CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Agricultural Clark Fork Bridge Crossing
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2025
Proponent:	Joe Asbury Burchco, LLC
Location:	NE1/4SE1/4 Section 17 Township 11N Range 13W
County:	Granite

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Proponent, Joe Asbury of Burchco LLC has applied for Right of Way (ROW) easement for a proposed agricultural bridge across the Clark Fork River 5.4 miles West of Drummond, MT.

The .04-acre ROW easement application is for a strip of land 20 feet wide by 83.27 feet long for the bridge span over the Clark Fork River. The 83.27 feet is the surveyed length between low water mark to low water mark, that the bridge would span over the Clark Fork River.

Montana Code (MCA 70-16-201) provides for state ownership from the low water mark to the low water mark on navigable water bodies. Based on historical documentation, the Clark Fork River is commercially navigable from Deer Lodge, Montana to the Idaho state line. Therefore, the state claims ownership of the riverbed below the low water marks. The DNRC has no authority outside the low water marks and is only analyzing between these two points.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

Scoping:

Adjacent landowners. No responses were received from Scoping Letters sent out on June 12th.
DNRC specialists and staff were consulted, including Andrea Stanley (Hydrologist/Soils Scientist, Carmen Evans (Right-of-Way Specialist), Patrick Rennie (Archeologist), Garrett Schairer (Wildlife Biologist) Mike Anderson (Fisheries Biologist).

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

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

Granite County Conservation District (310 Permit) did a technical review and at the December 2024 meeting issued a 310 Permit for this project. Granite County Floodplain Administrator has issued Burchco a permit for this project. The Department of Environmental Quality also has jurisdiction on this project.

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request by Joe Asbury of Burchco LLC to issue a ROW easement for agricultural bridge on the Clark Fork River.

No Action Alternative –Deny the request by Joe Asbury of Burchco.LLC to issue a ROW easement for an agricultural bridge over the Clark Fork River.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

No Action: No change to geology or soils.

Action Alternative: The Granite County Conservation District issued a 310 Permit for this project pursuant to the Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act. which ensures the proposed project would be conducted in an environmentally responsible manner.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

No Action: No change to water quality, quantity, or distribution.

Action Alternative: A floodplain permit has been issued for the project by Granite County Planning. Which implies the project meets their stipulated flood proofing requirements including design to minimize increase to flood heights.

If the project were to cause water quality impact, permitting would be required from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. For example, a 318 authorization for short-term water quality standard for turbidity due to construction activities.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e., particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

No Action: No change in the existing condition.

Action Alternative: Implementation of the proposed action will result in a temporary increase in emissions and dust from heavy equipment to install the bridge. These impacts should be short in duration and have no long-term impacts on air quality.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

No Action: No change to vegetation cover.

Action Alternative: Changes in vegetation cover would occur with the project associated with the proposed construction. The Granite County Conservation District issued a 310 Permit for this project pursuant to the Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act which ensures the proposed project would be conducted in an environmentally responsible manner.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Existing Conditions: Terrestrial, Avian, and Aquatic Wildlife: Limited habitats for terrestrial and avian wildlife exist in the project area. Some use of the DNRC-managed project area by aquatic mammals, birds, and amphibians is possible. Surrounding uplands and riparian habitats support a variety of wildlife species. Proximity to Highway 90, other smaller roads, agricultural activities, human recreation activities along the Clark Fork River, and numerous other forms of human disturbance likely limits wildlife use of the vicinity.

Fisheries habitat in the project area includes the Clark Fork River near river mile 255.5. Native species present include Bull Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Northern Pikeminnow, Longnose Dace, Longnose Sucker, and Slimy Sculpin, introduced species include Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout, Brook Trout, Northern Pike and other minor species (MFISH 2025). Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout are considered sensitive species by DNRC. Bull Trout are listed as a threatened species (USFWS 2010) with foraging, migration, and overwintering critical habitat in the Clark Fork River. Potential for impacts to this species and habitat are discussed in detail in Section 9 below. Instream habitat in this reach has been impacted by encroachment of both the I-90 interstate and BNSF railroad corridors resulting in simplification of instream habitat and reduced natural channel migration within the floodplain.

