

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Red Rock Refuge Well Drilling & Stock Tank Installation Proposal
Proposed Implementation Date: Spring/Summer 2014
Proponent: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Lessee
Location: SW ¼, Section 30, T13S, R1W
County: Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The lessee of the Section 30, T13S R1W has submitted a request to replace a hand dug well and windmill on the site with a new stock water well and a short pipeline to a single stock tank. The lessee will also install a propane, gas, or a solar powered generator on the site. The purpose of the well and stock tank is to provide a reliable year-round water source and to improve the quality of water available on the tract.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Dean Waltee, Wildlife Biologist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks – Sheridan,
Patrick Rennie, Archaeologist for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.
Martin Miller, Montana Natural Heritage Program.
Nathan Korb, The Nature Conservancy
Ryan Martin, BLM-Dillon Field Office
Beaverhead Commissioners, Local Land Owners, Local Sportsman Groups, and Grazing Associations.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Montana DNRC – Water Resources Division, Water Rights

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

- 1) Allow the drilling of a stockwater well and placement of 1 stock tank with pump power source.
- 2) Do not allow the drilling of stockwater well and placement of 1 stock tank with pump power source.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

According to the NRCS Soil Survey of Beaverhead County, Montana, soils on site are Regulus, frequently ponded-sandrift, 0 to 1% slope. Primary use is for grazing. The proposed well project would not affect the soils of the site.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The Red Rock River is located approximately 1.85 miles from the proposed project location, and Snowshoe Creek is located approximately 0.95 miles from the proposed project location. The river and creek are not accessible to livestock from this tract and would not be affected by the proposed project. The Centennial Sandhills are located 1 mile to the north of the proposed project location. The Sandhills are fenced and are not accessible to livestock from this tract. No affects to the Sandhills are expected as a result of this project.

Montana DNRC owns the water rights to the current well. Upon contacting the DNRC Water Resources Bureau, as long as the well is not being relocated, the current right will remain for the new well.
Water Right Number: 41A 42656 00

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

The proposed project would not alter the air quality of the area.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The tract is currently grazed by livestock, the project will not increase available AUMs on the tract, but may allow use during different times of the growing season by improving the reliability of stock water. No adverse effects are expected as a result of this improvement to the current stock water feature.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The tract is located in the Centennial Valley and in close proximity to Red Rocks Wildlife Refuge. The Red Rock River is not accessible to livestock from this tract. It is fenced along property boundaries with the river access on adjacent lands managed by the Red Rocks Wildlife Refuge. The Centennial Sandhills are listed in the Montana Natural Resource Information Service report as biologically significant due to the presence of three significant plant species, Painted milkvetch (*Astragalus ceramicus* var. *apus*), Fendler cats-eye (*Cryptantha fendleri*) and Sand wildrye (*Elymus flavescens*). These species occur in the Centennial Sandhills to the north of the project area. Painted milkvetch occurs only the Centennial Sandhills and the sandhills of SE Idaho. The project would provide an off-site water development which would decrease livestock use of the forbs preferred habitat. The site is frequently used by elk, mule deer, moose, pronghorn and waterfowl. The tract is used frequently by hunters in the Fall pursuing these species. The project would not alter use by large ungulates.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program was contacted regarding species of concern within and around the project area. Four Species of concern were identified in the report and are listed below.

