

October 21, 2020

Mr. Brad Thompson
State Supervisor
Washington Fish and Wildlife Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Dear Mr. Romanski,

According to the DNR Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), fifty percent of Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) designated dispersal areas within a quarter township shall be maintained in a dispersal habitat condition. Within the Ahtanum State Forest, Southeast region; DNR would like to propose eliminating the quarter townships, replacing them with SOMUs based on a landscape approach and shift the dispersal management areas to a configuration that allows practical management of dispersal habitat where it currently exists and where it is more likely to develop and be maintained, while continuing to meet the conservation objectives of the HCP. At this time, some of the quarter townships cannot reach the fifty percent threshold due to the following:

- High elevation
- Dry forest type
- Soils
- South facing slopes
- Plant association

Establishing dispersal management areas into spotted owl management units (SOMUs) that are based on forest type and areas that are dispersal habitat according to current inventory data will enhance DNR's ability to meet and maintain the conservation objectives of the HCP. Our goal is to create a configuration that provides dispersal habitat in both the short- and long-term.

DNR proposes grouping dispersal management areas to forest types that possess dispersal habitat characteristics and/or have a greater likelihood of growing into habitat due to their vegetation type (see attached maps). Knowing dispersal habitat will develop in certain forest types, we first evaluated where on the Ahtanum landscape, the Douglas fir, Grand fir, and cryic warm forest types were prevalent. We then compared the distribution of those forest types with where dispersal habitat was occurring according to the most recent RSFRIS2 (forest inventory) data. We discovered the new delineation of SOMU's increases the overall amount of NSO dispersal habitat, in vegetation types that will support it across the Ahtanum landscape now and into the future (Table 1). The new configuration of the Ahtanum owl dispersal management area will allow dispersal habitat to be more contiguous, maintain and develop in areas less prone to disturbance by fire and climate change, and allow DNR to meet HCP commitments in a shorter amount of time than the previous configuration.

Table 1. Comparison between Current and Proposed Areas Managed for Dispersal in the Ahtanum State Forest.

	Current NSO Dispersal (Acres)	Proposed NSO Dispersal (Acres)
Total Area managed for Dispersal conditions	30,881	31,680
Dispersal Habitat	14,957	17,499
Non-habitat	15,294	14,182

The threshold for maintaining 50% of the acres managed for dispersal in each SOMU will not change. Currently, in the Ahtanum State Forest, 10 of 16 quarter township SOMU’s are under threshold (ranging from 13 – 47% dispersal). The proposed area would be split into two SOMU’s, the Klickitat Meadows SOMU and the Ahtanum SOMU (see attached maps). Table 1 shows the total acres of current versus proposed dispersal and Table 2 shows the SOMU acreages and percentages. This shift gives us a greater opportunity for maintaining healthy stands of dispersal habitat at or above the fifty percent threshold in each SOMU, provides more flexibility for forest health treatments and a buffer in situations where fire impacts habitat. In addition this change consolidates dispersal management to a more contiguous configuration. See Ahtanum maps below for illustration.

Table 2. Proposed Acres and SOMU Percentages for Northern Spotted Owl Dispersal and Non-habitat in the Ahtanum State Forest.

	Klickitat Meadows SOMU (Acres)	Klickitat Meadows SOMU %	Ahtanum SOMU (Acres)	Ahtanum SOMU %
Dispersal	770	50.52	16,729	55.47
Non-habitat	754		13,427	

In 2007, DNR added 483 acres of habitat to the Ahtanum dispersal management area to mitigate the Upper and Lower Foundation timber sale that regenerated 483 acres (documented in the memo dated March 23, 2007). Some of the areas identified for mitigation are included in the newly proposed Ahtanum SOMU, while other mitigation areas did not meet the criteria evaluated for habitat and are not. The 483 mitigation acres are included within the 14,957 acres (refer to Table 1) currently managed by DNR. DNR is proposing to add an additional 799 acres to the Ahtanum dispersal management area with a resulting increase of 2,542 acres of dispersal habitat. This increased area and habitat is more beneficial to northern spotted owls.

SE Region also proposes updating the NRF & Dispersal SOMUs in the Teanaway landscape by replacing the Dispersal ¼ township SOMUs and NRF WAU SOMUs with a two paired SOMU landscape approach (east and west), each pair evaluated for NRF & dispersal separately. SE would maintain the NRF & Dispersal Management Areas locations and 50% habitat thresholds.

