

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

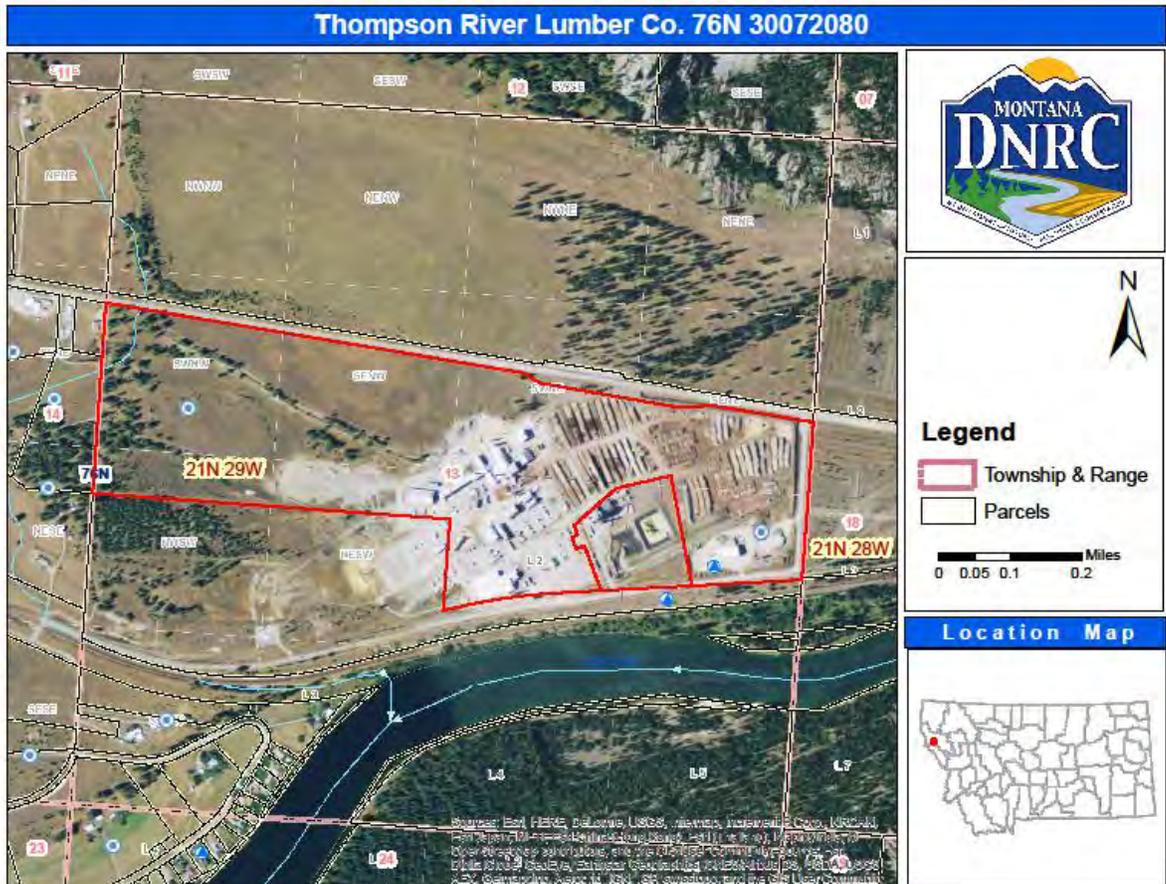
Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: Thompson River Lumber Co.
PO Box 279
Thompson Falls, MT 59873
2. Type of action: Application to Change an Existing Non-Irrigation Water Right 76N
30072080
3. Water source name: Groundwater
4. Location affected by project: S2N2 and N2S2 Section 13, Township 21N, Range 29W,
Sanders County
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:

The Applicant is proposing to change the purpose, place of use, and place of storage of unperfected Provisional Permit 76N 30011235. The purpose will be changed from power generation to industrial use in order to provide adequate water to an on-site lumber mill currently in operation. The proposed place of use under this change will be the S2N2 and N2S2 Section 13, Township 21N, Range 29W, Sanders County. The Applicant is also proposing to add an additional place of storage with a capacity of 0.42 AF and to reduce an existing place of storage from a capacity of 34 AF to 15.6 AF.

The DNRC shall issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.