- 1) Great Blue Heron (*Ardea Herodias*) – Great Blue Heron range throughout Montana and are listed as a species of concern by Montana FWP because of the small breeding population size, evidence of recent declines, and declining regeneration of riparian cottonwood forests due to altered hydrology and grazing. No occurrences are recorded on the tract, but have been recorded on the riparian zones of surrounding lands. The proposed project is located away from any riparian area and does not contain any cottonwood forest habitat.
- 2) Black Crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)- Black Crowned Night-Heron has been listed a sensitive by the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The species commonly uses the wetlands and riparian areas around the tract in the Centennial Valley. No occurrences have been reported on the tract, and the proposed project would provide a reliable water source away from any riparian areas.
- 3) White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*)- White-faced Ibis has also been listed as sensitive by the BLM. It also commonly uses the wetland and riparian areas in the vicinity of the tract. No occurrences have been reported on the tract, and the proposed project would provide a reliable water source away from any riparian areas.
- 4) Peregrine Falcon (*Falco Peregrinus*)- Peregrine Falcons are listed as sensitive by the US Forest Service, BLM and the State of Montana. Peregrine Falcons likely use the area for hunting of small, ground dwelling mammals. Nests are typically located on ledges of vertical cliffs, or tall man-made structures. The proposed project would have no adverse effects on Peregrine Falcon.
- 5) Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)- Greater Sage-Grouse are listed as sensitive by the US Forest Service, BLM and the State of Montana. The project area is located in Sage-Grouse core habitat as Identified by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The proposed project area is located approximately 1.3 miles from an identified Sage-Grouse lek. The proposed project would be replacing a water development currently on site. No additional cumulative effects to Sage-Grouse are expected as a result of the proposed improvement.
- 6) Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*)- Franklin's Gull is currently listed as sensitive by the BLM. The species utilizes wetlands and riparian lands in the area adjacent to the tract. No occurrences have been reported on the tract, and the proposed project would provide a reliable water source away from any riparian areas.
- 7) Forester's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) – Forester's Tern is currently listed as sensitive by the State of Montana. The birds also utilize wetlands and riparian areas in the Centennial Valley. No occurrences have been reported on the tract, and the proposed project would provide a reliable water source away from any riparian areas.
- 8) Painted milkvetch (*Astragalus ceramicus var. apus*)-Painted milkvetch is known only from the upper Snake River Plains of southeast Idaho and adjacent Montana, where it is restricted to the Centennial Valley of Beaverhead County. The disruption of natural disturbance regimes, including fire, ungulate grazing and pocket gopher activity, can lead to dune stabilization, reducing the extent of blowout areas with early successional vegetation, upon which this species depends. Portions of its habitat lie on private or public lands without sensitive species management policies in place. The project area lies one mile to the south of the Centennial Sandhills where Painted milkvetch has been identified. No occurrences of Painted milkvetch occur on the tract, and no sand dunes exist on the tract either.
- 9) Electric Peak Larkspur (*Delphinium glaucescens*)- Electric Peak Larkspur is listed as a potential species of concern. According to information from the Montana Natural Heritage Program, the plant occurs at relatively high elevations. No occurrences have been recorded on the tract, but exist in the higher peaks surround the Centennial Valley.

The proposed project would create a reliable water source for livestock outside of riparian areas, marshes, and the Centennial Sandhills. The project would replace existing improvements on the site.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist, was contacted regarding cultural resource listings for the tract. Nothing of cultural significance has been identified in the tract.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The project would not alter the aesthetics of the area.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

The project would not negatively affect the areas environmental resources. The proposed project would not have significant impacts of resources of water, air or energy.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

No other studies, plans, or projects were reported to DNRC Dillon Unit for this tract during the scoping process.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No health or safety risks would result from this proposed project.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The project would improve the quality of water available to livestock and local wildlife, and give a year round, reliable water source for use of the tract in the fall or winter season.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed project would not have cumulative effects on the employment market.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No tax revenue would be created or eliminated as a result of the approval of this project.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

No additional government services would be required as a result of this proposed project.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

No other environmental plans or goals were reported during the scoping for this document.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The proposed project will not alter recreational activities on the tract.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

The proposed project will not alter populations or housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

The proposed project would not disrupt local communities.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed project would not affect the unique qualities of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

There would be no monetary increase to the trust as a result of this proposed project. Potential benefits of the project, if completed, would be an improvement in water quality, and a reliable source of water to livestock as an alternative to the current water system.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Donald Cople	Date: 12/06/2013
	Title: Fire Supervisor	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

- 1) Allow the drilling of a stockwater well and placement of 1 stock tank with pump power source.

