CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**Expired CRP Break Request**
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2015
Proponent:	Robertson Ranch Co
Location:	T 24N R 5E Sections 33
County:	Chouteau
Trust:	Western/Eastern

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Robertson Ranch Co has submitted a request to break out two expiring CRP contracts and put them into small grain production. The area of potential effect (APE) involves two contracts that total 24 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)
Robertson Ranch Co (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 3 soils types of which all have a nonirrigated capability class of three. Two soils are not considered prime farmland and the third is only prime farmland if irrigated.

See attached for specific information.

Soils information was obtained from the NRCS soil data viewer.

No cumulative effects 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.

No important ground or surface water will be impacted by the proposed project.

No cumulative effects to the water resources 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.

The air quality in the area will not be affected.

No cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

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 current vegetation is a monoculture of crested wheatgrass.

No rare plants or cover types are present.

No long term cumulative effects to vegetation 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.

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. 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.

No cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 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 spiny softshell turtle is the only potential SOC listed and the area of potential effect does not contain any habit for the turtle which are prairie rivers and large streams.

There are no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources on this site.

No cumulative effects to habitat are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A search review was conducted on the Montana Historic Society State Antiquites Database and it showed no historical site present. The APE has also been previously cultivated.

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 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 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.

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.

The normal farming safety concerns of dealing with heavy equipment 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.

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.

The project will not create any new jobs. These positions are already held by employees of the proponent. No cumulative effects to the employment market are anticipated.

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.

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

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

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on government services.

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.

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.

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on recreation or wilderness 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

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

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

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?

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.

The proposed project will not have any cumulative economic or social effect.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Brandon Sandau
	Title:	Land Use Specialist
Signature:		**Date**: 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	XXX	No Further Analysis

