

**MEPA ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY FORM**

Project Name: Deadman's Basin Fencing Project

Proposed Implementation Date: August 2016

Proponent: DNRC – State Water Projects Bureau

Type and Purpose of Action: The action alternative for this project involves the replacement of existing fence and/or erection of new fence along (approximately) 10 miles of property boundary at Deadman's Basin Reservoir and Supply Canal. New fencing will consist primarily of a five-strand barbed wire design with metal posts and wood braces. Several short sections may require a wood jack-leg design due to rock outcroppings. The fence serves to prevent livestock from entering the property and to preserve and protect the canal and associated property. The fence will be constructed based on sage grouse design standards described in the MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks publication "A Landowner Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences", second edition, 2012, and the Legal Fence Definition found in Montana Annotated (MCA) Code 81-4-101 .

Location: T7N, R17E, Portions of Sections  
 13,14,22,23,24,27,28

County: Wheatland

**I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION
<p>1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:            Provide a brief summary of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.</p>	<p>Based on Inspections by SWPB staff and past livestock trespass incidents, it was concluded that fencing needs to be replaced or added. Groups/agencies involved and/or contacted include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deadman's Basin Water Users Association</li> <li>• DNRC Trust Land Mgmt. Division (Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program).</li> </ul>
<p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>	<p>The project is located on DNRC State Water Project land and private land (portions of the supply canal), of which the SWPB holds permanent easements. No other government agencies have jurisdiction.</p> <p>No permits are needed for the project. Consultation with the DNRC Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program has been completed.</p>

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: Proceed with the fence replacement.

No Action Alternative: Do not proceed with the fence replacement and/or new boundary fencing. The consequence of no action is continued livestock trespass problems potentially leading to soil and range degradation and the proliferation of noxious weeds.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

- Are fragile or unstable soils present?
- Are there unusual geologic features?
- Are there special reclamation considerations?

Located within the Musselshell River Valley, the general landscape can be characterized as nearly level floodplain to undulating prairie which exhibits frequent deeply eroded ephemeral drainages and outcrops of Eagle Formation Sandstone. Soils are primarily mixed Cabbart-Crago – Delpoint / Cabbart Moist Rock Outcrop Complexes, well drained with 4% to 60% slopes. These soils are not generally fragile or unstable under normal moisture conditions for the area; however they are subject to erosion and instability under wet conditions. There are no unusual geologic features or any special reclamation considerations.

Action Alternative: The fencing project involves placing new metal and wooden fence posts. Very minor, localized soil disturbance is anticipated from post hole digging and/or post installment. No significant or adverse impacts are expected.

No Action Alternative: No action alternative will have a negative impact due to potential soil degradation from continued livestock trespass.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Are important surface or groundwater resources present?

Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?

Surface and groundwater resources present in the project location include the Deadman's Basin Reservoir and the reservoir supply canal. The Deadman's Basin Project markets over 40,000 acre-feet of water annually for agricultural, municipal and domestic uses. The Musselshell River lies to the south of the project site. These important water resources will not be impacted by the construction. The construction will have no effect on water quality standards in the area.

Action Alternative: Installation of the replacement and/or new fence will have no impact on drinking or ambient water quality in the area.

No Action Alternative: under this alternative, there could be adverse impacts to water quality and quantity if livestock trespass continues, which could lead to further resource damage.

6. AIR QUALITY:

Will pollutants or particulate be produced?

Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I air shed)?

Action Alternative: Any impacts would be related to emissions from fence installation equipment and would be non-significant, minor, short-term, temporary, and end with the completion of the project. The project area is not influenced by any special air quality regulations.

No Action Alternative: No impacts.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

Will vegetative communities be permanently altered?

The current vegetative community consists of common native grasses, forbs, and woody shrubs intermixed with small areas of coniferous and deciduous trees (mixed classification – Great Plains Mixed Grass Prairie; Introduced Upland Vegetation-Cultivated; Cropland; Big Sagebrush Steppe and Great Plains Riparian).

Action Alternative: The fence installation activity may increase the possibility for noxious weed introductions due to minor, localized disturbances of existing vegetative communities. Any adverse impacts are non-significant, very small and localized. On-going control efforts will serve to mitigate any potential adverse impacts.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there could be negative consequences, as continued livestock trespass would exacerbate noxious weed proliferation and soil erosion.

