CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Wolverine Creek Recreation Management Plan Changes
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2018
Proponent:	Montana DNRC Dillon Unit
Location:	T 13 South, R 5 West, Sections 1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12,15,16,21,22,23, & 24
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Dillon Unit is proposing changes to the existing Recreational Use Rules in the Wolverine Creek drainage of the Centennial Valley. The Wolverine Creek drainage has approximately 7,545 acres of state trust land that is accessible to the public for recreational use. The area receives substantial use during Montana's general big game hunting season. Over the past few years the DNRC with help from MT Fish Wildlife and Parks wardens has increased enforcement activities in the Wolverine Creek area including constructing barriers on closed roads, putting up signs and kiosk's, and patrolling the area during the first two weeks of the hunting season. This increased enforcement has caused hunter, lessee, and agency conflict. Many of the state Recreation Use Laws are not being followed. This includes camping for more than the allowed 2-day limit, driving on closed roads, driving through private property, having campfires at camps and the destruction of signs, barriers and kiosk's. Conflicts with the lessee, include gates being left open, livestock possibly being shot, and destruction of gates and fences.

Due to these events, and similar behavior in other areas of the Dillon Unit, a decision was made to start a working group in SW Montana to try and address recreational use issues and the increasing frustration people felt with travel management and hunter ethics in the area. Several open meetings were held, and the Beaverhead Working Group was formed to give public input to agency representatives on the conflicts that are occurring out on the ground. The first three meetings were held in the spring of 2018 at the Dillon Unit office with a diverse group of interested parties. Sportsmen, ranchers, lessees, agency representatives, user groups, and elected officials attended all three of the meetings. The purpose of the working group is to find solutions to issues that are occurring on public and private lands in SW Montana due to recreational use.

On June 30, 2018 a group of interested sportsmen (about 30), the state land lessees, ranchers, interest groups and agency representatives met for a field trip to discuss ways to resolve conflicts in the Wolverine Creek drainage. The collaborative nature of the tour allowed for free conversation amongst the group, with each group expressing their concerns and suggestions for change. Several changes to the travel management in the area were proposed, including opening closed roads and closing open roads, in addition 2 camping areas were looked at for allowing hunters to use the areas for up to 16 consecutive days. Because of the field trip and consensus between the sportsmen, ranchers, lessees and agency representatives the following proposed changes are being evaluated in this Environmental Assessment;

1. Designate two locations in the Wolverine Creek Area as legally available for camping on DNRC lands for up to 16 consecutive days. DNRC would permit campfires in these areas if fire restrictions allow. These spots would be signed and designated on the ground and marked on a GIS layer map.
2. Close the currently open road through Section 15. This road is not often used and traverses relatively easy terrain from the County road. Further, closing the road will provide significant space between open roads to the east and west. Last, the road leaves the County Road through a wire gate in a continuous fence. This means that it will be much easier to effectively close and monitor and is likely to be a successful closure.
3. Open the Road known as the "Jack Thomas Road" beginning in Section 16 to the forest boundary.

4. Open the upper road in Section 1 from its intersection with the BLM Wolverine Creek Road north to an existing fence and a good parking and turnaround area.

The proposed changes would have to be accompanied other actions including:

- Place the two kiosks purchased by the Centennial Valley Association, one at the main Wolverine Creek Road and one t the bottom of the "Jack Thomas Road". These kiosks are currently being built by DNRC of materials donated by the Centennial Valley Association.
- Include maps and information on these kiosks which stresses the cooperative nature of these efforts and provides accurate information in clear concise and welcoming format.
- Sign and lock the closed road in section 15 with accurate information pointing to the roads which *ARE* open.
- Gate the road heading to Santana Ranch property from the Northwest corner of Section 13. This gate should be accompanied by a sign explaining which roads are available instead. Santana Ranch offered to contribute time and equipment in this effort, this offer should be accepted.
- Ensure that the two newly open roads are clearly marked and blocked at or before the Forest Boundary to prevent the newly opened roads from encouraging trespass on to the Forest.
- Request that FWP wardens make this area an enforcement priority in 2018.
- Talk with Madison Ranger District to have them re-enforce the closures along the FS boundary.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Beaverhead Recreation Working Group
Centennial Valley Association
Skyline Sportsmen's Group
Beaverhead Outdoors
Matador Cattle Company
Santana Livestock
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Wardens and Biologist
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Bureau of Land Management, Dillon Field Office
US Forest Service, Madison Ranger District
Beaverhead County Commissioners

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

Approval from the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Program

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: Approve the following changes to the existing Recreational Use rules in the Wolverine Creek Drainage;

- Open the road known as the "Jack Thomas Road" which starts at the junction of the North Valley Road in Section 16 and goes to the Forest Service Boundary in Section 3. Barricade the road in Section 9 that heads east off the "Jack Thomas Road" which leads to Santana Livestock private land.