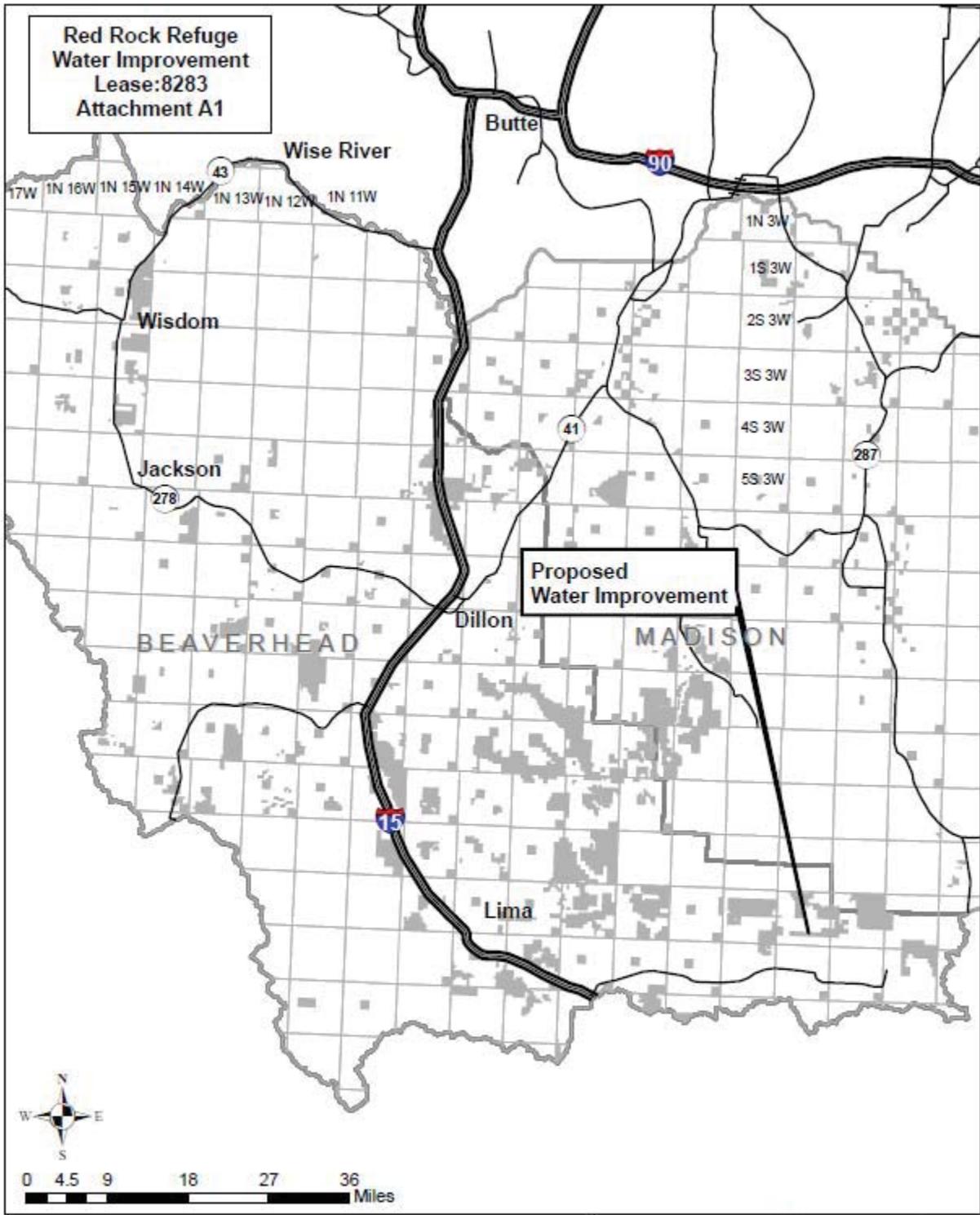
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Installing a new well and stock tank at this location should benefit the long term viability of this lease for years to come. Because the proponent is replacing an existing well and tank I see no long term significant impacts or cumulative effects to the site.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

- EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Timothy Egan
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan	Date: 12/6/2013