No-Action: No easement would be granted, thus no further disturbance to terrestrial and avian wildlife would occur in the project area. No changes to exiting habitats would occur. Collectively, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to terrestrial or aquatic wildlife would be anticipated.

Action Alternative: By granting an easement, bridge construction would be anticipated, which could introduce some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife. Any construction facilitated by the easement could contribute minor increases in disturbance to resident terrestrial and avian wildlife. Negligible long-term disturbance to wildlife in the vicinity would be anticipated. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Anticipated bridge construction could create an additional flight hazard for avian species using the river corridor but could also create additional nesting and roosting habitats for avian and mammalian species in the vicinity. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Implementation of the Action Alternative would have limited temporary impacts on fisheries habitat in the project area. Granting an easement would likely result in installation of the proposed bridge crossing. During construction, there would be a low risk of low temporary impact to fisheries habitat through introduction of sediment during construction of bridge abutments and associated work to prepare the site for the bridge. Equipment may cross the stream which may mobilize fine sediment and lead to temporary increases in turbidity and sedimentation downstream from the project area. These impacts are expected to be short-term in duration and have a minimal downstream impact that would not impact fisheries habitat long-term. Implementation of sediment delivery Best Management Practices during and following construction of bridge abutments would likely minimize potential short- and long-term risk of sediment delivery. No measurable or detectable impacts to fisheries populations or connectivity would occur as a result of implementation of the Action Alternative.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Existing Conditions: Limited habitats for terrestrial and avian wildlife exist in the project area. Some use of the DNRC-managed project area by aquatic mammals, birds, and amphibians is possible. Surrounding uplands and riparian habitats likely supports a variety of wildlife species. The nearest known bald eagle nest is over 1.3 miles away from the project area. Habitats for yellow-billed cuckoos appear to be absent in the vicinity of the project area. No known great blue heron rookeries are in the vicinity. Northern hoary bats have been documented downstream of the project area along the Clark Fork River and numerous other sensitive bat species exist in the vicinity that could be found in the project area. A suite of avian species likely travel along the Clark Fork River and could use the project area and/or surrounding terrestrial habitats. Similarly several waterfowl species likely use the aquatic habitats in the project area for foraging. Proximity to Highway 90, the frontage road, agricultural

activities, human recreation activities along the Clark Fork River, and numerous other forms of human disturbance likely limits wildlife use of the vicinity.

The Clark Fork River in the project area is designated Bull Trout foraging, migration, and overwintering habitat (USFWS 2010) as well as providing habitat for Westslope Cutthroat Trout, a state species of concern. Existing habitat in this reach has been impacted by significant floodplain development including the I-90 interstate corridor, BNSF railroad corridor, and several county and private bridges. The project reach is likely rarely used by Bull Trout due to the proximity to local spawning habitat both upstream and downstream. Westslope Cutthroat Trout may occupy the project reach occasionally as thermal and physical habitat conditions allow.

No-Action: No easement would be granted, thus no further disturbance to unique, threatened, or endangered terrestrial or aquatic wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would occur. Collectively, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to terrestrial or aquatic wildlife would be anticipated.

Action Alternative: By granting an easement, bridge construction would be anticipated, which could introduce some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial unique, threatened, endangered, or sensitive terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species in the vicinity during construction. Any construction facilitated by the easement could contribute minor increases in disturbance to resident unique, threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species. Negligible additional long-term disturbance to wildlife in the vicinity would be anticipated. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Anticipated bridge construction could create an additional flight hazard for avian species using the river corridor but could also create additional nesting and roosting habitats for avian and mammalian species in the vicinity. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial unique, threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated.

