

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Snowline Grazing Association Stock Water Development
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring/Summer, 2015
Proponent:	Lessee, Snowline Grazing Association
Location:	Sections 9, 23, & 24, T14S R7W
County:	Beaverhead County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The DNRC received an improvement request form from Wes Miner, manager for Snowline Grazing Association to develop a well site and 2 spring sites located on 3 state sections within T14 S R7W. The proposed well site currently consists of a stock tank where the lessee trucks water to the site when livestock are present. The proposed well would provide a localized water source with a short pipeline to the existing tank. The 2 spring sites proposed for development would be piped underground approximately 500 feet to a dry grassland site with one stock tank per line. The project is located in Southern Beaverhead County near Monida Pass. The project would directly affect three tracts of Trust Land. Fencing of the spring sites may be required.

The purpose of the project is to improve water quality and availability to the area. The affected tracts include T14S R7W Sec. 9, 23, & 24. Three aerial photographs depicting the project have been included with this environmental assessment.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Dean Waltee, Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Wildlife Biologist
Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist
Martin Miller, Montana Natural Heritage Program
Pat Fosse, Bureau of Land Management, Dillon Field Office
Lindsay Schmidt, USDA Natural Resources & Conservation Service, Dillon Office

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

No other governmental agencies with jurisdiction or additional permit requirements were identified during the scoping for this proposed project. The project as proposed would involve only Montana Trust Land allocated to Common Schools Grant.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

Alternative B: Preferred alternative. To allow the construction of the well and two spring developments with associated buried pipelines, and one stock water tank per line.

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 USDA Natural Resources & Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey was used to identify affected soils on the project sites. These soils consist of:

Section 9 – 38D - Philipsburg gravelly loam, 2-15% slopes
Section 23 – 38E – Philipsburg gravelly loam 15-35% slopes
Section 24 – 97C – Crookedrun silt loam 1-8% slopes

The soils on site have no known fragile, compactable or unstable attributes according to the NRCS website.

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 surface or ground water resources were identified during scoping and the field inspection to the sites conducted on May 14, 2015.

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.

Air Quality would not be affected by this project.

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.

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities would not be significantly affected by this project due to the small size of the project and short duration of disturbance. Stock tanks would be placed outside of sagebrush where possible to reduce impact on sage grouse habitat.

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 project could increase the availability of water for both livestock and all species of wildlife.

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 Resource Information Service (NRIS) Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) website was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located in the vicinity of the project area. The query results are listed below:

Ferruginous Hawk – (*Buteo regalis*) – The ferruginous hawk is a BLM sensitive species. Ferruginous hawks have been documented using the general area around the project as nesting and hunting ground. The low surface impacts resulting from the project would not significantly alter vegetative composition or nesting habitat for the hawks. No rock outcrops are located within or near the project site. The primary vegetation on-site is primarily native grass species consisting of bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue with mountain big sagebrush as the primary shrub species. No cumulative effects are anticipated.

Sage Grouse – (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – Sage-grouse have been listed as a species of concern with a Montana State sage-grouse management plan in effect. DFWP wildlife biologist Dean Waltee was solicited for comments on the project. Comments received included a request to limit disturbance in existing sagebrush stands to reduce impacts to sage-grouse habitat. Snowline Grazing Association was advised of this proposed change and agreed to place stock tanks outside of existing sagebrush patches where possible to mitigate potential impacts identified by DFWP to sage grouse. Portions of this proposal will occur in areas that have been identified as Core Sage Grouse Habitat.

White-stemmed Globemallow (*Sphaeralcea munroana*) – White-stemmed globemallow is currently listed by the State of Montana as a species potentially at risk. The proposed project will not permanently alter the existing vegetative community type. The project would not have cumulative effects on globemallow habitat or species distribution in the area.

Idaho Sedge (*Carex idahoensis*) – Idaho sedge is a USDA Forest Service, DOI Bureau of Land Management, and State of Montana listed sensitive species. Habitat is riparian and wetland sites. The proposed project would move primary use of the site by livestock to a dry site outside of the spring sources and associated drainages where livestock currently use as a water source. If the project is approved, the spring sites may require fencing to limit further livestock use and force use of the stock tanks.

Letterman's Needlegrass (*Stipa lettermanii*) – Letterman's needlegrass is a state of Montana listed species of concern. Habitat is listed on the NRIS site as limestone talus and dry fescue grasslands in the valley and foothill zones. The proposed project would not negatively affect Letterman's needlegrass habitat as it will occur in wet meadow sites (collection boxes and buried plastic pipeline) and transition zones between wet meadow sites and dryland sites (pipelines and stock tank locations).

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist, was consulted regarding cultural resource issues on the tract. No cultural resources are listed in the data base. No cultural resources were identified during an inspection of the project sites conducted by the Dillon Unit Land Use Specialist on May 14, 2015 with Snowline Grazing Association's manager, Wes Miner.

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 project is not located on a prominent topographic feature and will not alter aesthetics of the area.

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 for additional environmental resources are required for this project. No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from this project.

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 studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for this project.

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 health or safety risks are posed by the project.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

If approved, this project is designed to provide reliable water sources, improve water quality, and improve access to water. Current water on site is trucked in to the proposed well site in Section 9, or by naturally occurring springs in drainages in Sections 23 & 24. Stock tanks would reduce impacts to drainages by providing accessible water on upland sites and improve livestock use and distribution on the three sections.

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 or eliminate permanent jobs 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.

No significant increase in tax revenues are expected as a result of 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.

No increased demand for government services are expected as a result of this project.

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 locally adopted environmental plans will be affected by 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.

This project will not negatively alter recreational activities in the area. The improved access to upland water sources as a result of the project may increase use of this area by wildlife, enhancing recreational opportunities.

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 change in population will result by this project.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No change in social structures and mores are expected as a result of this project.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The action affects water quality and availability. The increased water availability should increase both livestock distribution and wildlife use of the upland areas while the stock tanks will provide a source of water outside of the drainage which will improve water quality.

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 return to the Trust (Common Schools) for this project cannot be measured in dollars received. No additional revenue is expected as a result of this project as the fees received for the grazing lease are based on animal unit months (AUM's) that are calculated on a forage production basis. The lessee is expected to harvest that forage by utilizing the AUM's. To achieve this, the lease ground requires fencing, placing improvements, and/or herding livestock. The lessee's 2 spring developments and 1 well project would increase the overall value of the lease by improving water availability, decrease cattle use at the two spring sources, and improve livestock distribution on the affected section and adjacent Trust Land.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Charles Maddox	Date: 5/20/2015
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Preferred alternative. To allow the construction of the well and two spring developments with associated buried pipelines, and one stock water tank per line.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The lessee's 2 spring developments and 1 well project will increase the overall value of the lease by improving water availability, decrease cattle use at the two spring sources, and improve livestock distribution on the affected section and adjacent Trust Land.

Sections 23 & 24 where the spring developments will occur has been identified as Sage Grouse Core Habitat, but no lek's have been identified near or around these developments. Dean Waltee FWP wildlife biologist was contacted and the locations of the tanks was adjusted to reduce sagebrush disturbance.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Timothy Egan
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan	
Date: May 23, 2015	