

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**

Applicant/Contact name and address: **MONARCH VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT  
PO BOX 866  
MONARCH, MT 59463**

1. Type of action: **Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 41Q 30102958**
2. Water source name: **Belt Creek**
3. Location affected by project: **Section 33 T16N R7E (Cascade County)**
4. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:

**The Applicant proposes to divert water from Belt Creek by means of a pump located in the NWSESE Section 33, T16N, R7E, from April 1 through September 30. The flow rate is 200 gallons per minute (GPM), and the volume to be appropriated is 0.2 acre-feet (AF) per year. The purpose of use is fire training. The legal description of the place of use is considered the same as the point of diversion because of the purpose for which water will be used and because this is where the fire trucks will be filled. Water will be pumped from Belt Creek and used for fire training purposes, twice per month, in various and unknown locations throughout the area. The proposed appropriation is located in Cascade County in the town of Monarch.**

5. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:  
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)

**Dept. of Environmental Quality Website - TMDL 303d listing  
MT. National Heritage Program Website - Species of Concern  
USDI Fish & Wildlife Service Website - Endangered and Threatened Species  
MT State Historic Preservation Office - Archeological/Historical Sites  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Web Soil Survey  
USDI Fish & Wildlife Service – Wetlands Online Mapper  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – MFISH Website**

**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 reach of interest in Belt Creek for this permit application has not been identified as chronically dewatered stream by MT FWP, no data was found. The current USGS gage analyzed by the Department reflects that median of the mean monthly stream flows exceed the proposed combined flow rate of 200 GPM in all months requested for appropriation. The stream gage is located downstream of the proposed diversion and therefore this determination is contingent on certain stream conditions that must exist before appropriation can occur. The Applicant will be required to check stream flows at USGS Gage No. 06090500 (Belt Creek near Monarch, MT) before appropriating water under this permit. If Applicant adheres to all Department conditions of appropriation, this project will not have a significant impact on surface water quantity in the Belt Creek.

**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 Belt Creek near this project has been designated as needing a TMDL plan. The 2014 303d listing identifies impairments to drinking water, agricultural support and aquatic life support probably caused by past mining, acid drainage, riparian grazing and new construction in or around the source. No significant impacts to water quality are anticipated because of this project; the stipulations/conditions noted under the water quantity section above and detailed later in this document will also limit further impact to the impaired conditions by ensuring minimum stream flows are left in the source.

**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**

This is a short duration surface water appropriation for fire training and as such, there should be no significant impact to groundwater quality or supply.

**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**

It is unlikely that the project will have any significant impacts related to the diversion works. The method of diversion is a 6.5-horsepower gas-powered pump that provides 200 GPM and the Applicant will be required to adhere to specific monitoring conditions before appropriation can occur. Fire training diversions will be conveyed to 4 trucks with a maximum combined capacity of 5000 gallons.

#### **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 National Heritage Program website lists four animal species as species of concern within Township 16 North Range 7 East. Common names for these species are the Wolverine, Fringed Myotis (bat), Westslope Cutthroat Trout, and the Gillette's Checkerspot (butterfly). No plant species are listed as species of concern. The USDI Fish & Wildlife Service Website shows that Cascade County has two species listed as candidates for the Endangered Species Act; the Whitebark Pine and Sprague's Pipit. The website also lists the Canada Lynx as threatened and the Red Knot as a proposed species in Cascade County. This project is not expected to impact any species listed above as the project will divert water from Belt Creek via a small developed lot located in the community of Monarch. In addition, pumpsite installation is likely subject to 310 permitting requirements regulated by the Cascade County Conservation District.

***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**

This small irrigation project should not negatively impact any wetlands. The USDI Fish & Wildlife Service – Wetlands Online Mapper shows a small Riverine type wetland about 0.2 miles downstream on Belt Creek. This wetland should not be affected by the proposed irrigation, the Applicant will be required to abide by specific streamflow conditions before appropriating water, which includes a minimum instream flow of 90 CFS for the MT FWP fishery reservation.

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

*Determination:*           **No Significant Impact**

This project does not involve a pond. No impact to wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries is anticipated.

**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**

**There should be no significant impacts to the soil profile because of this project, the water will be pumped to trucks and used for fire training purposes.**

**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**

**Other than potential short-term effects from the pump set-up, no new disturbance of vegetative cover is expected. It is the responsibility of the property owner to control noxious 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**

**No impacts to air quality have been identified. The pump will be powered by a gas engine and will run approximately 5.5 hours per season for the requested fire training needs.**

**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:*           **No Significant Impact**

**Not Applicable – 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 Significant Impact**

**No significant impacts are anticipated, the Applicant will be required to monitor stream discharge to ensure minimum flows are left in the source to prevent adverse effects.**

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

Determination: **No Significant Impact**

**No local environmental plans or goals have been identified. The proposed action is consistent with emergency training activities in rural Montana.**

**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 Significant Impact**

**As conditioned, the proposed action should not negatively affect recreational activities in the area.**

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

Determination: **No Significant Impact**

**No impacts to human health have been identified. A competent well-trained rural fire department will benefit Monarch and surrounding areas.**

**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 Significant Impact**

**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? **None**
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? **None**
- (c) Existing land uses? **None**
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? **None**
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? **None**
- (f) Demands for government services? **None**

- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? **None**
- (h) Utilities? **None**
- (i) Transportation? **None**
- (j) Safety? **Fire training can be beneficial to community.**
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? **None**

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

Secondary Impacts:

**As mentioned above, this proposal may benefit Monarch and the surrounding area by allowing the rural fire department the ability to practice fire suppression techniques, prior to having an actual emergency.**

Cumulative Impacts:

**No significant cumulative impacts are anticipated.**

3. *Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:*

**The Department has deemed specific conditions necessary to meet the statutory criteria. These conditions are required by the Departments' Preliminary Determination:**

**Conditions**

1. **IMPORTANT INFORMATION:**

THE APPROPRIATOR MUST MONITOR USGS STREAM GAGE NO. 06090500 (BELT CREEK NEAR MONARCH, MT) AND COMPLY WITH MINIMUM STREAM FLOW CONDITIONS PRIOR TO DIVERTING WATER. THE APPROPRIATOR SHALL DIVERT WATER ONLY DURING THE PERIOD OF APPROPRIATION AND WHEN USGS GAGE NO. 06090500 INDICATES A STREAM FLOW IN EXCESS OF 130 CFS. THE APPROPRIATOR SHALL NOT DIVERT WATER UNLESS THE REFERENCED USGS STREAM GAGE IS OPERATING AND REGISTERING STREAM FLOWS. THE CURRENT WEBSITE ADDRESS FOR THE USGS STREAM GAUGING NETWORK IS: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis/current?type=flow>

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:*

**No action alternative: Deny the permit application. This alternative would result in no benefit to the Applicant from fire training.**

*PART III. Conclusion*

1. *Preferred Alternative*

**The preferred alternative is the proposed alternative.**

2. *Comments and Responses*

**None Received.**

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:*

**None of the identified impacts for any of the alternatives are significant as defined in ARM 36.2.524**

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

*Name:* **Douglas Mann**

*Title:* **Water Resources Specialist**

*Date:* **9/11/2015**