

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	BLM Wolverine Creek Road Easement Application EA
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	Summer & Fall 2015, & 2016
<b>Proponent:</b>	Bureau Of Land Management, Dillon Field Office
<b>Location:</b>	Sections 1,12,13,& 14, Township 13 South – Range 5 West (Common School Trust)
<b>County:</b>	Beaverhead County

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Dillon Field Office has applied for an easement across state lands in Sections 1, 12, 13, & 14, T 13S, R5W in the Wolverine Creek drainage of the Centennial Valley. These sections are lands that the DNRC acquired in a land exchange with the BLM in 1988. As part of the trade, the BLM retained a 60 foot easement across the existing Wolverine Creek Road #9657 for public access to federal lands to the north of the state sections. The BLM is responsible for the maintenance of the road.

Since 1988 there have been a number of land sales in the valley which caused changes in how road #9657 was used. A portion of the road crossed deeded property in Section 7, T12S – R 4W. When Section 7 was purchased by the Matador Cattle Company the Ranch closed the road to the public, thus eliminating access to BLM & Forest Service lands in the West Creek and Peterson Basin drainages.

In response the public created a new road across the state sections to access the federal lands. These new roads were not part of the original road easement that the BLM retained. In addition the new roads impacted a number of perennial streams on state lands causing water quality issues at three of the crossings.

The existing easement was a 60 foot road easement (30 feet each side of the center line). The easement that was retained by the BLM was never surveyed. To remedy some of the existing problems with the easement, and prodding by the DNRC, Dillon Unit the BLM has decided to apply for a new easement across state land and relinquish their existing easement. The new easement will better reflect how the public is currently using the road, will be surveyed, and will be moved off of all private lands. The BLM will also install culverts at the stream crossings to fix the water quality issues that exist. The new road easement will be re-routed to avoid some existing wet areas where rutting is occurring, and move the road onto dryer ground. The new easement that is being applied for will be a forty foot easement, 20 feet on both sides of the center line.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

**1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:**  
*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

Bureau of Land Management, Dillon Field Office  
Department of Fish Wildlife & Parks,  
Dean Waltee Wildlife Biologist  
Kerry Wahl, FWP Warden

Matt Jaeger, Fisheries Biologist  
Martin Miller, Montana Heritage Foundation,  
Patrick Renee, DNRC Archeologist  
Kyle Hardin, Matador Cattle Company (lessee of State Lands)  
Robert Dixon, Santana Ranch (lessee of State Lands)

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

No other governmental agencies have Jurisdiction over the easement. The BLM will need to secure 124 permits to install the culverts into the perennial streams if the easement is granted.

**3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

**No Action Alternative:** Deny the Bureau of Land Management an easement across state lands in the Wolverine Creek Drainage.

**Action Alternative:** Provide the Bureau of Land Management a 40 foot easement over state land in sections 1, 12, 13, & 14 T13S, R5W, in the Wolverine Creek Drainage of Beaverhead County.

**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.*

This proposed road easement would pass through 4 different soil types identified by the NRCS soil survey that took place in the Centennial Valley. The soil types listed include, 972B Dutchhollow, frequently ponded-Truaxcree-Crookedrun complex, 0 to 4%, 138c Philipsburg-Maciver complex, 2 to 8 % slopes, 2C Trailhollow loam, 2 to 8 % slopes, 945F Ratioppeak, very stony-complex 0 to 4 %, 928C Dutchhollow-Medicinelodge-Foolhen complex, 1 to 6 % slopes frequently flooded.

Soil characteristics vary by soil type, however all soils are derived from alluvium with loam soils being present in all of the soils in varying degrees, from loam, to clay loam, gravelly loam, very gravelly loam and frequently flooded loams.

Most of the soils will rut when wet and rutting is present and frequent on the majority of the road easement as it currently exists. Frequent maintenance is required with a road in these soil types. The road has been in place for a long time and is used for ranching purposes as well as recreation use especially during the hunting season. Rutting is not excessive except in low areas where people drive out of the road prism to avoid wet areas to avoid getting stuck. This proposal will move the road out of some of these areas on to higher ground to help alleviate some of the rutting and people being stuck in the road when wet conditions exist.