<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</p> <p>Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>The area contains habitat for wildlife and aquatic species indigenous to the region.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The site may see a slight disturbance in habitat quality during the reconstruction of the fence. These impacts are non-significant, minor, short-term and non-significant.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative adverse impacts related to livestock trespass would continue.</p>
<p>9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</p> <p>Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present?</p> <p>Any wetlands?</p> <p>Any sensitive species or Species of Special Concern?</p>	<p>The project is in an area listed as habitat for the following State Species of Special Concern: Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Greater Sage-Grouse, Pinyon Jay, Veery, Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, Brewers Sparrow, Bobolink, Evening Grosbeak, Northern Redbelly Dace, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, and Spiny Softshell. There are no wetlands on the project site. No federally listed ESA species are present.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The fencing project will have no impact on unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL / ARCHAEOLOGICAL :</p> <p>Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The immediate area of impact contains no known historical, archaeological or paleontological resources. The DNRC Archeologist was consulted and stated that this area is well documented. Any new historical/archaeological/paleontological resources uncovered during the project would be reported to the DNRC Archeologist and the SHPO.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There are no impacts to historical/archaeological/paleontological resources under this alternative.</p>

<p>11. AESTHETICS:</p> <p>Is the project on a prominent topographic feature?</p> <p>Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas?</p> <p>Will there be excessive noise or light?</p>	<p>The project location and access is located on both DNRC and private land. The site is visible from nearby county roads; however the fence is not normally considered an aesthetically detrimental feature.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Any increase in noise associated with the construction would be non-significant, temporary, and end with completion of the project. The fencing project will have no impact on the aesthetics of the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no change to existing aesthetics.</p>
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<p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:</p> <p>Will the project use resources that are limited in the area?</p> <p>Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The fencing project would not change the existing demand/use of water in the area. There are no other activities nearby that would affect the project.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there is no change to existing conditions.</p>
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<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:</p> <p>Are there other studies, plans or projects on this site?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: This project will not impact any other plans or studies.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts.</p>
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**III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION**

<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:</p> <p>Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: During installation, there may be inherent safety risks normally associated with fencing projects. OSHA and State safety standards, rules and regulations will apply, thereby reducing and health and safety risks to industry acceptable levels. Any risks would be minor, temporary and end with the completion of the project</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will not be any impacts to human health or safety.</p>
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15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:  
Will the project add to or alter these activities?

The project is on public and private land, with the canal right-of-way managed for the delivery of irrigation water.  
No adverse or significant impacts are anticipated.

Action Alternative: The project will have positive impacts on agriculture by reducing potential resource / irrigation structure degradation due to livestock trespass; thus indirectly allowing for the continued use of the canal.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there could be negative impacts to agricultural activities due to the risk of continued resource degradation.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:  
Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.

Action Alternative: Minor, short-term benefits to employment related to the actual fence construction would be experienced. Likely, no long-term beneficial or adverse effects for job creation.

No Action Alternative: The existing condition would have no positive or adverse impacts to employment.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:  
Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?

Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.

No Action Alternative: There are no impacts to the local and state tax base.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:  
Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads?  
Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc.) be needed?

Action Alternative: The project will not increase traffic nor add to demand for government services.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there is no change to existing conditions.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:  
Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?

Action Alternative: There are no locally adopted environmental plans, goals, zoning or management plans that would be affected by the project.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts on locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

<p>20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:</p> <p>Is wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through the project location?</p> <p>Is there recreational potential within the project location?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not impact any recreation resources. There are no wilderness areas in the vicinity of the project.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the recreational resources.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:</p> <p>Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the density and distribution of population and housing.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the density and distribution of population and housing.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:</p> <p>Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not disrupt any native or traditional lifestyles or communities.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to social structures under this alternative.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:</p> <p>Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of this rural area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.</p>

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Action Alternative: The fencing project would help to maintain the delivery of irrigation water through the canal by protecting irrigation infrastructure and resources, thereby helping to sustain the areas agricultural economy.

No Action Alternative: There could be negative impacts to agricultural economic circumstances under this alternative should resource degradation reach a point where canal operations could be affected.

IV. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action alternative.
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	No significant impacts anticipated.
27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS: <input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Prepared By: James P. Domino, DNRC-SWPB Environmental Science Specialist Date: 08/24/2016  
Name Title

EA Approved By: Tim Davis, DNRC Water Resources Division Administrator Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name Title

  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 8/23/16

Attachments: No attachments are included.

Additional Information:

This EA will be published for 30 days on the DNRC website at:

<http://dnrc.mt.gov/public-interest/environmental-docs>

Questions and comments should be directed to:

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Thank you for your interest.