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

Expired CRP Break Request
Chouteau County

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
2B	Marcott-Bigsandy complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
15E	Lambeth silt loam, 8 to 25 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
15F	Lambeth silt loam, 25 to 70 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
22F	Hillon loam, 25 to 60 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
28	Nishon clay loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Prime farmland if drained	100
37B	Evanston loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	100
37C	Evanston loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
38B	Ethridge silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	100
67B	Bearpaw clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	100
69C	Vida-Zahill clay loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
72F	Zahill clay loam, 25 to 60 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
75B	Farnuf loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	100
77F	Tinsley gravelly sandy loam, 15 to 45 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
79B	Yamacall loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	100
79C	Yamacall loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
79D	Yamacall loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
82B	Savage silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	100
90A	Harlake silty clay, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
94C	Busby fine sandy loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
98B	Kremlin loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	100
99	Rivra-Hanly complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
182F	Megonot-Yawdim silty clay loams, 25 to 60 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
221E	Hillon-Kevin clay loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	Not prime farmland Not in APE	100
222D	Hillon-Delpoint loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
272C	Attewan-Tinsley complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
311B	Ferd-Creed-Gerdrum complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
323B	Sagedale silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
323C	Sagedale silty clay loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
331B	Phillips-Elloam complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
351B	Kenilworth-Fortbenton fine sandy loams, 0 to 3 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
361B	Fortbenton fine sandy loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
368C	Fortbenton-Hillon complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
444D	Kevin-Scobey clay loams, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
503B	Telstad-Joplin loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	100
503C	Telstad-Joplin loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
561B	Scobey-Kevin clay loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	100
561C	Scobey-Kevin clay loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
563A	Fortbenton-Scobey fine sandy loams, 0 to 3 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
601A	Havre-Glendive complex, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	100
602A	Havre silty clay loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	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
692D	Vida-Bearpaw clay loams, 4 to 15 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	100
721E	Zahill-Vida clay loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	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
2B	Marcott-Bigsandy complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	6		50
15E	Lambeth silt loam, 8 to 25 percent slopes	6		91
15F	Lambeth silt loam, 25 to 70 percent slopes	7		90
22F	Hillon loam, 25 to 60 percent slopes	7		97
28	Nishon clay loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	5		90
37B	Evanston loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		93
37C	Evanston loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	3		93
38B	Ethridge silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		91
67B	Bearpaw clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		95
69C	Vida-Zahill clay loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes	3		62
72F	Zahill clay loam, 25 to 60 percent slopes	7		95
75B	Farnuf loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		95
77F	Tinsley gravelly sandy loam, 15 to 45 percent slopes	7		95
79B	Yamacall loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		85
79C	Yamacall loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	3		85
79D	Yamacall loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	4		94
82B	Savage silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		93
90A	Harlake silty clay, 0 to 1 percent slopes	4		91
94C	Busby fine sandy loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	4		90
98B	Kremlin loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		95
99	Rivra-Hanly complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes	6		88
182F	Megonot-Yawdim silty clay loams, 25 to 60 percent slopes	7		93
221E	Hillon-Kevin clay loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	6	Not in APE	51
222D	Hillon-Delpoint loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	6		85
272C	Attewan-Tinsley complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	3		60
311B	Ferd-Creed-Gerdrum complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		43
323B	Sagedale silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	4		93
323C	Sagedale silty clay loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	4		90
331B	Phillips-Elloam complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		61
351B	Kenilworth-Fortbenton fine sandy loams, 0 to 3 percent slopes	4		90
361B	Fortbenton fine sandy loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	4		95
368C	Fortbenton-Hillon complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	4		96
444D	Kevin-Scobey clay loams, 8 to 15 percent slopes	4		85
503B	Telstad-Joplin loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		87
503C	Telstad-Joplin loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	3		89
561B	Scobey-Kevin clay loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		87
561C	Scobey-Kevin clay loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	3		86
563A	Fortbenton-Scobey fine sandy loams, 0 to 3 percent slopes	4		88
601A	Havre-Glendive complex, 0 to 1 percent slopes	3		50
602A	Havre silty clay loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	3		85
671B	Bearpaw-Vida clay loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3		85
671C	Bearpaw-Vida clay loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	3		85
692D	Vida-Bearpaw clay loams, 4 to 15 percent slopes	4		85
721E	Zahill-Vida clay loams, 8 to 25 percent slopes	6		52

Animal Species of Concern

Species List Last Updated **04/21/2014**

2 Species of Concern
Filtered by the following criteria:
Species = Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Amphibians, Fish, Invertebrates
Heritage State Rank = S1, S2, S3
Township = 24 N Range = 5 E (based on mapped Species Occurrences)

MONTANA Natural Heritage Program

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

Species of Concern

2 Species
Filtered by the following criteria:
Species = Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Amphibians, Fish, Invertebrates
Heritage State Rank = S1, S2, S3
Township = 24 N Range = 5 E (based on mapped Species Occurrences)

REPTILES (REPTILIA) — 1 SPECIES

FILTERED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:
SPECIES = MAMMALS, BIRDS, REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS, FISH, INVERTEBRATES
HERITAGE STATE RANK = S1, S2, S3
TOWNSHIP = 24 N RANGE = 5 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
Apalone spinifera Spiny Softshell	**Trionychidae** Softshell Turtles	G5	S3			SENSITIVE	1	2%	26%	Prairie rivers and larger streams
		Species verified in these Counties: Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Teton, Toole, Treasure, Wheatland, Wibaux, Yellowstone							

FISH (ACTINOPTERYGII) — 1 SPECIES

FILTERED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:
SPECIES = MAMMALS, BIRDS, REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS, FISH, INVERTEBRATES
HERITAGE STATE RANK = S1, S2, S3
TOWNSHIP = 24 N RANGE = 5 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
Sander canadensis Sauger	**Percidae** Perches	G5	S2			SENSITIVE	1	1%	15%	Large prairie rivers
		Species verified in these Counties: Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Hill, Liberty, Mccone, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Stillwater, Teton, Treasure, Valley, 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 3/3/2015, 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,