No Action Alternative: will result in continued rutting in low areas and people frequently getting stuck during wet periods of use in the creek crossings and low areas. This causes rutting and soil compaction.

Action Alternative: will result in the BLM performing some maintenance of the road. The BLM will also install five culverts in the stream crossings, and the road being moved out of areas of frequent flooding. Rutting of the road will still occur during wet season use, however the majority of the road will only sustain minor rutting and all of the stream crossings will be fixed.

**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 road crosses, Second Wolverine Creek twice, First Wolverine Creek once and the north fork of First Wolverine creek once before entering BLM lands. All of these streams are perennial streams and have the potential to deliver to the Red Rock River. The crossings in their current condition are wide and flat with loam soils causing disturbance every time a vehicle crosses the creeks. Motorists frequently get stuck in the crossings causing major rutting that also contributes sediment to the streams. This sediment may make it all of the way to the Red Rock River which supports an Arctic Graying population. Most of the damage to the streams occurred when the Matador Cattle Company closed the road through deeded property causing people to move the road to reach public lands for hunting purposes. Three of the worst stream crossing are due to the road being moved off of the original road easement that the BLM retained in the 1988 Muddy Creek land exchange. This application would fix many of the current problems that are occurring to water quality deficiencies that currently exist.

No Action Alternative: The road would stay in its current condition and continue to deliver sediment into the creeks and Red Rock River.

Action Alternative: The easement would be granted. Culverts and better stream crossing locations would be identified , and water quality conditions in First, Second, and North Fork of Wolverine Creeks would improve.

**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.*

This proposal is located in a remote area away from any urban settings. The area in the Centennial Valley has good air quality, and good dispersion. The project is not located in a Class 1 non- attainment zone. If approved the proposal would not create much disturbance and little to no change in air quality standards would occur.

No Action Alternative: The road condition would remain in its current condition and no additional dust or air quality disturbance would occur.

Action Alternative: A short term increase of dust and particulate would occur during the construction phase of the project, but no long term or cumulative impacts would be anticipated from this alternative.

**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 area is a mixture of native grasslands with the dominant decreaser species being Bluebunch Wheat grass, Bluegrass species, slender Wheatgrass, Basin Wildrye, and pubescent Wheatgrass. There isn't much sage brush present on any of these sections. In checking the records the area was treated with spike in 1998 and it did a good job of removing nearly all of the sage brush in the area.

The area is identified as core sage grouse habitat however, in its current condition due to herbicide treatment the area does not have the habitat to support the birds at this time.

**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.*

A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors and songbirds potentially use this area. The majority of the sage brush on the sections was removed in with herbicide treatment in 1998. The area sustains heavy hunting pressure during the first two weeks of the big game hunting season with large camps of hunters using the area with atv's and horses.

**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, NRIS was contacted regarding species of concern within the project area. No endangered species were listed within the project area. However the area is listed as core sage grouse habitat. There were six sensitive species of concern identified in the area including; Greater Sage Grouse, Pygmy Rabbit, Wolverine, Little Brown Myotis, Hoary Bat and Ferruginous Hawk.

Greater Sage-grouse (***Centrocercus urophasianus***) Greater sage Grouse use has been recorded in the project area and is listed as core sage grouse habitat. The FWP has identified 2 leks in the vicinity of the proposal. The first lek is approximately 0.6 miles away from the junction of the North Centennial Road and Wolverine Creek Road and the second is 0.8 miles from the same junction. Sections 1, 10, 11, 12, and 14 were treated with the herbicide Spike in 1998 to remove the heavy sage brush component from the range. The project was approved by the DNRC at that time and was successful in removing the sage brush from the sections of state land that this proposal for a new road easement travels through. At this time the area does have the necessary habitat for sustained sage grouse use due to a lack of cover.

If the proposal is approved all construction work is planned for late summer and early fall of 2015 and 2016. By that time of the year the young grouse that may be found in the area will be off of any nests that may be in adjoining sections where sage brush is present. Measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would not be anticipated as a result of the proposed project.

