CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**Jay Meyer Hay Feeding Land Use License**
Proposed Implementation Date:	May, 2016
Proponent:	Jay Meyer – Lessee of Lease #9694
Location:	Section 36, Township 9 North, Range 28 East
County:	Musselshell

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Jay Meyer, lessee of the above described section, is proposing a Land Use License to authorize the use of 5 acres, of what now is a prairie dog town, to feed hay to his cattle from April-June each year. The impact of feeding hay will be minimized by being on the already disturbed prairie dog town. In addition, the hay feeding will leave some residue over the mainly barren prairie dog town. This will increase moisture in the soil and promote growth of some vegetation in the future. The feeding will only be allowed for a short time each year and harrowing and weed spraying post feeding season will be an annual requirement.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Southern Land Office, and Jay Meyer–Lessee of Lease #9694: Section 36, T9N R28E.

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

No other governmental agencies have jurisdiction over this proposal.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – The DNRC does not grant Jay Meyer a Land Use License for 5 acres of hay feeding area on Grazing Lease #9694 from April through June each year.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – The DNRC does grant Jay Meyer a Land Use License for 5 acres of hay feeding area on Grazing Lease #9694 from April through June each year.

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.

The soils in the proposed Land Use License area consist of mainly loams. The proposed activity is not expected to disturb the soil in the license area. It is hopeful that the hay feeding will actually improve the soil in the license area.

The area chosen for the proposed Land Use License is located on an existing prairie dog town. The hay feeding will provide some organic material to cover some of the exposed soil and hopefully bring back some soil moisture to the immediate area. This area was chosen to avoid the native rangeland that has not yet been affected by the prairie dog population.

No significant adverse impacts to the soils are anticipated.

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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 proposed activity is not expected to have any effect on the water quality, quantity and/or distribution in the immediate area.

No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity, or distribution are anticipated.

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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.

No significant adverse impacts to air quality are anticipated

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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.

There are no rare plants or cover types present in the proposed license area.

The affected area is currently an existing prairie dog town location. It is hoped that the hay feeding will add some organic material to the soil and increase the soil moisture in the immediate area. With increased organic matter content and increased soil moisture, vegetative cover in the license area is predicted to increase in the future. Annual weed spraying will be required in the license to prevent unwanted vegetation as a result of the hay feeding.

No significant adverse impacts to vegetation cover are anticipated.

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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 proposed activity is in an area that is currently an active prairie dog town. The species of prairie dogs present in the proposed license area are not listed as a sensitive/threatened species. In addition, the proposed activity is not expected to inhibit any of the prairie dogs current activities.

No significant adverse impacts wildlife habitats are anticipated.

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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 Species of Concern Report from the Montana Natural Heritage Program indicates that the Plains Spadefoot (*Spea bombifrons*), the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), the Spiny Softshell (*Apalone spinifera*), and the

Plains Hog-nosed Snake (*Heterdon nasicus*) may occur at least a mile outside of Section 36. However, these species has not been observed on this tract.

The species indicated above should not be impacted by the proposed short term use each year. The proponent will be required under the proposed Land Use License to harrow the site each year and perform reclamation if at any time the proponent or the DNRC's Southern Land Office terminates the Land Use License.

No significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

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

A cultural study of the tract was completed in 1994 by the DNRC Archeologist. No cultural/paleontological resources were discovered in the study.

No significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

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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 license would temporarily change the aesthetics of the area from April through June each year. After the feeding season has completed each year, Mr. Meyer will be required to harrow the feeding area and spray for weeds annually.

There would be some noise produced by hay feeding equipment and the high concentration of cattle coming in to feed. The proposed license area is in an agricultural area off of a low use gravel road. Feeding hay to cattle is a common practice in the area and the proposed license should not have any significant adverse impacts on the overall aesthetics of the area.

No significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

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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 demands on limited resources are required for this project.

No direct or cumulative effects to environmental resources are anticipated.

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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 projects or plans being considered on the tracts listed on this EA.

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 adverse impacts to human health and safety are anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Grazing of livestock will continue as before. No additional AUMs will be authorized under this license.

No adverse impacts to agriculture activities are anticipated.

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 activity will not create, move or eliminate any jobs. No new jobs will be created.

No adverse impacts to the employment market are anticipated.

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.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue for the proposed 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

There will be no increases in traffic, no changes in traffic patterns, and no need for additional fire protection, or police services.

No adverse impacts to government services are anticipated.

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.

There are no zoning or other agency management plans affecting these lands.

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 activity could inhibit some recreational activities from April-June of each year. The proposed hay feeding would create some noise during feeding times and this may or may not inhibit recreational activities. Also, the proposed feeding area will be located on an existing prairie dog town and therefore, prairie dogs will not be able to be hunted on this section during feeding times when there are high concentrations of cattle

present. When the cattle have dispersed post-feeding, prairie dog hunting will be available again. Recreational activities should return to their pre-license state for the remainder of the year.

No significant adverse impacts to the recreational value are anticipated.

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 proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

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 would be impacted by the proposal.

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

The proposed project will have no effect on any unique quality 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.

The area included in the existing spring development and pipeline is currently leased as grazing land. The proposed project will only encompass approximately 5 acres, and will not reduce anticipated grass production. The Land Use License for the hay feeding area would generate $150.00 annually for the Common Schools trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Jocee Hedrick
	Title:	Land Use Specialist
Signature: Jocee Hedrick	**Date:** April 29th, 2016	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the Proposed Alternative B, and recommend the issuance of a Land Use License to Jon Carter for his existing spring development and associated pipeline.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined that no significant adverse environmental impacts will result from the proposed activity.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☑ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Matthew Wolcott
	Title:	Southern Land Office Area Manager
Signature:		**Date:** April 29 16