CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	E Hanging T Ranch Co/DNRC State Trust Lands Reciprocal Easement for Administrative Access
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring/Summer 2021
Proponent:	E Hanging T Ranch Co and MT DNRC State Trust Lands Division
Location:	N2NW4, NW4NE4, Section 35, T31N, R20E – 120 acres Lots 1 & 2, S2NE4, Section 4, T30N, R20E – 160.29 acres E2, Section 3, T30N, R20E – 320 acres W2, N2NE4, Section 17, T30N, R20E – 400 acres Lots 1,2,3,4, E2W2, Section 18, T30N, R20E – 330.68 acres Lot 1, E2NW4, SE4, Section 19, T30N, R20E – 282.66
County:	Blaine County
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The DNRC and E Hanging T Ranch Co are proposing a reciprocal easement agreement for administrative access. Through the reciprocal easement agreement, E Hanging T Ranch Co would receive administrative access to approximately 6900 acres of deeded land and DNRC would receive administrative access to approximately 2200 acres of state land. The proposed agreement utilizes an existing road system that cross approximately 2.94 miles (14.25 acres) of state land and 5.27 miles (25.55 acres) of deeded land. The proposed reciprocal administrative access easement would be 40.00' wide on the existing road.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

DNRC – Surface Owner and Proponent
E Hanging T Ranch Co – Deeded Landowner, Surface Lessee, and Proponent (Leases #1391, #1392, #2566)
Gordon Cattle Co – Surface Lessee of Lots 1,2,3,4, E2W2 of Section 18, T30N R20E

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

No other government permits are needed.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Deny the reciprocal easement for administrative access.

No Action Alternative: Approve the reciprocal easement for administrative access.

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.

Soils and geology in this area are generally suitable for road use. The proponents will use the existing road and no road improvements will occur. The existing road surface is covered with existing surface gravel. No grading or graveling of the existing road will occur.

No cumulative effects to the soils are anticipated.

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.

No significant surface or groundwater resources will be impacted by the proposed easements as the road is existing and no road improvements will occur.

No adverse impacts are anticipated regarding water quality and/or quantity.

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.

The proposed easement will not consist of any disturbance to soils, therefore no cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

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.

The vegetation within the proposed project area consists primarily of native rangeland grasses, forbs, and shrubs. An existing road will be used, and no construction has been proposed at this time. No impact to the existing vegetation is anticipated.

A review of the Montana Natural Heritage database was conducted for tracts involved. There were no plant species of concern observations noted on the survey.

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 proposal does not include any land use change which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or traveling corridors. Nor will this action change the proximity to wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. The proposed action will not have significant adverse impacts on existing wildlife species and/or wildlife habitat.

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 review of the Montana Natural Heritage database was conducted for the tracts involved in this project proposal. There were 10 species of concern noted on the survey:

- Fish – Northern Redbelly Dace & Northern Pearl Dace
- Bird – Bobolink, Long-billed Curlew, Sprague's Pipit, Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Brewer's Sparrow
- Mammal – Black-trailed Prairie Dog
- Reptile – Greater Short-horned Lizard

The proposed action is not anticipated to have any impact on the threatened, endangered, sensitive habitat types, or other species of concern as an existing road will be used and no road construction will take place.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

No historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources will be present due to the disturbance caused by the construction of the existing road. No road improvements will take place to the existing road, so no cultural resources will be impacted by this proposal.

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 state land does not provide any unique scenic qualities not also provided on adjacent private lands. The proposed action will use an existing road and no road construction will take place, so there would be no change to the aesthetics in either alternative.

No direct or cumulative effects to aesthetics are anticipated.

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 significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tracts listed on this EA.

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 significant adverse impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The proponents will use an existing road and no road improvements will occur. The reciprocal access agreement will benefit in the future agricultural management of both DNRC and private lands.

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 action will have no significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

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.

The proposed action will have no adverse impact on tax revenue.

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

There will be no direct or cumulative effects 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.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans. Any further development of the State or private land would require review additional local government review.

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 wildemess activities.

The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational activities on state land because the access agreement will not include general public access for recreation.

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.

