

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND RECLASSIFICATION CAPABILITY INVENTORY

Project Name: Lease 7753 Reclassification of Grazing Land to Agricultural land	Proposed Implementation Date: Spring of 2022
Proponent: Siccum Ag LLC (Lessee)	
Project Description: The Lessee proposes the reclassification of 67.66 acres classified as 'Grazing' on state land lease no. 7753 located in Sec. 36, T36N., R11E.; in Hill County, MT, to 'Agricultural' acres, referred herein as the "Project". See Attachment A - Project Location Map. The Lessee is proposing to convert the 67.66 acres grazing acres into agricultural acres. Per Administrative Rule of Montana (ARM) 36.25.108 (2) The department shall classify and reclassify land in accordance with its capability to support a particular use. The purpose of the conversion from grazing acres to agricultural is to increase revenue on state lease no. 7753 with a land use that aligns with the Lessee's current operations while maintaining the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) land sustainability goals.	
Type of Reclassification: FROM: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grazing <input type="checkbox"/> Timber <input type="checkbox"/> Ag <input type="checkbox"/> Other TO: <input type="checkbox"/> Grazing <input type="checkbox"/> Timber <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ag <input type="checkbox"/> Other ACRES: 67.66	
Location: Sec. 36, T36N., R11E.	County: Hill

