

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: SRI Fence Proposal
Proposed Implementation Date: Fall, 2014
Proponent: Jaime Wood, SRI Ranch Manager (SRI is the Lessee)
Location: SE¼SW¼SW¼ Section 29, T3S R6W
County: Madison

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The lessee of the W½W½ of Section 29, T3S R6W has submitted a request to construct a short segment of fence in the SESWSW of the tract. The fence would be approximately 630 feet in length across the State Tract with the remainder on adjacent private land. Fence specifications would be a four strand design with the top and bottom wires smooth and the middle two wires being barbed. Wire spacing would be top wire maximum 42" and bottom wire 16 – 18". Vanna Boccadori, Butte Montana DFWP Wildlife Biologist recommends the second wire to be set at 30" and the third wire set at 24" to reduce hoof entanglements. This fence proposal is part of the lessee's plan to improve control of livestock utilization along the Big Hole River in this area. The fence would be placed on the bench above the river. A well has been proposed and assessed in a separate EA to be drilled on state land in adjacent Section 30 with 2 stock tanks providing an alternative primary water source for livestock.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Vanna Boccadori, Wildlife Biologist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks – Butte,
Patrick Rennie, Archaeologist for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.
Martin Miller, Montana Natural Heritage Program

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

No other agencies jurisdiction or need of additional permits were identified in scoping for this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

- 1) Allow construction of the fence
- 2) Do not allow construction of the fence

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 Madison County, Montana, soils on the fence site is Kalsted Sandy Loam 2-8% slope. Primary use is for irrigated crops and grazing. Erosion potential is highest from wind while water

erosion potential is low. The proposed fence project would not affect the soils of the site as the project will not create long term disturbance to the existing vegetation on 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 Big Hole River is located approximately 400 feet from the proposed project location. This project coupled with the adjacent well drilling request would reduce livestock use and impacts to the Big Hole River by moving livestock watering use to a dryland site outside of the river bottom area and would reduce livestock impacts to riparian vegetation and the river bank.

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 Big Hole River is located approximately 400 feet from the proposed project. The proposed project would have the benefit of improving management capabilities to contain and control movement of livestock use to a dryland site outside of the immediate proximity of the river and reduce livestock impacts to riparian vegetation. The proponent wishes to utilize the rangeland portion of the lease in Fall/Winter to reduce dependence on supplemental hay feeding. The native cool season range plant community will benefit from use outside of the growing season while the riparian plant community along the Big Hole River will benefit from the improved control over timing and season of use.

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 project area is located on a bench above the Big Hole River Valley. The Big Hole River is currently accessible to livestock from this project site but has been proposed to be fenced out if a substitute water source can be established (see SRI Stock Water Well Drilling Proposal EA, dated 9/29/2014). The area is used by whitetail deer and occasional antelope. The tract is used frequently by hunters in the Fall pursuing these species. The project would not alter use by deer and antelope and may increase bird use of the area along the Big Hole River as a result of reduced livestock use of the bottoms as it is currently the sole water source for the state leased ground.

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 (MNHP) was contacted regarding species of concern within and around the project area. Five Species of concern were identified in the report and are listed below.

1) Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – The Great Blue Heron is currently listed as sensitive by the State of Montana. According to the MNHP site, the blue heron primarily inhabits riparian areas and wetland habitats. This project is part of a plan by the lessee to create a water source for livestock on dry rangeland approximately 0.5 miles away from the Big Hole River. The current water source available is the Big Hole River. Blue Heron use of the area would tend to benefit from the reduced livestock use of the wetland habitat along the river that would be provided by construction of the fence.

2) Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) – Bald eagles are listed as Recovered, delisted, and being monitored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Montana State, the US Forest Service, and the US Dept. of the Interior Bureau of Land Management all list the bald eagle as sensitive. The proposed project would place a fence on an upland site in short grass dry rangeland conditions outside of known bald eagle nesting areas. The project would not increase disturbance to bald eagle use of the area.

3) Westslope Cutthroat Trout (Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi) – Westslope cutthroat trout are currently listed as sensitive by both the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the State of Montana. The proposed project would place a fence on an upland site in dry rangeland conditions outside of waterways and reduce livestock use of trout habitat.

4) Bobolink (Dolichonyx oryzivorus) – Bobolinks are listed as sensitive by the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. According to the MNHP website, the bobolink prefers habitat consisting of tall grass areas typical of moist sites. The fence project is located in short grass vegetation on a dry site. The project would allow for decreased livestock use of bobolink habitat.

5) Arctic grayling (Thymallus arcticus) – Fluvial arctic grayling are currently listed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Grayling are listed as a high risk species by the State of Montana, and as a sensitive species by the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. The proposed fence would have no impact upon arctic grayling.

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 on August 26th. Patrick checked the records and responded that there were no cultural resource issues with this proposal.

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.

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.

The Lessee has also requested to place a stock water well and two stock tanks on two adjacent Trust Land Sections (Section 30 & 31) to reduce or eliminate livestock use of the Big Hole River. This project is being assessed in a separate EA checklist. No other studies, plans, or projects were reported to DNRC Dillon Unit from other agencies 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 livestock management and riparian area utilization would be reduced or eliminated by implementation of the proposed project.

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. An access gate would be placed on the tract for recreationists.

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 improved management in controlling livestock utilization of upland rangeland sites and the riparian area along the Big Hole River.

Trust Land Grants on the affected tract is Western/Eastern

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| EA Checklist Prepared By: | Name: Charles Maddox | Date: 9/29/2014 |
| | Title: Land Use Specialist | |

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

- 1) Allow construction of the fence

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The new fence will keep livestock out of the Big Hole River Riparian area which is currently being used by cattle for their water source. This project coupled with the adjacent well drilling request would reduce livestock use and impacts to the Big Hole River by moving livestock watering use to a dryland site outside of the river bottom area and would reduce livestock impacts to riparian vegetation and the river bank.

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27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

- EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

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| EA Checklist Approved By: | Name: Timothy Egan |
| | Title: Dillon Unit Manager |
| Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan | Date: September 30, 2014 |