

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Water Resources Division  
Water Rights Bureau

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact**

**Part I. Proposed Action Description**

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: D D Gilger Ranch, 8 Gilger Rd, Boyes, MT 59316
2. Type of action: Application to Change a Water Right 42J 30122492
3. Water source name: Groundwater
4. Location affected by project: Sections 18 and 19, T5S, R54E, and Section 14, T5S, R53E, Powder River County
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits: The Applicant is requesting to change the place of use to add 5 stock tanks. The places of use including one existing stock tank and the domestic use are:
  - 1) SESESE Section 18, T5S, R54E, (Domestic)
  - 2) SESESE Section 18, T5S, R54E,
  - 3) NWNWSW Section 18, T5S, R54E,
  - 4) NENENE Section 19, T5S, R54E,
  - 5) NENWNW Section 19, T5S, R54E,
  - 6) NWSESE Section 14, T5S, R53E,
  - 7) SWSENW Section 14, T5S, R53E, all in Powder River CountyThe addition of stock tanks will enable the producer to better utilize available grazing land. The DNRC shall issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.
6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:  
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
United States Natural Resource and Conservation Service  
Montana Heritage Program  
Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program

**Part II. Environmental Review**

1. **Environmental Impact Checklist:**

## **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

### **WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION**

**Water quantity** – The source of water supply is groundwater and therefore not classified as dewatered by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The groundwater source has been in use since 2006 and the use will not be increased. No additional effect to water quantity will result from the addition of stock tanks to a stock watering system.

*Determination:* No impact

**Water quality** – The groundwater is not listed as impaired by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and the use of groundwater for stock watering has no potential to degrade groundwater quality.

*Determination:* No impact

**Groundwater** – Because the project is only to add stock tanks to an existing stock watering system, no increased groundwater use is proposed, and no degradation of groundwater quality is likely.

*Determination:* No impact

**DIVERSION WORKS** – The pipelines from the well to the new stock tanks are in place and buried. The locations of the new stock tanks have been used for watering cattle in the past. The construction of the project is complete, and the operation will not create barriers to migration or alter any stream flow or channel characteristics.

*Determination:* No impact

### **UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES**

**Endangered and threatened species** – According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program, there are no plant species of concern in the project area and only one animal species of concern, the Greater Sage Grouse. The well has been appropriating groundwater since 2006 and no additional impact would occur to any surface water sources. The pipeline is buried and creates no barriers. In a letter dated February 7, 2019, Carolyn Sime, Manager of the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program determined that the proposed activities were consistent with the program strategy.

*Determination:* No impact

**Wetlands** – The only wetlands in the area are reservoirs created by dams for stock water. No wetlands will be affected, and none are proposed.

*Determination:* No impact

**Ponds** – The only ponds in the area are reservoirs created by dams for stock water. No ponds will be affected, and none are proposed.

*Determination:* No impact

**GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE** – The project area covers several sections and a variety of soil types. The dominant soils are fine sandy or silty loam. Addition of stock tanks has no probability of degrading soils, altering their moisture content, or leading to saline seep.

*Determination:* No impact

**VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS** – Existing vegetative cover is native grasses, Grazing has a limited potential to alter native vegetation, but the addition of stock tanks allows the effects of grazing to be less concentrated allowing grasses to recover. It will be the responsibility of the land owner to control and prevent the spread of noxious weeds.

*Determination:* No significant impact

**AIR QUALITY** – Addition of stock tanks to a stock watering system has no potential to alter air quality.

*Determination:* No impact

**HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES** – The project is not located on State or Federal Lands.

*Determination:* Not applicable

**DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY** – The requirement of pumping water to the additional stock tanks will use energy. No other demands on environmental resources of land, water, and energy will be changed.

*Determination:* No significant impact

<b>HUMAN ENVIRONMENT</b>
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**LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS** – There are no known locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

*Determination:* No impact

**ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES** – There are no local wildness or recreation areas and no access of any sort through the project area.

*Determination:* No impact

**HUMAN HEALTH** - Addition of stock tanks to a stock watering system has no potential to affect human health.

*Determination:* No impact

**PRIVATE PROPERTY** - Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Yes \_\_\_ No **X** \_\_\_ If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

*Determination:* No impact

**OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

*Impacts on:*

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impact
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impact
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impact
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impact
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impact
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impact
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impact
- (h) Utilities? No significant impact
- (i) Transportation? No significant impact
- (j) Safety? No significant impact
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impact

**2. *Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:***

Secondary Impacts: No secondary impacts are recognized.

Cumulative Impacts: No cumulative impacts are recognized.

**3. *Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:*** None

4. **Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:** The only viable alternative to the proposed project is the no-action alternative. The no-action alternative does not prevent any significant environmental impacts and prevents the applicant from increasing the efficiency of his operation and maximizing the use of grazing land.

*PART III. Conclusion*

1. **Preferred Alternative:** Issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.

2 **Comments and Responses:** None

3. **Finding:**

Yes\_\_\_ No X Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

*If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:* An environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis because no significant impacts were recognized or likely from the addition of stock tanks to an existing stock watering system.

*Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:*

*Name:* Mark Elison

*Title:* Regional Manager

*Date:* 3/28/2019