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	
1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	The Lessee, Siccum Ag LLC, is the proponent. Agencies involved in the Project include the DNRC, Trust Lands Management Division.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	The DNRC is not aware of any other permits required for the Project on state land described as Sec. 36, T36N., R11E.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	Alternative A (Proposed Action): Grant the reclassification request and convert 67.66 acres of grazing land (Class 1) to agricultural land (Class 3). Alternative B (No Action): Deny the reclassification request.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below) <i>LAND CAPABILITY CHARACTERISTICS</i>
4. GEOLOGY, SOILS AND MINERALS: Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations? <i>Are there any mineral characteristics and how would reclassification impact development? If any lands are proposed for breaking, what are the soil types & capability classes, texture, "T" factor, Wind Erodibility Group (WEG), and slopes? What crops will be grown and what are their potential yields? Will there be any mitigation measures implemented to address identified soil limitations?</i>	[Y] The soil textures are loam to loam clay. Class 3e soils with a T-factor of 5 make up over 91.4% of the proposed "breaking" area. Only 8% of the soils are Class 4e with a T-factor of 5. 98.4% of the soils in the proposed "break" area have a WEG of 6; with 0.6%. The lessee has proposed to spray out the existing grass stand and directly seed into the acreage without any tillage to mitigate the risk of erosion. The soils are more than 30 inches in depth above bedrock and 91.4% have slopes between 0-8%; the remaining have slopes between 4-25% slopes and will be avoided to protect against erosion. The water table is more than 30 inches below the surface during the growing season. The lessee plans to grow small grains using a no-till system and a summer fallow rotation. The Web Soil Survey application could not provide potential yields for this area, but crops are being grown on all adjacent deeded lands.
5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?	[N] There are two surface or groundwater resources identified adjacent to the Project footprint. The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies a Freshwater Emergent Wetland with a classification code of PEM1A and a Riverine with classification codes of R4SBC and app. .16 miles southeast of the Project site. For a complete description of wetland, classification codes go to https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/Mapper.html . With the implementation of husband like agricultural practices and compliance with DNRC Breaking Policy cumulative impacts on water quality are not expected.
6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	[N] There are no nonattainment areas located on or near the Project per the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Nonattainment area maps (NEPAssist, 2021). Project activities are not expected to result in increased pollutants or particulates in the air and therefore, cumulative impacts on air quality are not expected.
7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present? <i>What is the existing vegetation?</i>	[N] Vegetation within the Project footprint consists of an established stand of tame grass species. A site visit conducted by DNRC staff on 11/09/2021 determined the tame grass site consists of nearly all Crested Wheatgrass (<i>Agropyron cristatum</i>).
8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish? <i>What wildlife resources use or occupy the area?</i>	[N] The Project site is not considered Critical Habitat per the EPA (NEPAssist 2021). The tract provides habitat for a variety of big game species, predators, upland game birds, ground-nesting birds, and small mammals. Moderate grazing will not impact habitat and with ARM 36.25.121(1) cumulative negative impacts to habitat are not expected.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<p>9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>[N] Although endangered species occur in this region critical habitats or endangered species were not identified within the Project footprint, therefore, cumulative impacts on endangered species are not expected.</p> <p>The National Wetland Inventory did not identify a wetland within the Project footprint. The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies a Freshwater Emergent Wetland with a classification code of PEM1A within the project site and a Riverine with a classification code of R4SBC app. .16 miles southeast of the Project site. For a complete description of wetland, classification codes go to https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/Mapper.html.</p> <p>Project activities are not expected to affect the identified wetlands adjacent to the Project footprint, and therefore, cumulative effects on limited resources are not expected.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: <i>Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</i></p>	<p>[N] 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. Because the area of potential effect was previously cultivated, 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.</p>
<p>11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light? <i>Are there notable aesthetic features on the tract?</i></p>	<p>[N] The Project is located app. 50 miles north of Box Elder, Montana and the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation. The Project will not result in any above-ground structures, significant change in the landscape, and/or noise impacts will not increase in this area as a result of the Project. Therefore, impacts to visual and noise resources are not expected.</p>
<p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? <i>Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?</i></p>	<p>[N] Tame pasture may be a limited resource for wildlife populations in the area. Tame pasture may provide habitat for a variety of big game species, predators, upland game birds, ground nesting birds, and small mammals but better native rangeland is available on the tract and in greater abundance. Conversion to agriculture on this small piece will not impact habitat and with ARM 36.25.121(1) cumulative negative impacts to habitat are not expected.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE</p>	<p>[N] Surrounding lands are owned by private</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<p>AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p>landowners and state and federal agencies with a mixed surface use of agricultural grain production, grazing, and recreational use. Any future development in the area will likely be restricted to these types of land uses and perhaps utility development, with non-significant impacts to the surface. Future development projects are not expected to have negative cumulative impacts.</p>
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III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS & CAPABILITY CHARACTERISTICS
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>[N] Any risk to human health and safety will be restricted to the Lessee or individual performing the farming activities. Farming and ranching activities can increase the ranchers or farmers exposure to pesticides that are used for managing weeds, respiratory diseases, noise-induced hearing loss from loud machinery, and skin disorders from working long hours in the sun. Farming and ranching activities have the potential to increase exposure to health hazards, however, if the personnel involved with the Project activities employ prevention measures it is not expected to result in cumulative impacts on health and safety.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>[Y] Current land use on lease no. 7753 consists of 320.58 grazing acres and 318.42 agricultural acres. If the Project proceeds with Alternative A, lease no. 7753, the revenue produced from agricultural conversion will most likely exceed the current revenue from grazing. On this tract, 67.66 areas of tame pasture = 20.98 AUMs; 12.83 per AUM x 20.98 AUMs = \$272.32 per year. When converted to \$32.00/ acre cash lease, 67.66 acres x \$32 per acre. = \$2165.12 per year.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p>[N] The Project will not result in any new jobs nor eliminate any, therefore cumulative effects to the employment market are not expected.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>[Y] See Section 15 above. The Project will add to tax revenues due to the revenue generated by general ranching and grazing activities. Negative cumulative impacts on tax revenues are not expected.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?</p>	<p>[N] Project activities on the tract are not expected to impact traffic or increase the demand for government services, and therefore, it is not expected to have negative cumulative impacts on them.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>[N] The DNRC classifies and reclassifies state land in accordance with its capability to support a particular use. The following classes are established</p>

