CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Roger Michel-Expiring CRP to Agricultural Land Classification
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer/Fall 2017
Proponent:	Roger Michel, 1960 25th Road NE, Dutton, MT 59433
Location:	Lease #8093, NE4SW4, Section 8, T26N, R1E-39.70 Acres Lease #7267, W2E2, NE4NE4, Section 20, T26N, R1E-195.00 Acres Lease #7267, N2NE4, Section 29, T26N, R1E-75.00 Acres
County:	Teton
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

CRP contract #1838, #1850, #1851, #1852, #1837, and #1849 containing a combined total of 317.84 acres all expire on 09/30/2017. The lessee, Roger Michel, has requested to break these expiring CRP acres. The CRP acres were not offered for re-enrollment due to their relatively high productivity. The tracts were last farmed in 1987. The estimated acres that will be broke and returned to small grain production is 309.70 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

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

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

DNRC-Surface Owner
Roger Michel-Lessee
Ryan Rauscher-MFWP
Montana Salinity Control Association
Montana Audubon Society

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.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

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

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Roger Michel 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%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	23.70	8
0-2%	6W	5	4	0 bu/acre	16.00	8
0-4%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	67.00	20
2-8%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	105.00	20
0-2%	5W	5	6	0 bu/acre	11.00	20
0-2%	6W	5	4	0 bu/acre	12.00	20
0-4%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	34.00	29
2-8%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	15.00	29
0-2%	6W	5	4	0 bu/acre	26.00	29
TOTAL	3E				244.70	
TOTAL	5W				11.00	
TOTAL	6W				54.00	
TOTAL	BREAK				309.70	

Class 3 soils have severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants and require special conservation practices. Class 5 soils are subject to little or no erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat. Class 6 soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use to mainly pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat. The letter "e" shows that there is an erosion hazard unless close-growing plant cover is maintained. The letter "w" shows that water in or on the soil surface interferes with plant growth or cultivation. In some soils the wetness can be partly corrected by artificial drainage.

The class 3E soils have an expected yield of 40 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 class 5W soils have an expected yield of 0 bu/acre due to water on the soil surface. The yield concerns for this soil type will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. The no-till farming practice aides in absorbing excess water and not allowing it to runoff onto this soil type. No-till farming will allow this soil type to become productive and have an equivalent yield to the adjacent soil types

The class 6W soils have an expected yield of 0 bu/acre due to water on the soil surface. The yield concerns for this soil type will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. The no-till farming practice aides in absorbing excess water and not allowing it to runoff onto this soil type. No-till farming will allow this soil type to become productive and have an equivalent yield to the adjacent soil.

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, "State Lease #8093, Section 8, T26N R1E. Potential CRP breaking concerns regarding the NE quarter of area is part of a larger lakebed that will be flooded or subirrigated on wet years. State Lease #7267, Section 20, T26N, R1E. Potential CRP breaking concerns over area in northern portion of E2. Obvious lakebed that is similar to two lakebeds that will not be broken but without pit reservoirs. Evidence of salt on lakebed in W2."

These concerns will be mitigated with the use of no-till farming not destroying the residue produced in small grain production. The land in the area is full of the same potholes, and is still very productive.

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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 tracts were last farmed in 1987. 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.

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 309.70 acres which is only a very small portion of the total CRP acres held within Teton County.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted. There was one animal species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey: Birds-Burrowing Owl. These particular tracts of CRP do not contain many, if any of this species. If any are present, they may be dispersed into surrounding permanent cover.

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

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.

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 or farmed, reclassification as agricultural land will not affect the aesthetics of the area.

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.

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.

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.

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

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 40 bu/acre. In a 50-50 crop fallow system economic returns will vary between $20/acre to $30/acre. The current CRP payments will not be sustained due to the contracts expiring. Converting these acres to cropland, the Common Schools trust would see an increase in revenue. In addition, the Common Schools trust will receive 25% of any FSA PLC payments.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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. Sections 20 and 29 are legally accessible, but Section 8 is not legally accessible. The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on these state tracts.

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.

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.

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.

