

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Art Thompson Corral Creek Fence Request 2020
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer, 2020
Proponent:	Lessee: Art Thompson
Location:	T15S R5W Sections 1 & 12
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This fencing project is being proposed by the lessee, Art Thompson, to replace an existing fence on the above referenced Trust Land to improve livestock control and reduce livestock trespass onto adjacent lands to the East and South. The proposal includes approximately 6,600 feet of 4 strand barbed wire fence. The fence would be built to specifications of approximately 16" bottom wire and a top wire of 38" – 42". The existing fence has stretches that were constructed on sites that are heavily impacted by snow loading. Over winter, the fence is pressed to near ground-level and posts broken off where cattle can walk over it. The lessee wishes to reconstruct the fence and alter the location at these sites to avoid snow-load impacts and reduce maintenance and improve control of cattle using the lease. The project is located in close proximity to the Idaho border in the Western Centennial Mountain Range of Beaverhead County.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Dean Waltee, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Biologist
Art Thompson, Lessee
Montana Natural Resource Information Service
Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist
Montana Sage Grouse Advisory Committee (Responded that fences are categorically excluded)

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

No other government oversight or agencies with Jurisdiction or permits needed for this request.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A) Allow construction of the proposed fence
Alternative B) No action, fence construction would be denied.

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: <i>Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.</i>
--

The project area is located in mountainous terrain. Topography is moderately steep and partially timbered. Due to the low impact nature of barbed wire fencing on soils, the project will not cause cumulative impacts. No special reclamation is expected. If the project is approved, the site will be assessed after construction by Dillon Unit staff prior to grazing lease expiration and alterations may be required if significant impacts are noted.

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.

Water sources in the vicinity include the upper headwaters of the East Fork Corral Creek & West Fork of Corral Creek. Both the existing fence and the proposed replacement fence are/would be located on the ridge between the two drainages and would not affect water quality.

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.

None

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.

No cumulative effects to vegetation are expected to result from this proposed project.

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 area is heavily used by elk & mule deer. The proposed fence re-construction is designed to be wildlife friendly with a top wire of 38"-42" and a bottom wire of 16". Dean Waltee, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks biologist was solicited for comments on this project regarding wildlife impacts. He requested that if fences are built on steep slopes where elk and other wildlife like to travel, that gates be put in to reduce impacts from uphill and downhill travel and to leave the gates open when livestock are not present. The lessee intends to place let-down fence near the Montana – Idaho border to minimize elk and snowpack damage.

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 query was made on the Montana Natural Heritage Program site regarding endangered or sensitive species located in the vicinity of the project area. The resulting Species of Concern Data Report included 3 species found:

1) **Westslope Cutthroat Trout** (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) – Westslope cutthroat trout are currently listed as sensitive by both the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the State of Montana. The proposed project is to replace an existing fence located in an upland site in dry rangeland conditions. Trout habitat will not be impacted by the fencing project.

2) **Wolverine** (*Gulo gulo*) – The wolverine is listed as a BLM and USFS sensitive species and a species potentially at risk by the State of Montana. The proposed project is a reconstruction of an existing fence with a minor variation in location to avoid high snow loading areas. A proposed 16" bottom wire would not interfere with wolverine movement or use of the project area.

