

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Teton County Road Department – Gravel Pit Site
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2020
Proponent:	Teton County Road Department
Location:	SE¼NW¼ NE¼SW¼ of Section 16, T21N., R6W.
County:	Teton
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Teton County Road Department (TCRD) proposes the removal of gravel with a disturbance/mining area of approximately 8.1 acres (Gravel Pit), located on state land (lease number 1206) in Teton County, MT, referred herein as the "Project". See **Attachment A**, Project Location Maps. The Gravel Pit will provide the materials necessary to improve roads in the surrounding area (Teton, County).

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The project is located on state-owned land and TCRD is the proponent. Agencies involved in the permitting process include the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, (DNRC) - Trust Land Management Division - Minerals Management Bureau and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

Surface Lessee – Lease 1206 - Blenton Ranch (Mark Young, Augusta Montana)

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

TCRD is required to obtain a Permit to Take and Remove Gravel from State Lands (Take and Remove Permit) from the DNRC and an Opencut Permit from DEQ.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action Alternative): Deny TCRD permission to develop the Gravel Pit on state land (lease number 1206).

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Grant TCRD permission to develop the Gravel Pit on state land (lease number 1206).

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.

Soil Quality and Moisture:
There are two types of soils found within the Project footprint.

Windham gravelly loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes:

These soils consist of very deep (more than 60 inches), well-drained soils that formed in alluvium. These soils are found on relict stream terraces. Available water capacity is mainly 3 inches; the mean annual precipitation for the region is 15 to 19 inches (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties Montana, 2003). Per the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey (WSS) this type of soil is rated as “Fair” for a road fill source (NRCS ratings are “good” “fair” and “poor”).

Beanlake-Winspect cobbly loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes:

These soils consist of very deep (more than 60 inches), well-drained soils that formed in alpine till. These soils are found on the footslopes and shoulders of moraines. Available water capacity is 6 to 8.3 inches; the mean annual precipitation for the region is 15 to 19 inches (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties Montana, 2003). Per the NRCS WSS, this type of soil is rated as “Fair” for a road fill source.

Soil Stability:

Soils identified within the Project footprint have a Soil Erodibility (K) Factor of 0.1 to 0.15. The K Factor range is 0.02 to 0.69 (0.69 being the most susceptible to sheet and rill erosion by water). The K Factor is low for the Project site which indicates a low susceptibility to erosion by water.

BMPs:

TCRD proposes to strip and stockpile the topsoil from the Gravel Pit, to be used for reclamation purposes. The topsoil will be stockpiled within and abutting the border of the Project’s permitted area. As part of the stipulations under the Take and Remove Permit, the DNRC will require TCRD to re-grade the disturbed area to match the surrounding landscape to not leave a depression.

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. The Project has the potential to impacts soils, however, given its suitability as road fill, its low susceptibility to erosion, relatively flat landscape, and the implementation of the BMP’s described above, the Project is not expected to have cumulative impacts on soil.

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.

Surface or Groundwater Resources:

There are no diversion points for irrigation located within the Project footprint. There are known Points of Diversion (PODs) located approximately 0.4 miles northeast on Clemon’s Coulee and Reservoir, which flows southeast. The Project footprint falls within Places of Use (POUs) under Water Rights 41K 21521400, 41K 21631700, and 41K 2218700, for additional information see <http://wrqs.dnrc.mt.gov/>.

BMPs:

As part of the Opencut Mining Act, Title 82, Chapter 4, Part 4, MCA, TCRD is required to abide by Water Protection regulation [MeA 82-4"434(3)(I)J & [ARM 17.24.218(J)(e)J & [ARM 17.24.219(J)(c)(ii)J and Water Management and Use regulation under [MeA 82-4-434(3)(1)] & [ARM 17.24.2J8(J)(e)j].

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. The Project has the potential to impact Clemon’s Coulee and Reservoir located approximately 0.4 miles northeast of the Project site, however, given the BMPs described above Project activities are not expected to result in cumulative impacts on water resources.

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:

There are no Nonattainment areas located on or near the Project, per the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Nonattainment area maps (NEPAssist, 2020). New air emissions can occur from the processing of gravel on the Project site through fine particulate matter becoming airborne.

BMPs:

TCRD will maintain compliance with the Clean Air Act of Montana, Title 75, Chapter 2, as required by DEQ.

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. The Project has the potential to add new air emissions within the Project vicinity during active mining operations, however, with the implementation of the above BMP and the short duration of the Project (1 year), it is not expected to have cumulative impacts on air quality.

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.

Vegetative Community:

Vegetation on the Project site consists of native grasses; a Field Evaluation conducted by DNRC staff on 6/23/20 determined native grass species on lease 1206 consist of Western wheatgrass (*Agropyron smithii*), Bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*), Blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), Prairie junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*), Threadleaf sedge (*Carex filifolia*), and Needle-and-thread (*Stipa comata*). Noxious weeds were not reported within the Project footprint. The Natural Heritage Program database indicated two plant species of concern within Township 21N, Range 6W: Great Basin Downingia, (*Downingia laeta*), and Wood Lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*), though neither were identified within the Project footprint.

