

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	LF Ranch Pipeline & Tanks
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2020
Proponent:	Lessee, LF Ranch
Location:	T19N R6W Sections 23 & 36
Trust:	Montana Tech & Common Schools
County:	Lewis & Clark

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Lessee, LF Ranch, has submitted a proposal to place improvements on two sections Montana State Trust Land. DNRC grazing lease #7813 includes E $\frac{1}{2}$ Section 23 & N $\frac{1}{2}$ Section 36, T19N R6W. The portion of the improvement located on State Trust Land would include burying over 4 miles of 3-inch, HDPE pipeline from an existing spring located on deeded land. A total of approximately 1400 feet of this pipeline would be on State Trust Land; approximately 750' in Section 23 and approximately 650' in Section 36. The pipelines would supply a total of 6 proposed stock water tanks, two of which are on State Trust Land. One tank would be in SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 23 and the other tank would be in NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 36. The pipeline would be installed by a D8 dozer with a 6-foot long ripper. A tracked tractor would help pull the dozer along the pipeline route. A backhoe would be used to install the stock water tanks. Ground disturbance would be minimal with this equipment. Disturbed areas would be reseeded with a DNRC approved seed mix. The proposed pipelines and stock water tanks would enable the ranch to manage the livestock grazing and rangeland in a new and improved way while providing a dependable water source for cattle, keeping them out of undeveloped springs and wet areas. Please see attached map for locations of existing and proposed infrastructure on State Trust Lands.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Brent Lonner, Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks 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 agencies are known to have jurisdiction and permits on this section.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

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

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to install a buried pipeline and stock water tanks on State Trust Lands.

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.

Web Soil Survey indicates soils on the State Lands sections 23 and 36 where the pipeline and tank would be installed are Reeder-Regent-Cabba loams. The soils in these sections were examined in "Suitabilities and Limitations for Use" tab of Web Soil Survey. These soils have only a slight erosion hazard potential and are moderately to well suited for reclamation.

Construction of the proposed pipeline would entail burying the pipe 6 feet deep. Impacts to the soil would be minimized by use of a ripper to bury the pipe. This type of equipment causes minimal disturbance to the ground surface, typically less than 1 foot in width during construction and only a small ridge is left after the pipe is ripped into place. The disturbed soil would be reseeded to maintain stability and minimize erosion. A clean, reliable water source at stock water tanks could minimize cattle use of lower, wet areas and decrease erosion potential of those sites.

Please see the map at the end of this document for location of existing and proposed infrastructure of this project on State Trust Lands.

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.

There is an unnamed intermittent tributary which begins in SE¼ of Section 23 and flows to a dam on State Trust Land in Section 24. The head of this tributary appears to be approximately 1200' feet to the north and 100' in elevation below the proposed tank site. There is an unnamed intermittent tributary which begins in NW¼ of Section 36 and flows south to Flat Creek. The head of this tributary appears to be approximately 1000' feet to the west and 140' in elevation below the proposed tank site. Neither pipelines would cross these tributaries. No other water bodies were identified in Sections 23 and 36 via topographical maps and site visits. The proposed pipelines and stock water tanks would help to improve livestock grazing distribution, protect the riparian areas, and provide a clean, reliable water source for cattle and wildlife. This project would have a positive effect on the area keeping cattle out of the bottoms of drainages, dams and surrounding wet areas.

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.

Sites for the pipelines and tanks in both sections are classified as Rocky Mountain Lower Montane, Foothill, and Valley Grasslands according to Montana Natural Heritage Program website. DNRC Land Use specialist, Dylan Craft, completed a site visit on 10/2/20 and found the following species to include green needle grass, bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, prairie junegrass and various native, perennial forbs.

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities would not be significantly, negatively affected by the construction and implementation of this project due to the low amount of disturbance and use of low impact equipment. Vegetative communities would have a positive impact in the long term after this project is in place. The pipeline would go through native rangeland, and disturbed areas on State Lands would be reseeded with a seed mix approved by DNRC. LF Ranch is required to manage noxious weeds as part of the grazing lease and would continue to do so on the pipeline route. This project would give the LF Ranch ability to manage the rangeland with the result of increased cover, quantity and quality of the vegetative community.

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 increase the availability of water for both livestock and wildlife.

Construction practices used in the placement of the pipeline, stock water tanks and cross fences would be a one-time, short duration occurrence to limit disturbance and will not lead to negative cumulative effects on wildlife. Wildlife escape ramps would be placed in the tanks for birds and small mammals.

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 Heritage Program was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located in the vicinity of the project area. There are 2-point observations of Sprague's Pipit in Section 36. No point observations of any species of concern were located in Sections 23. Additionally, these sections are within the polygons for Grizzly Bear and Sprague's Pipit. The Grizzly Bear polygons represent Recovery Zone Boundaries, monitoring areas, and known distribution. The Sprague's Pipit polygons represent a buffer of a minimum of 115 meters from breeding areas.

Construction practices used in the placement of the pipeline and stock water tanks would be a one-time, short duration occurrence to limit disturbance and will not lead to negative cumulative effects on these species of concern.

FWP Biologist, Brent Lonner, commented that escape ramps in the stock water tanks are a good idea.

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 revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. 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 located in a rural part of Lewis & Clark County, approximately 9 miles south southeast of Augusta, MT. The disturbed areas would be reseeded. Pipelines and stock water tanks are typical use of infrastructure in rural Montana and this project would only slightly 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.

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 water to aid in improving livestock distribution and forage utilization.

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 would not negatively alter recreational activities in the area. The improved access to upland water sources may increase use of the 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 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 action affects water availability in dry areas and improves grazing management opportunities. The increased water availability should improve 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 grazing lease for Sections 23 and 36 (which includes a total of 2,198.63 acres) provides approximately \$4,883, which is divided between Montana Tech, Pine Hills School, Capitol Buildings and Common Schools Trusts.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Heidi Crum	Date: 10/6/20
	Title: Helena Unit Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:


Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to install a buried pipeline and stock water tanks on State lands.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Installation of the pipeline and stock water tanks to disperse livestock over the lease and help better utilize the available forage. Mitigations outlined in this analysis are appropriate and sufficient. No long term or cumulative, negative impacts are anticipated from the implementation of this proposal.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne	
	Title: Trust Land Program Manager, Central Land Office	
Signature:		Date: 10/7/2020

Section 23 E½ (T19N-R6W)

Blue/Yellow dashed lines = State Trust Land boundaries. Green dashed lines = fences. Blue dashed line is the proposed pipeline route. Water tank icon is the location of the proposed stock water tank.



Section 36 N½ (T19N-R6W)

Blue/Yellow dashed lines = State Trust Land boundaries. Green dashed lines = fences. Blue dashed line is the proposed pipeline route. Water tank icon is the location of the proposed stock water tank.

