

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Fisher Sand and Gravel Railroad Ballast Test Drill
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	Summer/Fall 2018
<b>Proponent:</b>	
<b>Location:</b>	Township 31 North, Range 14 East, Section 36
<b>County:</b>	Hill County
<b>Trust:</b>	Common Schools

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

To drill into a prominent rock outcropping in Hill County to determine its suitability to be mined for use as railroad bed ballast.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)  
Northeastern Land Office (NELO)  
Proponent: Fisher Industries, Fisher Sand and Gravel  
Surface Lessees: Gregoire Farms Inc.

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

The DNRC, and NELO have jurisdiction over this proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for acquiring all required permits for the proposed project. The proponent is responsible for settling all surface damages with the surface lessees.

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)** – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant permission to drill test holes for railroad ballast suitability.

**Alternative B (the Proposed Action)** – Under this alternative, the Department does grant permission to drill test holes for railroad ballast suitability.

### 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.*

Summary by Map Unit — Hill County, Montana (MT041)						
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
76D	Bowery loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Slight	Bowery (85%)		13.1	18.6%
			Belain (5%)			
			Hedoes (3%)			
			Farnuf (2%)			
			Slopes less than 8 percent (2%)			
561B	Scobey-Kevin clay loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Slight	Scobey (50%)		22.7	32.2%
			Kevin (35%)			
			Hillon (8%)			
			Eloam (3%)			
			Nishon (2%)			
			Acel (2%)			
561C	Scobey-Kevin clay loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Slight	Scobey (45%)		17.6	24.9%
			Kevin (40%)			
			Hillon (8%)			
			Eloam (3%)			
			Nishon (2%)			
			Acel (2%)			
721E	Zahill-Vida clay loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	Moderate	Zahill (45%)	Slope/erodibility (0.50)	5.5	7.8%
			Vida (40%)	Slope/erodibility (0.50)		
			Cabba (1%)	Slope/erodibility (0.50)		
			Wayden (1%)	Slope/erodibility (0.50)		
			Zahill (35%)	Slope/erodibility (0.75)		
899F	Zahill-Rock outcrop-Whitlash complex, 15 to 60 percent slopes	Severe	Zahill (35%)	Slope/erodibility (0.75)	11.7	16.5%
			Whitlash (20%)	Slope/erodibility (0.75)		
<b>Totals for Area of Interest</b>					<b>70.6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Most of the soils that are affected by this project are rated as slight for off road erosion potential. The only two soils that have a higher potential are the ones that are on top of the rocky ridge where the test drilling will be done. There is very little soil on this part of the site and no water nearby so there is little potential for serious sediment runoff.

No cumulative effects to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture are anticipated.

**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 is one small reservoir to the east of the proposed test area that has water in it seasonally. There are no other surface water resources near the test area and due to the geology of the site that will be tested no groundwater should be disturbed.

No cumulative effects to the water resources are anticipated.

**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.*

The air quality in the area will not be affected.

No cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

**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.*

Most of the disturbance caused by this test project will be short term tracks from the small drilling rig that will be used to do the testing. These tracks should recover quickly due to the surrounding vegetation being almost entirely crested wheatgrass.

If re-seeding is necessary the proponent will acquire certified, weed free seed and refer to the Plant Materials Tech Note No. MT-46 (Rev. 4) dated September 2013 for seeding rates.

No noxious weeds previously recorded on any tracts but some invasive weeds are present and will need controlled.

No rare plants or cover types are present.

No long term cumulative effects to vegetation are anticipated.

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/mt/plantsanimals/?cid=nrcs144p2\\_05773](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/mt/plantsanimals/?cid=nrcs144p2_05773)

**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.*

All the areas that will be affected that are not already solid rock have been farmed and disturbed previously and would quickly recover. Some bird roosts may be disturbed but there were no raptor or other bird nests seen when inspecting the site.

No aquatic habitats will be affected

No cumulative effects are anticipated.

