

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	TJ Wanken-Expiring CRP to Agricultural Land Classification
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	Summer/Fall 2017
<b>Proponent:</b>	TJ Wanken, PO BOX 664, SHELBY, MT 59474
<b>Location:</b>	Lease #10777, SE4SE4, Section 5, T30N, R3W-10.31 Acres Lease #10777, E2NE4, NE4SE4, Section 8, T30N, R3W-41.50 Acres Lease #10777, W2W2, SE4SW4, Section 9, T30N, R3W-121.21 Acres
<b>County:</b>	Pondera
<b>Trust:</b>	Common Schools (CS) and University of Montana (UM)

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

CRP contract #1131C, #1132B, and #1133B containing a combined total of 173.02 acres all expire on 09/30/2017. The lessee, TJ Wanken, has requested to break these expiring CRP acres. The CRP acres were not offered for re-enrollment due to their relatively high productivity. The estimated acres that will be broke and returned to small grain production is 173.02 acres. The lessee plans to spray out the CRP in the summer/fall of 2017 and then direct seed the proposed break area to winter wheat in the fall of 2017.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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**1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:**

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

DNRC-Surface Owner  
TJ Wanken-Lessee  
Ryan Rauscher-MFWP  
Montana Salinity Control Association  
Montana Audubon Society

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

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

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**3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny TJ Wanken permission to break the expiring CRP and return it to small grain production.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant TJ Wanken permission to break the expiring CRP and return it to small grain production.

### 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 tracts consist of flat to gently rolling topography. The below table outlines the soil types that will be broke.

Slope	Class	T-Factor	WEG	Estimated WW Yield	Acres	Section
2-8%	4E	5	4L	30 bu/acre	10.31	5
2-8%	4E	5	4L	30 bu/acre	35.00	8
0-4%	4E	5	4L	44 bu/acre	6.50	8
2-8%	4E	5	4L	30 bu/acre	121.21	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4E</b>				<b>173.02</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>BREAK</b>				<b>173.02</b>	

Class 4 soils have very severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both. The letter “e” shows that there is an erosion hazard unless close-growing plant cover is maintained.

The class 4E soils have an expected yield of 30-44 bu/acre for winter wheat are susceptible to wind and water erosion. These erosion concerns will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. Clearly, the majority of the soils on this tract meet DNRC’s land break requirements.

The last noted practice types were CP-18B which is which is for the establishment of permanent vegetation to reduce salinity. The reason for initial enrollment in CRP is for increased revenue and due to farming difficulties presented by the utilization of mechanical tillage which destroyed the resided produced by small grain production.

Jane Holzer, Montana Salinity Control Association commented, “Tony – MSCA does have experience with the area in question T30N R3W Section 5, 8 & 9 where the lessee requests permission to return the CRP perennial forage to annual cropping status. We worked with Dale Seifert in Section 8 – West of the Bullhead Road where MSCA has drill logs that note very sandy soil profile. I have attached two aerial photos for 1997 and 2012 and drawn a light red line across the known saline seeps for Seifert in Section 8 and then a red line in Section 9 across the CRP in question – it would appear that there was a similar saline situation at the same time. You will see that by 2012, the CRP forage on Section 8 reclaimed or certainly improved the saline soil resource. It is a MSCA general admonishment to CRP contract holders to retain the perennial forage established on former saline areas and crop the recharge area intensively. The alternative is to crop both recharge and discharge areas but be prepared to rotate some or all the cropland periodically back to perennial forage when the saline conditions return.

If you want to look at drill logs, etc. you are welcome to review them in our office.” See attached E-Mail.

These concerns will be mitigated with the use of no-till farming not destroying the residue produced in small grain production. Also, the majority of the acres in Section 8 are now seeded to alfalfa, which is a permanent forage crop. In addition, the lessee has removed the wheel line irrigation system and replaced it with a pivot. The pivot is more water efficient and will lead to less saline potential due to overwatering.

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**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.*

There are no documented and/or recorded water rights associated with the tracts. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

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**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.*

No cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

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**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.*

The existing vegetation is native and introduced species consisting of primarily crested, intermediate, and western wheatgrass, smooth brome, and alfalfa. The vegetative community will be altered by the reclassification. The conversion of CRP to small grain production will increase the overall productivity of the tracts as the current grass stand has very low vigor.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted and there were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

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**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.*

FWP did provide site specific comments regarding this proposed break.