The reason we propose this is because the Teanaway management areas are so few and scattered that managing to the current SOMUs threshold boundaries, poses challenges for DNR to manage habitat at a landscape approach (opportunity for larger habitat blocks), and to maintain forest health . See Teanaway maps below for illustration.

Sincerely,

Andrew Hayes
Division Manager, Forest Resources Division

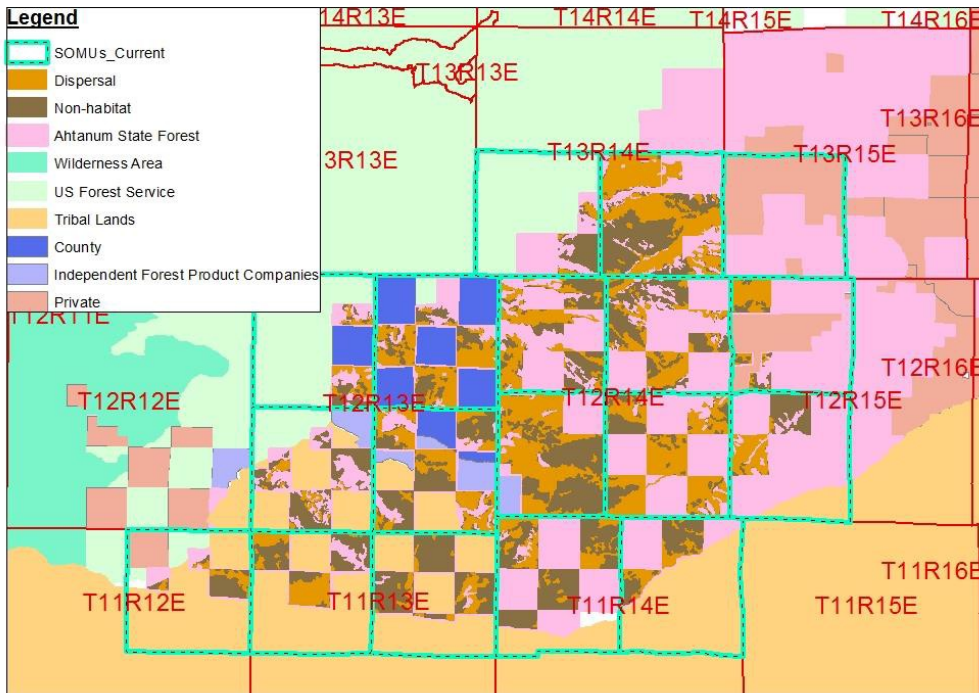
I concur with the approaches outlined above.

Brad Thompson
State Supervisor
Western Washington Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