Ferruginous Hawk (***Buteo regalis***) Ferruginous hawks have been documented using the general area around the project as nesting and hunting habitat. The state of Montana lists the bird as an S3B species meaning it's, at potential risk because of limited and potentially declining numbers, extent or habitat even though it may be abundant in some areas. The low surface impacts resulting from the project would not significantly alter vegetative composition or nesting habitat for the hawks. The primary vegetation on-site is native grass species and they would not be impacted if the project is approved. The project would not cause direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to this species.

Pygmy Rabbit (***Brachylagus idahoensis***) Pygmy Rabbits were observed in the project area in 1996 where the road passes through in the SW ¼ of Section 12, T 13S – R5 W. The species is listed as a S3 species by the state of Montana meaning it's at potential risk because of limited and potentially declining numbers, extent or habitat even though it may be abundant in some areas. The area of the siting was where the sage brush was treated with spike herbicide in 1998 to remove the sage brush which is the main habitat for the rabbit. At this time there isn't any habitat for pygmy rabbits to survive. All sage brush has been removed and the habitat would not support pygmy rabbits at this time. The proposal as applied for in this application would not move the road from its existing location where the rabbits were located. The rabbits were present with the road passing through the area in the past when the habitat for their use was present. This proposal will not change any condition as it currently exists in the SW1/4 of Section 12. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects would be anticipated from either of the proposed alternatives.

Wolverine (***Gulo gulo***) Wolverines have relatively continuous habitat within the Gravelly, Greenhorn and Snowcrest mountain ranges. This project falls outside the wolverine range by several miles. The BLM and US Forest Service list the wolverine as a sensitive species. Wolverines could and may pass through the state sections when moving between mountain ranges however the state sections do not provide the necessary habitat for sustained use by wolverines at this location. Because of this, this project would not cause direct,

indirect, or cumulative effects on this species and the area of this proposal is not considered prime habitat for wolverines.

**Little Brown Myotis – (Myotis lucifugus)** Little Brown Bats are considered a species of concern. The species is a year round resident in Montana. Found over a variety of habitats across a large elevational gradient. The bats usually forage over water, eating mostly insects. The bats can live up to 30 years. There is not good roosting habitat near the proposal for this bat species for there aren't any trees near the project area. The closest sighting to the proposal is one mile away. Neither of the two proposed alternatives should have any direct, indirect or long term cumulative impacts on Little Brown Bats habitat nor disturb roosting habitat.

**Hoary Bat – (Lasiurus cinereus)** – The hoary bat is potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas. The mammal lives in riparian and forest habitats. Hoary bats are thought to prefer trees at the edge of clearings, but have been found in trees in heavy forests, and open wooded glades. Hoary bats have an important ecosystem role as insect consumers. The first sighting and recording of Hoary bat use of the area was in 2008 long after the road was in place. The proposed alternatives for this project should not disturb any prime Hoary Bat habitat. Neither of the proposed alternatives should have any direct, indirect or long term cumulative impacts on the hoary bat population in the area of the proposal.

#### **10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archeologist was scoped for this project. There was a recorded finding of obsidian flakes along Wolverine Creek in section 12. These flakes were outside the area of this proposal so no potential effects were identified from either of the proposed alternatives.

#### **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.*

Aesthetics of the area will stay the same. There currently is an existing road at this location and all proposed changes to the road are minor in scope. Neither of the proposed alternatives will cause any major changes to the aesthetics of the Wolverine Creek drainage.

#### **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.*

This proposal as applied for should help reduce demands on environment resources. The location of the proposal should reduce rutting, improve the stream crossings and improve water quality. It may also reduce some of the off road travel on state land. Many hunters have expressed their displeasure with the current stream crossings complaining that they are concerned about getting stuck in Wolverine Creek and have used other roads on the state land instead.

No Action Alternative: Demands on Environmental Resources would remain the same.