- Open the road in section 1 from the intersection with the main BLM Wolverine Creek Road and goes north to a good parking area and turn around about ¼ mile from the USFS boundary.
- Close the currently open road through Section 15 that starts at the North Centennial Road.
- Designate camping areas along the main BLM Wolverine Creek Road just off the North Valley Road in Section 14, and another in Section 12 just before crossing Second Wolverine Creek.
- Install 2 Kiosk's to inform public of changes to the area.
- Increase patrol in the area to inform the public of the changes.

No Action Alternative: Deny proposed changes to the Wolverine Creek area recreational use rules, including changes to the travel management plan and allowing designated camping for more than 2 consecutive days.

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.

Soils found on the 7,545 acres of state land are varied in nature with some being clay loams in the bottoms and more well drained rocky aggregate in the uplands. Many of the existing roads that are being used are rutted with 4-5-inch cuts. The state received these lands as part of a land exchange with the BLM in the early 1980's. The BLM retained ownership of the main Wolverine Creek Road and is responsible for the maintenance of the road. During the 2019 field season the BLM will be revising the main roads location out of wet areas and fixing the current fords at stream crossings with culverts. Because the roads in this area receive the most use in the fall, during the general big game hunting season, they will continue to sustain rutting with little money available for maintenance.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will change the geology or impact soil quality, stability or moisture content. All roads are on gentle to moderate slopes and erosion problems are not an issue if road closures are followed and enforced.

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 five perennial streams within the 7,545 acres of state land. They include, (moving from the west boundary to east boundary) East Fork of Clover Creek, Swamp Creek, Sandy Creek, Second Wolverine Creek and First Wolverine Creek. Only Second Wolverine and First Wolverine Creeks may be affected by this proposal.

Action Alternative: All roads are currently being driven by recreationists during the hunting season. A number of these roads are impacting water quality where the roads cross perennial streams. Three of the crossings on First and Second Wolverine Creek will be fixed when the BLM improves the road in the summer of 2019. Stream crossings without culverts will continue to impact water quality.

No Action Alternative: No changes to water quality will occur under this alternative.

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 changes to air quality will occur under either of the proposed alternatives.

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.

Action Alternative: The roads proposed open in the action alternative are currently used primarily during big game hunting season. DNRC road closures have had little or no impact on travel. It is not anticipated that declaring said roads "open" would impact vegetation. The two proposed camping areas are currently used (contrary to DNRC Rec Use Rules) in the manner proposed in the action alternative. Additionally, the entire area is grazed by livestock as part of a DNRC grazing lease. A site visit during late June of 2018 showed little or no impact of past camping activities on vegetation and no further future impacts are anticipated.

Noxious weeds are currently present on the tracts. Scattered pockets of spotted knapweed, houndstongue, Canada, and bull Thistle are scattered about. The lessee, DNRC, Beaverhead County and Centennial Valley Association have participated in annual weed spray days the last three years. Because all roads on the tracts are being driven during the hunting season the knapweeds seem to be scattered along the traveled roads. Houndstongue and thistle can be found in the wet areas where the cattle congregate.

Keeping hunters on designated roads may help reduce the spread of weeds outside of road corridors and make it easier to locate knapweed concentrations on weed spray days. Continued herbicide spraying of the area will be required under both alternatives.

No Action Alternative: No anticipated effect.

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.

Action Alternative: A variety of big game, small mammals, reptiles, raptors, upland game birds and songbirds use this area. The proposed recreational use changes may disrupt wildlife movement and patterns during the hunting season. The proposed changes however will reduce travel on a large portion of the state land and may provide wildlife species hiding and security cover from motorized travel which will reduce wildlife disturbance.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative no changes to Terrestrial, Avian and Aquatic Life and habitats will occur. Current use of the area will remain the same.

Neither alternative will significantly change the present use of the Wolverine Creek area, the closure of the roads in Section 15, and the road through Santana Livestock's deeded property under the action alternative will reduce vehicle traffic in that area by sportsmen, resulting in slightly less disturbance to terrestrial habitats.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage program was done for the project area. There were six sensitive species of concern that were identified in the search. They include the following; Pygmy Rabbit, Little Brown Myotis (bat), Ferrugineous Hawk, Greater Sage-Grouse, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, and Arctic Grayling.

The whole Wolverine Creek Basin is considered Core Greater Sage Grouse habitat, and there are two active leks located in Sections 22 & 23 T13S R5W. Both leks are located south of the North Valley Road and will not be impacted from either of the proposed alternatives. The leks are monitored in the spring of each year by FWP, BLM and DNRC employees to determine numbers of birds on the leks. These counts help determine population trends of the bird.

An application to the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Program was submitted for review and approval of this proposal on September 7, 2018.

No adverse effects to any of the identified species of concern would be expected with either of the proposed alternatives.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Because neither alternative is expected to alter the current use of the area except for the closure of the road across Section 15, neither alternative will have an impact on historical or archeological resources.

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.

Neither alternative will yield aesthetic changes.

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.

Neither alternative will increase demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.

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.

The current lessee has submitted improvement request forms in the past for new fences and stock water tank developments. Each request has been reviewed and been approved.

