

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: Cody and DeLynn Meidinger, 1013 Hwy 340, Fallon, MT 59326
2. Type of action: Application to Change an Existing Irrigation Water Right
3. Water source name: O'Fallon Creek
4. Location affected by project: Section 19 T11N R54E, Prairie County
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits: The Applicant proposes to take 36.0 acres out of flood irrigation in NW and SW section 19 T11N R54E, Prairie County and add 26.3 acres of center pivot sprinkler irrigation in SW section 19 T11N R54E Prairie County. The Applicant proposes to replace 80 AC of flood irrigation with 70.3 AC of center pivot sprinkler irrigation centered on the historic place of use. The Applicant proposes to change the point of diversion from two points to a single transitory diversion extending from one of the historic PODs to the other. The DNRC shall issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.
6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Natural Heritage Project
Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program
United States Natural Resources Conservation Service

Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity – O'Fallon Creek is not identified as a periodically or chronically dewatered stream by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The amount of water diverted

from the stream will not change as a result of this project and no change to water quantity will occur.

Determination: No Impact.

Water quality – The reach of O’Fallon Creek from Mildred to the Yellowstone River is classified as fully supporting contact recreation and aquatic life and has no listed impairment. The increase in efficiency of water use moving from flood to sprinkler irrigation will reduce potential degradation of the stream by return flows. The diversion will continue to be by trailer mounted pump so no headgate would be involved.

Determination: Possible Positive Impact.

Groundwater – The proposed project will not substantially alter return flow rate, timing or location and will not affect groundwater supply. Efficiency gains may benefit groundwater quality by reducing leaching of salts.

Determination: No Impact.

DIVERSION WORKS - The diversion is a trailer mounted pump that would not create any barrier or significantly modify flow in the stream. Riparian areas in the project area are sparsely vegetated and the mobile pump does not require any removal of existing vegetation. Movement of the pump in and out of the channel could potentially alter the bank locally. No dams or wells are included in the project. No new construction for the diversion is planned.

Determination: No Significant Impact.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species – The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists no plant species of concern and eight animal species of concern including the Black-tailed Prairie Dog, the Hoary Bat, the Golden Eagle, the Great Blue Heron, the Greater Sage Grouse, the Loggerhead Shrike, the Blue Sucker and the Sauger. No changes or modifications to the stream are proposed and the fish species will not be affected. The land to be irrigated is in agricultural production at present and no alterations to habitat are planned. The area of the project lies within general sage grouse habitat and the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program has authorized the project without specific stipulations.

Determination: No Significant Impact.

Wetlands – No wetlands are mapped by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the National Wetlands Inventory. Wetlands that may exist in the area are primarily related to ephemeral streams or emergent wetlands occasionally flooded during high water. No activities involving wetlands are proposed.

Determination: No Impact.

Ponds – The proposed project does not involve ponds.

Determination: No Impact.

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE – Soils in the project area are sandy, silty and clay loam dominated by Ryell very fine sandy loam and Havre silty clay loam. These soils have uniformly low slope (0 to 2 %) and are nonsaline to slightly saline. The change from flood to sprinkler irrigation has no potential to degrade the soil, cause slope instability or result in saline seep.

Determination: No Impact.

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS – The project area is currently agricultural and would remain agricultural. There will be no change to existing vegetative cover. Installation of the center pivot sprinkler system has the potential for the introduction or spread of noxious weeds. It will be the responsibility of the landowner to control noxious weeds.

Determination: No Significant Impact.

AIR QUALITY – The proposed project will have no impact on air quality.

Determination: No Impact.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES – The project is not located on State or Federal Lands.

Determination: N/A

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY – No previously unaddressed demands on environmental resources are recognized.

Determination: No Impact.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS – There are no known locally adopted environmental plans or goals.

Determination: No Impact.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES – The project area is not an access to recreation or wilderness activities and change in irrigation method has no potential to affect quality of recreation or wilderness activities.

Determination: No Impact.

HUMAN HEALTH – The project has no potential to impact human health.

Determination: No Impact.

PRIVATE PROPERTY - *Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.*

Yes ___ No X If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

Determination: No Impact.

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - *For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.*

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No Significant Impact.*
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No Significant Impact.*
- (c) Existing land uses? No Significant Impact.*
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No Significant Impact.*
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No Significant Impact.*
- (f) Demands for government services? No Significant Impact.*
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No Significant Impact.*
- (h) Utilities? No Significant Impact.*
- (i) Transportation? No Significant Impact.*
- (j) Safety? No Significant Impact.*
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No Significant Impact.*

2. *Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:*

Secondary Impacts: No secondary impacts are predicted to result from the change in irrigation method.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no known pending activities in the area of the project and changes in irrigation method will not create cumulative impact.

3. *Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:* None.

4. **Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:** Alternatives include the no action alternative and approval of the change authorization. No significant impacts would result from approval. The no action alternative prevents the land owner from improving the efficiency and profitability of his agricultural land.

PART III. Conclusion

1. **Preferred Alternative:** Issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.

2. **Comments and Responses:** None.

3. **Finding:**
Yes___ No_X___ Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action: An environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis because no significant impacts were recognized or predicted.

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Mark Elison

Title: Hydrologist

Date: 3/11/2016