

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Expired CRP Break Request
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	Fall 2015
<b>Proponent:</b>	Gary Bennett
<b>Location:</b>	T 23N R 9E Sections 28
<b>County:</b>	Chouteau
<b>Trust:</b>	Common Schools MSU Morrill

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Gary Bennett has submitted a request to break out three expiring CRP contracts and put them into small grain production. The area of potential effect (APE) involves three contracts that total 138.7 acres of expiring CRP.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)  
Northeastern Land Office (NELO)  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)  
Gary Bennett (Proponent)

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

The DNRC, and NELO have jurisdiction over this proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for performing all required actions to stay in conservation compliance with the 2014 Farm Bill and shall be in contact with the Fort Benton USDA offices.

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Alternative A (No Action)** – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant a break request for the area of potential effect (APE).

**Alternative B (the Proposed Action)** – Under this alternative, the Department does grant a break request for the APE.

### 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 APE contains 6 soils types of which all have a non-irrigated capability class of three. All of the soils are classified as either "prime farmland" or "farmland of statewide importance."

No Action: No impacts will occur on the geology, soils quality, stability or moisture.

Proposed Action: Associated farming erosion will occur due to wind and water, but mitigating farming practices will be implemented to keep soil loss within 2014 farm bill conservation compliance tolerance.

See attached for specific information.

Soils information was obtained from the NRCS soil data viewer via Arcmap.

#### 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 Action: No change is expected to current water quality, quantity and distribution.

Proposed Action: Soil loss can be expected to increase turbidity to adjacent waterways. This increase in turbidity will be mitigated by the grassed waterways that will catch and filter sediment.

#### 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.*

No Action: No change in air quality.

Proposed Action: Increased pollutants can be expected with tillage & spraying practices. Cumulative effects to air quality will be minimal.

#### 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.*

No Action: Land would remain in permanent cover of intermediate wheatgrass, western wheatgrass and alfalfa. Land would be either hayed or grazed on an annual basis.

Proposed Action: Permanent vegetative cover would be lost. The land will go into a continuous crop rotation for small grain.

**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 area is not considered critical wildlife habitat.

No Action: No change in terrestrial and avian habitats.

Proposed Action: Potential nesting habitat for various avian species will be lost with the removal of permanent vegetation. Addition of a small grain crop will increase forage availability for those wildlife species that utilize grain.

**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 search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program for Species of Concern (SOC) with a state rank of 3 or higher was conducted in the township that includes the area of potential effect. (State rank of 3 means Potentially at risk because of **limited** and/or **declining** numbers, range and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.)

The black-tailed Prairie Dog, Great Blue Heron, Greater Sage-grouse and Greater Short-horned Lizard are all identified as species of concern in the APE.

No Action: No change to unique, endangered, fragile or environmental resources.

Proposed Action: Currently the CRP does not provide suitable habitat for any of the species of concern. No effect is expected to the SOC's and their associated habitat.

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

No Action: No effect on historical or archaeological sites.

Proposed Action: A search review was conducted on the Montana Historic Society State Antiquities Database and it showed no historical site present. The APE has also been previously cultivated. No effect on historical or archaeological sites is expected.

**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.*

No Action: No change to aesthetics.

Proposed Action: 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 Action: No change to demands on limited resources.

Proposed Action: No direct or cumulative effects to environmental resources are anticipated.

**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 Action: No change

Proposed Action: There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tracts listed in this EA Checklist.

**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 Action: No effect on human health and safety.

Proposed Action: The normal farming safety concerns of dealing with heavy equipment and spraying will apply if the land is broke out and put into small grain production.

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

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

No Action: No change to industrial, commercial or agriculture activities and production.

Proposed Action: This project will add to existing agricultural activities in this area.

**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.*

No Action: No change to employment.

Proposed Action: The project will not create any new jobs. These positions are already held by employees of the proponent.

**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.*

No Action: No change to local or state tax base.

Proposed Action: Increased revenue may occur if the field is put into small grain production.

**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*

No Action: No change in government services.

Proposed Action: There will not be any increases in traffic or traffic patterns if this project is approved.

**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.*

No Action: No change.

Proposed Action: There are no zoning or other agency management plans affecting this project.

**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: No change in recreational activities present.

Proposed Action: Removal of suitable nesting habitat for game birds may have a negative effect on the population size that are desired by sportsmen.

**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*

No Action: No change.

