

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Davis Hayland Break Request
Proposed Implementation Date:	April 2015
Proponent:	Nancy Davis
Location:	T10N R1E sections 28 (W½NW¼) & 32 (NE¼NE¼)
County:	Broadwater
Trust:	Public Buildings

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Nancy Davis, the surface lessee, has requested to break & farm approximately 65 acres of hayland on two tracts of state land. These lands were in C.R.P. from 2004 to 2014, and were classified as hayland when the contract expired last September. These tracts were traditionally irrigated and farmed for the purposes of small grains and alfalfa hay production in previous years. The lessee intends to do the same in the future.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Scoping letters were sent to solicit pertinent involvement from the public, agencies, groups and individuals in February 2014.

Agencies, Groups or Individuals Scoped:	Response:
DNRC, Landowner	Neutral
Nancy Davis, Surface Lessee and Proponent	Proponent is in favor of the project.
Adam Grove, Wildlife Biologist - Townsend, MT Fish Wildlife & Parks	Mr. Grove is in favor of the project and commented that the proposed conversion will probably enhance wildlife use of the area.
Montana Audubon Society	No Response
Ducks Unlimited, Robert Sanders-Manager of Conservation Programs (Montana)	Mr. Sanders stated that he did not see any major wildlife issues with this proposal.

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

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or any permits needed.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: To grant Nancy Davis permission to break & farm the hayland, and return them to irrigated small grains & hay production.

No Action Alternative: To deny Nancy Davis permission to break & farm the hayland, and return them to irrigated small grains & hay production.

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.

The lands considered in this proposed project consist of gentle rolling topography. This parcel meets all 9 of the criteria to break State Lands other than native sod (for irrigated farming methods) according to the DNRC Land Breaking Policy. The following information shows that this soil (Amesha loam) meets or exceeds the criteria concerning this proposed land breaking project of State Land.

Amesha loam

1. loam texture & 10 – 25% clay content
2. 9.4 inches of available water storage
3. < 35% coarse fragments
4. Sprinkler irrigation with 1 – 4% slopes
5. Soil depth is more than 80 inches and is well drained
6. Water table is more than 80 inches
7. Non-saline soils and suitable irrigation water available
8. No saline seep potential nor any potential to be a recharge area
9. Not subject to flooding or ponding during the growing season

Proposed Alternative- Irrigated/continuous farming practices would be implemented to mitigate soil erosion concerns. The soil contained in the project area meets the land breaking criteria. Minimal cumulative impacts are anticipated because the proposed action adheres to the land breaking criteria and to the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

Minimal cumulative impacts are anticipated because the proposed action adheres to the land breaking criteria and to the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan.

Proposed Alternative- No direct or cumulative impacts to water quality are anticipated as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

In general, this area is considered to be of high quality air standards with good ventilation. Breaking and farming operations may temporarily influence air quality while activities are taking place. When the activity is complete, air quality quickly restores itself to a high standard.

Proposed Alternative- No direct or cumulative effects are expected to occur to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

There are no known rare plants or cover types present. A review of the Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted and there were no plant species of concern or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

Proposed Alternative- The vegetation would be changed as a result of the proposed action. The present vegetation is dominated by crested wheatgrass, blue flax, and Russian thistles. The tracts were last farmed in 2003, and were in C.R.P. from 2004 - 2014. The vegetative community would be altered by the reclassification. The conversion of dryland hayland to irrigated crop production would substantially increase the overall productivity of the tracts.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

These tracts are used by a variety of wildlife that include large ungulates (elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, and antelope), small to large sized predators (weasels, red fox, and coyotes), numerous species of small mammals (mice, voles, ground squirrels, rabbits, etc.), various raptors (red-tailed hawks, bald eagles, American kestrels, prairie falcons, etc.), upland game birds (Hungarian partridges), waterfowl, and numerous non-game bird species (a wide variety of migrant and resident bird species associated with available habitats). The conversion of the hayland vegetation to irrigated crop production would decrease wildlife thermal and hiding cover. This reduction in cover may adversely impact some of these wildlife species, but converting this to irrigated cropland would provide better food sources of wheat, peas, and alfalfa to many wildlife species.