6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:
Montana Natural Resource Information System (NRIS)
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (DFWP)
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Montana Natural Heritage Program
National Wetlands Inventory
USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey



Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

Determination: No significant impact

The source of supply is groundwater. A hydraulic connection between the source aquifer and the Clark Fork River most likely occurs downstream of Thompson Falls. The Clark Fork River below Thompson Falls has not been identified as chronically or periodically dewatered by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks.

Water quality - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

Determination: No significant impact

The reach of the Clark Fork River which will be depleted by groundwater pumping of the Applicant's wells has been identified by DEQ as not supporting aquatic life and fully supporting agriculture, primary contact recreation, and drinking water. It is not anticipated that pumping of the Applicant's groundwater well will have any negative impacts on the water quality of the Clark Fork River.

Groundwater - Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

Determination: No significant impact

The Applicant is proposing to divert a flow of 250 GPM up to 236.43 AF annually from the groundwater aquifer. The proposed changes are being made to an unperfected Provisional Permit. Under change proceedings on an unperfected permit, the water right owner has the ability to change up to the permitted flow rate and volume of the underlying permit. There will be no additional flow or volume withdrawn from the aquifer above that which has already been permitted.

DIVERSION WORKS - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.

Determination: No significant impact

The means of diversion (well) has already been constructed. Since this is a groundwater appropriation, there will be no channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, dams, or riparian impacts to the lower Clark Fork River which is located adjacent to the project area.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any "species of special concern," or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or "species of special concern."

Determination: No significant impact

The Montana Natural Heritage Program identified a list of 14 animal species of concern within the township and range that the project is in. Of this list, the Grizzly Bear and Bull Trout are listed as "threatened" by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Two plant species of special concern were identified by the Montana Natural Heritage Program to potentially be in the project area. None of the plant species are identified as endangered or threatened by the US Fish & Wildlife

Service. The project area for this change application is an active lumber mill. Authorization of the proposed changes will not have an effect on the identified plant and animal species of concern.

Townsend's Big Eared Bat	Wolverine	Fisher	Grizzly Bear
Northern Goshawk	Evening Grosbeak	Pileated Woodpecker	Cassin's Finch
Varied Thrush	Lewis's Woodpecker	Clark's Nutcracker	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
Bull Trout	A Millipede	Diamond Clarkia	Clustered Lady's slipper

Wetlands - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

Determination: No significant impact

There were no wetlands identified within the project area.

Ponds - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

Determination: No significant impact

There were no ponds identified within the project area.

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE - Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.

Determination: No significant impact

The beneficial use under the proposed change is industrial use. It is not anticipated that any of these uses will have an impact on the soil quality, stability, or moisture content. The place of use is developed as a lumber mill and yard and water will be used for dust suppression, log watering, and fire suppression.

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.

Determination: No significant impact

It is not anticipated that issuance of a water use permit will contribute to the spread of noxious weeds in the project area. The project area is developed as a lumber mill and yard and it will be the responsibility of the landowner to control weeds on their property.

AIR QUALITY - *Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.*

Determination: No significant impact

There will be no impact to air quality associated with issuance of a water use permit. Under the proposed change to industrial use, water will be used mitigate dust within the lumber yard.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - *Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.*

Determination: N/A- Project not located on State or Federal Lands.

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - *Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.*

Determination: No other potential impacts have been identified.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - *Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.*

Determination: No known environmental plans or goals will be impacted by this project.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.*

Determination: No access or recreational activities will be significantly impacted by this project.

HUMAN HEALTH - *Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.*

Determination: This proposed project will have no significant impact on human health.

PRIVATE PROPERTY - *Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.*

Yes ___ No X *If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.*

Determination: No regulatory impacts are known.

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impacts identified
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impacts identified
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impacts identified
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impacts identified
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impacts identified
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impacts identified
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impacts identified
- (h) Utilities? No significant impacts identified
- (i) Transportation? No significant impacts identified
- (j) Safety? No significant impacts identified
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impacts identified

2. *Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:*

Secondary Impacts No significant impacts identified

Cumulative Impacts No significant impacts identified

3. *Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:* None

4. *Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:*

The only alternative to the proposed action would be the no action alternative. The no action alternative would not provide authorization for the Applicant to use water for dust abatement, log watering in the lumber yard, and fire suppression.

PART III. Conclusion

1. *Preferred Alternative*

Issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.

2 ***Comments and Responses***

None

3. ***Finding:***

Yes ___ No **X** *Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?*

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

No significant impacts related to the proposed project have been identified.

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Nathaniel T. Ward

Title: Water Resource Specialist

Date: October 6, 2015