

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Ester Reservoir turnout/valve replacement

Proposed Implementation Date: October 2017

Proponent: Little Big Warm Ranch, LLC

Type and Purpose of Action: Little Big Warm Ranch, LLC is proposing to replace a failed valve and turnout pipe on Ester Reservoir's dam. Little Big Warm Ranch, LLC has a water right to use water out of Ester Reservoir for irrigation purposes. The proponent needs to replace these structures to continue to utilize their water right in the future. Repairing these structures is also necessary for other downstream water users to continue to irrigate their lands using water from Ester Reservoir.

Location: Sec. 16 - Twp. 27N - Rge. 27E.

County: Phillips

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

<p>1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.</p>	<p>Little Big Warm Ranch, LLC has requested a Land Use License (LUL) from the Glasgow Unit Office of the MT DNRC to replace a failed valve and turnout pipe on Ester Reservoir's dam.</p>
<p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>	<p>The dam is not classified as "High Hazard"; therefore, DNRC does not have jurisdiction of the dam structure. However, DNRC own's the surface acreage where the dam is located and must permit any surface activity not covered under an existing lease, license, and/or ROW. No other governmental agencies have jurisdiction regarding the proposed Land Use License on State land.</p>
<p>3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:</p>	<p>Action Alternative: Approve the Land Use License application from Little Big Warm Ranch, LLC. No Action Alternative: Deny the Land Use License application from Little Big Warm Ranch, LLC.</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	<p>N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)</p>
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>The area proposed to be disturbed is isolated to just the area directly around the turnout and along the top of the dam. Soils would be removed to install the new pipe and valve and then replaced and compacted. This area has been disturbed several times in the past.</p> <p>Action: Temporary impacts to the geology or soil characteristics located directly within the project area would occur. The site would be returned to its current state following installation of the new turnout.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics would occur.</p>
<p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are</p>	<p>The reason this project is being proposed is to</p>

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<p>important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>maintain the ability for downstream water users to continue utilizing the area's water in the same way it is currently being used.</p> <p>Action: Impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface and ground water on or around the project area are not anticipated as it would be utilized the same as it is presently being used.</p> <p>No Action: It is unknown exactly how the water quality, quantity, and distribution would be impacted if no action was taken. The reservoir would no longer have the ability to be filled to full capacity and water users would likely not receive water.</p>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>The project area is not located in an air quality regulation zone or airshed.</p> <p>Action: The air quality may or may not be temporarily reduced during this activity. Small amounts of pollutants from machinery and particulates from the disturbance of the areas soil may be produced. The possible reduction in air quality would be minimal, and air quality would quickly return to normal levels.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the air quality would occur.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>The construction of Ester Reservoir created an environment for aquatic and riparian vegetation not previously found in this area. The area directly adjacent to the reservoir and irrigation ditch now consist of vegetative communities that rely on the presence of water within the reservoir and irrigation ditch. The ability to use the water for irrigation purposes allows water users to increase production on their grazing land, hay land, and cropland.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality are anticipated as no changes to current use or time of use of the water are taking place.</p> <p>No Action: Impacts to vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality would likely occur if the valve and pipe were not replaced as it would be impossible for the water users to irrigate.</p>
<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>Ester reservoir and the nearby area is utilized substantially by a broad spectrum of wildlife, birds, and fish species.</p> <p>Action: Current use of the reservoir is anticipated to remain the same; therefore, wildlife, birds, and/or fish species utilization of this area is not anticipated to be impacted by the proposed action.</p> <p>No Action: Impacts to wildlife, birds, and/or fish</p>

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	<p>species may occur if Ester Reservoir was no longer used in the same manner in which it has been used for the previous 100 years.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Eight animal species of concern are listed on the Montana Natural Heritage Report for this township.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: Not replacing the turnout would prevent Ester Reservoir from being annually filled to full/nearly full capacity. The exact impacts resulting from lowering the reservoir are unknown. The reservoir's fish population would be more susceptible to freeze out over the winter months and elevated water temps during the summer. The wetlands/habitat in and around Ester Reservoir would also change from its present state due to the lowered water level.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>No historical, archaeological, and/or paleontological sites or resources are known to exist on or directly under the surface of the proposed action area.</p> <p>Action: The proposed action would not affect any known historical, archaeological, and/or paleontological sites and/or resources within the action area.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts would occur to any historical, archaeological, and/or paleontological sites or resources.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Although the project area is small and seems insignificant in terms of aesthetics, it directly impacts Ester Reservoir which is a prominent feature to this area. The productivity on the downstream lands is also considered to be aesthetically pleasing.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: The inability to control the water level of Ester Reservoir and irrigate downstream lands may impact the area's aesthetics.</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>Ester Reservoir temporarily holds water used to irrigate lands located downstream. Nearby activities mainly consist of farming and ranching operations.</p> <p>Action: No changes to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: Water from Ester Reservoir would not be able to pass through the dam and enter the irrigation ditch. This would potentially prevent the downstream water users from irrigating.</p>

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<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p>The author of this document is not aware of any current environmental studies, plans, and/or projects on this tract.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to environmental studies, plans, and/or projects pertinent to this area are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to environmental studies, plans, and/or projects would occur.</p>
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III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] 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>The proposed project would create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation and maintenance of the turnout pipe and valve.</p> <p>Action: The employer and employee identify these risks as occupational hazards. These risks will only be present during installation and maintenance of the turnout pipe and valve.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks would occur.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>The area is primarily used for farming and ranching activities. Replacing the valve and turnout pipe is required if the water users are to continue using Ester Reservoir for irrigation purposes.</p> <p>Action: No changes to industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities and/or production are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: Water users of Ester Reservoir may not be able to successfully irrigate their land without fixing the failed valve and turnout pipe; therefore, agricultural production would be negatively impacted.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment would occur.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenue are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: Tax bases could potentially be reduced if the currently irrigated lands lost the ability to be receive water. The reduction would be a combination of lost production and reclassification from irrigated to dryland.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to the level of demand for road use or government services are anticipated.</p>

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services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	No Action: No impacts to the level of demand for road use or government services would occur.
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals would occur.
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?	The tract of State land is legally accessible. Ester Reservoir and surrounding area is frequently utilized by several groups of recreationalists including bird watchers, anglers, hunters, campers, swimmers, etc. Action: No impacts to recreational quality or recreational opportunities of the project area and/or surrounding lands are anticipated. No Action: Impacts to recreational activities may occur if the repairs are not made.
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing would occur.
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	The local population within Phillips County and the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation are the primary users of this area; however, people from all over Montana and beyond also use this area for fishing and other recreational activities. These activities are considered a lifestyle and very important to the local population. Action: No impacts to the area's social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities are anticipated as current use/management of the reservoir would remain the same. No Action: Impacts to the
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	Action: No impacts to the area's cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the area's cultural uniqueness and/or diversity would occur.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	Action: The State trust has received money for the \$25.00 application fee and would receive a onetime \$200.00 rental fee for the LUL. No other impacts are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances would occur and the State trust would not receive the additional \$200.00 revenue.

