudia	1995	Claudia Druss	—	125
2001/576	Elo Rd. and Johnson Rd. Turn Bays. Idaho Transportation Department.	Petersen, N.	2001	Idaho Transportation Department	NH-3270(149)	1
2004/416	SH-55 Mission Street to Mater Road. L. Mauser, Boise, ID.	Mauser, L.	2003	Idaho Transportation Department	ST-3270(648)	1
1989/2475	Cultural Resource Inventory of Lieu Selection Lands in Idaho.	Harrison, Richard, Thomas Green, and Larcie Burnett	1978	—	—	0
1994/852	Idaho Department of Lands Right-of- Way. BLM ² , Boise District.	Shaw, D.	1994	BLM ² , Boise	ID-1-94-C-14	3
1992/830	Boater's Park Exchange. BLM ² , Coeur d'Alene District.	Sisson, David	1992	BLM ² , Coeur d'Alene	Id6-92-66	5116
¹ N.F. - National Forest.						
² BLM - Bureau of Land Management.						

4.6.3 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Valley County's wildland/urban interface. Natural deterioration, incompatible alterations, and fire are threats to the Dining Lodge, other buildings, and the former Nazarene Church Camp buildings. Threat of destruction of the historic Dining Lodge and other park buildings by the spread of wildfires are a number one concern of management. A 2006 fire risk assessment by the Student Conservation Association determined that the primary wildfire threat

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at the McCall field campus is from embers falling onto the facilities' aging cedar shake roofs. Embers carried by the wind could travel several miles and fall onto the campus buildings, potentially igniting the roofs. A fire could spread from roof to roof, and roof to tree, endangering the entire campus. Other threats to the buildings and campus include excess dry duff and groundcover on the campus, and the lack of adequate fire hydrants and hoses. The impact scale would range from small to large, depending on the size and amount of destruction from a wildfire. Because no Federal activity would occur, no requirement for compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA exists under the No Action Alternative.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The Proposed Action includes removal of vegetation from approximately 3,165 acres of public lands. Funding from FEMA would be provided to the University of Idaho for the purposes of hiring contractors to conduct vegetation removal from private lands. Consequently, compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA is required.

As part of this project, a metal roof would be installed on the Dining Lodge. The original cedar shake roof, which is in poor condition, would be removed and the new metal roof installed. Although a metal roof would be installed instead of replacement in-kind with cedar shakes, there would be no adverse effects to the historic Dining Lodge (Appendix C, Attachment 2). The replacement of the roof is reversible and the cedar shake roof could be installed in the future if circumstances change. The impact scale would be small. The installation and upgrades to the current irrigation system, hydrants and fire hoses, and removal of excess dry duff, groundcover, and vegetation on and around the McCall field campus would have no impact on the historic Dining Lodge or its setting. It is recommended that the University of Idaho consult with the SHPO to select a compatible type of metal roof prior to choosing the final type and color of the metal roof.

There would be no effect on the buildings and structures of the former Nazarene Church Camp, as project activities would be limited to vegetation removal.

The proposed ground disturbance would be temporary and minimally invasive. The impact scale would be small. Little or no vegetation currently exists within the 3-acre APE due in large part to the prevalence of non-shade tolerant vegetation in a heavily shaded area and severe compaction from foot traffic. No effects to archaeological resources are expected. In the event of an unanticipated discovery, and in compliance with various State and Federal laws protecting cultural resources, including Section 106 of the NHPA, all work shall cease in the immediate vicinity of the find until appropriate parties (including the SHPO) are consulted and an appropriate plan is established.

4.7 SOCIOECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EO 12898)

Executive Order (EO) 12898, Environmental Justice, directs Federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations in the United States resulting from Federal programs, policies, and activities. Socioeconomic and demographic data for residents in the project vicinity was studied to determine if a disproportionate number (defined as greater than 50 percent) of minority or low-income persons have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Action.