Proposed Action: The proposed project does not include any changes to housing or developments. Population and housing will not be affected.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

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

No Action: No change to social structures.

Proposed Action: There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

No Action: No change to cultural uniqueness and diversity.

Proposed Action: The proposed project will have no effect on any 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.*

No Action: Land would expire from CRP and revenue from payments would be lost. The land would transfer into grazing or hay land production which would bring in less revenue than small grain production.

Proposed Action: The proposed project may increase the revenue that is associated with small grain production over the existing revenue that is brought in by being enrolled in CRP, grazing or hay.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Brandon Sandau <b>Title:</b> Land Use Specialist
<b>Signature:</b> 	<b>Date:</b> March 3, 2015

**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

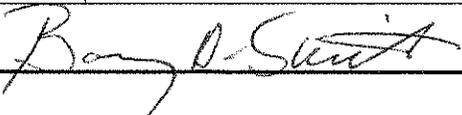
I have selected the Proposed Alternative B, and recommend the proponent be granted permission to break out the expired CRP and put the field into small grain production.

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

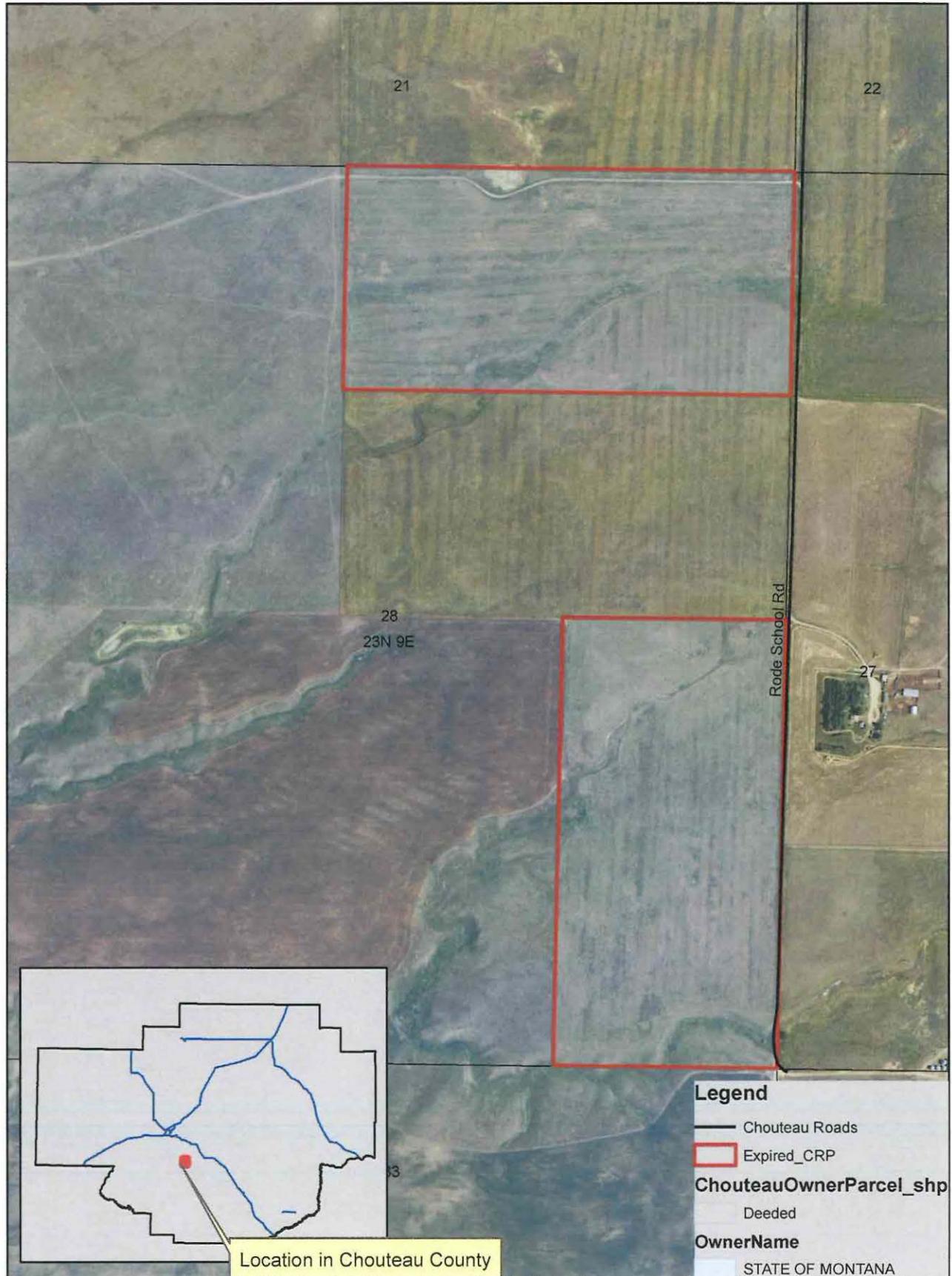
I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined that no negative long-term environmental impacts will result from the proposed activity.

