

## Environmental Assessment Checklist

**Project Name: Mountain Meadow and Autumn Roads Easement Grant**

**Proposed Implementation Date: November, 2015**

**Proponent: Libby Unit, Northwestern Land Office, Montana DNRC**

**County: Lincoln**

### Type and Purpose of Action

**Description of Proposed Action:**

The Libby Unit of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is responding to the request to grant and easement from Lincoln County. The project is located approximately 4 miles south of Libby (refer to vicinity map Attachment A-1 and project map A-2) and includes the following sections:

Beneficiary	Legal Description	Total Acres	Treated Acres
Common Schools	NW/4 of SW/4 of section 36 T30N R31W	≈2.6	≈2.6
Public Buildings			
MSU 2 <sup>nd</sup> Grant			
MSU Morrill			
Eastern College-MSU/Western College-U of M			
Montana Tech			
University of Montana			
School for the Deaf and Blind			
Pine Hills School			
Veterans Home			
Public Land Trust			
Acquired Land			

Objectives of the project include:

- Grant a historical right of way easement to Lincoln County for the existing Autumn road and grant a new right of way easement to Lincoln County that authorizes the placement and construction of ≈2000feet of new county spec road that connects the end of Mountain Meadow road to Autumn road. The intent of this project is to allow emergency vehicle traffic to more quickly respond to the Amish community, Lincoln county airport, Lincoln County Shooting complex, and the numerous residences in the Farm to Market area.

Proposed activities include:

Action	Quantity
<b>Proposed Harvest Activities</b>	
Clearcut	
Seed Tree	
Shelterwood	
Selection	
Commercial Thinning	
Salvage	
<b>Total Treatment Acres</b>	
<b>Proposed Forest Improvement Treatment</b>	
Pre-commercial Thinning	
Planting	
<b>Proposed Road Activities</b>	
	# Miles
New permanent road construction	0.38
New temporary road construction	
Road maintenance	
Road reconstruction	
Road abandoned	
Road reclaimed	
<b>Other Activities</b>	

<b>Duration of Activities:</b>	
<b>Implementation Period:</b>	≈ 12/2015 – 3/2016

The lands involved in this proposed project are held in trust by the State of Montana. (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11). The Board of Land Commissioners and the DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

The DNRC would manage lands involved in this project in accordance with:

- The State Forest Land Management Plan (DNRC 1996),
- Administrative Rules for Forest Management (ARM 36.11.401 through 471),
- and all other applicable state and federal laws.

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## Project Development

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### SCOPING:

- DATE:
  - October 1 – October 30, 2015

- PUBLIC SCOPED:
  - Public notice run in the Western News newspaper October 2, 9, 16, 2015
  - Mailings to adjacent landowners
- AGENCIES SCOPED:
  - Lincoln County
- COMMENTS RECEIVED:
  - How many: one
  - Concerns:
    - proposed road would be built upon unstable soil type that has springs;
    - the intersection of Autumn road and Farm to Market road is unsafe for sight distance looking south and the increased traffic would exacerbate the problem
  - Results (how were concerns addressed): October 7<sup>th</sup>, the respondent, project leader and Lincoln County road crew supervisor met on site to evaluate road construction on this soil type, how to mitigate for subsurface moisture, and to verify sight distance at the intersection. Lincoln County is aware of the complexities with road construction on this soil type and the possible requirement of rock stabilization of cut and fill slopes, proper ditching, relief culverts and use of French drains. Lincoln County also is aware of the ongoing maintenance responsibilities associated with roads on this soil type. The road crew supervisor verified they would clear vegetation that was encroaching and limiting sight distance as this vegetation was within the right of way of Farm to Market road. The respondent was satisfied that his concerns were brought forth, recognized and mitigated.

DNRC specialists were consulted, including: Tony Nelson, Leah Breidinger.

Internal and external issues and concerns were incorporated into project planning and design and will be implemented in associated contracts.