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Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Valley County’s wildland/urban interface. Because no Federal activity would occur, no requirement for compliance with EO 12898 exists.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

U.S. Census Bureau data for Valley County was used to identify the minority¹ and low-income² compositions of the study area, which is located in Block Group 2 (within Census Tract 9702). Census 2000 data at the county level and census block group level was reviewed. In Valley County and Block Group 2, the minority population was 4 percent. The poverty level in Valley County was 9 percent, while the poverty level in Block Group 2 was 13 percent.

The areas selected under the Proposed Action are areas determined high-priority based solely on their need for fuel reduction. As the project vicinity has a similar percentage of minorities and residents below the poverty level, the Proposed Action would not cause adverse economic impacts and would comply with EO 12898. The impact scale would be small. The intended result of the Proposed Action is general safety for the surrounding local populations. The ability to decrease the potential for catastrophic fire would be a social and economic beneficial impact to the community as a whole.

¹ A minority person is “a person who is: (1) Black (a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa); (2) Hispanic (a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race); (3) Asian American (a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands); or (4) American Indian and Alaskan Native (a person having origins in any of the original people of North America and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition).”

² Low-income is identified as “one whose median household income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines.” Income data based on Department of Health and Human Services guidelines are difficult to gather, so Census Bureau data are often used for environmental justice analyses.

SECTION FIVE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA require an assessment of cumulative effects during the decision-making process for Federal projects. Cumulative effects are defined as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7). Cumulative effects were determined by combining the effects of these alternatives with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

For new development, Valley County requires that pre-fire activities are implemented that may help improve the survivability of people and homes in areas prone to wildfire. Activities may include vegetation management around the home, use of fire resistant building materials, appropriate subdivision design, removal of fuel, and providing a water source.

The Proposed Action and other wildland/urban interface activities that are planned in the fire management plans by the county are not expected to have adverse cumulative impacts to climate, geology, and soils; floodplains; wetlands; vegetation; historic, archeological, and cultural resources; or socioeconomics and environmental justice, as no project impacts are anticipated. Impacts to migratory birds could occur through habitat modification. Various factors including changes in food sources, shelter, population density, and dispersal effort would determine the severity of impacts to non-listed wildlife. These impacts would dissipate as displaced individuals either establish new home ranges or are outcompeted. These effects would not exceed the natural range of variability or have long-term effects on the natural processes sustaining these populations.

The Proposed Action includes an educational element to promote an understanding of the fire-related risks as development increases in the wildland/urban interface.

SECTION SIX PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

FEMA is the lead Federal agency for conducting the NEPA compliance process for the proposed vegetation management project. As the lead agency, FEMA expedites the preparation and review of NEPA documents, responds to the needs of residents surrounding the treated lands, meets the spirit and intent of NEPA, and complies with all NEPA provisions.

A public notice is required for this draft EA. The public will have the opportunity to comment on the EA for 30 days after the publication of this notice. The notice identifies the action, location of the proposed site, participants, location of the draft EA, and who to write to provide comments. FEMA will review all written comments submitted for identification of any significant issues that need to be addressed, and will incorporate them into the final EA, as appropriate.

Public involvement is ongoing and had begun before the initiation of this EA. Many communities in Idaho organized or increased their public education efforts to reduce hazardous fuels on public and private forested lands by making plans in accordance with the National Fire Plan's 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and the Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan. The plans outline priority areas, strategies, and action plans for wildfire fuel reduction treatments, and educate their respective communities on living in a fire-adapted ecosystem.

The following two plans are relevant to public involvement efforts supporting this EA.

6.1 VALLEY COUNTY WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE WILDFIRE MITIGATION PLAN

The *Valley County Wildland/Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan* is the result of analyses, professional cooperation and collaboration, assessments of wildfire risks and other factors considered with the intent to reduce the potential for wildfires to threaten people, structures, infrastructure, and unique ecosystems in Valley County, Idaho. Agencies and organizations that participated in the planning process included: the Valley County Commissioners, Idaho Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Idaho Department of Lands, Southern Idaho Timber Protective Association, Tamarack Resort, local fire departments, Valley County Planning and Zoning, and Valley County Emergency Management (Valley County 2007).