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

EIS     
 More Detailed EA     
 No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Barny D. Smith <b>Title:</b> Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office
<b>Signature:</b> 	<b>Date:</b> March 3, 2015

# Expired CRP Break Request Chouteau County



# Expired CRP Break Request Soils



## Farmland Classification

Aggregation Method: No Aggregation Necessary  
Tie-break Rule: Lower

Chouteau County Area, Montana  
Survey Area Version and Date: 10 - 11/26/2013

Map symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Map unit percent
69C	Vida-Zahill clay loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
75B	Farnuf loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	100
671B	Bearpaw-Vida clay loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	100
671C	Bearpaw-Vida clay loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
721E	Zahill-Vida clay loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
801B	Williams-Vida loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	100
801C	Williams-Vida loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100

## Nonirrigated Capability Class

Aggregation Method: Dominant Condition  
Tie-break Rule: Higher

Chouteau County Area, Montana  
Survey Area Version and Date: 10 - 11/26/2013

Map symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Map unit percent
69C	Vida-Zahill clay loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes	3	62
75B	Farnuf loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3	95
671B	Bearpaw-Vida clay loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3	85
671C	Bearpaw-Vida clay loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	3	85
721E	Zahill-Vida clay loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	6	52
801B	Williams-Vida loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3	85
801C	Williams-Vida loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	3	85

# Animal Species of Concern

Species List Last Updated 04/21/2014



A program of the Montana State Library's  
Natural Resource Information System  
operated by the University of Montana.

4 Species of Concern

Filtered by the following criteria:

Species = Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Amphibians, Fish, Invertebrates

Heritage State Rank = S1, S2, S3

Township = 23 N Range = 9 E (based on mapped Species Occurrences)

## Species of Concern

4 Species

Filtered by the following criteria:

Species = Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Amphibians, Fish, Invertebrates

Heritage State Rank = S1, S2, S3

Township = 23 N Range = 9 E (based on mapped Species Occurrences)

## MAMMALS (MAMMALIA)

1 SPECIES

FILTERED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

SPECIES = MAMMALS, BIRDS, REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS, FISH, INVERTEBRATES  
HERITAGE STATE RANK = S1, S2, S3  
TOWNSHIP = 23 N RANGE = 9 E (BASED ON MAPPED SPECIES OCCURRENCES)

SCIENTIFIC NAME COMMON NAME TAXA SORT	FAMILY (SCIENTIFIC) FAMILY (COMMON)	GLOBAL RANK	STATE RANK	USFWS	USFS	BLM	CFWCS TIER ID	% OF GLOBAL BREEDING RANGE IN MT	% OF MT THAT IS BREEDING RANGE	HABITAT
<b>Cynomys ludovicianus</b> Black-tailed Prairie Dog	<b>Sciuridae</b> Squirrels	G4	S3		SENSITIVE	SENSITIVE	1	15%	71%	Grasslands
<b>Species verified in these Counties:</b> Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Hill, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Mccone, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Toole, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Yellowstone										

## BIRDS (AVES)

2 SPECIES

FILTERED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

SPECIES = MAMMALS, BIRDS, REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS, FISH, INVERTEBRATES  
HERITAGE STATE RANK = S1, S2, S3  
TOWNSHIP = 23 N RANGE = 9 E (BASED ON MAPPED SPECIES OCCURRENCES)