#### **OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS**

**NEEDED:** *(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

- **Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)-** DNRC is classified as a major open burner by DEQ and is issued a permit from DEQ to conduct burning activities on state lands managed by DNRC. As a major open-burning permit holder, DNRC agrees to comply with the limitations and conditions of the permit.
- **Montana/Idaho Airshed Group-** The DNRC is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group which was formed to minimize or prevent smoke impacts while using fire to accomplish land management objectives and/or fuel hazard reduction (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). The Group determines the delineation of airsheds and impact zones throughout Idaho and Montana. Airsheds describe those geographical areas that have similar atmospheric conditions, while impact zones describe any area in Montana or Idaho that the Group deems smoke sensitive and/or having an existing air quality problem (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). As a member of the Airshed Group, DNRC agrees to burn only on days approved for good smoke dispersion as determined by the Smoke Management Unit.

#### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

**No-Action:** Deny the request from Lincoln County to grant easements.

**Action Alternative (Provide a brief description of all proposed activities):** Grant the Historical Right of Way easement for ≈600 feet of Autumn road. No changes in use are expected; this would reconcile the record in the courthouse with the use on the ground. Grant the new Right of Way easement authorizing the placement and construction of ≈2000 feet of new road that extends from the terminus of Mountain Meadow road at the west property line and connects to Autumn Road at the east property line. These grants would encumber ≈0.82 acres for Autumn road and ≈1.79 acres for Mountain Meadow road. The State would secure revenue from these grants, further develop the property with quality all season public access, increase the future value of the parcel, while allowing emergency traffic quicker response times to the Amish community, Lincoln county airport, Lincoln County Shooting complex, and the numerous residences in the Farm to Market area.

### Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

**VEGETATION:** Evaluation of the impacts of the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on Vegetation (including unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources).

**No-Action:** No activities associated with issuance of easements would occur. Thus no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to vegetation would be anticipated.

**Action Alternative:** Selection of the action alternative allowing the granting of easements and construction of new road, would remove approximately 1.79 acres of existing forested stands from the landscape. These areas would be impacted by the proposed new construction. ≈0.68 acres is young (20 year old) regenerated Ponderosa pine plantation, ≈1.11 acres is mature seed trees that remain from a 2011 firewise treatment. The trees are currently healthy and thriving and would be harvested and sold during this process. It is probably that the disturbance would open the site to weeds.

Vegetation	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Noxious Weeds	x				x				x					
Rare Plants	x				x				x					
Vegetative community	x				x				x					
Old Growth	x				x				x					
<b>Action</b>														
Noxious Weeds		x			x	x			x				Y	V-1
Rare Plants	x				x				x					
Vegetative community				x	x			x	x				N	V-2
Old Growth	x				x				x					

*Comments:*

V-1: Disturbance associated with constructing a new and open road would open the site for the introduction of noxious weeds. Lincoln County does spray for weeds along county roads.

V-2: The ≈1.79 acres that would support the new construction of Mountain Meadow road would have its vegetation community removed.

**SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:**

**Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions:** The project area in the SW ¼, section 36, T30N, R31W contains landform and soils characteristic of landtype 103 from the Soil Survey of Kootenai National Forest Area, Montana and Idaho (USDA, 1995). This landtype is comprised of alluvial terraces.

**No-Action:** No activities associated with issuance of easements would occur. Thus no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to soil disturbance and productivity would be anticipated.

**Action Alternative:** The proposed easement includes construction of approximately 2000 feet of open road with an approximately 40-foot clear limit right-of-way, and removal of 1-2 loads of logs.

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	X				X				X					
Erosion	X				X				X					
Nutrient Cycling	X				X				X					
Slope Stability	X				X				X					
Soil Productivity	X				X				X					
<b>Action</b>														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)				X				X				X	N	S-1
Erosion		X				X				X			Y	S-2
Nutrient Cycling	X				X				X					
Slope Stability		X				X				X			Y	S-3
Soil Productivity		X				X				X			N	S-4

*Comments:*

S-1: Road construction requires cut and fill of soil along with compaction to create a suitable running surface. These impacts are expected and required for the project. No mitigation is necessary.

S-2: Exposure of bare soil on cut slopes, fill slopes and road tread will increase the short-term risk of erosion. No delivery of eroded material to a stream or draw is expected.

S-3: Side slopes in the proposed project area are steep, leading to increased risk of slope failures when disturbed. No evidence of soil mass movement was identified during field reconnaissance (scarp faces, depositional areas or trees with sweep).

S-4: All ground within the proposed clearing limits would be taken permanently out of productivity and converted to a road.