Public involvement in this plan was made a priority from the inception of the project. Using various outreach methods, such as news and radio notices, mailed surveys, committee meetings, and public meetings, a diverse group of citizens and local agency representatives were involved.

Seven communities, including McCall, were identified in the 2001 Federal Register as "Urban Wildland Interface Communities within the vicinity of Federal Lands that are at high risk from wildfires" (Valley County 2007).

6.2 STATE OF IDAHO HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

The *State of Idaho Hazard Mitigation Plan* was prepared by the Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security (BHS) to reduce disaster assistance costs and preserve disaster assistance eligibility for the State, counties, and cities. The plan is the comprehensive, statewide mitigation planning

Public Involvement and Response to Comments

effort conducted in Idaho. It identifies hazards and associated vulnerabilities within the State and provides a comprehensive statewide strategy to reduce future disaster losses through sound mitigation projects.

The four public involvement objectives in the plan are to develop a statewide fire public education/outreach program to promote individual fire mitigation and wildfire prevention, provide fire training to public officials and representatives, increase the number of communities participating in the Firewise Program, and to train fire corps volunteers and Community Emergency Response Team members in assessing wildfire hazards in the home ignition zone (BHS 2007).

Public education elements that individual counties would be responsible for include:

- increasing public knowledge regarding safety while building in wildfire-prone areas
- developing local programs which provide education to local homeowners on becoming a Firewise Community
- increasing elected and appointed official knowledge regarding land use practices in wildfire-prone areas
- promoting participation in the Keep Idaho Green Program
- incorporating wildland/urban interface/home ignition zone information into the Citizen Corp and Community Emergency Response Team Programs (BHS 2007)

SECTION SEVEN REQUIRED PERMITS AND COMPLIANCE

Development at the Proposed Action Alternative sites shall comply with the project's scope of work. The University of Idaho should consult with the SHPO to select a compatible type of metal roof prior to choosing the final type and color of the metal roof. In the event that historically or archaeologically significant materials or sites (or evidence thereof) are discovered during the implementation of the project, the project shall be halted immediately and all reasonable measures taken to avoid or minimize harm to property. The University of Idaho would then be required to consult with FEMA and the SHPO for further guidance. In the event that Canada lynx or the northern Idaho ground squirrels are found within the project area, the University of Idaho would be required to consult with IDFG and USFWS prior to any vegetation removal activities. All work on the trees should occur outside of the nesting season.

SECTION EIGHT CONCLUSION

The draft EA evaluated potentially significant resources that could be affected. The evaluation resulted in identification of no significant impacts associated with the resources of climate, geology, and soils; floodplains; wetlands and water resources; vegetation; fish and wildlife (ESA); historic, archaeological, and cultural resources; and socioeconomic and environmental justice. Obtaining and implementing permit requirements along with appropriate BMPs will avoid or minimize any effects associated with the action. It is recommended that a finding of no significant environmental impact to the human or natural environment be issued for the Proposed Action Alternative.

