CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Mussard Spring Development Request, 2025
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer / Fall, 2025
Proponent:	Bryan Mussard, Lessee
Location:	NESENENE (Lot 1), Section 16, T10S R13W
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent is requesting to develop a small spring located in the above described legal description to provide an improved livestock water source for cattle using the lease. The spring site is predominately clay soil that is impacted by livestock and wildlife attempting to access water. The lessee plans to place a headbox in the spring and jack leg fence the source to reduce trampling. A short approximate 80' pipeline would be placed with a single tank at the end of it, also located in Government Lot 1. Construction would occur during the summer or early fall, 2025 and would be short duration of less than a week.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Jesse Newby, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Biologist
Bryan Mussard, Lessee
Montana Natural Resource Information Service
Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist
Lessee contacted the Montana Sage Grouse Advisory Committee (MSGOT)

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

Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program was consulted for this project.
No other government oversite or agencies with Jurisdiction or permits needed for this request.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A) Allow construction of the proposed water development
Alternative B) No action, water development construction would be denied.

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 project area is located in foothill terrain. Topography is rolling. Due to the low impact nature of the water development project on soils, the proposal would not cause cumulative effects. No special reclamation is

expected. If the project is approved, the site will be assessed after construction by Dillon Unit staff prior to grazing lease expiration and alterations may be required if significant impacts are noted.

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.

The proposed water development would move livestock use out of the spring site and into an upland area. In-stream flow water quality is expected to improve as a result of the proposed project as cattle and wildlife use of the spring source site is reduced.

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.

None

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.

No cumulative effects to vegetation are expected to result from this proposed project. Vegetation around the spring source would benefit from exclusion fencing.

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 area is heavily used by elk, pronghorn, & deer. The proposed project is located within designated core sage-grouse habitat. The project was submitted to MSGOT for sage grouse input. Wildlife escape ramps on the stock tank would be required. The project is greater than 3 miles from the nearest active lek. Construction is to be temporary in nature. The pipeline will be buried, installation methods would create minimal ground disturbance, and the vegetation will be reclaimed within one growing season. Jesse Newby, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks biologist was solicited for comments on this project regarding wildlife impacts. He did not expect the proposed water tank to have measurable negative impacts to wildlife use of the area. He requested that the spring source be fenced and ground disturbance be minimized to reduce potential for weed infestation.

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.

A query was made on the Montana Natural Heritage Program site regarding endangered or sensitive species located in the vicinity of the project area. The resulting Species of Concern Data Report included 9 species found:

1) **Wolverine** (*Gulo gulo*) – The wolverine is listed as a BLM and USFS threatened species and a species potentially at risk by the State of Montana. The proposed water development project would not affect wolverine use of the area.

2) **Greater Sage-Grouse** (*Centrocercus urophasianus)*- Greater Sage-Grouse are listed as sensitive by the US Forest Service, BLM, and the State of Montana. The project area is located in Sage-Grouse core habitat as identified by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. According to MSGOT, the nearest lek is over 3 miles

West of the project area. The stock tank will be fitted with a wildlife escape ramp. The water development project will have no cumulative effects to Sage-Grouse use or habitat.

3) **Ferruginous Hawk** (*Buteo regalis*) – Ferruginous hawks have been sighted adjacent to the proposed project area. It is a BLM sensitive species. The foothills around the project area meets nesting habitat descriptions. The proposed spring development project would not affect habitat of this species.

4) **Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Golden eagles are a protected species under U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regulations; it is also a BLM sensitive species and classified in the State of Montana as a species potentially at risk. The proposed project will not alter the existing vegetative community type and would not influence use of the area by golden eagles. The project would not have cumulative effects on golden eagle habitat or species distribution in the area.

5) **Chicken-Sage** (*Sphaeromeria argentea*) – Chicken-sage is a BLM listed sensitive species and a potentially at risk species by the State of Montana. The plant is generally thought to be unpalatable to cattle. Due to the low surface impact of this project, significant impacts to this species are not expected to result from this project.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was consulted regarding the project. He responded as follows:

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. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Additionally, the Dillon Unit Land Use Specialist inspected the APE first-hand with negative results for cultural resources. 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.

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 proposed project is located in a remote part of Beaverhead County. The site of the proposed water development is not visible from any open roads or trails. The project would not be detrimental to aesthetic values 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 limited resources would be required. The proposed project would not alter or affect other activities in the area. No cumulative effects to environmental resources are expected as a result of 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 or reviews were reported during 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 human health or safety risks are expected to result from this project.

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

The proposed project would not significantly alter agricultural activities or production.

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 proposed project would not affect the employment market, the lessee is planning on constructing the water development himself. No positive or negative cumulative effects to the employment market would result from this project.

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.

Tax revenue would not be affected by 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.

None

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.

None

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.

The proposed project would not alter any unique quality or diversity of the area.

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.

None

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed project would not alter any unique quality or diversity of the area.

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 purpose of this environmental document is to assess a request to improve access to water for livestock and improve quality of water in-stream from the spring source by reducing trampling. Livestock distribution would also benefit from improved access to water. The improvement, if approved, would be owned by the lessee. Monetary return to the Common Schools Trust beneficiary as a direct result of this proposed water development project is zero.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Charles Maddox	**Date:**	8/7/2025
	Title:	Land Use Specialist		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative A) Allow construction of the proposed water development

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Installation of the spring development and stock tank will improve overall grazing on the section by spreading the livestock out over the section allowing for better utilization of the available forage on the section and will reduce trampling in the spring area. No significant impacts are anticipated.

Mitigation measures will include the installation of a wildlife ramp in the tank as an escape feature for birds and small mammals.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Timothy Egan		
	Title:	Dillon Unit Manager		
Signature:	/S/ Timothy Egan		**Date**:	8/7/2025


Stockwater Tank
Spring undeveloped