*Soil Mitigations:*

- Pavement of road running surface and prompt re-seeding of all exposed cut and fill slopes would reduce the long-term risk of direct, secondary and cumulative impacts to soil erosion and would return the risk to near pre-project levels once vegetation is established.
- Unstable cut and fill slopes can be stabilized by laying them back at stable angles and buttressing the toe of slumping areas with large boulders where needed.

**WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:**

**Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions:**

**No-Action:** No activities associated with issuance of easements would occur. Thus no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to water quality and quantity would be anticipated.

**Action Alternative:** The proposed easement includes construction of approximately 2000 feet of open road with an approximately 40-foot clear limit right-of-way, and removal of 1-2 loads of logs.

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Water Quality	X				X				X					
Water Quantity	X				X				X					
<b>Action</b>														
Water Quality	X				X				X					WQ-1
Water Quantity	X				X				X					WQ-2

*Comments:*

WQ-1: The proposed project is not located near a stream or draw, so no impacts to water quality are anticipated.

WQ-2: Vegetation removal and acreage of proposed new road are not sufficient to generate a measurable increase in water quantity.

*Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations:* Follow standard Forestry BMPs for road drainage.

**FISHERIES:**

**Fisheries Existing Conditions:**

**No-Action:**

**Action Alternative (see Fisheries table below):**

Fisheries	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b><i>Action</i></b>														
Sediment	X				X				X					
Flow Regimes	X				X				X					
Woody Debris	X				X				X					
Stream Shading	X				X				X					
Stream Temperature	X				X				X					
Connectivity	X				X				X					
Populations	X				X				X					

*Fisheries Mitigations:* None

**WILDLIFE:**

Evaluation of the impacts of the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on Wildlife (including unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources).

**No-Action:** No activities associated with issuance of easements would occur. Thus no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to vegetation would be anticipated.

**Action Alternative (see Wildlife table below):** The proposed easement includes construction of approximately ≈2000 feet of open road and removal of 1-2 loads of logs.

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Threatened and Endangered														

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
Species	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>Grizzly bear</b> ( <i>Ursus arctos</i> ) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	X				X				X				N	
<b>Canada lynx</b> ( <i>Felix lynx</i> ) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zone	X				X				X				N	
<b>Sensitive Species</b>														
<b>Bald eagle</b> ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> ) Habitat: Late-successional forest more than 1 mile from open water	X				X				X				N	
<b>Black-backed woodpecker</b> ( <i>Picoides arcticus</i> ) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	X				X				X				N	
<b>Coeur d'Alene salamander</b> ( <i>Plethodon idahoensis</i> ) Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams	X				X				X				N	
<b>Columbian sharp-tailed grouse</b> ( <i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i> ) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture	X				X				X				N	
<b>Common loon</b> ( <i>Gavia immer</i> ) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	X				X				X				N	

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>Fisher</b> <i>(Martes pennanti)</i> Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	X				X				X				N	WI-1
<b>Flammulated owl</b> <i>(Otus flammeolus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	X				X				X				N	WI-2
<b>Gray Wolf</b> <i>(Canis lupus)</i> Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities	X				X				X				N	
<b>Harlequin duck</b> <i>(Histrionicus histrionicus)</i> Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	X				X				X				N	
<b>Northern bog lemming</b> <i>(Synaptomys borealis)</i> Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats	X				X				X				N	
<b>Peregrine falcon</b> <i>(Falco peregrinus)</i> Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	X				X				X					
<b>Pileated woodpecker</b> <i>(Dryocopus pileatus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	X				X				X					
<b>Townsend's big-</b>	X				X				X					

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>Hoary bat</b> ( <i>Plecotus townsendii</i> ) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines														
<b>Wolverine</b> ( <i>Gulo gulo</i> ) Habitat: Alpine tundra, high-elevation forests, persistent spring snow	X				X				X					
<b>Big Game Species</b>														
<b>Elk</b>		X				X				X			N	WI-3
<b>Whitetail</b>		X				X				X			N	WI-3
<b>Mule Deer</b>		X				X				X			N	WI-3

*Comments:*

W-1: The Project Area contains potentially suitable fisher habitat; however considering that the area contains many residences and that the patch size of mature forest is small, fishers are not likely to use the area. Thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisher would be anticipated.

