

## PUBLIC LAND SURVEY SYSTEM DESCRIPTIONS WHEN AND HOW TO USE A COMMA

Writing legal descriptions is a fundamental part of the professional land surveyor's practice. Knowing when to use a comma in describing aliquot parts of a section is of the utmost importance to provide a clear and concise description without ambiguity.

SW1/4NW1/4, SEC 26, T17N, R2W, WM is a common description of that 40 Acre parcel. The same description can be written out as:  
The SW1/4 of the NW1/4 of Section 26, Township 17 North, Range 3 West, Willamette Meridian, Thurston County, Washington.

The use of a comma ends the aliquot part of the section being described and starts another. SW1/4, NW1/4, SEC 26, T17N, R2W, WM describes all of the SW1/4 and all of the NW1/4 of Sec. 26 which results in describing 320 Acres. That also can be written as the W1/2, SEC26, T17N, R2W, WM.

When indexing a Record of Survey by 1/4 1/4 **DO NOT USE A COMMA!** If the survey is in more than one 1/4 1/4 you can use a graphic diagram as allowed in WAC 332-130-050 (1)(iv)(A).

The preferred order in locating quarter sections is counter-clockwise, North East quarter, North West quarter, South West quarter and South East quarter. If parts of the quarter sections are to be described, the same order should be observed.

The Cadastral Office of the BLM has a very good handout on how to write legal descriptions for aliquot parts of a section. The

## Land Legal Descriptions

A legal description/land description is the method of locating or describing land in relation to the public land survey system, which was established by law in 1785, under the Articles of Confederation.

Land is broken down into areas called townships. Townships are for the most part 36 square miles or 6 miles square. Each township is broken down into 36 sections; each section is usually 640 acres.

Sections in each township are numbered consecutively beginning with number 1 in the northeast corner of the township, and counting right to left then left to right and so on weaving back and forth through the sections of the township, and ending with number 36 in the southeast corner.

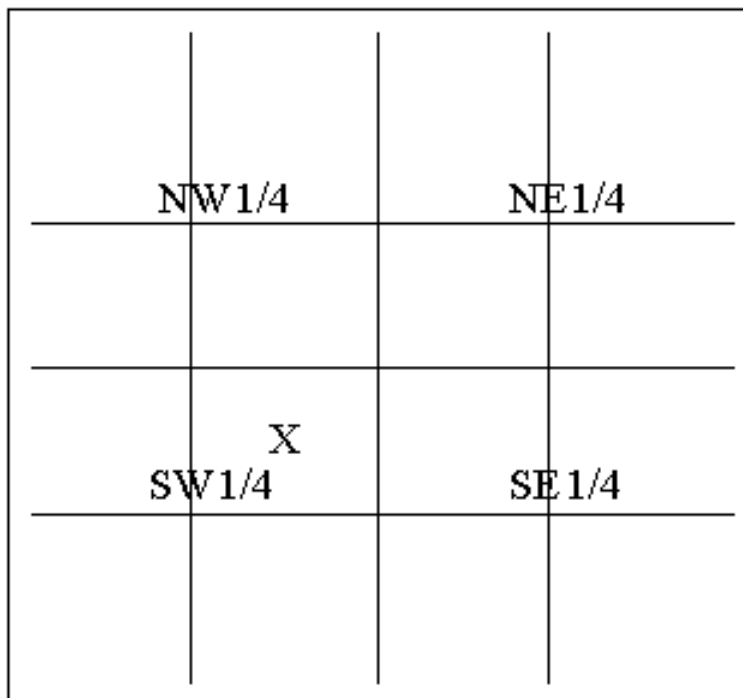
In Oregon and Washington, the rectangular survey system of township and range is referenced to the north-south Willamette Meridian and the east-west Willamette Base Line. The lines cross on the Willamette Stone in the west hills of Portland, Oregon. Townships (normally 6 miles by 6 miles) are numbered starting with Township 1 North (of the base line) to the Canadian border

and Township 1 South to the California border. The Ranges are numbered west from the meridian to the Pacific Ocean and east to the Idaho border. Normal townships are divided into 36 Sections and further into Lots and Aliquot Parts. The complete legal land description for a 160 acre parcel in eastern Oregon would read: the SE1/4 of Section 14 in Township 14 South, Range 34 East, Willamette Meridian.

When you write a legal description, you can start with the Township and Range or you can start with the section description. Whichever way you start, when you are writing the description of the section, always start with the smallest piece of land first and graduating to the largest piece.

The section diagram below shows the section broken down into 16 pieces. Since each section is 640 acres, each section shown in the diagram will be 40 acres.

### **Section 12, Township 27N Range 32E, WM**



In this example, you would write the legal description for the portion with the "X" as follows:  
NE1/4SW1/4, Sec.12, T27N R32E WM or WM, T 27N, R 32E, Section 12, NE1/4 SW1/4

All lands in the states of Washington and Oregon are measured from the Willamette Meridian. You need to include this in your legal description.

The diagram below illustrates a subdivision of a normal one square mile Section of land (640 acres).