- 3) **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 nearest lek is 2.5 miles North of the project area. There is heavy timber in the immediate vicinity of the proposed site. The fence reconstruction will have no cumulative effects to Sage-Grouse use or habitat.
- 4) **Great Grey Owl** (*Strix nebulosa*) - is listed as a sensitive species by the BLM and as a species of concern by the State of Montana. The fence reconstruction proposal will have no effect on rodents that live in the area which are the main food source for the owl. The project site is outside of timber on open sagebrush grassland with no riparian or wet meadow areas in the vicinity. The project will not cause cumulative effects to the great gray owl.
- 5) **Grizzly Bear** (*Ursus arctos*) – The project site is in an area occupied by grizzlies in the Centennial Mountain Range. This population is part of the Yellowstone Distinct Population Segment (DPS) which was deemed by the USFWS to be a recovered population which no longer met the Endangered Species Act's definition of threatened or endangered as of March 22, 2007. The project would not alter grizzly habitat and would not cause cumulative effects to the species.
- 6) **Hoary Bat** – (*Lasiurus cinereus*) – The hoary bat is potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas. The mammal resides in Montana in the Summer living in riparian and forest habitats. Hoary bats are thought to prefer trees at the edge of clearings, but have been found in trees in heavy forests, and open wooded glades. The proposed minor alteration of the existing fence should not disturb any prime Hoary Bat habitat. The proposed alternative should have any direct, indirect or long term cumulative impacts on the hoary bat population in the area of the proposal.
- 7) **Northern Goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*) - is listed as a sensitive species by the BLM. The bird inhabits and lives in old growth forests where its food source is found. The fence would be re-constructed on or near its current location in open range land away from stands of timber where the goshawk lives. The fence would not affect northern goshawks, their prey or their habitat.
- 8) **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 replace an existing fence on an upland site in mountain big sagebrush - grass dry rangeland conditions outside of known bald eagle nesting areas. The project would not increase disturbance to bald eagle use of the area.
- 9) **Long-billed Curlew** (*Numenius americanus*) – Long-billed curlews are listed as sensitive by the BLM and as a species of concern by the State of Montana. Curlews avoid areas like the project site that has trees, heavy sagebrush, and dense grass and forbs. The site does not match curlew habitat preference, which is short to mixed grass prairie. Curlews will not be affected by the proposed project.
- 10) **Ballhead Ipomopsis** (*Ipomopsis congesta*) – Ballhead ipomopsis (gilia?) is listed as a State of Montana Species of Concern. According to the Montana NRIS site, it is found in "Open, often eroding sandy soil of sagebrush steppe in the foothill zone." It does not give a precipitation zone. Soils on site are silty to shallow, with dense overstory of mountain big sagebrush, understory is also dense grass and forbs. Habitat on-site does not meet criteria found in available literature and the proposed project would have no known impact to this species.
- 11) **McCown's Longspur** (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – McCown's longspur is a BLM and State of Montana listed sensitive species. From MNHP website: **State Rank Reason** – "*Species faces threats from cover-type conversion and altered grazing and fire regimes and although populations in the core of their breeding range in northeast Montana appear to be relatively stable, declines are occurring in much of the species global breeding range.*"
The proposed project would include reconstruction and slight alteration of an existing fence line which would not convert native grassland and would not affect habitat preference of McCown's longspur.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was consulted regarding the project. He responded as follows:

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. The proposed fence line and pipeline routes were inspected on foot. No cultural resources were identified.

Proposed developments will 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 proposed project is located in a remote part of Beaverhead County in the Centennial Mountain Range. The fence is not currently visible from any open roads and would not be visible from any open roads after reconstruction. The project location is visible from the Continental Divide Trail but the project itself will not alter aesthetics as the proposal is to move the location of the existing fence line in certain places to a location that heavy snow and snow drifts will not break the fence down. The project would not be detrimental to aesthetic values 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 limited resources would be required. The proposed project would not alter or affect other activities in the area. No cumulative effects to environmental resources are expected as a result of 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 separate environmental assessment is being conducted for a proposed spring development, approximate 1,400' pipeline, and stock tank project located within 1 mile (West) of this project. The two projects are proposed by the lessee and interference between the projects would not occur. No other studies or reviews were reported during 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 human health or safety risks are expected to result from this project.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The proposed project would not significantly alter agricultural activities or 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.

The proposed project would not affect the employment market, the lessee is planning on constructing the fence himself. No positive or negative cumulative effects to the employment market would result from this project.

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.

Tax revenue would not be affected by 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.

None

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.

None

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.

The proposed project would not affect recreational use of the area.

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.

None

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed project would not alter any unique quality or diversity 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 purpose of this environmental document is to assess a request to better align the existing four strand barbed wire fence with on-site snow-loading to improve reliability in keeping livestock contained in separate pastures and to reduce reoccurring maintenance issues where snow pushes down the fence. The improvement, if approved, would be owned by the lessee. Monetary return to the Common Schools Trust beneficiary as a direct result of this proposed fencing project is zero. The lessee expects to see reduced maintenance and improved control of livestock both on the lease and in keeping cattle from trespass onto adjacent BLM & US Forest Service land.

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

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative A) Allow construction of the proposed fence.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The fence is needed to keep livestock off federal lands. The new fence will be constructed in a wildlife friendly manner, following standards set by the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. No long term or cumulative effects are anticipated from implementing this project.

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: March 2, 2020

T15S R5W Section 1 & 12



1 inch = 1 250 feet