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

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

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

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

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness 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 reciprocal easement will net a $4293.00 payment to the E Hanging T Ranch Co from the DNRC. The access agreement will also improve long term management of land owned by E Hanging T Ranch Co and the DNRC.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Jocee Hedrick	**Date:**	05 May 2021
	Title:	Lewistown Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Approve the reciprocal easement for administrative access.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are anticipated.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

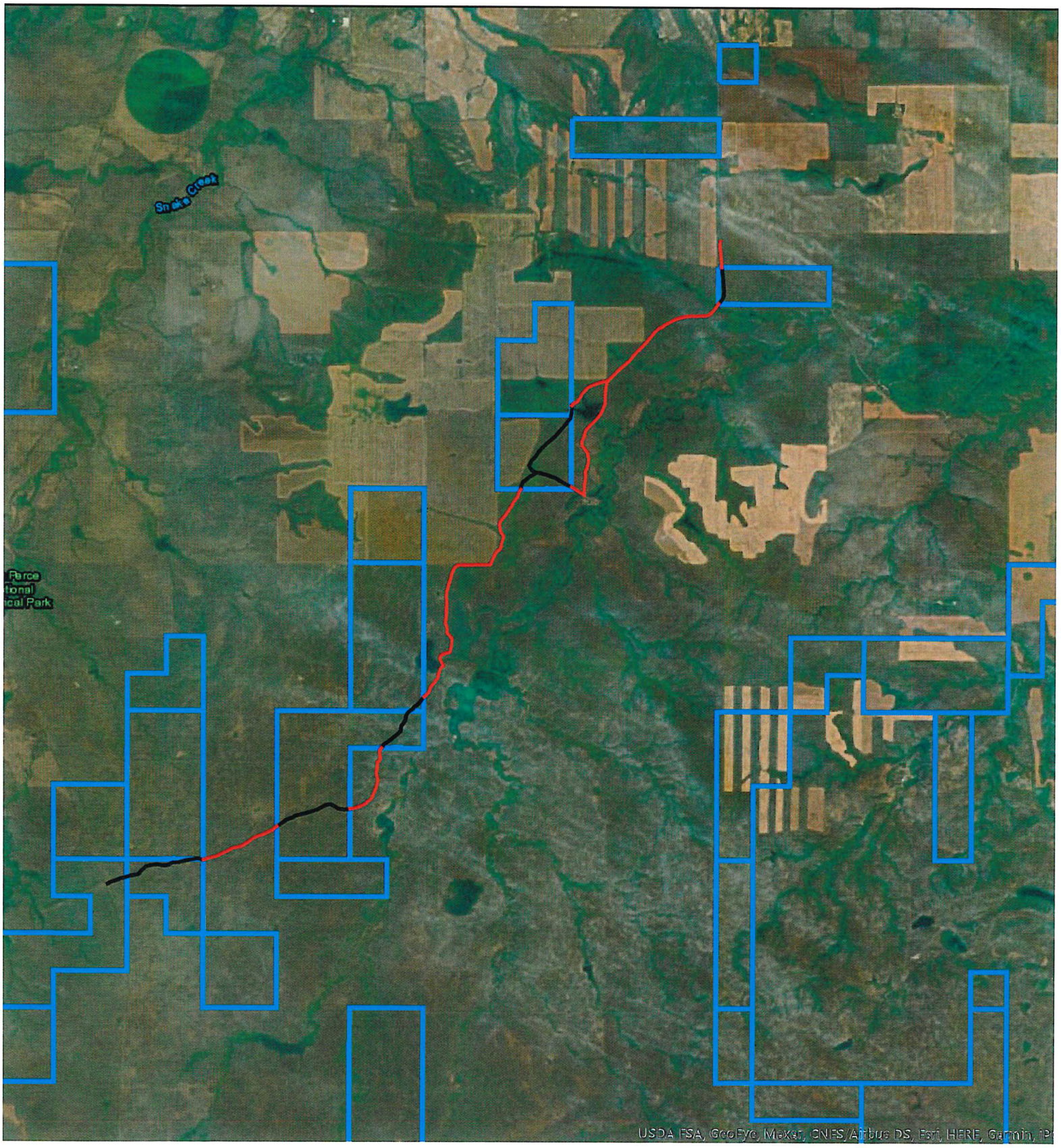
EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Clive Rooney
	Title:	Area Manager, Northeastern Land Office
Signature:		**Date:** 5-5-21

E Hanging T Ranch Road RoW Map

The proposed RoW exchange would open up approximately 2200 acres of state land. The Easement would be encompass approximately 25.55 acres of private land acres at a rough estimate of $380/acre for remote grazing for an estimated value of $9708.00. The State easement would encompass approximately 14.25 acres at an estimated value of $5415.00.

N E S W

1 2 4 Miles

Private Road (5.27 Miles

State Road (2.94 miles)