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 trust with an estimated return of between $20 - $30/acre, depending on grain prices. No other unique circumstances exist.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Tony Nickol	**Date:**	June 5, 2017
	Title:	Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

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

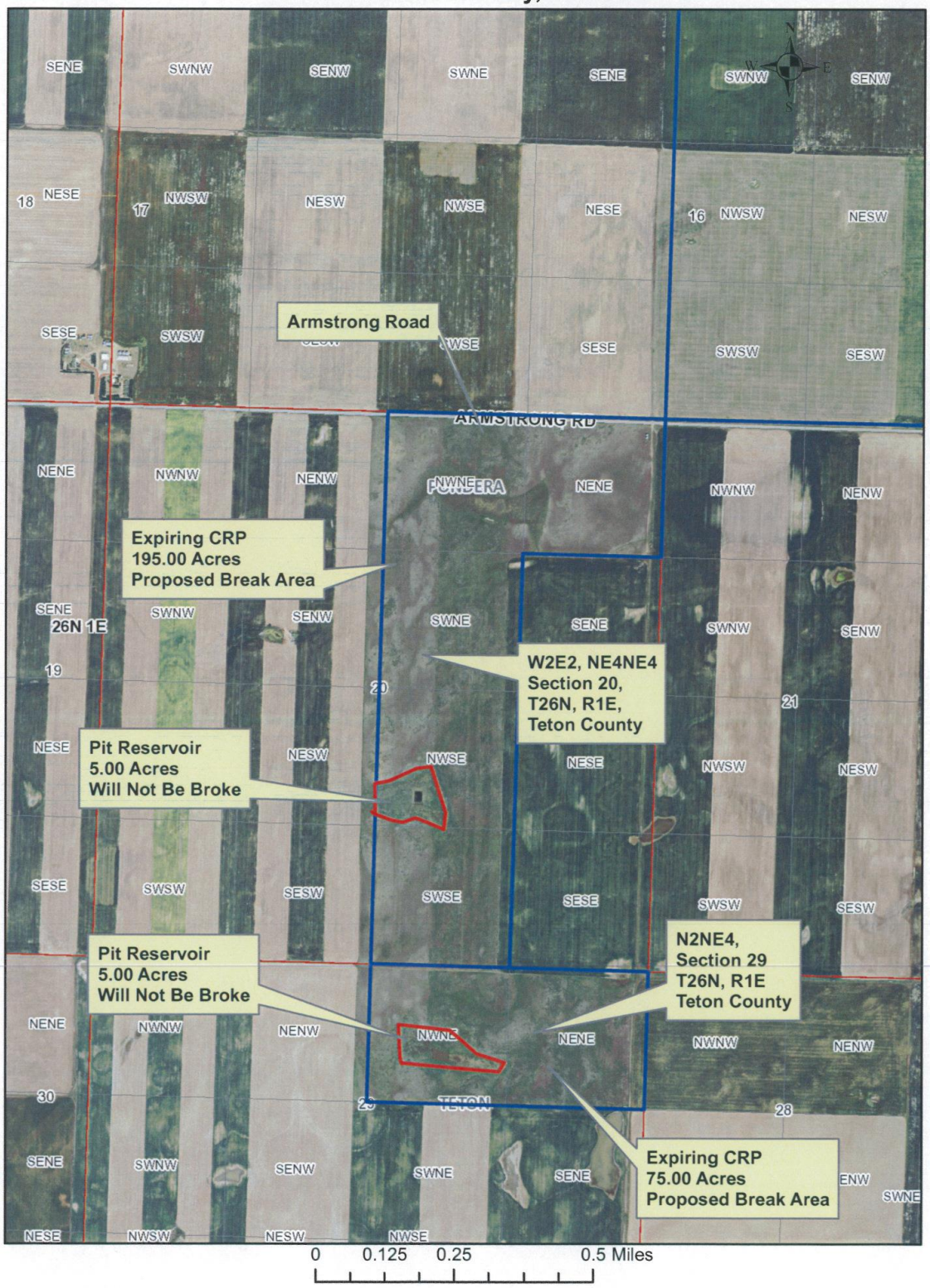
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After reviewing comments and extensive onsite field review, it was determined that 309.7 acres of the 317.84 acres that were 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.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS	[ ] More Detailed EA	[X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Erik Eneboe **Title:** Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC
Signature:	**Date**: June 13, 2017

Pondera County, Montana

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