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks supports this proposal.

Proposed Alternative- The conversion of the hayland vegetation to irrigated crop production would decrease wildlife thermal and hiding cover. This reduction in cover may adversely impact a few of these wildlife species, but converting this to irrigated cropland would provide a better food source to many of these wildlife species.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified several Species of Concern: wolverine, fringed myotis, little brown myotis, Townsend's big-eared bat, golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, veery, peregrine falcon, varied thrush, Clark's nutcracker, and the green-tailed towhee

Proposed Alternative- These particular tracts do not contain many, if any of these species. If any of these species are present, they would be dispersed into the surrounding grasslands.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

There are no historical, paleontological or archaeological resources present. Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted on March 3, 2015 and he stated that due to the land being previously cultivated and farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.

Proposed Alternative- No direct or cumulative effects are expected to occur to historical and archaeological sites as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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 proposed project area represents a typical rural farming and ranching community found in this geographic area in Broadwater County, Montana.

Proposed Alternative- The state land in this proposal does not provide any unique or scenic qualities. This proposed project will not be visible from any populated areas. No direct or cumulative effects to the aesthetics are anticipated.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

The proposed project area represents a typical rural farming and ranching community found in this geographic area in Broadwater County, Montana.

Proposed Alternative- The demands on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy would not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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 these tracts listed in this EA.

<p style="text-align: center;">IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i> |
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14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The proposed project area represents a typical rural farming and ranching community found in this geographic area in Broadwater County, Montana.

Proposed Alternative-No impacts to human health or safety would occur as a result of the proposal.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Proposed Alternative-Agricultural production would increase. The estimated irrigated winter wheat yield is 90 - 110 bushels per acre. Economic returns under irrigated crop production are projected to be at least \$85 per acre. The Public Buildings Trust would see a large increase in revenues by converting these acres to irrigated crop production.

No Action Alternative-This would cause inefficiencies with the lessee's farming operations due to the private lands that are included in the irrigation pivots.

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.

Proposed Alternative-The proposal would have no affect on quantity and distribution of employment.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

Proposed Alternative-The proposed action would increase the tax revenues due to the increased revenue generated from the irrigated wheat and pea production.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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

Proposed Alternative-The proposal would not have any impacts on government services.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

These tracts of state land are located east of Canyon Ferry Reservoir and generally have fair recreational value. The tract in section 28 is not legally accessible, but the tract in section 32 is accessible.

Proposed Alternative-The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational or wilderness activities on these state tracts.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming 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.

Proposed Alternative-The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments. No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Proposed Alternative- No native or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity would be impacted by the proposal. No direct or cumulative effects are expected to occur to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed project area represents a typical rural ranching and farming community found in this geographic area in Broadwater County, Montana.

Proposed Alternative- The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

No Action Alternative-No direct or cumulative impacts will occur without breaking and farming activities.

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.

Proposed Alternative- The proposed conversion of hayland to irrigated crop production would greatly improve the productivity on the tracts and increase the returns to the School Trust. The existing vegetation has low production. Therefore, converting this acreage to irrigated cropland will provide the Public Buildings Trust with an estimated return of \$85 per acre. No other unique circumstances exist.

No Action Alternative- Permission to break & farm the haylands by Nancy Davis would be denied; current conditions would prevail.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Casey Kellogg	Date: March 9, 2015
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED: Proposed Alternative: To grant Nancy Davis, surface lessee, permission to break & farm 65 acres of hayland on State Trust Land in Broadwater County- T10N R1E sections 28 (W½NW¼) & 32 (NE¼NE¼), and return the agricultural operation to irrigated small grains & hay production.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The proposed project area consists of fair condition, converted hayland (September 2014) located in a rural area. The project area was farmed for small grain production until 2004 when it became CRP. This project would disturb about 65 acres of hayland and change the land use to irrigated crop, small grain production. Soil erosion concerns do not exist. Adherences to DNRC land breaking criteria for State Lands other than native sod and to the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan are anticipated to result in minimal cumulative effects. The proposed action would be beneficial for the lessees, DNRC, and the School Trust beneficiary (Public Buildings).