Bridge construction may result in short-term increased risk of sedimentation and turbidity during installation of the bridge. Impacts to Bull Trout critical habitat and Westslope Cutthroat Trout would be limited to the period during construction, during which Best Management Practices for sediment control would be implemented to mitigate potential risk of delivery. Granting the easement would result in low risk of low short-term impacts to fisheries habitat through increased sedimentation and turbidity. Implementation of the Action Alternative would have no measurable or detectable impact on fisheries populations or connectivity. Negligible effects to unique, threatened, endangered or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated.

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10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. As expected, the Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, but the APE on state land is the active riverbed and channel.

Because of the improbability for the presence of cultural or palaeontologic resources, proposed bridge activities are expected to have *No Effect* to *Antiquities*. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

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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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

No Action: No change in the existing condition.

Action Alternative: The proposed project would be visible from Interstate 90 and the Drummond Frontage Road. The bridge would also be visible to recreationalists on the Clark Fork River.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No Action: No change to existing condition.

Action Alternative: Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on demand for environmental resources over existing conditions.

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.

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 Action: No change to the existing condition.

Action Alternative: Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on human health and safety.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No Action: No change to the existing condition.

Action Alternative: There would be an increase of Agriculture activities south of the Clark Fork River due to this bridge.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

No Action: No change to the existing condition.

Action Alternative: Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment aside from temporary work associated with the construction of the project.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No Action: No change to the existing condition.

Action Alternative: Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on local and state taxes or local private property values.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

No Action: No change to the existing condition.

Action Alternative: Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact 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.

No Action: No change to the existing condition.

Action Alternative: The proponent has obtained permitting from Granite County Floodplain, and Granite Conservation District for 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

No Action: No change to the existing condition.

Action Alternative: In the submitted project design the bridge is 10 ft above the Ordinary High-Water Mark. According to these metrics the proposed project should not reduce recreation access.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

Neither the Action nor No Action Alternatives are expected to have an effect on population and housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Neither the Action and No Action Alternatives are expected to have an effect on social structures and mores.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Neither the Action nor the No Action Alternative are expected to have an effect on cultural uniqueness and diversity.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The charge for the ROW Easement would be $971.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Craig Hansen **Title:** Unit Manager		**Date:** **7/09/2025**

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED: Action Alternative

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

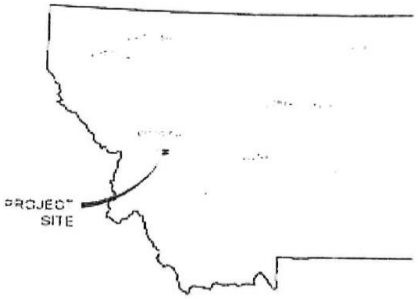
In this project, the DNRC Montana Trust Lands Division does not have the authority to restrict or mitigate impacts beyond our ownership and jurisdiction, which in this case is the bed of the river between the low-water marks. There are other agencies that have regulatory responsibilities outside the low-water marks. Therefore, what has been analyzed by the DNRC has little or no significant impacts.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

	EIS		More Detailed EA	**X**	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Sierra Farmer **Title:** Trust Lands Program Manager, Southwestern Land Office.	
Signature: 		**Date**: 7/14/25

JOE ASBURY
CLARK FORK RIVER BRIDGE CROSSING
GRANITE COUNTY, MT



LOCATION MAP

SURVEY CONTROL POINT LIST

SHEET INDEX

SHEET	DESCRIPTION
1	COVER SHEET
2	GENERAL NOTES & ABBREVIATIONS
3	LEGENDS & SYMBOLS
4	EXISTING CONDITIONS MAP
5	FLOODPLAIN IMPACT EXHIBIT
6	FLOODPLAIN IMPACT EXHIBIT NOTES
7	RESOURCE IMPACT EXHIBIT
8	BRIDGE CROSSING PLAN
9	BRIDGE DETAILS
10	ABUTMENT DETAILS

PROJECT OVERVIEW

811 Montana Utility Notification Center

WGM GROUP

FOR AGENCY REVIEW

COVER SHEET
CLARK FORK RIVER BRIDGE CROSSING
GRANITE COUNTY, MT

MAY 2024

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