

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: H Bar O Farms Expired CRP Break

Proposed

Implementation Date: Spring 2026

Proponent: H Bar O Farms

Location: T24NR7E Section 33

County: Chouteau

Trust: Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

H Bar O Farms has requested to break roughly 371 acres of land that has been in CRP for 30 years. The CRP contract is expiring and will not be renewed. H Bar O Farms plans to spray out and no-till farm the land to mitigate erosion and soil damage. There is a large Cottonwood Grove located on these acres, created many years ago by a flood. H Bar O is planning to avoid these acres with a buffer to keep the grove intact and usable by many forms of wildlife. As stated above, the land has been in CRP for 30 years, but to continue that practice would require a significant investment in reseeded, and the proponent has concluded it is more cost effective to put the land back into small grain production.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Northeastern Land Office (NELO)
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)
H Bar O Farms (Proponent)

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

The DNRC, and NELO have jurisdiction over this proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for performing all required actions to stay in conservation compliance with the 2018 Farm Bill and shall be in contact with the Chouteau County USDA offices.

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant a break request for the area of potential effect (APE).

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does grant a break request for the APE.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine 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. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Because the area of potential effect on state land was once cultivated, because the Holocene age soils in the APE are relatively thin, and because the local geology is not likely to produce caves, rock shelters, or sources of tool stone, 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.

No Action: No effect on historical or archaeological sites.

Proposed Action: A search review was conducted on the Montana Historic Society State Antiquities Database and it showed no historical sites present. The APE has also been previously cultivated and no effects on historical or archaeological sites are expected.

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.

No Action: No change to aesthetics.

Proposed Action: No direct or cumulative effects to aesthetics are anticipated.

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 Action: No change to demands on limited resources.

Proposed Action: No direct or cumulative effects to environmental resources are anticipated.

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 Action: No change

Proposed Action: There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tracts listed in this EA Checklist.

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 effect on human health and safety.

Proposed Action: The normal farming safety concerns of dealing with heavy equipment and spraying will apply if the land is broke out and put into small grain production.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No Action: No change to industrial, commercial or agriculture activities and production.

Proposed Action: This project will add to existing agricultural activities in this area.

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.

No Action: No change to employment.

Proposed Action: The project will not create any new jobs. These positions are already held by employees of the proponent.

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.

No Action: No change to local or state tax base.

Proposed Action: Increased revenue may occur if the field is put into small grain production.

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

No Action: No change in government services.

Proposed Action: There will not be any increases in traffic or traffic patterns if this project is approved.

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.

No Action: Land would expire from CRP and revenue from payments would be lost. The land would transfer into grazing or hay land production which would bring in less revenue than small grain production. Recreational opportunities by sportsman will continue.

Proposed Action: The proposed project may increase the revenue that is associated with small grain production over the existing revenue that is brought in by being enrolled in CRP, grazing or hay. Loss of recreational opportunities by sportsman may occur.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Josh Ricklefs Title: Land Use Specialist
Signature: 	Date: October 8, 2025

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the Proposed Alternative B, and recommend the proponent be granted permission to break out the expired CRP and put the field into small grain production.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the potential environmental effects and have determined that no negative long-term environmental impacts will result from the proposed activity.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS	☐ More Detailed EA	☒ XXX No Further Analysis
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EA Checklist Approved By: 	Name: Josh Stoychhoff Title: Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office
Signature: 	Date: October 8, 2025



Map showing areas of CRP conversion to farming. The Cottonwood grove in the middle and the wetland area in the SE will be avoided