

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Haugrud Break Request
Proposed Implementation Date:	May 1, 2015
Proponent:	Roger & Roger L. Haugrud, Lessee of State Leases #2204, #3770, #7518
Location:	NW4, NE4, SE4, Sec. 16, T1N, R23E
County:	Yellowstone Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The purpose of the proposed project is to break 422.81 acres of old CRP land and convert it to dryland hay production over the course of the next 6 years. The proponent plans on breaking 1/3 of this acreage every 2 years for the next 6 years.

The largest gain from this project will be the increase in quality of production on the subject parcels. The current vegetation composition of the subject section is in dire need of revitalization. There is a heavy presence of non-desirable non-native species such as cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) along with other weedy species. By breaking the proposed area, the proponent hopes to decrease the non-desirable weedy species and establish a quality hay field post breaking.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Roger & Roger L. Haugrud-12606 Molt Rd, Molt, MT 59057
USDA-NRCS-Yellowstone County Office, Billings, MT
MT DNRC-Southern Land Office
MT FWP-Region 5

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

USDA-NRCS-Yellowstone Field Office, Lessee must remain in crop land and farming practice compliance for litter and soil loss tolerances.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: The "No Action" alternative.

Alternative B: The alternative to allow the 422.81 acres of low value grazing acreage to be broken out and farmed for dryland 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 subject acreage contains a small seasonal drainage in the northern part of this tract that will not be broken. Also present on the southern end are some rimrocks with very steep grades that will not be broken in the proposal.

The soils in the proposed break area are all loams, but vary from sandy loams to clay loams. The main soils from largest percentage composition to least are: Bonfri-Cabbart loams with 0% to 4% slopes, Delpoint-Cabbart loams with 2% to 8% slopes, and Cabbart-Bonfri loams with 2% to 8% slopes. The Bonfri-Cabbart loams are 3e soils, the Delpoint-Cabbart loams are 4e soils, and the Cabbart-Bonfri loams are 6s soils. Combined, the Bonfri-Cabbart and Delpoint Cabbart loams cover over 87% of the proposed break area. Therefore, over 87% of the proposed break area soils are within the DNRC's required capability class of 4 or lower. With the majority of the soils meeting the criteria set by the DRNC, this proposed breaking should not have any significant adverse impacts to the soil quality, stability, and moisture of the subject acreage.

No significant adverse impacts to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture 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.

There is a very low probability of any water degradation from this project. The one small seasonal drainage in the northern end of the subject acreage will not be farmed and will keep vegetative cover throughout the entire breaking process. This will mitigate the possibility of soil loss or water quality and quantity degradation.

No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated.

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.

Pollutants or particulates will not be produced.

No cumulative effects are expected.

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 present vegetative stand contains approximately 40% cheatgrass with the remaining percent composition containing a small amount of alfalfa and equal amounts, approximately 15%, of intermediate wheatgrass, crested wheatgrass, and western wheatgrass. The current stand will be destroyed when broken up for reseeding. All of these species are neither native nor rare except for western wheatgrass, which will be planted back in post breaking. The main goal of the proposed breaking is to largely decrease the presence of cheatgrass on this acreage.

The proposed break and conversion to a crested wheatgrass, western wheatgrass, and alfalfa hay crop will increase the quality in vegetative composition greatly for the subject acreage. In the surrounding area, other conversions to crested wheat and alfalfa stands have had great success.

No significant adverse impacts to vegetation cover, quantity and quality are anticipated.

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.

Aquatic life will not be adversely affected. There were no tract specific concerns raised from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks scoping process for this section at this time. If there are any populations present, they will be dispersed.

The MT DNRC has the responsibility of maintaining a positive revenue stream on this acreage for the Common Schools Trust.

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 proposed project area search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database identified two vertebrate animals that are listed as a species of concern, threatened, or endangered: Greater Sage-Grouse and Black-tailed Prairie Dog. Of these two species, none have had any confirmed sightings on the subject section. These species may traverse this section, but are not known to occupy it.

The area for the proposed breaking is in the General Habitat area for the Greater Sage-Grouse and the nearest active lek is more than 5 miles to the west of the proposed project area. The mitigations required by the Governor's Executive Order No. 10-2014 will all be followed for the proposed project. These mitigations include:

- Vegetation removal as part of permitted activities will be limited to the minimum disturbance required by the project.
- The proposed project area has previously been actively farmed and is not native rangeland. Therefore the proposed project is not a conversion of sagebrush/native rangeland to cropland agriculture.

These mitigations, in my opinion, will be sufficient to avoid having any significant adverse impacts to the Greater Sage-Grouse General Habitat.

No significant adverse impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

There are no historical, paleontological or archaeological resources present. The DNRC Archaeologist was consulted regarding this project and he recommended that no further investigation was needed due to the fact that the subject sections have previously been farmed.

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 and public lands.

The proposed project area is along and adjacent to Buffalo Trail Rd in Yellowstone County. There should not be any excessive noise or light associated with the proposed activity. The activity is expected to have minimal negative effects.

No significant adverse impacts 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 demands on limited resources are required for this project.

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.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks has been scoped concerning this project. They have no major concerns regarding this conversion.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
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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.

There is some human safety risks associated with the operation of heavy equipment. The proponent, the contractor, and their employees accept these risks.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Agricultural production will maintain or increase after the proposed breaking. The large gain from this project will be the quality of production there will be after the land breaking. The current vegetation composition of the subject section is in dire need of revitalization. There is a heavy presence of non-desirable non-native species along with weedy species. By breaking the proposed area, the proponent hopes to decrease the non-desirable weedy species and have a quality hay field post breaking.

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 new jobs will be created through the proposed project.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to the employment market.

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 tax base will not be affected.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes for this project.

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

Additional services will not be required.

No cumulative effects are expected.

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 MT DNRC requires that the lessee control soil erosion and maintain proper litter cover by state of the art farming practices acceptable by the USDA-NRCS. Furthermore, in order to break the proposed acreage, the soils have to pass the strict requirements set by MT DNRC's Land Breaking Policy. The majority (over 87%) of the soils within the project area have passed that criteria set by the policy.

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.

There is minimal recreational potential within this section. This section does lie next to Buffalo Trail Rd, but it is old farmland that does not provide any unique recreational experiences that could not be found on other tracts. Once the vegetation on this tract has reestablished, recreational activities will be able to continue as before.

No significant adverse impacts to recreation or wilderness activities are anticipated.

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.

Additional housing will not be a requirement of this project.

No direct or cumulative effects are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Disruption is not likely. There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

On February 17th, 2015 the DNRC's Archaeologist recommended that no archaeological investigative work was needed prior the proposed breaking of the subject acreage. His reasoning for this recommendation came from the recent historic cultivation of the subject acreage.

No direct or cumulative effects are anticipated.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

There should be no shift in the quality of the area.

No adverse impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity are anticipated.

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.

Estimated return to the School Trusts is anywhere from a low figure of \$5.00 per acre to a high end figure of \$30.00 per acre revenue from the proposed hay production once established. Even at the low figure, the expected revenue from hay production is much higher than as a grazing tract.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jocee Hedrick
	Title: SLO Land Use Specialist
Signature:	<i>Jocee Hedrick</i> Date: <i>3/18/15</i>

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: The alternative to allow the 422.81 acres of old CRP land to be broken out and farmed for hay production.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant adverse impacts are expected with this land break. Over 87% of the soils meet or exceed the MT DNRC's requirements for soils that can be broken under the Department's Policy and Procedures for granting Land Breaking on State Lands. The proposed land breaking will increase the quality of the vegetation of the tract and will increase the revenue the Trust receives from this acreage every year.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

- EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Matthew Wolcott
	Title: Area Manager-SLO
Signature	<i>[Signature]</i> Date <i>March 19 2015</i>