

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Red Rock Springs Ranch Stock Water Pipeline LUL 2020
Proposed Implementation Date:	Late Winter/Summer/Fall, 2020
Proponent:	Red Rock Springs Ranch, Lessee
Location:	Sections 15 & 16, T12S R9W
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This environmental assessment (EA) is being conducted to study effects of a proposed buried stock water pipeline and a stock tank to be located on the above referenced Trust Land Tracts. The proponent, Red Rock Springs Ranch, Bart Storey – Manager, has submitted a land use license application to initiate this EA. The pipeline would originate at a spring on adjacent BLM located in the SWSENE, Section 15, T12S R9W. A stock water tank is proposed along the pipeline route in the NWNENW of Section 16 near the border with BLM. The pipeline route would then enter BLM land in the SWSW of Section 9 and proceed approximately ½ mile North into section 9 where the final stock tank will be located. Length of pipeline on Trust Land would be approximately 7,700 feet. The purpose of the new line is to provide upland water sources to a dry 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.*

Dean Waltee, Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Wildlife Biologist
Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist
Vic Hager, RE Miller & Sons Construction Company
Montana Natural Heritage Program

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

The proponent, Red Rock Springs Ranch LLC, applied to the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (MSGOT) for a review of the proposed project. Input from MSGOT review is found under various parts of this document. No other governmental agencies with jurisdiction or additional permit requirements were identified during the scoping for this proposed project. The project as proposed would involve only Montana Trust Land allocated to Common Schools Grant. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is conducting an environmental review for the portion of the project that is located on their ownership to the East and North of the Trust Land block.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

Alternative B: Preferred alternative. To issue a 10 year Land Use License allowing construction of the buried pipeline and stock tank.

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.

No fragile, compactable, or unstable soils are present. Construction of the project would entail burying approximately 1.46 miles of 1½ - 2" pipe. Impacts to the soil would be minimized by use of a dozer with a vibra-shank ripper or small excavator to place the pipe.

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.

The affected tracts are part of a block of Trust Land with no naturally occurring water sources to provide for livestock use and distribution. The project would improve water availability and improve cattle grazing distribution on the upland sites.

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.

Air Quality would not be affected by this project.

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.

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities would not be significantly affected by this project due to the low amount of disturbance and use of low impact equipment.

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.

The project could increase the availability of water for both livestock and all species of wildlife.

Dean Waltee, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Biologist for the area, included the following comments regarding the proposed project: *"I recommend that proper weed management occur following soil disturbance and that efforts be made to ensure that the installation route does not become a route traveled by motorized users. As long as these precautions are taken, I don't have any wildlife concerns with the proposal."*

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.

The Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS) Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) website was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located in the vicinity of the project area. The query results are listed below:

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Bald eagles are listed as Recovered, delisted, and being monitored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Montana State, the US Forest Service, and the US Dept. of the Interior Bureau of Land Management all list the bald eagle as sensitive. The proposed project would develop a spring and include a buried stock water pipeline and stock water tanks on upland sites in native, dry, sagebrush-grass rangeland conditions outside of known bald eagle nesting areas. The project would not increase disturbance to bald eagle use of the area.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – The Great Blue Heron is currently listed as sensitive by the State of Montana. According to the MNHP site, the blue heron primarily inhabits riparian areas and wetland habitats. This project is part of a plan by the lessee to improve upland water source for livestock on dry rangeland approximately 1 to 2 air miles East of the Red Rock River, the nearest blue heron habitat. The current water source available in the vicinity is directly from the spring site located on BLM land in T12S R9W Section 15. The site is all dry rangeland and would not impact blue heron habitat.

Ferruginous Hawk – (*Buteo regalis*) – The ferruginous hawk is a BLM sensitive species. Ferruginous hawks have been documented using the general area around the project as nesting and hunting ground. The low surface impacts resulting from the project would not significantly alter vegetative composition or nesting habitat for the hawks. No rock outcrops are located within or near the project site. The primary vegetation on-site is mountain or Wyoming big sagebrush and grass species such as bluebunch wheatgrass, needle-and-thread, and Sandberg bluegrass. No cumulative effects are anticipated.

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Golden eagles are a BLM sensitive species and classified in the State of Montana as a species potentially at risk. The proposed project will not alter the existing vegetative community type and would not influence use of the area by golden eagles. The project would not have cumulative effects on golden eagle habitat or species distribution in the area.

Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)- Greater Sage-Grouse are listed as sensitive by the US Forest Service, BLM and the State of Montana. The project area is located in Sage-Grouse core habitat as Identified by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The proposed project area is located approximately 1 to 2 miles from an unconfirmed Sage-Grouse lek. The proposed project would be construction of a buried livestock water pipeline and stock water tank development. MSGOT was consulted regarding mitigating impacts to sage grouse core habitat and minimizing effects to sage grouse during construction. MSGOT's recommendation was to allow construction of the project before March 15 or after July 15 to avoid sage grouse lek and nesting periods and to require wildlife escape ramps on stock tanks.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist, was consulted regarding cultural resource issues on the tract, his response is included below:

“A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, but it should be noted that Class III level inventory work has not been conducted there to date.

Because the topographic setting and geology suggest a low to moderate likelihood of the presence of cultural or paleontologic resources, proposed developments are expected to have No Effect to Antiquities. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.”

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.

The project is not located on a prominent topographic feature and will not alter aesthetics of the area.

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 for additional environmental resources are required for this project. No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from this project.

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.

A request for a 10 year water line LUL to be located on Trust Lands and adjacent BLM lands was received from the same proponent, Red Rock Springs Ranch LLC in 2019. The 2019 project is located 3 to 4 miles North of the current proposal.

A request to construct a pasture division fence was also received by the proponent (who is also the lessee of the involved Trust Lands) of both LUL's referred to in this document. The fence request is located 3 miles North of the proposed project in Section 28, T11S R9W. No other studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for this project.

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.

No health or safety risks are posed by the project.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

If approved, this project is designed to improve water availability to otherwise dry upland range sites. Increased water availability would improve operational efficiency of the lessee allowing better distribution of livestock leading to improved utilization of forage.

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 or eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

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.

No significant increase in tax revenues are expected as a result of this 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.

No increased demand for government services are expected as a result of this project.

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.

No locally adopted environmental plans will be affected by 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.

This project will not negatively alter recreational activities in the area. The improved access to upland water sources as a result of the project may increase use of this area by wildlife, enhancing recreational opportunities.

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.

No change in population will result by this project.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No change in social structures and mores are expected as a result of this project.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The action affects water availability in an otherwise dry area. The increased water availability should increase both livestock distribution and wildlife use of the upland areas.

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 return to the Common Schools Trust for this project would be a one-time land use license fee of \$300.00 (\$200.00 for the first mile, \$100.00 for each additional 1/2 mile) for the 10 year term of the license. The lessee's stock water pipeline project may increase the overall value of the lease by improving water availability while improving livestock distribution on the affected section and adjacent Trust Land and BLM lands.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Charles Maddox	Date: 2/3/2020
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