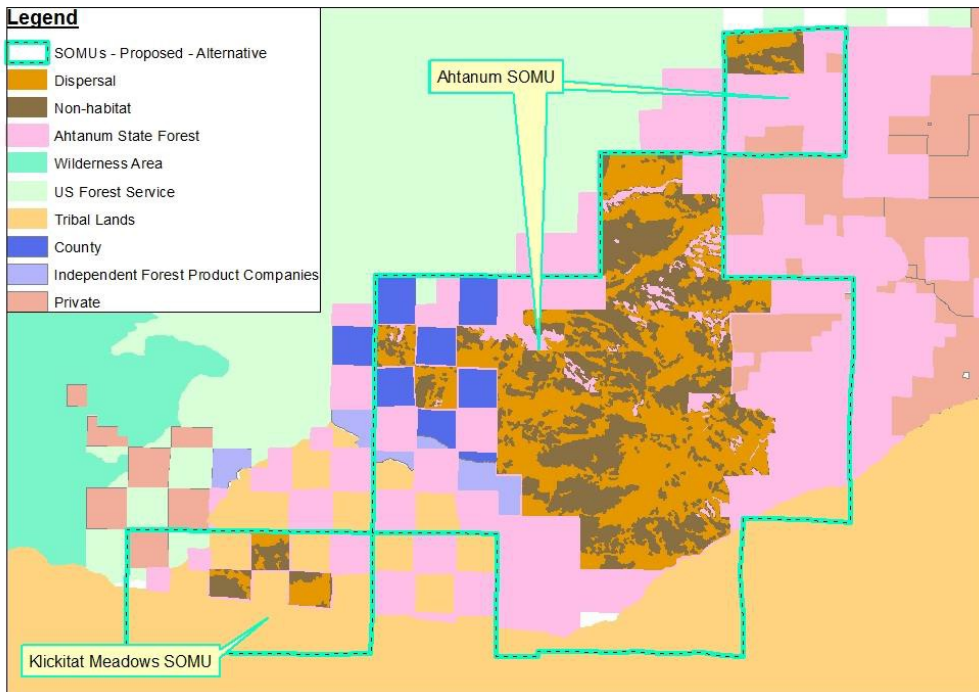
Date

Ahtanum Management Area, Habitat, SOMU Maps

Current NSO Dispersal Management Area

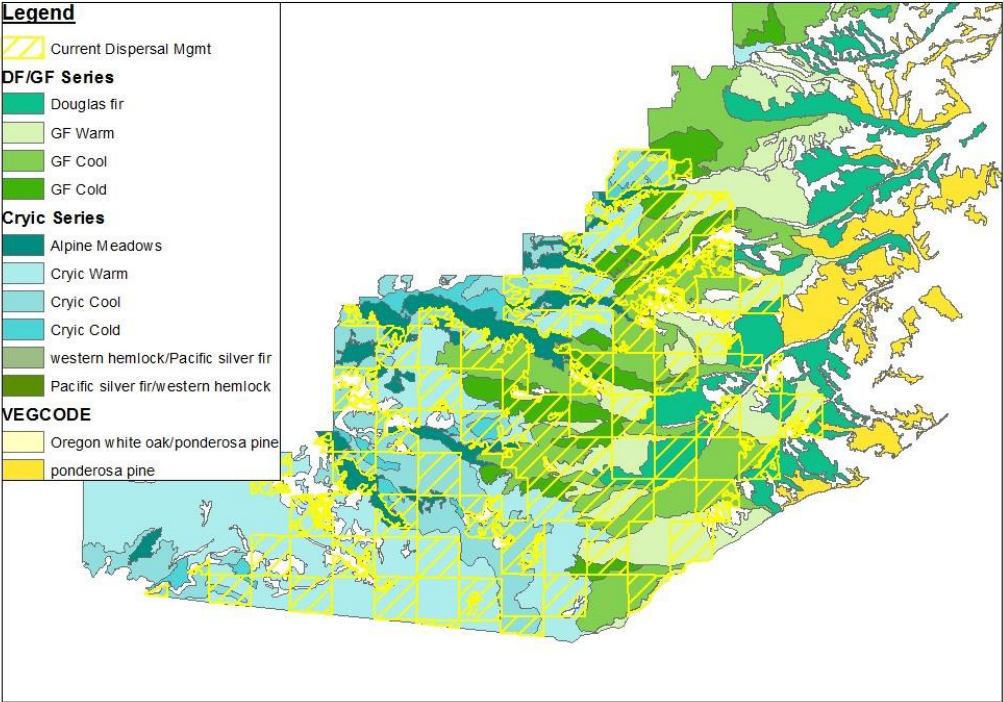


Proposed NSO Dispersal Management Area