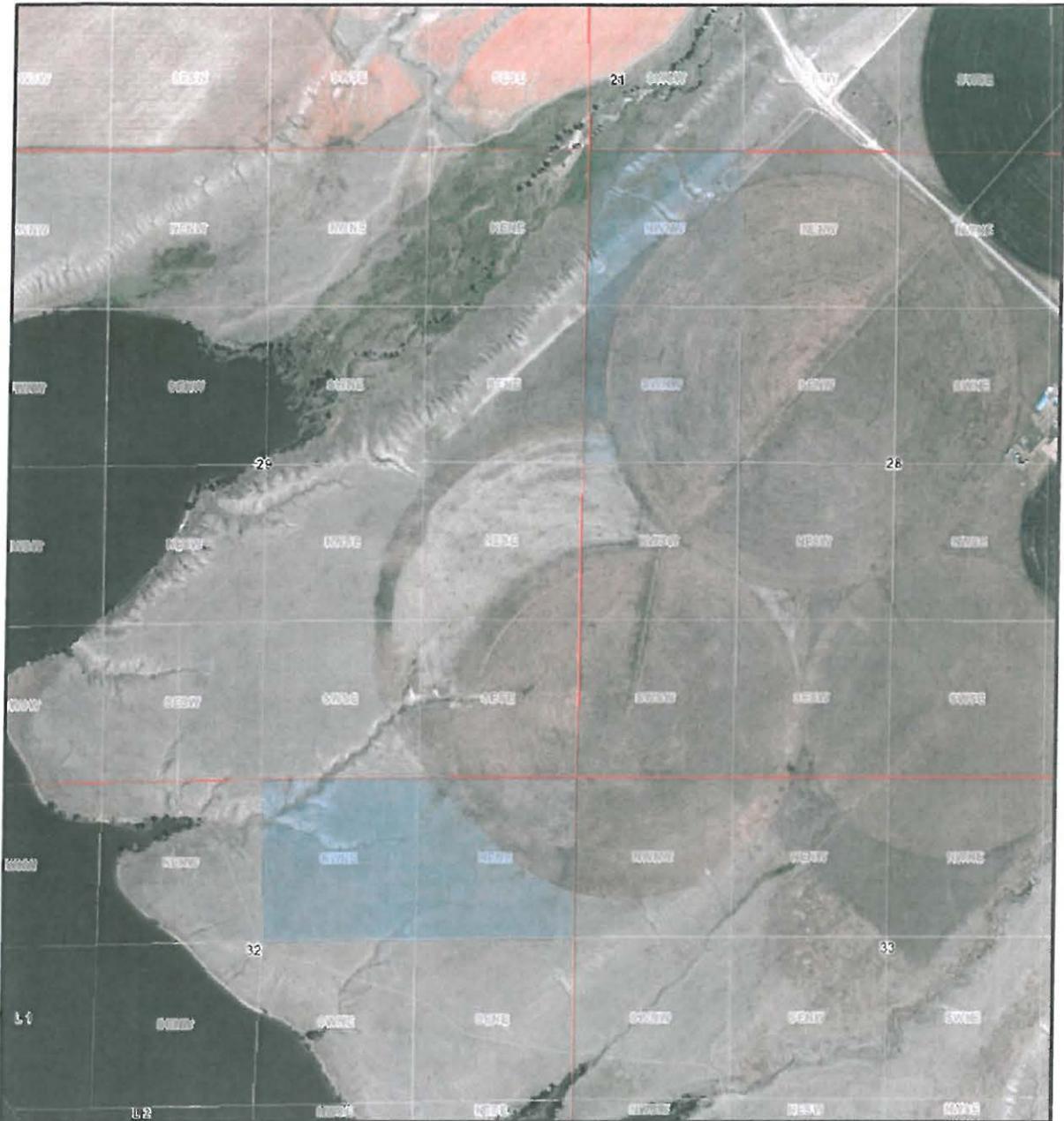
27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne
	Title: Helena Unit Manager, Central Land Office
Signature: 	Date: 3/12/14



Nancy Davis

Proposed Break

T10N R1E

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