Action Alternative: Possible improvement of Demands 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.*

No other known environmental documents pertinent to the area were identified during the scoping process.

#### 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.*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect human health or safety.

#### 15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities and production.

#### 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.*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect quantity and distribution of employment 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.*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect local and state tax base and tax revenues of the state or local area.

#### 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.*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect the demands for government services in the area of the proposal.

#### 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.*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect any locally adopted environmental plans and goals for the area.

#### 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.*

No Action Alternative; No changes to the current recreational use of the area will occur. Road use will remain the same. Rutting of roads in wet areas will continue, water quality problems will continue to occur at the stream crossings and Dillon Unit office will continue to hear complaints about the road in Wolverine Creek drainage.

Action Alternative: Road improvements will occur. Some of the rutting on the road will be eliminated, water quality at stream crossing will improve and possible reduced use of other state lands roads that are closed on these sections may be reduced.

**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.*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect the density and distribution of population and housing in the area.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect social structures and mores.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

Neither of the proposed alternatives for this proposal will affect the cultural uniqueness and 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.*

This proposal will not produce any new revenue for the trust. The current easement that the BLM has across state land is a 60 foot easement. Although this new easement will be of greater length, the actual acreage that is encumbered by the proposal will be less than the current easement because it will be reduced to a 40 foot easement. Thus no new revenue for the easement will be generated. The condition of the road should be improved and water quality issues will be addressed if the Action Alternative is chosen for this proposal.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Timothy Egan	<b>Date:</b> 7/10/2015
	<b>Title:</b> Dillon Unit Manager	

**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

Action Alternative: The completion of the EA Checklist did not identify issue of significance.

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

The Completion of the EA checklist did not identify issues that could be

**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Hoyt Richards
	<b>Title:</b> Central Land Office Area Manager
<b>Signature:</b> /s/	<b>Date:</b> 7/30/2015

BASS OF SURVEY

Geodetic Control, North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83), for this survey project was established utilizing static Global Positioning System (GPS) observations post-processed by National Geodetic Survey's (NGS) Online Positioning User Service (OPUS).

