

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: Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Inc. 1732 S 72nd St W, Billings, MT 59106
2. Type of action: Application to Change an Existing Non-Irrigation Water Right
3. Water source name: Groundwater
4. Location affected by project: NE Section 24 T1S R24E
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits: Applicant proposes to change the point of diversion from two wells in NENW section 19 T1S R25E, Yellowstone County to two wells in SENWNE Section 24 T1S R24E, Yellowstone County approximately one half mile WSW of the current point of diversion. The wells provide domestic water to the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch. 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 Natural Resources and Conservation
Montana Natural Heritage Program
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
United States National Resources Conservation Service
Yellowstone County City of Billings Planning Board

Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity – The groundwater aquifer in the area affected by the proposed project is sufficient as modeled by DNRC hydrogeologists and no additional water will be diverted under the proposal.

Determination: No Impact.

Water quality – The project will have no effect on water quality. No changes to the operation of the water system or wastewater system at the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch is proposed.

Determination: No Impact.

Groundwater – The project proposes to move the point of diversion for two wells approximately one half mile WSW. The proposed wells are in the same aquifer so not additional impact will occur to groundwater quantity. The new wells are approximately the same distance from Canyon Creek. Canyon Creek was determined by DNRC hydrogeologists to be hydraulically connected to the groundwater aquifer of this project. Modeling indicates that there would be no change in surface water depletions as a result of this project.

Determination: No Impact.

DIVERSION WORKS – The new wells are in place and will have no effect on surface water channels, flow, or riparian areas. The wells were drilled by a licensed well driller. The distribution system for domestic water at the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch is in place and operational

Determination: No Impact.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species – There are no plants species of concern listed by the Montana Natural Heritage Program in the area of this project. The program lists nine animal species of concern within the project area. None of the species of concern have habitat resembling the developed and cultivated area included in the project. There are no cliffs, forests, or large prairie rivers near the project area. A Preliminary Engineering Report on the water system for the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch prepared by Interstate Engineering cites a letter from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service stating that they do not anticipate adverse effects to threatened, endangered or candidate species.

Determination: No Impact.

Wetlands – According to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, there are no wetlands in the project area. Two wells would have no effect on wetlands if they were present.

Determination: No Impact.

Ponds – There are no current or proposed ponds in the project area.

Determination: No Impact.

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE – The dominant soils in the project area are McRae loam and Lonna silt loam with low slopes. Diversion of groundwater for domestic use has no potential to degrade soil quality, cause saline seep or create soil instability.

Determination: No Impact.

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS – Existing vegetative cover in the project area is lawn related to a baseball field associated with the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch. No change in vegetative cover is proposed and no activities related to the proposed change have the potential to establish or spread noxious weeds.

Determination: No Impact.

AIR QUALITY – Changing the location of groundwater wells that provide domestic water has no potential to affect 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 additional demands on environmental resources are recognized.

Determination: No Impact.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">HUMAN ENVIRONMENT</h2>
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LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS – The project area lies within the Yellowstone County and City of Billings planning area. The Yellowstone County and City of Billings 2008 Growth Policy Update considers threatened species, soils, and noxious weeds among other topics. Nothing within the proposed project is inconsistent with that policy update.

Determination: No Impact.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES – There are no recreational or wilderness activities in the project area or nearby and there are no access roads that cross the area.

Determination: No Impact.

HUMAN HEALTH – The diversion of groundwater for domestic use has no potential to negatively affect human health. The absence of potable water on the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch would, however, negatively affect human health of the residents.

Determination: Possible Positive 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: Moving the water supply wells for the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch has no apparent secondary impacts.

Cumulative Impacts: There is rapid development on the west end of the City of Billings and groundwater is in high demand. There are multiple subdivisions in various stages of approval in and around the project area. Because this project does not change the amount of groundwater appropriated, the impacts of this project will not be cumulative with other pending or contemplated projects.

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:** The two alternatives to the proposed action are the project as proposed and the no action alternative. The no action alternative prevents the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch from providing potable water to their residents and prevents the use of new wells. The no action alternative does not prevent any significant impacts as opposed to the proposed project.

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: The lack of any recognized significant impacts resulting from the proposed project indicates that an Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis.

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

Name: Mark Elison

Title: Hydrologist

Date: 3/15/2016