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.

Action Alternative: The action alternative will incorporate a focus on self-policing of recreationists and include additional on-site information and kiosks. Dispersed camping may invoke concerns about human health and sanitation. Under the action alternative this area will be the focus of more enforcement scrutiny from DNRC and FWP. Any concerns with human waste and sanitation will be identified and may be dealt with appropriately.

No Action Alternative: The status quo will continue under this alternative and any current concerns about sanitation and human waste will be unresolved.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Action Alternative: The current Lessee of the parcel has experienced recurrent problems with recreationists leaving gates open and driving on closed roads and through private property. The action alternative is designed to help mitigate these problems through education and self-policing. This alternative may be expected to ease the effect of recreationists on agricultural activities.

No Action Alternative: Current activities by recreationists may be expected to continue to negatively impact agricultural production if nothing is done.

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.

Neither alternative will have any effect

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.

Neither alternative will have any effect

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.

Neither alternative will have any effect

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.

Neither alternative will have any effect

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.

Action Alternative: This alternative is designed to grant better access to sportsmen to quality hunting on Forest Service lands to the north of the state land as well as protect private property and lessee improvements. The proposal will also close the whole middle portion of the state land from motorized travel granting wildlife some security from motorized travel. It will also provide hunters the ability to legally camp on state land up to 16 days.

One of the concerns identified in the scoping process is that through this proposal we may be granting better access for recreationists to violate rules on the National Forest. It was suggested that DNRC work with the

Forest Service to better block motorized travel off state land on to the forest where the roads lead to forest service land. The DNRC has been in discussions with the Madison Ranger District on this concern.

The collaborative nature of this alternative may make enforcement of state land rules easier and provide more self-policing of the Wolverine Creek area.

No Action Alternative: Recreational use of the area will remain the same with continued violations of the states recreational use rules.

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.

Neither alternative will have any effect

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Neither alternative will change the social structures and mores of the area. Ranchers will continue use the state land for grazing livestock, the area will provide wildlife habitat for a variety of species, and the area will continue to provide recreational opportunities to hunters into the future.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Neither of the proposed alternatives will change the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the Wolverine Creek basin or the Centennial Valley. The area is a remote out of the way area of Montana and is rarely used except during the hunting season. Neither of the alternatives will change that uniqueness.

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.

Neither alternative will alter the number of AUM's available for grazing which is the main source of trust income on this state land.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Timothy Egan	**Date:**	October 1, 2018
	Title:	Dillon Unit Manager		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The selected alternative is a modified action alternative, specifically:

1) Designate an area at the bottom of Wolverine Creek Road available for extended-stay camping. This area, extending approximately 400 yards along lower Wolverine Creek Road will allow camping for up to 16 consecutive days. This area will be signed and designated on the ground and marked on the kiosk maps. No extended stay camping is allowed outside this
2) Close the currently open road through Section 15. This road is not often used and traverses relatively easy terrain from the County road. Further, closing the road will provide significant space between open roads to the east and west. Last, the road leaves the County Road through a wire gate in a continuous fence. This means that it will be much easier to effectively close and monitor and is likely to be a successful closure.
3) Open the Road known as the "Jack Thomas Road" beginning in Section 16 to the steep section before the forest boundary. This will prevent the road from delivering motorized use directly to the forest boundary and causing the Forest Service management concerns.
4) Open the upper road in Section 1 from its intersection with the BLM Wolverine Creek Road north to the existing fence and a good parking and turnaround area.
5) Place two kiosks purchased by the Centennial Valley Association, one at the main Wolverine Creek Road and one at the bottom of the "Jack Thomas Road". Include maps and information on these kiosks which stresses the cooperative nature of these efforts and provides accurate information in clear concise and welcoming format.
6) Gate the road heading to Santana Ranch property from the Northwest corner of Section 13. This gate should be accompanied by a sign explaining which roads are available instead. Santana Ranch offered to contribute time and equipment in this effort, this offer should be accepted.
7) Construct a barrier on the illegal road in section 12 that parallels First Creek
8) Purchase cameras to ensure all recreational use rules are followed within the Wolverine Creek area.

This decision is being made with the following stipulations:

- All DNRC recreation rules are applicable to the use of this area outside the approved designations.
- Designated open roads are seasonally restricted to Sept 1- December 31, in accordance with the Montana Sage Grouse program recommendations.
- Sign and lock the closed road in section 15 with accurate information pointing to the roads which *ARE* open.
- Ensure that the two newly open roads are clearly marked and blocked at or before the Forest Boundary to prevent the newly opened roads from encouraging trespass on to the Forest.
- Request FWP wardens prioritize enforcement of DNRC Recreation rules in this area.
- Encourage the Madison Ranger District to re-enforce the closures along the FS boundary.
- State will monitor and spray noxious weeds on the newly designated open roads.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This decision and consequent action will not result in significant impacts to the values described in the Environmental Analysis.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Martin Balukas
	Title:	Central Land Office Trust Land Program Manager
Signature:		