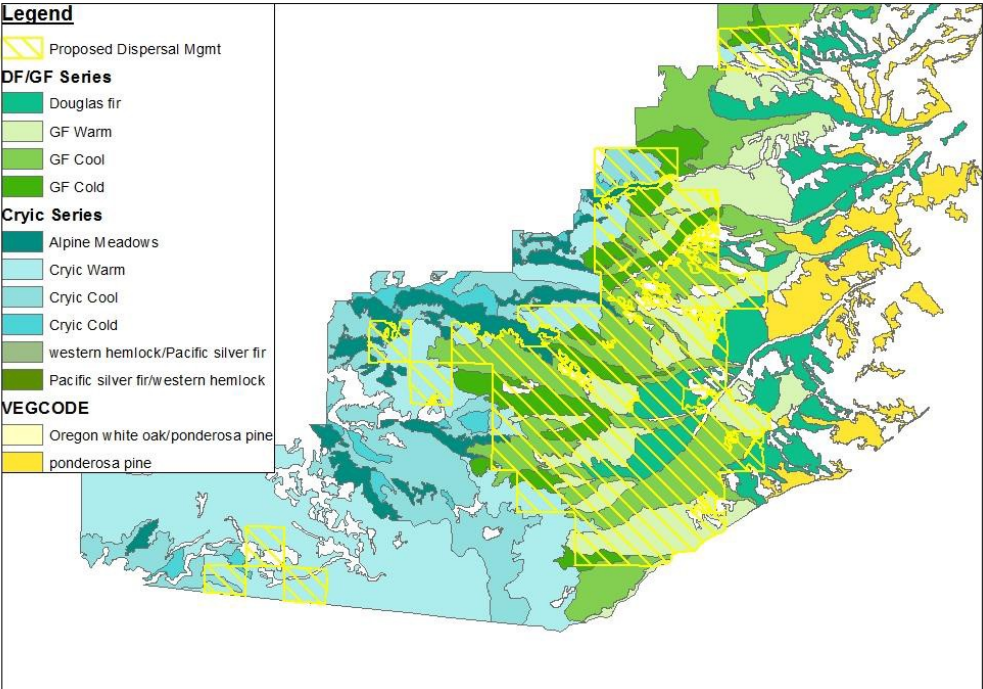


Ahtanum Plant Association Maps

Current NSO Dispersal Management Area

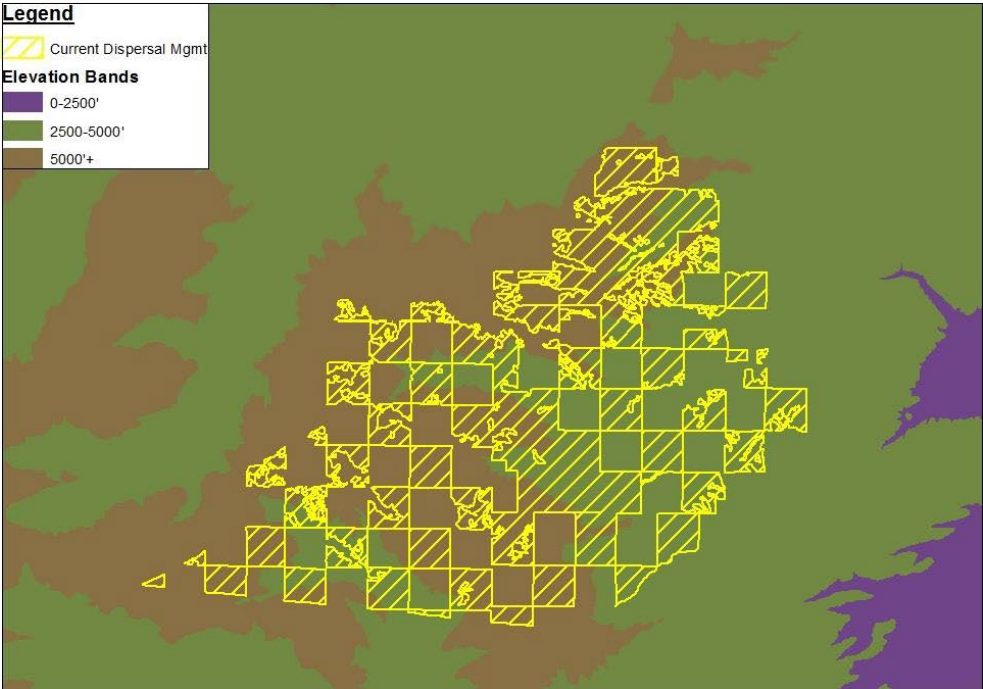


Proposed NSO Dispersal Management Area

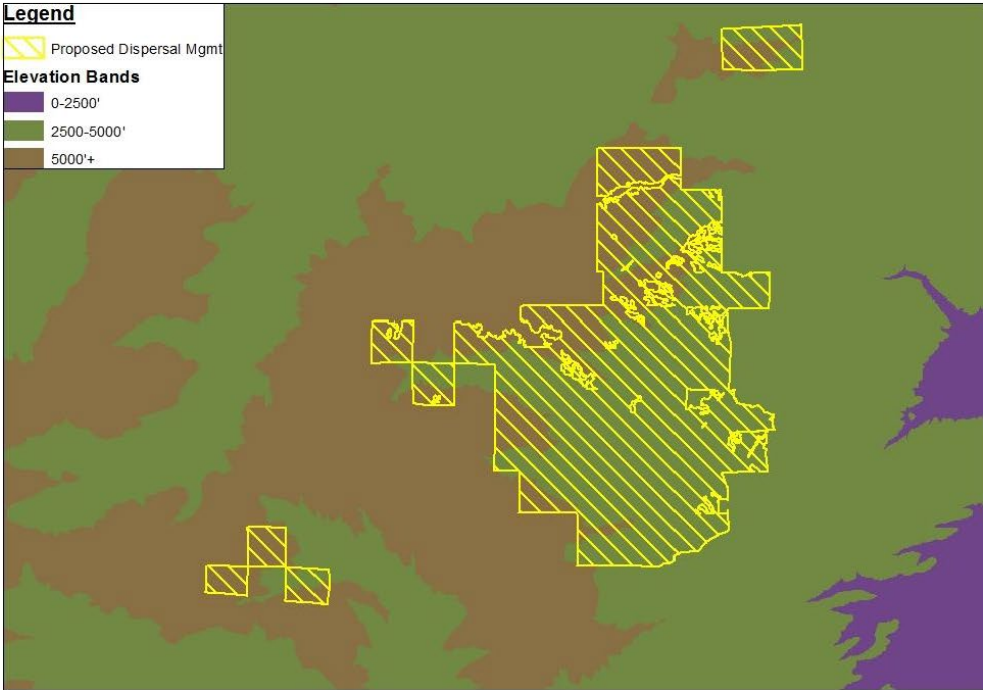