W-2: The Project Area contains flammulated owl cover types; however these stands are not likely to be used by flammulated owls considering the small patch size. Thus, no adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be anticipated.

W-3: The proposed activities would occur in potential big game winter range habitat. However, the Project Area is adjacent to residential development and does not contain high canopy cover of mature trees; thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game are anticipated.

*Wildlife Mitigations:*

- If a threatened or endangered species is encountered, consult a DNRC biologist immediately and develop additional mitigations that are consistent with the administrative rules for managing threatened and endangered species (ARM 36.11.428 through 36.11.435). Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors or wolf dens are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area contact a DNRC biologist.

**AIR QUALITY:**

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Smoke	x				x				x					

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number	
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative						
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High			
Dust	x				x				x						
<b>Action</b>															
Smoke	x				x				x						
Dust	x				x				x					Y	A-1

**Comments:**

A-1: This proposal would generate some dust during the road construction phase of the operation. However, the surface of the new road would be paved, the overall impact to the area would be small and would be of a limited duration of time.

**Air Quality Mitigations:**

- The County has expressed the need to pave this new road for all season use and thus will effectively mitigate air quality issues related to this project.

Will the No-Action or Action Alternatives result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number	
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative						
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High			
<b>No-Action</b>															
Historical or Archaeological Sites	x				x				x						
Aesthetics	x				x				x						
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	x				x				x						
<b>Action</b>															
Historical or Archaeological Sites	x				x				x						
Aesthetics		x			x				x					N	
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	x				x				x						

**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 under MEPA review on the tract listed in this EA.

**Impacts on the Human Population**

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Human Population.

Will the No-Action or Action Alternatives result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number	
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative						
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High			
<b>No-Action</b>															
Health and Human Safety			x				x			x					HH-1
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	x				x				x						
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	x				x				x						
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	x				x				x						
Demand for Government Services	x				x				x						
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	x				x				x						
Density and Distribution of population and housing	x				x				x						
Social Structures and Mores	x				x				x						
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	x				x				x						
<b>Action</b>															
Health and Human Safety			x				x			x					HH-1
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	x				x				x						
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	x				x				x						
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	x				x				x						
Demand for Government Services	x				x				x						
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	x				x				x						
Density and Distribution of	x				x				x						

Will the No-Action or Action Alternatives result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
population and housing														
Social Structures and Mores	x				x				x					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	x				x				x					

*Comments:*

HH-1: No action has a negative impact because of increased emergency response time to the service area, while the action would positively impact the service area with a reduced emergency response time.

**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 area.

**Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances:**

**No Action:** The No Action alternative would not allow the County to construct a new road across State land. This would not allow faster response time of emergency vehicles to the Farm to Market service area.

**Action:** Granting the easement and thus allowing the road to be constructed would shorten the response time of emergency service vehicles approximately 5 minutes to the area previously serviced by the Cabinet View Fire department. This action would benefit countless residences in the Farm to Market area, the Amish community, the County airport and Shooting sports complex.

**References**

DNRC 1996. State forest land management plan: final environmental impact statement (and appendixes). Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

DNRC. 2010. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan: Final EIS, Volume II, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

**Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?**

None that are known or anticipated.

**Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?**

None that are known or anticipated.

**Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:**

**Name: Jeremy Rank**  
**Title: Management Forester**  
**Date: November 6, 2015**

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**Finding**

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**Alternative Selected**

The action alternative is being selected.

**Significance of Potential Impacts**

No significant environmental or social impacts are expected to occur as a result of the proposed activity. The action alternative would allow for the Historical Right of Way easement for the Autumn Road, reconciling the record in the courthouse with the use on the ground. It would grant the new Right of Way easement authorizing the placement and construction of new road that extends from the terminus of Mountain Meadow road at the west property line and connects to Autumn Road at the east property line. This would allow for emergency traffic to respond quicker to the Farm to Market area which includes areas such as the Amish community, Lincoln county airport and numerous private homes.