Red Rock Refuge
Water Improvement
Lease: 8283
Attachment A1

Proposed
Water Improvement

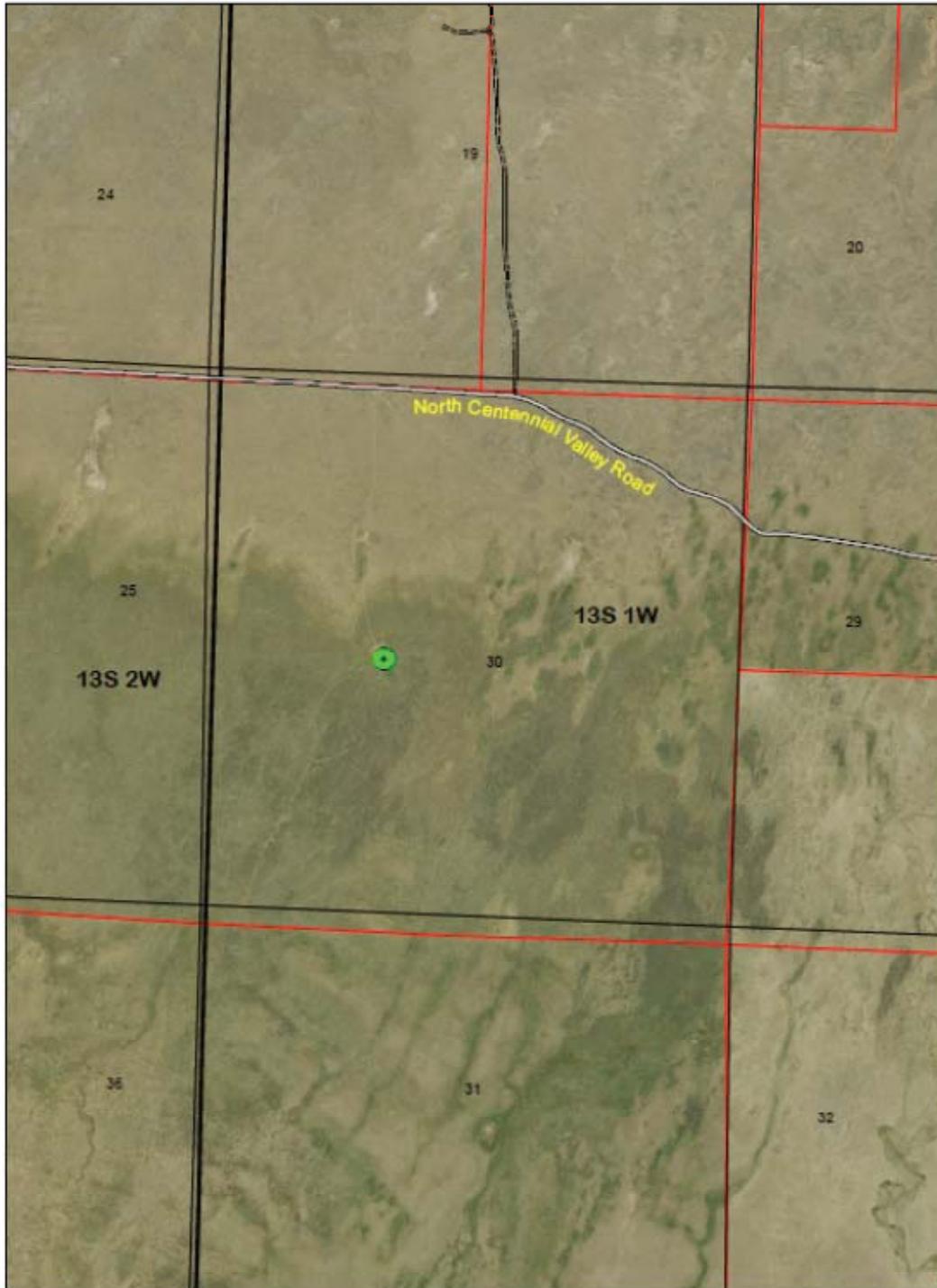


0 4.5 9 18 27 36 Miles

secondary	Interstate	State Highway	U.S.
	DNR Trust Lands	County	



D Coppie
12/06/2013



1:16,438

 Proposed Well Improvement Site

0 650 1,300 2,600 Feet Date: 12/6/2013