Ahtanum Elevation Maps

Current NSO Dispersal Management Area

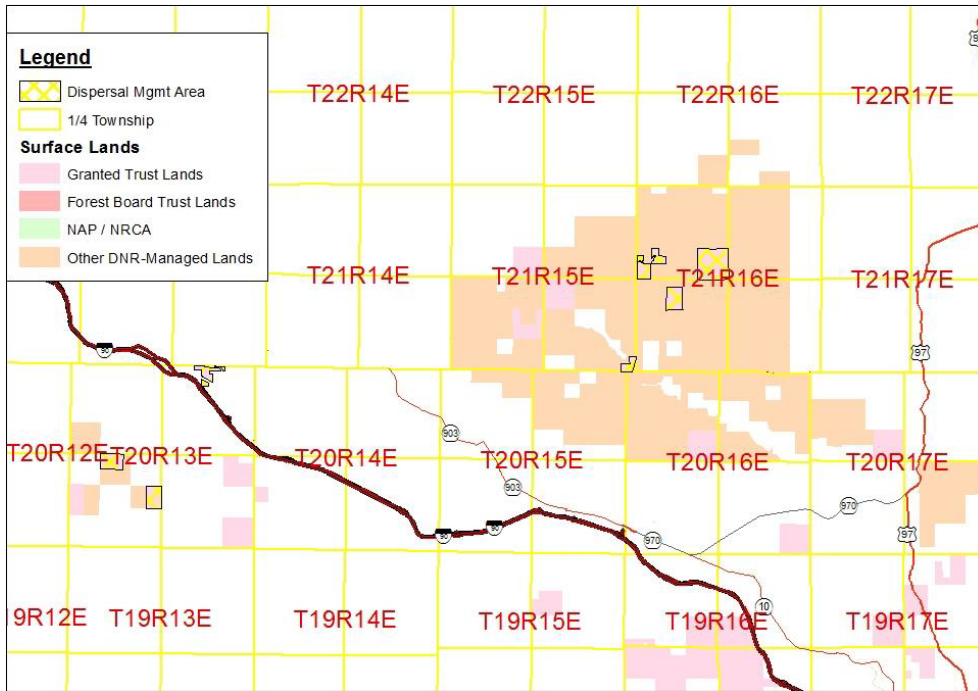


Proposed NSO Dispersal Management Area

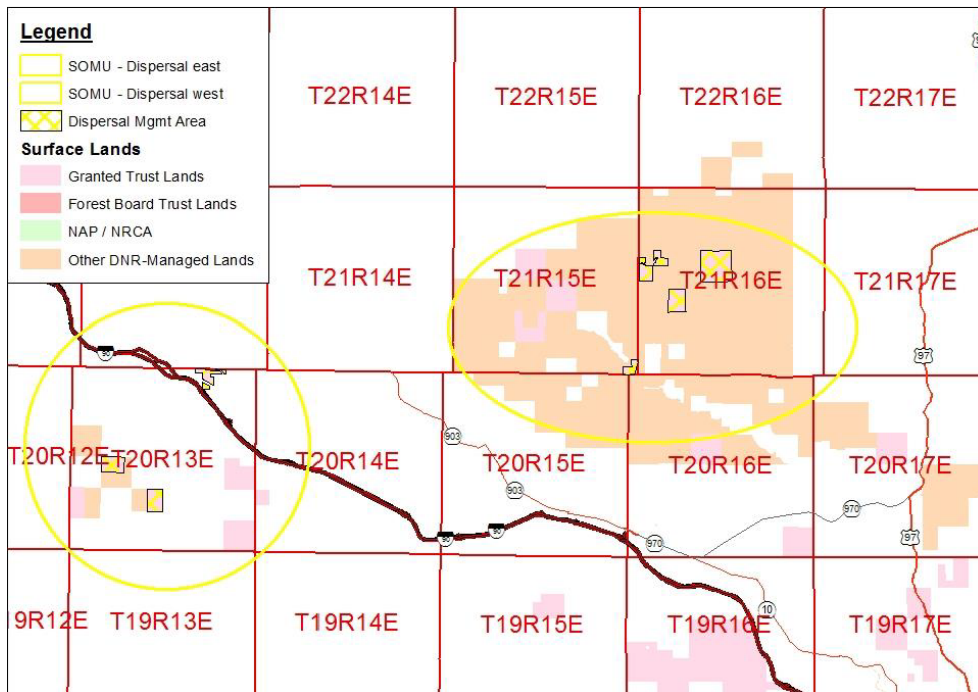


