

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Zach Wirth Trail
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring – Summer 2020
Proponent:	DNRC Grazing Lessee, Zach Wirth
Location:	T13N R4W Section 20 (S2NW4, S2)
County:	Lewis & Clark

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The DNRC Grazing Lessee, Zach Wirth, has submitted a proposal to place an improvement on his Montana State Trust Land grazing lease number 8299 located in T13N-R4W Section 20 S½NW¼, S½. The portion of the improvement located on Trust Land would include construction of a trail, approximately 8 feet wide and 800 feet in length (0.15 acres). The trail would be constructed with a mini excavator. The purpose of the trail would be for UTV's to access the higher elevations of this tract for weed spraying and fence maintenance. Currently the only access to higher elevations of this particular tract is by foot or horseback. The surrounding deeded and State Trust Lands are too steep for vehicle travel. This proposed trail would be constructed with best management practices for the terrain, slope, and soil conditions. The project would assist the grazing lessee in improving general management of the State Trust Land with weed spraying and fence maintenance. Please see attached maps.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Jenny Sika, Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Wildlife Biologist
Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist
Montana Natural Heritage Program

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

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 the Common Schools.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

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

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to construct a trail.

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.

The following information was derived from Web Soil Survey for this section. The proposed trail would be constructed on two soil types on this well drained, Shallow ecological site. Tolex-Holter-Casther channery loams and Castner-Holter-Rock outcrop complexes both contain channery loams over extremely channery loams in the profile. Both of these soils types have a slight to moderate erosion hazard in off-road sites and severe erosion hazard on roads, poorly suited and unsuited for mechanical site preparation, low resistance to soil compaction, and moderate restoration potential.

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.

This project would not have cumulative impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution. Little Prickly Pear Creek is the nearest body of water, which is approximately ¼ mile away and 400 feet lower in elevation and across Chevallier Drive from the location of the proposed trail on State Trust Land. There are two unnamed intermittent tributaries to Prickly Pear Creek in the E½ of Section 19, and the small scale of this project on State Trust Land should not have impacts to these waterways.

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, small disturbed space (0.15 acres) and short construction time frame. The proposed trail would be constructed on approximately 800 feet of native rangeland and would be reseeded with a seed mix approved by DNRC. This portion of the section is high elevation, approximately 4600 feet. Montana Natural Heritage Map view classifies the sites where the trail would be located as Rocky Mountain Lower Montane, Foothill and Valley Grassland, Big Sagebrush Steppe, and Montane Sagebrush Steppe. DNRC Land Use Specialist completed a site visit to this section on 10/27/19 and found the following species at the proposed trail location: Douglas fir, big sagebrush, woods rose, western yarrow, lupine, rough fescue, Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, prairie junegrass and needle and thread grass.

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 would have a secondary impact on birds and wildlife as the trail would give the grazing lessee the ability to spray noxious weeds and maintain fences on the high elevations of this tract. No cumulative impacts to fish are anticipated from this project.

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) was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located near the project area. There are no documented point observations of any species of concern in Section 20. The Bobolink and Evening Grosbeak bird species have been observed in the area and their habitat polygons overlap into Section 20. The Bobolink polygon for confirmed breeding areas is supported by presence of nests, chicks and territorial adults. This polygon is a buffer of 150 meters from observation site to include the male's territory of this species. The Evening Grosbeak polygon for confirmed breeding areas supported by presence of nests, chicks and territorial adults. This polygon is a buffer of 1,000 meters from observation site to include the foraging distance from nests.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

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, the proposed action is 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.

A field inspection by DNRC Land Use Specialist Heidi Crum was completed on October 27, 2019. No cultural resources were found near the proposed projects.

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 in a rural part of Lewis & Clark County, approximately 0.12 miles west of Chevallier Drive and 2 miles southwest of the Sieben Exit on Interstate 15. Both roadways are traveled by the public; however, the public would not have legal access with a vehicle to the deeded land in Section 19 to access the proposed trail in Section 20 of Trust Land. Additionally, vehicle access to any State Trust Land is only allowed on public roads and/or designated open roads. Grazing lessees are allowed to drive on their grazing lease for purposes of maintaining the lease only. This project would alter aesthetics of the area temporarily during construction and minimally when the project is complete.

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.

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 access to higher elevations of State Trust Land for the grazing lessee to spray weeds and maintain fences to improve grazing management.

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. There is no legal access for the public to this tract of State Trust Land.

