

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Snow-Kiting on Big Hole Pass
Proposed Implementation Date:	February 2019
Proponent:	Ron Orton
Location:	Sections 13,24,25, T6S – R14W (Western/Eastern Trust)
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Ron Orton has applied for a Land Use License (LUL) to use state land in the Big Hole Pass area once a year as a snow-kiting location (see attachment). A group of 20-50 people gather once a year over the Presidents Day weekend to fly kites that pull people over the snow on skis or snowboards. Concentrated use would be on the parking lot on Forest Service land and the group would use snowmobiles or a snow coach to access state land from the parking area.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: *Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

- Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archeologist
- Craig Fager, MT FWP Wildlife Biologist
- Rick Schmauch, MT FWP Warden
- Montana Natural Heritage Program
- Roger Peters, State Lessee
- Stoddard Ranch, State Lessee
- Beaverhead County Commissioners
- USDA Forest Service, Dillon District

Comments:

- **Patrick Rennie:** "I see no cultural resource concerns. Nothing has been identified on these tracts and they are not doing anything that should disturb the ground much (if any)."
- **Rodger Peters:** "In regard to your letter about the application from Ron Orton of Kiteron located in Bozeman about wanting to use State Land in the Big Hole Pass area. I feel it seems to be an appropriate use of State Lands and we don't have any problems with it."
- **Rick Schmauch:** Did not state any concerns in his response to the scoping letter.

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

Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Program

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

- A. **Action Alternative:** Grant Ron Orton a Land Use License to use state land in the Big Hole Pass area (Sections 13, 24, 25 T6S – R14W) once a year as a snow-kiting location.

B. **No Action Alternative:** The proposed Land Use License would not be granted.

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.

A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal would not have any cumulative impacts to the soil because the activities would take place on top of snow. No ground disturbance would occur and no impact to the soil would occur.

B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to soils.

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.

A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal would not have any cumulative impacts to water quality or water resources. There is a perennial stream in the area but due to the type of activity proposed, the time of year of use and the short time period of the activity, no impacts to the stream or water quality would be expected. All activity will be on top of the snow and no ground disturbance will occur.

B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution would 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.

A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal would not have any short term or cumulative effects to air quality.

B. **No Action Alternative:** No impact to air quality.

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.

A. **Action Alternative:** A search was conducted using the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) database on 01/03/2019 and found 1 species of concern (Whitebark Pine) was identified. This proposal will not impact or disturb any vegetation including Whitebark Pine trees that are in the area. No short term, long term or cumulative impacts would be anticipated under this alternative.

B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to vegetation cover, quantity and quality would occur under this alternative.

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** There may be minimal disruption of wildlife that inhabit the area during the three days of use under this alternative. The scale and length of the project however will not be enough to permanently disrupt the wildlife species, and no cumulative impacts would be anticipated. Species in the area include elk, wolves, mule deer, raptors and other birds, various rodents, rabbits and other mammals.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to fish and wildlife.

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. **Action Alternative:** A search was conducted using the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) database on 01/03/2019 and found 5 species of concern (Brewer's Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, Wolverine, Clark's Nutcracker and Greater Sage Grouse) that have the potential to be the area. All information pertaining to these species was gathered using MNHP.

Brewer's Sparrow: The sparrow typically breeds in the shrubsteppe dominated by sagebrush. They are a migratory songbird and only inhabit these areas of Montana from mid- to late-April until their fall movements from August to early October. Due to the time of year there will be no impacts to the species.

Sage Thrasher: The Sage Thrasher breeds in habitats dominated by Big Sagebrush. They are a migratory songbird and only inhabit these areas of Montana from late April to mid-August. Due to the time of year there will be no impacts to the species.

Clark's Nutcracker: Nutcrackers are a permanent resident to this area and typically occupy conifer forests dominated by whitebark pine at the higher elevations and limber pine along with douglas firs at lower elevations. Due to the location and short time period of the activities there is no impacts expected to this species.

Greater Sage Grouse: Sage grouse may be resident year around or make seasonal migratory movements. Seasonal movements vary greatly and depend upon several factors including gender, behavior, seasonal habitat quality, and weather. They are closely associated with sagebrush habitat types. The grouse will begin occupying leks from early March to June with peaks in April to early May. The area of the proposed project is in Greater Sage Grouse general habitat and the proponent has applied for a permit through the Montana State Sage Grouse program. Because of the high elevation and snow depth there should be no grouse activity in the area during the proposed time of the snow-kiting. Due to the short time period of activity and time of year no impacts to the species are expected.

Wolverine: The main habitat for Wolverines is in alpine tundra, boreal and mountain forests. They occupy dens in caves, rock crevices, fallen trees, thickets or similar sites when inactive. They prefer large wilderness areas away from human interference. Because of the location of the proposed activities being close to populated areas and lack of preferred habitat there is no impacts expected to this species.

- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The DNRC archaeologist stated that there are “No cultural resource concerns. Nothing has been identified on these tracts and they are not doing anything that should disturb the ground much (if any).”

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal would not have any lasting impacts to the aesthetics of the area due to the short duration of proposed activities.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to aesthetics.

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This alternative is not expected to have any impacts to the environmental resources of land, water, air or energy. No short term, long term or cumulative impacts would be anticipated under this alternative.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to 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.

There are no other environmental documents currently being evaluated in this area at this time. (Section 13,24,25, T6S – R14W).

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** No human and health safety risks were identified as a result of the proposed project other than the type of hazards that coincide with snow-kiting. The proponent would be responsible for all risks to human health and safety associated with their activity.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to human health and safety.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal would not have any impacts on industrial, commercial or agriculture activities and production.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to industrial, commercial or agriculture activities and production.

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal would not create, move, or eliminate jobs.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to quantity or distribution of employment.

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal will not impact local and state tax base and revenues.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impact to local and state tax base and tax revenues.

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal is not expected to impact the demand for government services.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impact to demand for 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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal will not impact locally adopted environmental plans or goals.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to locally adopted environmental plans or goals.

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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal will not impact access to and quality of recreational use and wilderness activities. The proposal would utilize the area for winter recreational use.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to access to and quality of recreational use and 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.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal will not impact density or distribution of population and housing.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to density and distribution of population and housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal will not impact social structures and mores.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impacts to social structures and mores.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

- A. **Action Alternative:** This proposal will not impact cultural uniqueness or diversity.
- B. **No Action Alternative:** No impact to cultural uniqueness and diversity.

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 proponent has provided \$25.00 for a Land Use License Application. The proponent will also pay a \$250.00 license fee for the use of state trust land. The sections are Western/Eastern grant sections.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jackson Spooner	Date: 01/29/2019
	Title: Dillon Unit Senior Engine Boss	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

- C. **Action Alternative:** Grant Ron Orton a Land Use License to use state land in the Big Hole Pass area (Sections 13, 24, 25 T6S – R14W) once a year during the Presidents Day weekend as a snow-kiting location.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Significant impacts from this proposal are not anticipated. The proposed activity of snow kiting will be of a short duration (three days during the Presidents Day weekend), and the use will occur on top of the snow with no vegetation disturbed and minimal disturbance of wildlife. No long term or cumulative impacts would be anticipated from this proposed activity.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Timothy Egan
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan	
Date: 1/29/2019	

**Attachment 1
Snow-Kiting Map
Sec. 13, 24, 25 T6S – R14W**