GPS METADATA

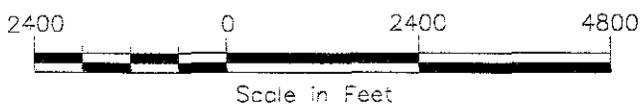
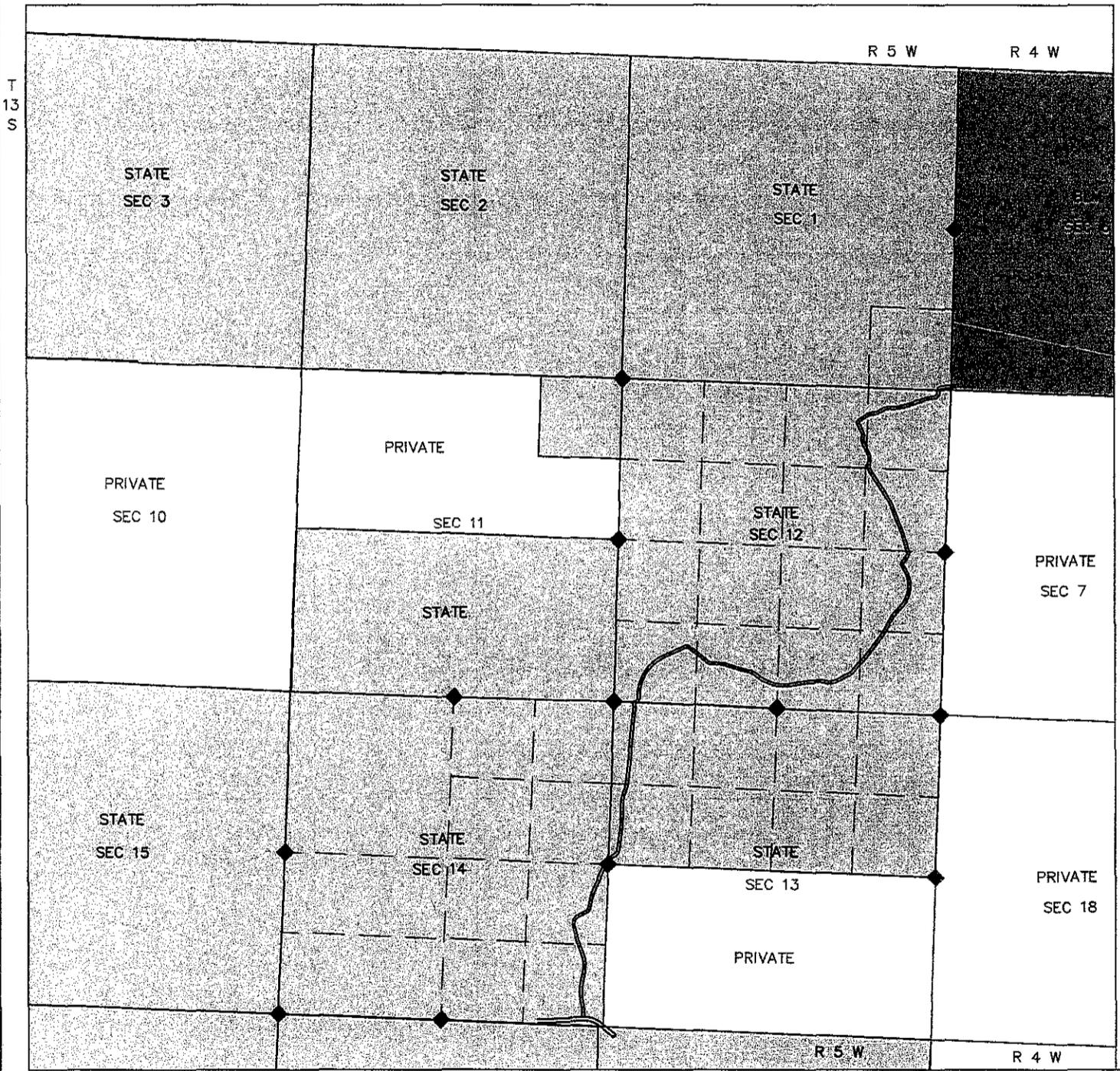
Receiver	Trimble R8 GNSS
Antenna	R8 Model 2
Position Fix Mode	RTK
Office Software	Trimble TBC Version 2.70
Data Collector	Trimble TSC2
Scale Factor	0.99986
Convergence Angle	-01°56'37"

BASIS OF BEARING

The direction and measurements of the lines of this Survey refer to Montana State Plane Coordinate System, NAD83(2011)(Epoch:2010:0000) and were determined by Global Positioning System Real Time Kinematic (GPS-RTK) methods.

SURVEYOR'S NOTE

The procedures and equipment used to perform and prepare this survey are accurate to ± 0.1 feet for PLSS corner ties. The calculated centerline shown hereon is based upon ± 50 foot location stationing, of an existing road. The calculated centerline of the easement is ± 3 ft of actual centerline of the existing road being ± 12 ft in width.

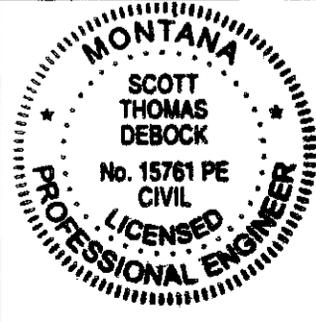


BLM

STATE

PRIVATE

FND CORNER



<p>SEC 1, 12, 13 &amp; 14 T13S, R5W P.M.M.</p> <p>BEAVERHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA</p>	<p>MTM- 107985</p> <p>EXHIBIT "A "</p> <p>PARCEL <u>1</u></p> <p>SHEET <u>1</u> OF <u>15</u></p>	<p>CORRECT AS TO SURVEYING DATA</p> <p><i>Scott T. DeBock</i> 15761PE</p> <p>Scott T. DeBock, PE</p> <p>CIVIL ENGINEER 5/21/15</p> <p>TITLE DATE</p>
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