SECTION NINE REFERENCES

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Appendix A
Figures

Figure 1 – Project Vicinity

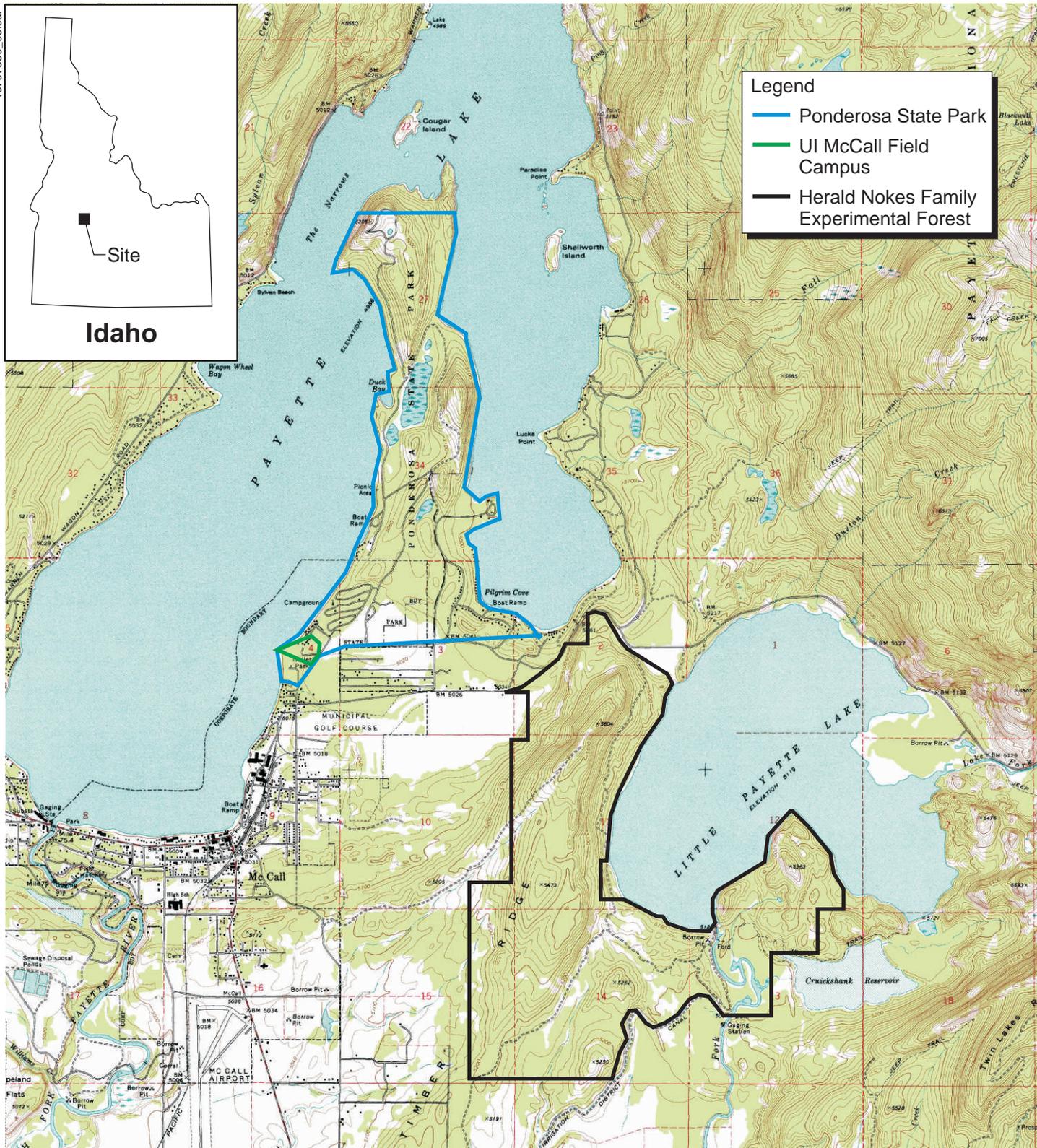
Figure 2 – UI McCall Field Campus and Ponderosa State Park