BMPs:

Compliance with the Take and Remove Permit will require TCRD to reclaim the Gravel Pit. Reclamation includes re-grading the disturbed area to match the surrounding landscape to not leave a depression, replacing topsoil, re-seeding with a native seed mix, and monitoring for noxious weeds. The recommended re-seeding mix shall consist of 35% Western wheatgrass (*Agropyron smithii*), 35% Slender wheatgrass (*Agropyron trachycaulum*), 15% Bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*), 10% Green needlegrass (*Stipa viridula*), and 5% Lewis blue flax (*Linum lewisii*) or Purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*). The mix shall be Certified Noxious Weed Seed Free, drilled at a seeding rate of 8 lbs/acre Pure Live Seed (PLS), if broadcast seeding, poundage shall be doubled and harrowed, and seeding shall occur either in the fall (after September 15) or early spring (before May 1).

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. Project activities will result in a temporary disturbance of the vegetative community within the Project footprint. The BMPs proposed above will mitigate any long-term adverse effects and therefore cumulative impacts on vegetative resources are not expected.

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.

Habitat:

The Project site is not considered Critical Habitat per the EPA. The surrounding area provides habitat for a variety of big game species, predators, upland game birds, other non-game mammals, birds of prey, and various songbirds. The Clemon's Coulee and Reservoir provide habitat for waterfowl species and are known to contain stocked and natural fish species.

BMPs:

Impacts on wildlife will be temporary (e.g. noise impacts during active mining days). Compliance with the Take and Remove Permit will require TCRD to reclaim the Gravel Pit. Reclamation includes re-grading the disturbed area to match the surrounding landscape to not leave a depression, replacing topsoil, re-seeding with a native seed mix, and monitoring for noxious weeds. As part of the Opencut Mining Act, Title 82, Chapter 4, Part 4, MCA, TCRD is required to abide by Water Protection regulation [MeA 82-4'434(3)(I)J & [ARM 17.24.218(J)(e)J

& [ARM 17.24.219(J)(c)(ii)J and Water Management and Use regulation under [MeA 82-4-434(3)(1)] & [ARM 17.24.2J8(J)(e)j].

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. The Project will have a temporary disturbance on wildlife habitat within the vicinity of Project activities and a potential effect on aquatic habitat, however, with the implementation of the BMPs described above, cumulative impacts on wildlife and aquatic habitats are not expected.

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.

Species of Concern/Threatened/Endangered:

Federally listed species that occur in Teton County, Montana include Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Red Knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), Wolverine (*Gulo luscus*), and Whitebark Pine (*Pinus albicaulis*).

The National Heritage Program database identifies Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), Common Loon (*Gavia immer*), Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), and McCown's Longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) as species of concern within Township 21N, Range 6W.

Per the Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks – Choteau Unit, Clemon's Reservoir contains stocked Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and Tiger Muskie (*Esox masquinongy* X *Esox lucius*), as well as native Walleye (*Sander vitreus*) and forage fish species (Katie Vivian, Region 4 Fish Biologist).

Wetlands:

The National Wetland Inventory identifies a Freshwater Pond habitat with a classification code of PABF and Freshwater Emergent Wetland habitats with classification codes PEM1C and PEM1F approximately 0.4 miles northeast of the Project site; for a complete description of wetland classification codes go to <https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/Mapper.html>. Project activities could potentially impact wetlands through stormwater run-off.

BMPs:

Impacts on wildlife will be temporary (e.g. noise impacts during active mining days). Compliance with the Take and Remove Permit will require TCRD to reclaim the Gravel Pit. Reclamation includes re-grading the disturbed area to match the surrounding landscape to not leave a depression, replacing topsoil, re-seeding with a native seed mix, and monitoring for noxious weeds. As part of the Opencut Mining Act, Title 82, Chapter 4, Part 4, MCA, TCRD is required to abide by Water Protection regulation [MeA 82-4"434(3)(I)J & [ARM 17.24.218(J)(e)J & [ARM 17.24.219(J)(c)(ii)J and Water Management and Use regulation under [MeA 82-4-434(3)(1)] & [ARM 17.24.2J8(J)(e)j].

Determination:

Effect, Not likely to Adversely Effect. The Project has the potential to temporarily impact identified species on or near the Project site and their habitats, however, with the implementation of the BMPs described above cumulative impacts on species and their habitats are not expected.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Historical and Archeological Sites:

The DNRC archaeologist conducted a Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory of the Project's area of potential effect. Despite a detailed examination, no such resources were identified.

Determination:

Proposed Gravel Pit expansion work will have No Effect on Antiquities as defined in the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

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.