**Need for Further Environmental Analysis**

EIS

More Detailed EA

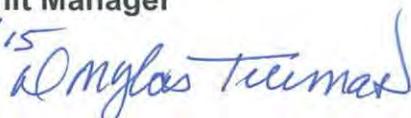
No Further Analysis

**Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:**

**Name: Douglas Turman**  
**Title: Libby Unit Manager**

**Date:** 11/17/15

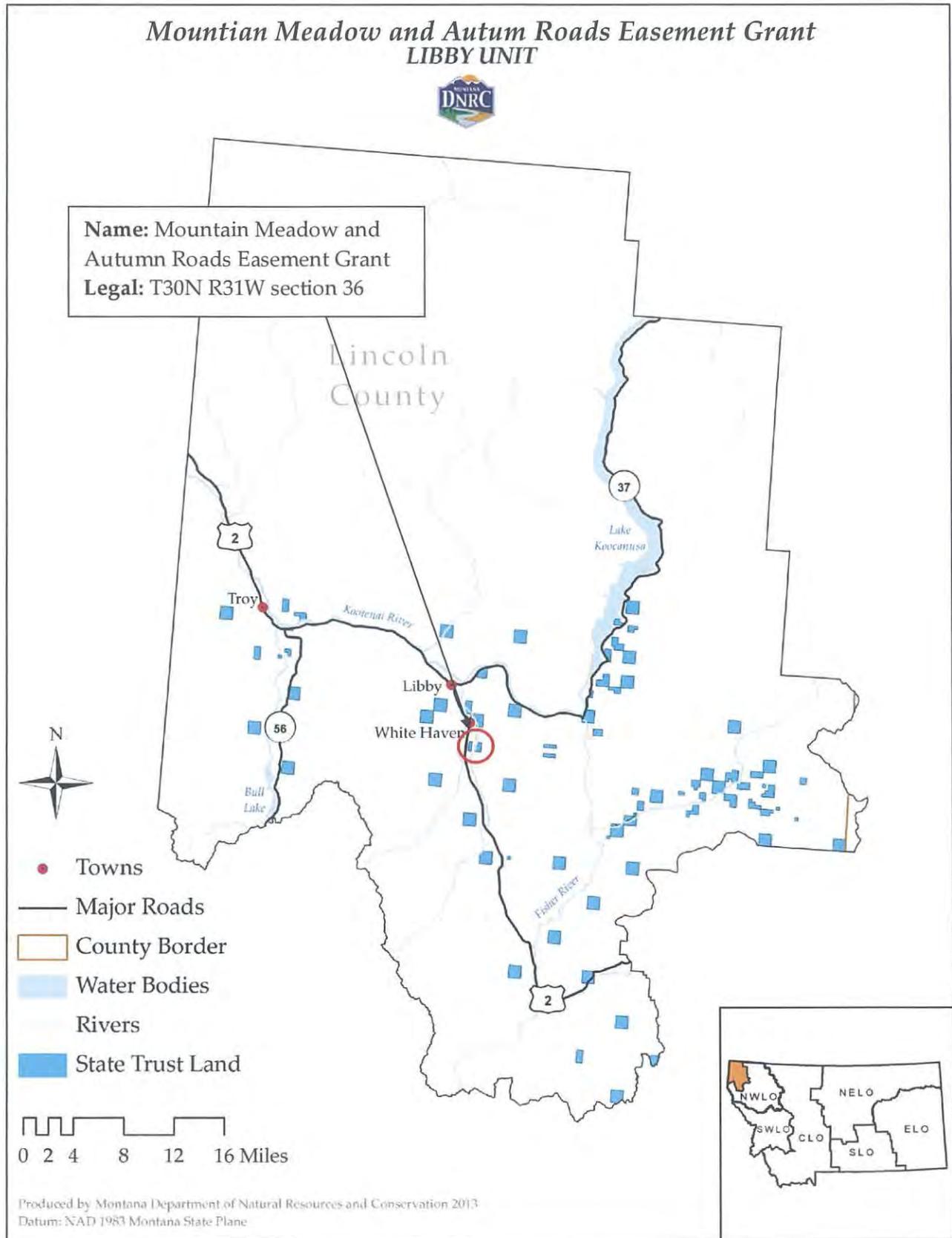
**Signature:**



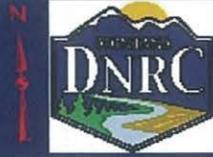
**/s/ Douglas Turman**

## **Attachment A- Maps**

A-1: Vicinity Map



# Mountain Meadow and Autumn Road T30N R31W Sec. 36



0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles