

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Blacktail Creek Gravel Pit
Proposed Implementation Date:	Expansion Existing Gravel Permits G1149-88 & G1148-88
Proponent:	Beaverhead County Road Department/ Matador Cattle Company
Location:	NE1/4 Section 9, Township 9 South, Range 8 West (Common School Grant)
County:	Beaverhead County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This Environmental Assessment is for a pre-existing gravel pit located on state land off the Blacktail Creek Road South of Dillon in Beaverhead County. Beaverhead County Road Department applied and received an opencut permit from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in 2009 in order to comply with DEQ regulations. The open cut permit expanded the gravel pit to a maximum size of 16.32 acres.

The last Environmental Assessment conducted by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) for this gravel pit was in 1988, and the most recent gravel permits issued to Beaverhead County Road Department and Matador Cattle Company by the DNRC was in January, 2016. The DNRC's current pit expansion only allows for a gravel pit size of 10 acres. The purpose of this EA is to evaluate the environmental impacts of an expansion of the gravel pit to the open cut permit size of 16.32 acres.

Both Beaverhead County Road Department G-1149-88 and Matador Cattle Company G-1148-88 are permitted to remove gravel in this pit until 12/31/2017. At that time MT DNRC will evaluate whether it is appropriate to renew the current gravel permits and possibly expand the pit to the 16.32 acre size. This document will determine from an environmental standpoint if there is any reason that the pit should not be expanded to the maximum size allowed under the open cut permit.

The open cut permit that was issued by the DEQ allows for a pit expansion to 16.32 acres, includes a 13.44 mine-level area, a .88 acre facility-level area for access roads, and a 2.0 acre area for stockpiling of gravel.

This project is within state trust lands in the Common Schools Grant.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:
Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

- Beaverhead County Planner
- Beaverhead County Commissioners
- Dean Waltee, Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Wildlife Biologist
- Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Archaeologist
- Martin Miller, Montana Natural Heritage Program
- Kyle Hardin, Matador Cattle Company
- Gladys Conover, Resident
- Nancy Urick, Resident
- Judy Brown, Resident
- Alan Conover, Resident
- Veronica Bolick, Resident

We received comment from Rick Hartz, Beaverhead County Planner, who had no objections to the expansion of the gravel pit but requested there be an active weed management plan for the site. Beaverhead County Road Department will need to file a weed management plan with the Beaverhead County Weed Department as mitigation measures if expansion of the pit is allowed under this EA.

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

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality is issued an Opencut Permit for this gravel pit to Beaverhead County Road Department in 2009.

No other government agencies have permitting authority at this location.

The project as proposed involves Montana Trust Land allocated to the Common Schools Grant.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: No Action Alternative: Deny expansion of the gravel pit to the 16.32 acre size as permitted under the 2009 DEQ open cut permit that was issued to the Beaverhead County Road Department at the Blacktail Gravel Pit.

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow expansion of the gravel pit to the 16.32 acre size as permitted under the 2009 DEQ open cut permit that was issued to the Beaverhead County Road Department at the Blacktail Gravel Pit.

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 NRCS soil survey for this area identifies soils in the area encompassing the gravel pit as Crago, stony-Crago complex, 4-10 percent slopes. The parent material for this type of soil is alluvium. The typical soil profile is 0-8" gravelly loam, 8-18" very gravelly loam, 18-34" extremely gravelly loam and 34-60" extremely gravelly sandy loam. These soils are well drained and have a land capability classification of 4e.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the soil conditions will occur if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: There is little to no topsoil at this site due to a combination of erosion and previous mining activity. Some adverse impacts will occur to the soil. The current permit requires that the overburden be removed, stored on site and used for reclamation purposes. Details of the Reclamation Plan can be found in the DEQ Opencut Permit #C18-005, section III which is attached to this document.

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.

No surface water resources are located within the project area. Neither of the two alternatives will effect or cause degradation of water quality or cause cumulative effects to water quality.

There is an identified well near the site. The depth is 53 feet with a static water level of 19.7 feet. This well is located in the flats and groundwater is likely deeper where the mining is occurring. There are no signs of springs and there would likely be little or no impact to water quality or quantity from pit operations.

No Action Alternative: No changes to water quality would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be ground disturbance that occurs. Because of the lack of surface water present on the tract and depth of the groundwater, no long term cumulative effects to water quality would occur under this alternative.

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.

This gravel pit is located in a sparsely populated area. The area currently meets EPA ambient air quality standards and is not located in a class I air shed.

No Action Alternative: No changes to Air Quality standards would occur if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: During mining operations a small increase in dust particulates in the air will occur in the immediate surrounding area. This change in air quality standards would be small in scale, and no long term or cumulative effects would be anticipated.

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.

A NRIS search of the area did not identify any rare plants or cover types in the area of the proposal or the surrounding area. The vegetation cover type that was identified in the 2011 range evaluation is a mixture of the following grasses, and forbs: Bluebunch Wheatgrass, Threadleaf Sedge, Western Wheatgrass, Needle & Thread, Plains Reedgrass, Sandburg Bluegrass, Prairie Junegrass, Broomsnakeweed, and Green Rabbitbrush.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the current vegetative cover type will occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: This alternative will cause some disturbance to native vegetation. Noxious weeds could be introduced to the area which could have long term effects to the surrounding environment with the action alternative.

All disturbed and reclaimed areas should be broadcast seeded with native grass within 1 year of cessation of operations, as described in DEQ 2009 Opencut Permit. In addition, mitigation measures for the action alternative should include treating reclaimed areas of the pit with herbicide for 3 years after reclamation for noxious weed prevention.

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 area is used by both large and small mammals, and birds. Large game species include antelope, deer, and elk. The area is not inside sage grouse core or general habitats.

No Action Alternative: No changes in the current habitat would occur if this alternative is chosen for this proposal.

Action Alternative: The gravel pit operations will cause some disturbance to the birds and mammals in the vicinity; however cumulative effects are not anticipated due to the relatively small size of the disturbance area. The sensitive species is located in the forested and alpine zones in the larger geographic area, and although the wolverine could move through, it is highly unlikely the mining activities will have a direct impact on the species.

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 Resource Information Service (NRIS) was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located in the vicinity of the project area. The query results are listed below:

Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) – The Wolverine is currently listed as a sensitive species by the State of Montana. According to the MNHP site, the wolverine primarily inhabits alpine tundra and boreal forests. The mining area is located outside of any alpine or forested ecological systems. The site is in valley bottom rangeland and would not impact Wolverine habitat.

Neither **No Action**, nor **Action Alternatives** would have any short term, long term or cumulative impacts on Wolverine habitat.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE on state land. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

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 gravel pit is located in a rural area approximately eleven air miles from the town of Dillon, Montana. The town has a population of approximately 4200 people. The aesthetics in this area are good, with beautiful mountain views, blue ribbon trout streams, world class hunting and fishing, and plenty of clean water and air. Over the past twenty years rural housing development around the town has sprung up in all directions. There are still enough large ranches surrounding these pockets of development though, that it keeps the "open space" look in the greater Dillon area intact.

The mine site is located just off a county road to the SSE of town. The area is not highly utilized for recreation other than hunting. Since the gravel pit is already in existence, any damages to the aesthetics of the immediate area have been made. The proposed expansion would have little impact on the current aesthetics of the site.

No Action Alternative: No changes to aesthetic values would occur if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: Under this alternative, very minor aesthetic changes would occur in the form of making the already existing mine slightly larger over a period of many years.

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 demand on environmental resources includes the removal of gravel from the site to utilize in road maintenance and other construction activities. Gravel removal currently occurs at an approximate rate 1000 to 2000 cubic yards/year between two current permit holders. The rate of removal is not expected to increase or decrease under either alternative, however, the action alternative would allow for removal operations to occur for a longer duration of time due to expansion of the pit area.

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 Montana DEQ has issued an opencut permit for the expansion in 2009, this document also contains their Environmental Assessment conducted in August 2009 and a Plan of Operation.

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 are posed by either of the proposed alternatives.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

No Action Alternative: No changes to agricultural activities would occur if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: No changes to agricultural activities would occur if this alternative is chosen.

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.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will create nor eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

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.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will increase tax revenues nor result in an increase or decrease of the tax base.

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 increased demand for government services are expected as a result of either of the proposed alternatives.

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.

Neither of the proposed alternatives would cause any changes to environmental plans and goals for the area.

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.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect nor alter recreational activities in the area.

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.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect distribution of population or housing in the Twin Bridges or surrounding area.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect social structures or mores of the surrounding area.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect cultural uniqueness and diversity 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.

No Action Alternative: No changes in revenue for the trust would be generated from this alternative.

Action Alternative: No immediate changes in revenue for the trust will occur under this alternative at this time, however allowing the expansion of the pit will generate thousands of dollars of additional revenue for the common school trust into the future.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jessica Bryers-Holschbach	Date: March 9, 2016
	Title: Senior Engine Boss	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow expansion of the gravel pit to the 16.32 acre size as permitted under the 2009 DEQ open cut permit that was issued to the Beaverhead County Road Department at the Blacktail Gravel Pit.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are anticipated under the action alternative which will allow the expansion of the existing gravel permit to a total of 16.32 acres. Beaverhead County and Matador Cattle Company will need to continue to re-apply bi-annually to re-new their existing permits.

The expansion of the pit will generate considerable income for the common school trust. The open cut permit requires the pit to be reclaimed as work is finished and that portion seeded with native grass seed. The permit holders will be required to spray for weeds for three years once the mining has been completed.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Timothy Egan
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan	Date: March 9, 2016