

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	
Project Name: Land breaking of former Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage for conversion to dryland agriculture on State Leases No. 6368 & 814.	Proposed Implementation Date: 2016
Proponent: Rose Hill Cattle Company, Inc., 40 Spring Coulee Rd., Glasgow, MT 59230	
Type and Purpose of Action: Rose Hill Cattle Company, Inc., the lessee of record on State leases 6368 and 814, has made a request for permission to break 178.5 acres of tame/native grass and alfalfa formerly enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. The breaking would result in a conversion from present use of tame/native grass and alfalfa to dryland agriculture for the purpose of production of small grains or pulse crops. The acreage would be reclassified from dryland hay to dryland agriculture.	
Location: Lots 1-7, SE4NW4, S2NE4, SE4, E2SW4 of Section 6, Township 30N, Range 40E	County: Valley

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	
1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	Rose Hill Cattle Company made a request to break 178.5 acres(+/-) of tame/native grass and alfalfa formerly enrolled in CRP on State leases 6368 and 814. The request will be reviewed per Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod. The Glasgow Unit Office contacted the following agency for comment: Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 6.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	The other government agencies that may have jurisdiction over this project are the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Farm Service Agency and USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	Action Alternative: Grant permission to the lessee to break 178.5 acres of former CRP acreage. The land would then be used for dryland agriculture for the production of small grains and pulse crops.

No Action Alternative: Deny permission to the lessee to break 178.5 acres of former CRP acreage. Under this alternative, the land use would be classified as dryland hay production.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compatible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: This project will impact the soils that are currently producing tame/native grasses and alfalfa vegetation. The soil to be broken is Theony-Phillips Complex, 1 to 5 percent slopes. This silt and clay loam is suitable for the purpose of dryland agriculture. This soil type has moderate hazards for wind and water erosion; however, the lessee will mitigate impacts to the susceptibility of erosion through management practices such as continuous cropping and chemical fallow. The onsite inspection of the area of impact showed no salinity present in the topsoil profile. The 178.5 acres requested to be broken will maintain current soil qualities and stability under dryland agriculture management. Areas of the tract deemed environmentally sensitive may be flagged by DNRC personnel to be left in permanent vegetative cover.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no changes to soils on the State land.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed breaking of the State land would not impact the quality, quantity or distribution of water in the area, besides the moisture associated with the topsoil received from annual precipitation. The potential for increased runoff or erosion would be mitigated by management practices used by the lessee, including continuous</p>

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	<p>cropping and chemical fallow.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, there will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.</p>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: This type of project on the State land will have no impact on the air quality. Some dust may occur due to vehicle use.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to air quality.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The current vegetative community consists primarily of tame and native wheatgrasses and alfalfa. The breaking of this land would permanently destroy the vegetative cover currently present. There are no rare plants or cover types present on this former CRP acreage.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plant communities on the State land. The vegetative community would remain as is.</p>
<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The State land provides habitat for upland birds, mule deer and antelope. There is a slight potential for recreation (hunting) on this State land. Breaking the State land would result in the fragmentation of this habitat. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 6 was contacted for comment regarding the proposal. Their comment included the following: "MFWP would recommend that a 100 meter buffer be left in permanent vegetation along the south edge of this field, an area that is likely to see run off into Foss Coulee as well as the adjoining draw to the west, below the stock dam. This will benefit reptile and amphibian use, upland game bird nesting cover,</p>

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as well as for filtering pollutant runoff and limiting top soil erosion.”
After consideration of this comment, the Glasgow Unit Office discussed the project with the proponent and came to an agreement with him that only 178.5 acres would be broken rather than the originally planned 190.45. This will leave a buffer of permanent vegetation around Foss Coulee on the southern edge of the field.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, there will be no impacts to the possible use of the State land as wildlife habitat.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?

Action Alternative: There are several animals listed by the State of Montana as species of concern seasonally present in the area including: Baird’s Sparrow, Sprague’s Pipit, Chestnut-collared longspur, Greater Sage-Grouse, and Long-Billed Curlew. The area of impact is within “Core” Greater Sage-Grouse habitat; however the nearest lek is approximately 4.5 miles away and the area is rarely used by Greater Sage-Grouse due to the proximity of the paved highway and no sagebrush being present. There are no rare or sensitive plant species present. There are no wetlands or environmentally sensitive habitat within the area of impact.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to any unique, fragile or limited environmental resources in the area.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?

Action Alternative: The area of impact contains no historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

No Action Alternative: There will be no impact to historical or archaeological sites under this alternative.

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<p>11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed land breaking will have minimal impact on the aesthetics of the area. The tract to be broken is directly adjacent to a public highway, and therefore very visible to the public. However, the area already consists of dryland ag fields scattered amongst grazing land, so this project will not alter the aesthetics of the area greatly.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to aesthetics associated with the State land.</p>
<p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed land breaking would place no additional demands on any environmental resources in the area. Nearby activities include grazing of livestock and dryland agriculture, and would not affect the project.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no additional demands placed on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: This project will not impact any other plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the State land.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the State land.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The breaking of State land would result in a slight increase of risk to the operator</p>

	<p>during breaking operations, but in the long-term there will be no additional health and safety risks.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to human health or safety.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will enhance the potential for revenue to the trust on the tract, by allowing for the production of small grains and/or pulse crops. The rate of return on dryland agriculture is generally higher than grazing or hayland use.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative the land will be hayed and/or grazed for the foreseeable future, and returns to the trust would be expected to increase slightly from when the tract was enrolled in CRP.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not create nor impact any jobs in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment under this alternative.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the local and state tax base under this alternative.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The land-breaking project will not add substantial traffic to Hwy. 24 (adjacent to tract). No additional demand for government services would be created.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no additional demand for government services.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will</p>

<p>PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>need to clear State management plans before implementation.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this type of alternative there will be no impacts on locally adopted environmental plans and goals.</p>
<p>20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: There is limited potential for recreation within the tract and surrounding areas, due to its proximity to Hwy. 24 and the town of St. Marie. Breaking of this land would decrease the amount of upland bird habitat in the area, but hunting opportunities are limited anyways, due to the aforementioned reasons.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the recreational values associated with the State land under this alternative.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: 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: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not disrupt the traditional lifestyles of the local community.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the social structures under this alternative.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: 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 the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.</p>
<p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The conversion of this former CRP acreage into dryland agriculture would benefit the trust</p>

economically and allows for expanded management decisions/opportunities for the tract.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, the tract would most likely be used for hay production, and revenue to the Trust would be expected to increase slightly from when the acreage was enrolled in CRP, though not as much as if converted to dryland agriculture.

EA Checklist Prepared By: s/Jack Medlicott\s Date: 02/28/2016
Jack Medlicott Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action alternative.
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	No significant impacts are 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 Checklist Approved By: Matthew Poole Glasgow Unit Manager
Name Title

s/Matthew Poole\s Date: February 18, 2016
Signature