CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Red Rock Ranch Stock Water Improvement Project
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall, 2020
Proponent:	Turner Enterprises, Inc. Red Rock Ranch, Lessee
Location:	Section 24, T11S R10W
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This environmental assessment is being conducted to study effects of a proposed re-development of a spring site, new buried stock water pipeline, and 2 stock tanks to be located on the above referenced Trust Land Tract. The proponent, Turner Enterprises, Inc (TEI) is the lessee of the affected trust land. The pipeline would originate at an existing but dilapidated spring development on Trust Land located in the SWSENE, Section 24, T11S R10W. The buried line would follow the unnamed drainage West, then split where lines would go to each of 2 tanks (see attached aerial photo depiction of the project), Tank No. 1 would be located in the SWNWSE, and Tank No. 2 would be located in the NWNENW. Length of buried pipeline on Trust Land would be approximately 7,200 feet. The purpose of the new line is to provide upland water sources to improve water availability and quality 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, TEI Red Rock Ranch, 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 the MSU Morrill Grant.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

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

Alternative B: Preferred alternative. To approve re-development of the spring, placement of buried stock water pipeline, and 2 stock tanks as requested.

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 1.36 miles of 1¼" - 1½" pipe. Impacts to the soil would be minimized by use of a dozer with a vibra-shank ripper and/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 few naturally occurring water sources to provide for livestock use and distribution. The project would improve water availability and improve bison 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.

Current vegetation is dominated by needle-and-thread grass, Sandberg bluegrass, threadleaf sedge, with some sagebrush in draws. 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.

If approved, the project could increase the availability of water for bison and all species of wildlife.

The spring site would be fenced using jack legs to avoid continued trampling of the site. Wildlife escape ramps will be placed on both tanks.

Dean Waltee, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Biologist for the area, requested that stock tanks be located outside of sagebrush sites as the limited sagebrush in the area provides important winter cover for mule deer and antelope.

The proposed locations of stock tanks are in sites dominated by native grass with no sagebrush on those sites.

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:

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 availability for bison on dry rangeland approximately 1 air mile East of the Red Rock River. The current water source available in the vicinity is directly from the spring site located in Section 24. The surrounding area is dry rangeland and would not impact blue heron habitat.

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 has been determined to be in sage-grouse general habitat as identified by the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. The proposed project site is located approximately 3.5 air miles from an unconfirmed sage-grouse lek. The proposed project includes a re-development of an existing spring development, buried stock water pipeline, and two stock tanks. MSGOT was consulted regarding mitigating impacts to sage grouse general habitat and minimizing effects to sage grouse during construction. MSGOT's response included the conclusion that "the project as requested will not adversely affect sage grouse and will be consistent with Executive Order 12-2015." Their recommendation includes enhanced weed management on the affected site including control of cheatgrass and Japanese brome. The proponent will fence the spring site using jack leg fencing and will install 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. A search of records revealed that no cultural resources were previously recorded on the tract. A field inspection by Chuck Maddox found two cairn lines along the proposed buried pipeline route. The lines were flagged during a subsequent inspection attended by the contracting agents' employee, Vic Hager and Red Rock Ranch Manager, Tyler Hamilton, and will be avoided by equipment while construction is occurring.

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 would result from completion 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.

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, and allow for altering season of use of the affected pasture to late Fall / Winter. Increased water availability would improve operational efficiency of the lessee allowing better distribution of bison 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 improve both bison 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.

This project request is for a lease improvement. There would be no monetary return to the Montana State University Morrill Trust as a result of this project. Approval of the lessee's stock water pipeline request would increase the overall value of the lease by improving water availability and improve livestock distribution on the affected section and adjacent Trust Land.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Charles Maddox	**Date:**	9/4/2020
	Title:	Land Use Specialist		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Preferred alternative. To approve re-development of the spring, placement of buried stock water pipeline, and 2 stock tanks as requested.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Any potential impacts anticipated from this project should be mitigated in the following manner.

- No construction on the project will be allowed before July 15 (MSGOT) of each year due to sage grouse leks and brooding habitat in the work area
- Wildlife escape ramps are required to be installed in all stock tanks
- Proponent needs to restrict all off designated route vehicle travel associated with this project
- Reclamation of construction disturbance may be required depending on amount of ground disturbance
- Any cheatgrass that gets established during construction needs to be controlled by the proponent

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

	EIS		More Detailed EA
X	No Further Analysis		

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Timothy Egan
	Title:	Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan		**Date**: 9/5/2020


Historic / Cultural Site
Historic / Cultural Site
Historic / Cultural Site
Historic / Cultural Site
Stockwater Tank