Converting existing CRP acres to agricultural land will decrease wildlife thermal and hiding cover. This reduction of cover may adversely impact various wildlife species including songbirds, upland game birds, waterfowl, antelope, white tailed deer, and mule deer. Agricultural land may provide a limited food source for wildlife species including deer, antelope, upland game birds and migrating waterfowl. No comments were received from the Montana Audubon Society.

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**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.*

There are no threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern associated with the proposed project area. Montana FWP did provide site specific comments regarding wildlife, (see item #8). At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area. The project consists of three tracts of CRP totaling 173.02 acres which is only a very small portion of the total CRP acres held within Pondera County.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T30N, R3W. There were zero animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey

With the use of the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan, minimum cumulative effects are anticipated.

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**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted and he stated that due to the tracts being previously farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.

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**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.*

Since the fields are currently in CRP and the surrounding tracts are all either CRP, grazing or farmed, reclassification as agricultural land will not affect the aesthetics of the area.

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**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 such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

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**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.*

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

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**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.*

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**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

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**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

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

The reclassification to agricultural land will increase the vegetative productivity of these tracts. The estimated WW yield is 30-44 bu/acre. These acres will be rolled into the existing cash lease at \$59.00/acre. The current CRP cash lease payments will not be sustained due to the contracts expiring. Converting these acres to cropland, the Common Schools and University of Montana trusts would see an increase in revenue.

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**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.*

The proposed action will not significantly affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.

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**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.*

The proposed action will increase the tax revenue due to the increased revenue generated in small grain production.

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**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*

There will be no increases in traffic, no changes in traffic patterns, and no need for additional fire protection, or police services.

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on government services.

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**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.*

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

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**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.*

These tracts of state land are rural and generally have low recreational value. All of the tracts are legally accessible. The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on these state tracts.

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**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*

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

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**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

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**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

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**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.*

The proposed conversion of CRP to agricultural land will greatly improve the productivity on these tracts and increase the return to the trust. The current CRP stand has lost its vigor and has very low productivity. These tracts were not offered for renewal of the CRP contract due to their relatively high productivity. Therefore, converting this acreage to small grain production will provide the Common Schools and University of Montana trusts with a return of \$59.00/acre No other unique circumstances exist.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Tony Nickol	<b>Date:</b> July 18, 2017
	<b>Title:</b> Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

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<b>V. FINDING</b>
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**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant TJ Wanken permission to break the expired CRP and return it to small grain production.

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**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

After reviewing comments and extensive onsite field review, it was determined that acres that requested to be broke meet DNRC breaking policy. This tract of state land is adjacent to highly productive cropland land. The lessee must work with FSA and NRCS and obtain a Conservation Plan and comply with all sod busting regulations. The proposed action will help meet TLMD objectives by increasing revenue to the school trust. Other significant negative impacts are not expected.