Cory Loecker

Cory Loecker
Wildlife Biologist
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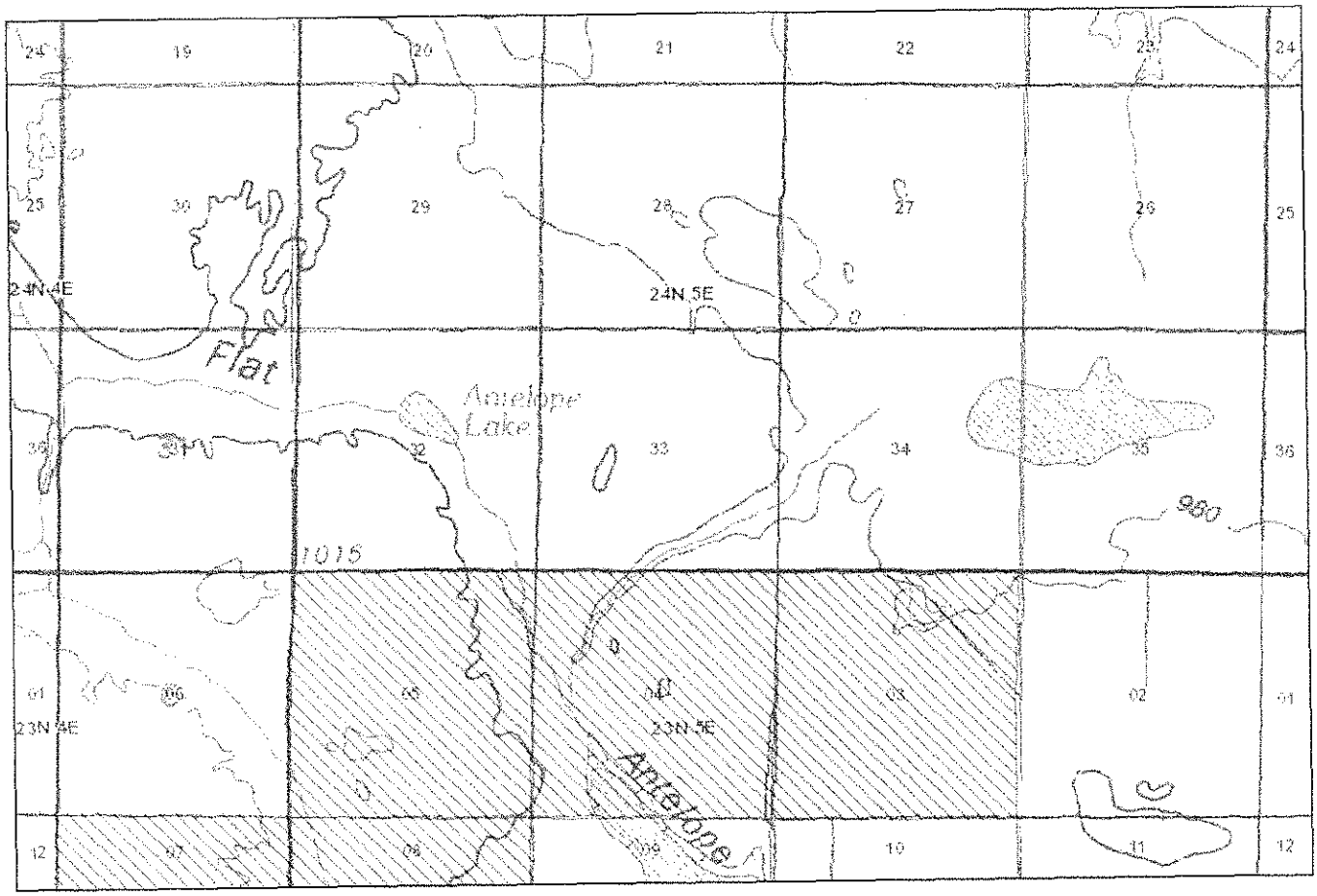
24N 4E
24N 5E
23N 4E
23N 5E
Flat
Antelope Lake
Antelope
1015
980