CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Gaelectric Environmental Studies
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2010
Proponent:	Gaelectric, LLC
Location:	Section 16, Township 1 North, Range 13 East (Common Schools)
County:	Sweet Grass

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent has requested the DNRC Southern Land Office issue a Land Use License in order to conduct environmental studies related to potential future wind generation projects. The issues studied include bird and bat studies, as well as gathering other observational data. The data gathered on the Trust land will be assembled with data currently being obtained on adjoining private land to determine the feasibility of a future wind farm on private and/or Trust land.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project.

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request to issue a Land Use License for environmental monitoring on Section 16-1N-13E with the mitigations listed at the end of this document.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request to issue to issue a Land Use License for environmental monitoring.

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.

All permitted motorized travel will be limited to established roads during dry or frozen conditions. Foot travel to the remainder of the property is permitted. Minimal soil disturbance would occur as a result these activities, no significant impacts are expected.

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.

There is a spring development and seasonal reservoir in the SE¼SE¼ of the Section. One of the mitigation strategies proposed would limit motorized travel to existing roads and only during dry or frozen conditions to protect the soil as well as limit erosion. No significant impacts are anticipated from the proposed action.

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 proposal would entail limited vehicular travel on the Trust land. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated from the proposed action.

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.

Minimal soil disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed activities. The mitigations will limit the conditions in which vehicular travel will be permitted and then it will only be allowed on established roads. No significant impacts are expected from implementing the proposed action.

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.

A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors and songbirds use this area. The type of work proposed along with the limitations on motorized travel should limit impacts to species using or traversing the Trust land. No significant impacts are expected from implementing the proposed action.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated that no endangered, threatened or sensitive species are located on the subject section. However, it did indicate that this property is located within the “expected range” of the Gray Wolf, which is a sensitive species, having been de-listed as an endangered species in May of 2009. According to the Montana Field Guide, the gray wolf migrates seasonally, with no particular preference to habitat, following ungulates that are its main food source. Their migration range can go up to 70-500 miles. It is conceivable that a wolf could cross this section; however, it would be unlikely that they would remain there for any significant period of time.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

The nature of the proposed action is gathering environmental data and the mitigations would limit motorized travel to established roads. The grazing lease reviews did not note any archaeology and there have been no studies of the Section noted in TLMS. No significant impacts historical or archaeological sites are anticipated.

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 proposed project area is located in a very sparsely populated area with very few residences. Due to location and nature of the proposed project, aesthetics should not be adversely affected.

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.

No significant impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are anticipated as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

There are no other known State actions planned in the immediate area. The Coyote Wind Farm EIS Record of Decision was issued on 1 December 2009 and is located approximately three miles southwest of the subject property. However, the action being reviewed in this document is only for gathering environmental data. This data could be used for a future environmental review on the subject section if a wind energy development is proposed. However, there is no proposal at this time.

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 significant impacts to human health and safety are anticipated as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No significant impacts to agricultural, industrial or commercial activities are anticipated as a result of issuing a Land Use License.

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 implementation of the proposed action will not create any new jobs. The licensee is expected to utilize existing employees and consultants to gather the necessary data. The proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on employment.

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.

The proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.

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.

The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to generate an increased demand for government services.

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.

Sweet Grass County does have an adopted Growth Policy that covers the entire County and the proposed alternative does not conflict with the Growth Policy. Also, the subject section has not been zoned by Sweet Grass County.

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 subject Trust land does not currently have legal public access. The ability for the general public to recreate on this tract is limited to those persons who were able to obtain permission from the adjoining private landowners to cross their land and access the State section. One of the mitigation measures would prohibit motorized vehicular travel during hunting season to avoid any problems with enforcement of the general ban on driving on Trust land. The implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have an adverse effect on the recreation or hunting activity on the section.

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 alternative is not expected to have an adverse effect on density and distribution of population and housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that should be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed alternative would not directly impact cultural uniqueness or diversity.

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.

The Common Schools Trust will benefit by getting a rental fee from Gaelectric, LLC of $150.00/year. This Land Use License would allow the gathering of environmental data on the Trust land.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Jeff Bollman, AICP	**Date:**	23 July 2010
	Title:	Area Planner, Southern Land Office		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that a Land Use License (LUL) be issued to Gaelectric, LLC. This LUL would permit Gaelectric, LLC to gather environmental information and could possibly lead to future wind energy development on the subject Trust land.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I conclude all identified potential impacts will be avoided by utilizing the mitigations listed below and no significant impacts will occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

Mitigations:
1. Motorized travel on established roads only.
2. No motorized use during wet and/or muddy conditions.
3. No motorized use during the approved archery and general hunting seasons for deer and elk. In 2010, this would prohibit motorized use from 4 September to 17 October and 23 October to 28 November.
4. Licensee must contact grazing lessee at least 24 hours before entering the subject Trust land.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS	[ ] More Detailed EA	[X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Richard A. Moore		
	Title:	Area Manager, Southern Land Office		
Signature:	/s/ Richard A. Moore		**Date**:	7/23/10