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 from 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 proposed project has no anticipated affects to the 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 grazing lease and on this tract of State Trust Lands generates approximately \$668 in revenue annually for the Common Schools trust. This project would enable the lessee to improve management of the rangeland by spraying weeds and maintaining fences at higher elevations, which have been inaccessible by vehicles.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Heidi Crum	Date: 1/13/2020
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to construct a trail.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Installation of a trail; approximately 8' wide and 800' feet in length, which is a total of 0.15 acres. No long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated from the implementation of this proposal.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EI

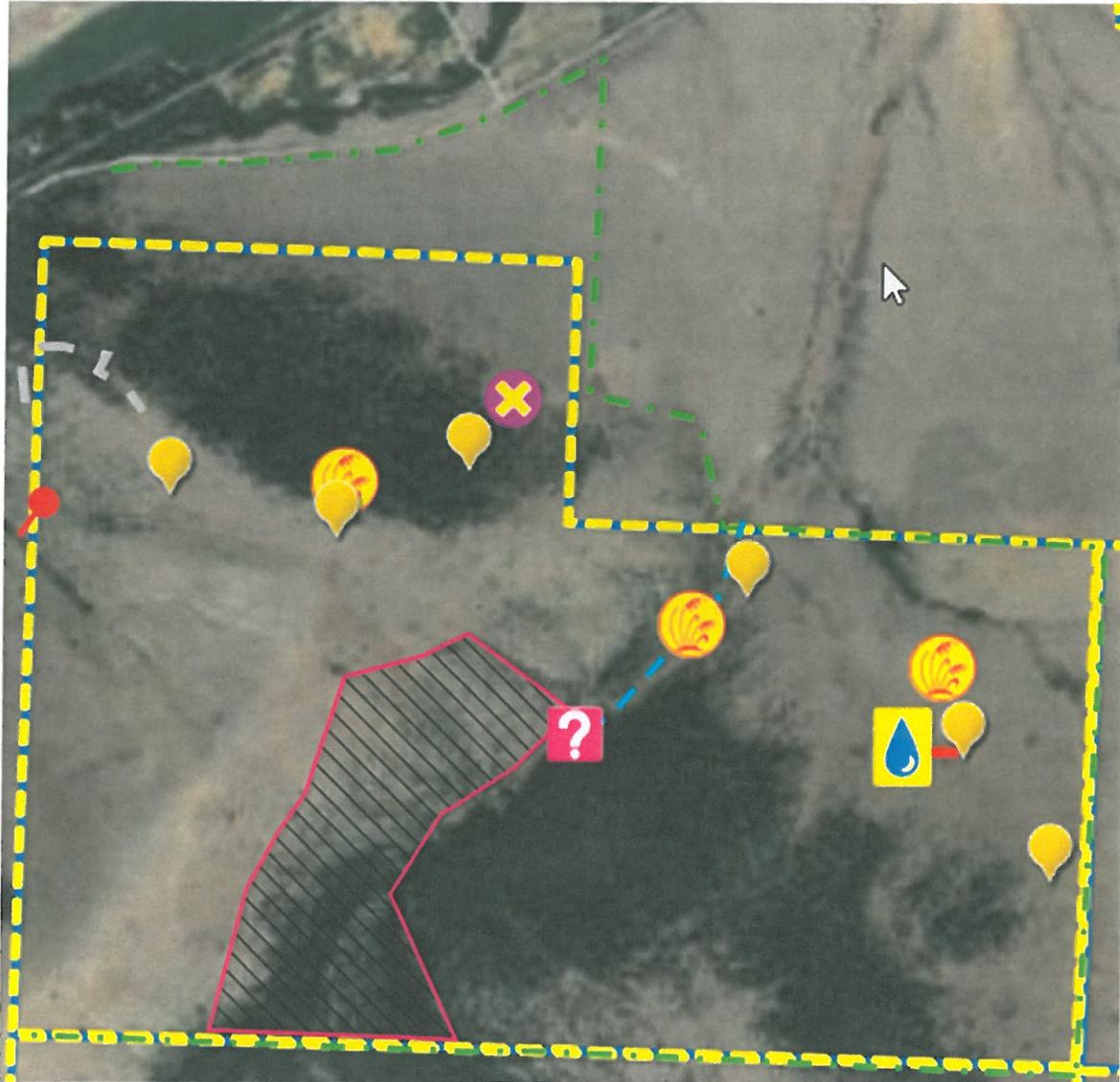
More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: John Huston
	Title: Helena Unit Manager
Signature: 	Date: 2/6/20

T13N-R4W Section 20: Aerial imagery maps of the section are below. The State does not own all of Section 20, only S½, S½NW¼, indicated by the blue/yellow dashed line.

The proposed trail is indicated by the grey dashed line in S½NW¼.



T13N-R4W Section 20: Zoomed into the S½NW¼ of the section to show a better representation of the proposed trail location with the grey dashed line.