Teaway Dispersal SOMU Maps

Current Dispersal SOMUs (Teaway)

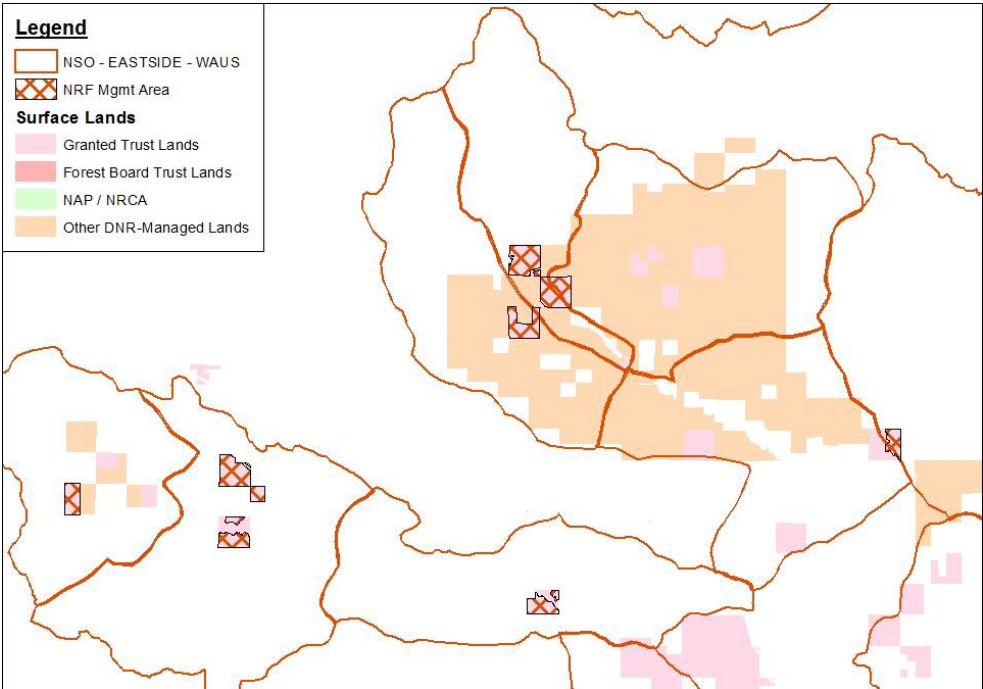


Proposed Dispersal SOMUs (Teaway)



Teanaway NRF SOMU Maps

Current NRF SOMUs (Teanaway)



Proposed NRF SOMUs (Teanaway)