	<p>in accordance with 77-1-401, MCA:</p> <p>(a) Class 1 shall be grazing land (b) Class 2 shall be timber land (c) Class 3 shall be agricultural land (d) Class 4 shall be cabin sites and land uses other than grazing, timber or agricultural.</p> <p>Reclassification of land, if to occur, is not expected to affect the Project and therefore cumulative impacts are not expected.</p>
<p>20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? <i>Is the land legally accessible and is there recreational potential within the tract?</i></p>	<p>[N] The Project is located on legally accessible land via Road 190 N. Recreation potential consists of hunting, hiking, birding, etc. Agricultural activities will have minimal impact on the recreational opportunity on the Project site due to the small size of the project and the large size of adjacent native rangeland and therefore, cumulative negative impacts are not expected.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p>[N] The Project will not require additional housing and is not expected to have cumulative impacts on population and housing.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>[N] The Project is located ~ 50 miles north of Box Elder, Montana and the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation. No archeological sites were identified within the Project footprint. The local area is mostly agricultural hence this project will integrate into the local area appropriately.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>[N] The Project will not result in any new activities to occur in the area and therefore, it is not expected to cumulatively impact the unique quality of the area.</p>
<p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</p>	<p>[Y] The Project will benefit the Common School Trust in terms of a grazing lease on lease no. 7753, see Section 15 above. In addition, this area consists of agricultural use, in which, additional agricultural land will aligns well with the Lessee's future management plan.</p>

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative A (Proposed Action): Grant the reclassification request and convert 67.66 acres of grazing land (Class 1) to agricultural land (Class 3).

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are expected from this reclassification. Converting to agricultural land is considered the highest and best use and will provide higher long-term revenue. Reclassifying the grazing land to agricultural land will help meet the DNRC, TLMD objectives by increasing revenue trust beneficiaries in a sustainable manner.

27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

Jocee Hedrick

Name

Lewistown Unit Manager, NELO

Title



Signature

June 6, 2022

Date

V. RECLASSIFICATION RECOMMENDATION AND APPROVAL

28. Land Office Recommendation, including Highest and Best Use:

Recommend reclassification request and convert 67 acres of grazing land (Class 1) to agricultural land (Class 3).

Name

Title

Signature

Date

29. Recommendation by Bureau Chief:

Reasons for Recommendation:

Bureau Chief Signature

Date

30. Final Decision on Reclassification by Trust Land Management Division Administrator:

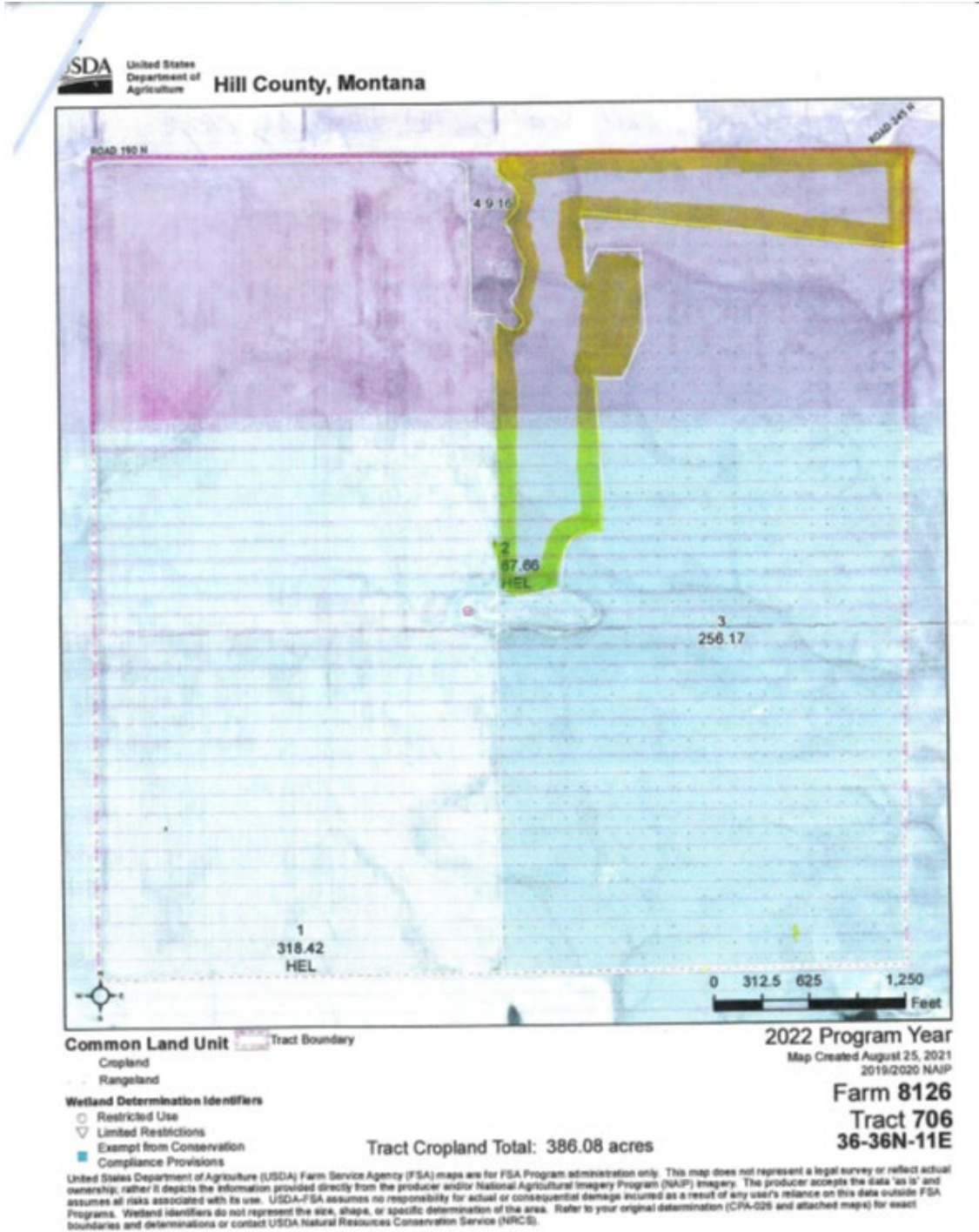
Approve

Deny

Signature

Date

Attachment A
Project Location



Attachment B
Soil Characteristics

Soil Type	~ Acres within Project Footprint	~ Percent of Project Footprint	Fragile Rating	Susceptibility to Compaction	Farmland Classification Summary	Percent Sand	T Factor	WEG
173E ¹	1.10	2.17	Not rated	Medium	Not Prime Farmland	38.80	2	4L
377C ²	39.30	77.36	Not rated	Medium	Not Prime Farmland	34.50	3	4L
776C ³	10.40	20.47	Not rated	Medium	Not Prime Farmland	38.80	2	4L
Totals	50.80	100.00						

Fragile Soils Summary

Rating	Acres in Project Footprint	Percent of Project Footprint
Not Rated	50.80	100.00
Totals	50.80	100.00

T Factor Summary

Rating	Acres in Project Footprint	Percent of Project Footprint
2	11.50	22.64
3	39.30	77.36
Totals	50.80	100.00

Susceptibility to Compaction Summary

Rating	Acres in Project Footprint	Percent of Project Footprint
Medium	50.80	100.00
Totals	50.80	100.00

WEG Summary

Rating	Acres in Project Footprint	Percent of Project Footprint
4L	50.80	100.00
Totals	50.80	100.00

Farmland Classification Summary

Rating	Acres in Project Footprint	Percent of Project Footprint
Not prime farmland	50.80	100.00
Totals	50.80	100.00

Percent Sand Summary

Rating	Acres in Project Footprint	Percent of Project Footprint
1-25%	0.00	0.00
25-50%	50.80	100.00
50-75%	0.00	0.00
75-100%	0.00	0.00
Totals	50.80	100.00

1 173 - Cabbart-Delpoint loams, 15 to 35 percent slopes
 2 377C - Marmarth-Delpoint-Cabbart complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes
 3 776C - Delpoint-Cabbart-Rootel loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes

End of Documentation