SCIENTIFIC NAME COMMON NAME TAXA SORT	FAMILY (SCIENTIFIC) FAMILY (COMMON)	GLOBAL RANK	STATE RANK	USFWS	USFS	BLM	CFWCS TIER ID	% OF GLOBAL BREEDING RANGE IN MT	% OF MT THAT IS BREEDING RANGE	HABITAT
<b>Ardea herodias</b> Great Blue Heron	<b>Ardeidae</b> Bitterns / Egrets / Herons / Night-Herons	G5	S3				3	3%	100%	Riparian forest
<b>Species verified in these Counties:</b> Beaverhead, Big Horn, Blaine, Broadwater, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Flathead, Gallatin, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Granite, Hill, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lake, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Lincoln, Madison, Mccone, Meagher, Mineral, Missoula, Musselshell, Park, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Powell, Prairie, Ravalli, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sanders, Sheridan, Silver Bow, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, Yellowstone <b>State Rank Reason:</b> Small breeding population size, evidence of recent declines, and declining regeneration of riparian cottonwood forests due to altered hydrology and grazing.										
<b>Centrocercus urophasianus</b> Greater Sage-Grouse	<b>Phasianidae</b> Upland Game Birds	G3G4	S2	C	SENSITIVE	SENSITIVE	1	17%	75%	Sagebrush
<b>Species verified in these Counties:</b> Beaverhead, Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Carter, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Gallatin, Garfield, Golden Valley, Hill, Liberty, Madison, Mccone, Meagher, Musselshell, Park, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder River, Prairie, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Silver Bow, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, Yellowstone										

## REPTILES (REPTILIA)

1 SPECIES

FILTERED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

SPECIES = MAMMALS, BIRDS, REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS, FISH, INVERTEBRATES  
 HERITAGE STATE RANK = S1, S2, S3  
 TOWNSHIP = 23 N RANGE = 9 E (BASED ON MAPPED SPECIES OCCURRENCES)

SCIENTIFIC NAME COMMON NAME TAXA SORT	FAMILY (SCIENTIFIC) FAMILY (COMMON)	GLOBAL RANK	STATE RANK	USFWS	USFS	BLM	CFWCS TIER ID	% OF GLOBAL BREEDING RANGE IN MT	% OF MT THAT IS BREEDING RANGE	HABITAT
<b>Phrynosoma hernandesi</b> Greater Short-horned Lizard	<b>Phrynosomatidae</b> Sagebush / Spiny Lizards	G5	S3		SENSITIVE	SENSITIVE	2	19%	66%	Sandy / gravelly soils
<b>Species verified in these Counties:</b> Big Horn, Blaine, Broadwater, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Gallatin, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Hill, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, McCone, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Toole, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, Yellowstone										

Citation for data on this website:

Montana Animal Species of Concern Report. Montana Natural Heritage Program and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Retrieved on 2/9/2015, from <http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesOfConcern?AorP=a>



## Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

February 19, 2015

FEB 19 2015

Brandon Sandau  
Land Use Specialist  
613 NE Main, PO Box 1021  
Lewistown, MT 59457-1021

Brandon,

After reviewing the proposal (dated January 9, 2015) to convert currently enrolled CRP to small grain production, I provide the following comments. These nineteen (19) DNRC tracks sum about 1,500 acres in Chouteau and Judith Basin Counties. Acreages this large in size currently enrolled in CRP most likely have considerable breeding, nesting and brood rearing habitat value for upland game birds, waterfowl, non-game wildlife species, along with habitat benefits for big game species. Non-game grassland birds, one of the fastest declining groups of birds in the country, have also responded positively to the habitat afforded by CRP, staving off declines that could lead to increased listings of threatened and endangered species. CRP cover has the potential to intercept and store precipitation that would contribute to downstream flooding and sediment deposition into neighboring streams and rivers.

Recovering wildlife populations are enjoyed by sportsmen and wildlife viewers across the nation generating millions of dollars and jobs for rural economies. Many producers also have opened up the land they have enrolled in CRP to public access for hunting, thus improving the relationship between landowners, state fish and wildlife agencies and the hunting public. While it is understood the lessee's interest in converting to small grain production, the overall affect of removing permanent vegetative cover will likely not be beneficial for area wildlife species. Additionally, it appears most of these tracts are publicly accessible via county roads or adjacent public lands. The cumulative impacts of the conversion from CRP to small grain production on these DRNC and other private parcels will continue to have long term negative habitat impacts to deer, antelope, upland game birds and non-game wildlife species, along with reductions in recreational upland game bird hunting access and wildlife viewing in Chouteau and Judith Basin Counties.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cory Loecker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cory Loecker  
Wildlife Biologist  
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
4600 Giant Springs Rd.  
Great Falls, MT 59405  
406-454-5840  
[cloecker@mt.gov](mailto:cloecker@mt.gov)