Visual and Noise:

The Project is located approximately 5.5 miles north of Augusta, Montana (population 309), adjacent to Young Road, and approximately 0.4 miles southwest of Clemon's Coulee and Reservoir, a public recreation site.

BMPs:

Compliance with the Take and Remove Permit will require TCRD to reclaim the Gravel Pit. Reclamation includes re-grading the disturbed area to match the surrounding landscape to not leave a depression, replacing topsoil, re-seeding with a native seed mix, and monitoring for noxious weeds.

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. The Project has the potential to have visual and noise impacts to the public who utilize Young Road and Clemon's Coulee and Reservoir. Given that the Project is expected to be completed by August 30, 2021, and Gravel Pit reclamation is required, it is not expected to have cumulative impacts on aesthetics.

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.

Environmental Resource Demand:

The Project is expected to take a total gravel quantity of no more than 10,000 cubic yards before August 30, 2021. The Project is located approximately 5.5 miles north of Augusta, Montana (population 309), adjacent to Young Road, and approximately 0.4 miles southwest of Clemon's Coulee and Reservoir, a public recreation site.

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. The Project has the potential to affect land resources and visual resources to the public who utilize Young Road and Clemon's Coulee and Reservoir. However, given that the Project will restore the existing historical Gravel Pit to match the surrounding landscape and the duration of the Project's active lifespan of 1 year, it is not expected to have cumulative impacts on environmental resources.

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.

Surrounding land is owned by the state with a surface use of grazing under lease 1206. As part of condition #15 of the grazing lease the state reserves the ability to lease mineral rights of this tract. Any future development in the area will likely be restricted to utility or mineral development, with minimal impacts to the surface. Future development of projects is not expected to have negative cumulative impacts.

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.

Determination:

No Effect. Any risk to human health and safety will be restricted to personnel on the construction crew performing the work and it is assumed TCRD will abide by all Occupational Safety and Health Administration laws.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Land Use:

The Project footprint is located on grazing land lease number 1206.

BMPs:

Compliance with the Take and Remove Permit will require TCRD to reclaim the Gravel Pit. Reclamation includes re-grading the disturbed area to match the surrounding landscape to not leave a depression, replacing topsoil, re-seeding with a native seed mix, and monitoring for noxious weeds.

Determination:

Effect, Beneficial Effect. The Project will provide the materials necessary to improve roads in the surrounding area (Teton, County), which will result in improved travel and safety conditions. The Project is not expected to have negative cumulative impacts on existing and future land activities on lease number 1206.

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.

Determination:

Effect, Beneficial Effect. The Project will have a beneficial impact through increased employment opportunities for this region. Negative and long-term cumulative impacts on the employment market are not expected.

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.

Determination:

Effect, Beneficial Effect. The Project will add to the tax revenue, negative cumulative impacts on taxes, and revenue are not expected.

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

Determination:

Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. Project activities have the potential to slow traffic on Young Road due to gravel truck hauling, however, given that the operation is of a small scale and for an active life-span of one year it is not expected to have a negative cumulative impact on government services.

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.

Determination:

No Effect. The Project is in compliance with State laws and TCRD is in the process of obtaining all necessary permits to complete the project, see **Section II (2)** for a full list of permits.

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.

Legal Access and Recreation Opportunities:

The Project is located on legally accessible land via County Road (Young Road). Recreation potential consists of hunting and fishing.

Determination:

No Effect. The Project will not result in any permanent impacts to the land, impact access, or recreational opportunities. The Project is not expected to have cumulative impacts on recreational and wilderness activities.

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.

Determination:

No Effect. The Project is a small scale and proposed by TCRD a local governmental agency, it is not expected to have negative cumulative impacts on population and housing demands.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Determination:

No Effect. The Project is located approximately 55 miles south of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. No archeological sites were identified within the Project footprint. Negative cumulative impacts on social structures are not expected.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Determination:

No Effect. Project activities include reclamation of the Gravel Pit and therefore it is not expected to cumulatively impact 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 Project will benefit the School Trust in terms of compensation for a one-time application fee of \$25 and will receive approximately \$15,000 in royalties for the 10,000 cubic yards of aggregate (\$1.50/yard) that will be removed from the Project site.

Any future development in the area will likely be restricted to utility or mineral development, with minimal impacts to the surface. Future development of projects is not expected to have negative cumulative impacts.

The Gravel Pit will provide the materials necessary to improve roads in the surrounding area (Teton, County).

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Michaela Hanson	Date: 9/1//2020
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Grant TCRD permission to develop the Gravel Pit on state land (lease number 1206).

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are expected. A temporary disturbance will occur as a result of proposed action, but it has been determined that the effects will not be cumulative or significantly adverse. Granting of the permit will benefit trust beneficiaries and residents of Teton County through improving road conditions.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Erik Eneboe Title: Conrad Unit Manager, CLO
Signature: 	Date: 9/25/20

Attachment A
Project Location Maps

Teton County Proposed Gravel Site

Legend

 Young Road Gravel Plt