Figure 3 – Herald Nokes Family Experimental Forest

Figure 4 – Wetlands - Ponderosa State Park

Figure 5 – Wetlands - Herald Nokes Family Experimental Forest

Figures 6a, 6b, 6c – FireCorps Site Photos

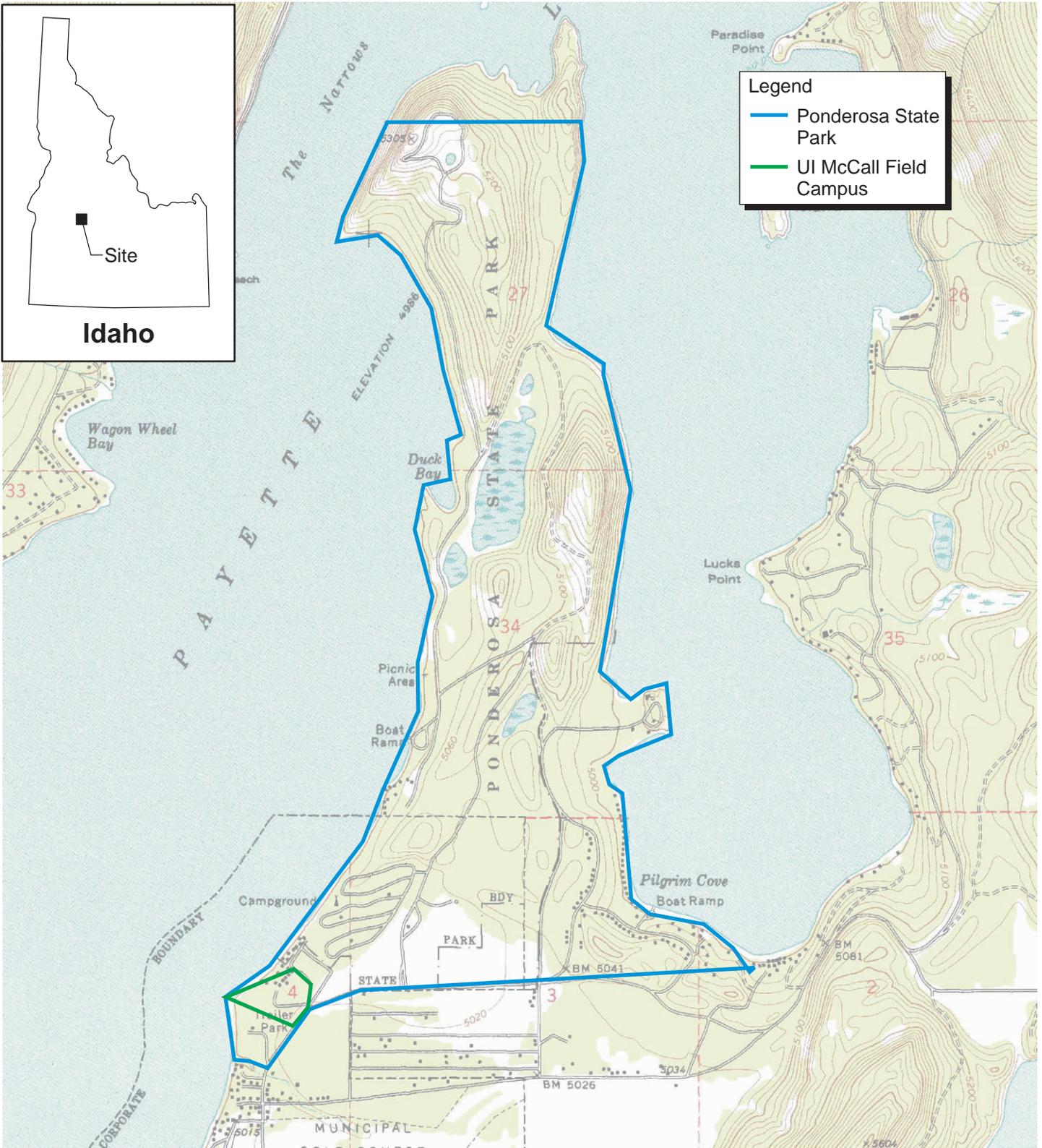


Source: USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle map McCall, Idaho dated 1973.