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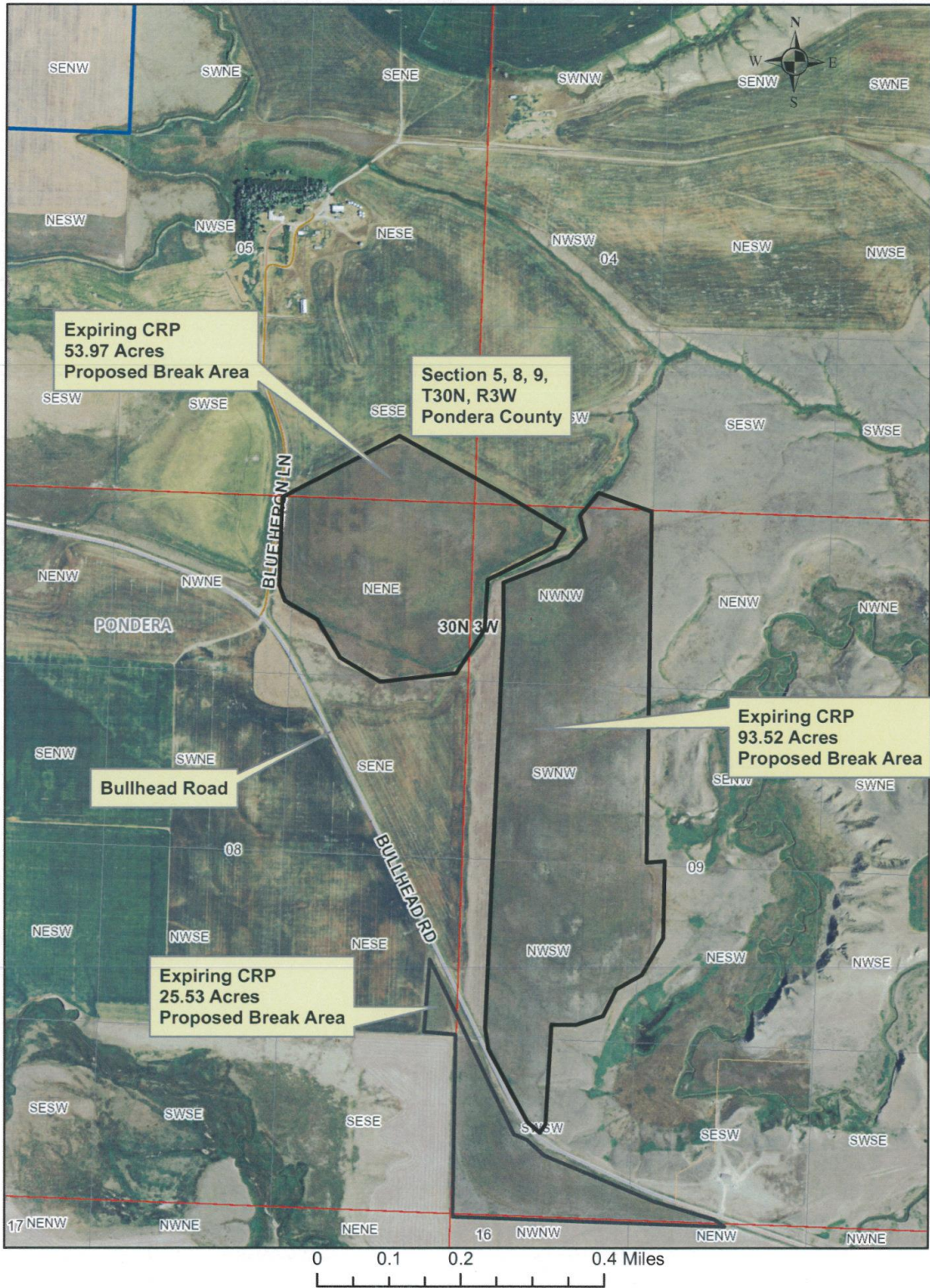
**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

EIS       More Detailed EA       No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Erik Eneboe <b>Title:</b> Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC
<b>Signature:</b> 	<b>Date:</b> August 1, 2017



Pondera County, Montana



**From:** Jane Holzer MSCA [<mailto:msca@3rivers.net>]  
**Sent:** Monday, July 10, 2017 12:10 PM  
**To:** [tnickol@mt.gov](mailto:tnickol@mt.gov)  
**Subject:** CRP breaking request

Tony – MSCA does have experience with the area in question T30N R3W Section 5, 8 & 9 where the lessee requests permission to return the CRP perennial forage to annual cropping status. We worked with Dale Seifert in Section 8 – West of the Bullhead Road where MSCA has drill logs that note very sandy soil profile. I have attached two aerial photos for 1997 and 2012 and drawn a light red line across the known saline seeps for Seifert in Section 8 and then a red line in Section 9 across the CRP in question – it would appear that there was a similar saline situation at the same time. You will see that by 2012, the CRP forage on Section 8 reclaimed or certainly improved the saline soil resource. It is a MSCA general admonishment to CRP contract holders to retain the perennial forage established on former saline areas and crop the recharge area intensively. The alternative is to crop both recharge and discharge areas but be prepared to rotate some or all the cropland periodically back to perennial forage when the saline conditions return.

If you want to look at drill logs, etc. you are welcome to review them in our office.

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