**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.*

Species of Concern													
3 Species													
Filtered by the following criteria:													
Breeding = SENSITIVE (based on merged Species Occurrences)													
FISH (ACT INOPERATIVE)					TERRIPIAN - DEFINITE (based on merged Species Occurrences)								
SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	TAXA SORT	FAMILY (SCIENTIFIC)	FAMILY (COMMON)	GLOBAL RANK	STATE RANK	USFWS	USFS	BLM	FWP W/REP	% OF GLOBAL BREEDING RANGE IN MT	% OF MT THAT IS BREEDING RANGE	HABITAT
<i>Chrosomus ros</i>	Northern Rebellly Dace		Cyprinidae	Milenev	G5	S3				SGCH2	4%	2%	Small prairie rivers
					Species Occurrences verified in these Counties: Blaine, Cascade, Chouteau, Daniels, Dawson, Fergus, Golden Valley, Hill, Judith Basin, Lewis and Clark, Mussouri, Hughes, Mussouri, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder, Richland, Rosevelt, Sheridan, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Yellowstone, Wibaux.								
					State Rank Reason: The Northern Rebellly Dace is currently listed as an "S3" species of concern in Montana because they are at risk of extirpation due to loss of habitat and/or declining numbers, range and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.								
<i>Etheostoma exile</i>	Iowa Darter		Percidae	Percles	G5	S3				SENSITIVE	1%	9%	Small prairie rivers
					Species Occurrences verified in these Counties: Blaine, Carter, Chouteau, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Mussouri, Phillips, Powder River, Richland, Rosevelt, Sheridan, Teton, Yellowstone, Wibaux.								
					State Rank Reason: The Iowa Darter is currently listed as an "S3" species of concern in Montana because they are potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.								
<i>Sander canadensis</i>	Sauger		Percidae	Percles	G5	S2				SENSITIVE	1%	15%	Large prairie rivers
					Species Occurrences verified in these Counties: Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Hill, Liberty, Mussouri, Mussouri, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Rosevelt, Rootbud, Stillwater, Teton, Treasure, Wibaux, Yellowstone.								
					State Rank Reason: The Sauger is currently listed as an "S2" species of concern in Montana because they are at risk of extirpation in the state, because of limited and/or declining numbers, range and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas. Population losses from the reservoir sections of the Missouri River and the Big Horn River are likely permanent. Competition and hybridization from the introduced yellow perch is another threat to native sauger populations.								

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. Some animals may be temporarily displaced but the duration of this project will be short enough to not cause any lasting animal population effects.

There are no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources on this site.

No cumulative effects to habitat are anticipated.

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

A Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect on state land. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified in the easement corridor. No additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings is forthcoming and will be made available through the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

No effects on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources anticipated.

**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.*

Aesthetics would temporarily be affected due to a small drill rig that will be used to carry out the test.

No direct or cumulative effects to aesthetics are anticipated.

**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.*

No demands on limited resources are required for this project.

No direct or cumulative effects to environmental resources are anticipated.

**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 tracts listed in this EA Checklist.

**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.*

There will be safety risks associated with the operating of the drilling equipment but safety procedures will be the responsibility of the operator and the proponent.

Once the installation has been completed, there will be no health and safety concerns associated with this project.

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

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

This project will not add to or deter from other industrial, agricultural, or commercial activities in this area.

**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 project will not create any new jobs. These positions are already held by employees of the proponent. No cumulative effects to the employment market are anticipated.

**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.*

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue for the proposed project.

**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 not be temporary increases in traffic or traffic patterns if this project is approved.

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.*

There are no zoning or other agency management plans affecting this project.

**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.*

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on recreation or wilderness activities.

**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 proposed project does not include any changes to housing or developments. Population and housing will not be affected.

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 project will have no effect on any unique quality 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 project will not have any cumulative economic or social effect.

**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

**Alternative B (the Proposed Action)** – Under this alternative, the Department does grant an easement for an underground telecommunication cable.

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined that no negative long-term environmental impacts will result from the proposed activity.

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

EIS

More Detailed EA

**XXX**

No Further Analysis

**EA Checklist  
Prepared By:**

**Name:** Dustin Lenz

**Title:** Land Use Specialist

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**EA Checklist  
Approved By:**

**Name:** Barny D. Smith

**Title:** Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office

**Signature:**

**Date:**