Approximate Scale in Miles

Figure 1
Project Vicinity



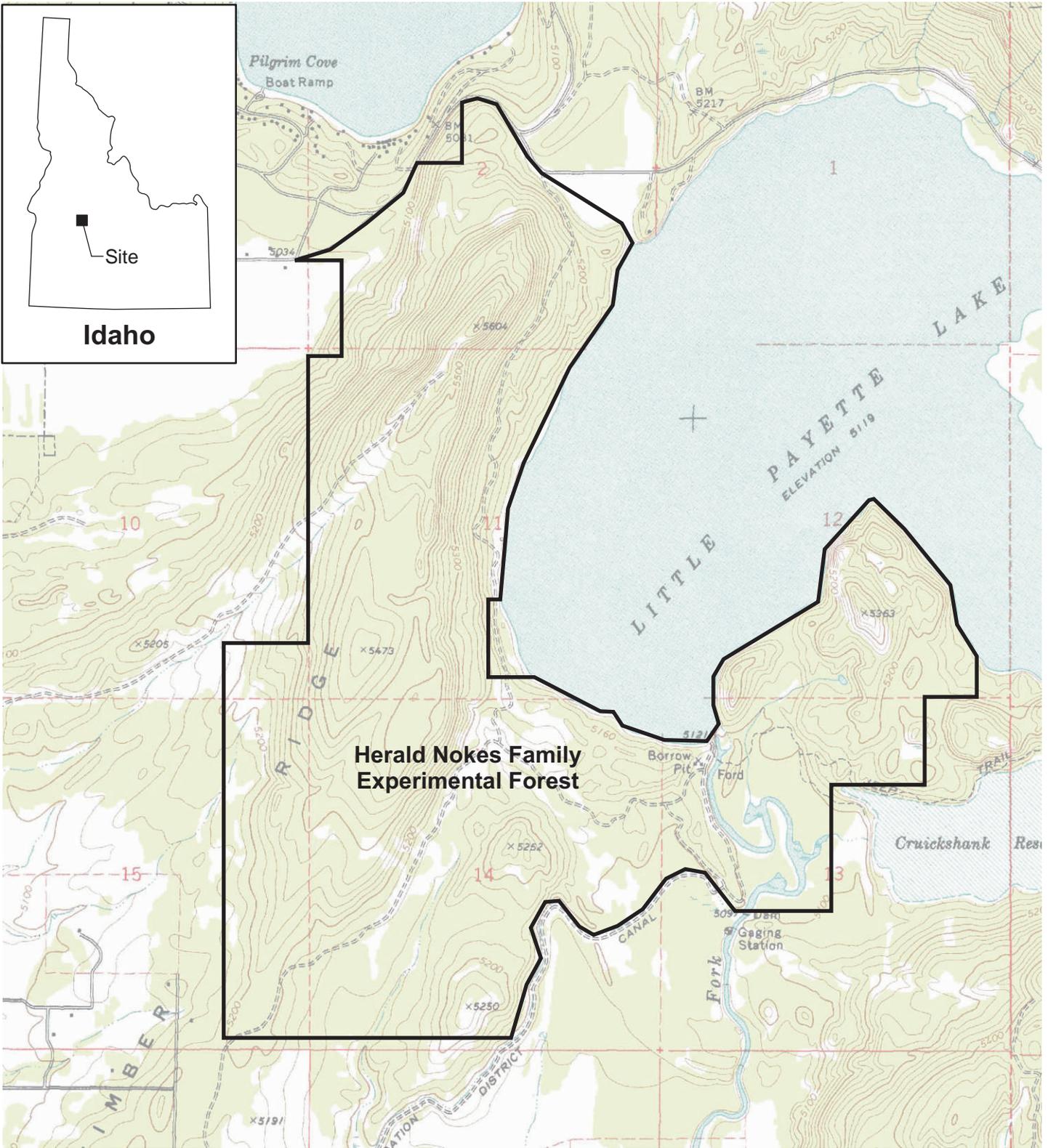
Source: USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle map McCall, Idaho dated 1973.



Approximate Scale in Miles

Figure 2

UI McCall Field Campus and Ponderosa State Park



Source: USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle map McCall, Idaho dated 1973.



Approximate Scale in Miles

Figure 3

Herald Nokes Family Experimental Forest