

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	
Project Name: Land breaking of hay acreage for conversion to dryland agriculture on State Lease No. 4890.	Proposed Implementation Date: Spring 2017
Proponent: Precision Grain LLC, PO Box 115, Richland, MT 59260	
Type and Purpose of Action: Precision Grain LLC, the lessee of record on State lease 4890, has made a request for permission to break 303.91 acres of tame grass and alfalfa. The breaking would result in a conversion from present use of tame grass and alfalfa cut for hay 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 & 2, S2NE4, SE4 of Section 2, Township 34N, Range 43E	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.	Richard Fulton, member of Precision Grain LLC, submitted a written request to break 303.91 (+/-) acres of tame grass and alfalfa formerly used as hayland on Lease No. 4890. The request will be reviewed per Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod.
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:	<p>Action Alternative: Grant permission to the lessee/proponent to break 303.91 acres of former hay acreage. The land would then be used for dryland agriculture for the production of small grains and pulse crops.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny permission to the lessee to break 303.91 acres of former hay acreage. Under this</p>

alternative, the land use would continue to 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>The soil to be broken is primarily a Reeder-Cambert-Doney complex of soils with 2 to 9% slopes. This complex of loams is suitable for the purpose of dryland agriculture. This soil type has a soil loss tolerance (T) factor of 3 tons/acre, and depth to bedrock is generally less than 60 inches, which are both values less than desirable for breaking. The secondary soil type and additional soils meet breaking criteria set forth by the Department. The onsite inspection of the area of impact showed no salinity present in the topsoil profile.</p> <p>Action Alternative: This project will permanently impact the soils that are currently producing tame grasses and alfalfa vegetation. The 303.91 acres requested to be broken will maintain current soil qualities and stability under dryland agriculture management. The lessee will mitigate impacts to the susceptibility of erosion and shallow depth to bedrock through management practices such as continuous cropping and chemical fallow. 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</p>	<p>No important surface or groundwater resources are present in the area of impact. The project would have no impact on water quality standards or</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?

water contaminants.

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 cropping and chemical fallow.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, there will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.

6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?

Action Alternative: This type of project on the State land will have no impact on the air quality. Some dust may occur due to normal farming practices.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to air quality.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?

The current vegetative community consists primarily of tame wheatgrasses and alfalfa. There are no rare plants or cover types present on this former hay acreage.

Action Alternative: The breaking of this land would permanently destroy the vegetative cover currently present.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impact to the plant communities on the School Trust land. The vegetative community would remain as is.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?

The School Trust land provides a small amount of habitat for upland birds, mule deer and antelope. There is good potential for recreation (mainly hunting) on this tract, due to ease of

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

access.

Action Alternative: Breaking the land would result in the fragmentation of this habitat. Use of the area by wildlife would decrease slightly.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, there will be no impact to the possible use of the School Trust 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?

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, McCown's Longspur and Ferruginous Hawk. There are no rare or sensitive plant species present. There are no wetlands or environmentally sensitive habitat within the area of impact.

Action Alternative: Use of non-native grass stands by the various grassland birds in this area is shown to be very low, so the removal of this habitat will have very little, if any, impact to the above-referenced species.

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.

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?

The tract to be broken is within a half mile of a county road, and therefore somewhat visible to the public, especially recreationists. However, the general area already consists of dryland ag fields

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
	<p>scattered amongst grazing and hay land, so this project will not alter the aesthetics of the area greatly.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed land breaking will have minimal impact on the aesthetics of the area.</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 School Trust 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 School Trust 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 this tract would result in a slight increase in risk to the operator during breaking operations, but in the</p>

	<p>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 be lower than if the land were broken.</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 nearby county roads. 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 PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State,</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will need to clear State management plans</p>

<p>County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>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>There is good potential for recreation within the tract and surrounding areas, due to ease of access from nearby county roads.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Breaking of this land would decrease the amount/quality of upland bird habitat in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the recreational values associated with the School Trust 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 tame grass/alfalfa hay acreage into dryland agriculture would benefit the trust economically and allows for expanded management</p>

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 likely be lower than the potential revenue from farming the acreage.

EA Checklist Prepared By: s/Jack Medicott\s Date: 10/5/2015
Jack Medicott Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action alternative

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are anticipated. Revenues for the Trust are anticipated to increase as a result of the action.

27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By: Matthew Poole Glasgow Unit Manager
Name Title

s/Matthew Poole\s
Signature

Date: January 20, 2017