

**DNRC Water Resources Division
 State Water Projects Bureau (SWPB)
 1424 9th Ave. Helena, MT 59620**

**Project Type – Property Boundary Fence
 EA Publication Date – August 2024
 Information Telephone No. (406) 444-2932**

MEPA ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY FORM

Project Name: Upper Musselshell Water Project Lands- 2024 Fence
Proposed Implementation Date: Fall 2024
Proponent: DNRC – Water Resources Division, State Water Projects Bureau (SWPB)

Type and Purpose of Action: The proposed action involves the replacement of existing fence and/or installation of new fence along portions of the North and East Dam of Martinsdale Reservoir which is part of the Upper Musselshell Water Project. This project is owned by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and administered by the State Water Projects Bureau (SWPB).

The purpose of this fencing project is to accurately delineate the State’s fee title interest in land ownership and help to reduce existing encroachment issues from neighboring landowners, including livestock trespass, noxious weeds, and building infrastructure.

The replaced, or new boundary fence will consist of a four-stranded barbed wire design with metal posts and tensioned with wood panel braces. Fence construction will follow Montana Code Annotated (MCA) code 81-4-101 which defines a legal fence. Best management practices from the Fish Wildlife and Parks “A Landowners Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences” Second Edition, 2012 will also be implemented.

Location: Sections 18, 19, 20 Township 8N Range 12E **County:** Wheatland

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION
<p>1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:</p> <p>Provide a brief summary of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.</p>	<p>Based on inspections by SWPB staff and recent cadastral survey information, property boundary fencing does not exist, or existing fence needs relocation to properly and accurately represent the property boundary. Group/agencies involved and/or contacted include: Upper Musselshell Water Users Association Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Trust Lands Division Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Lands Unit</p>
<p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>	<p>The proposed project will be taking place within State Water Projects lands and DNRC Trust Lands not located in sage grouse habitat or historically registered places. There are no other governmental agencies with jurisdiction.</p>

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: The proposed project is to replace/build new fencing to reflect State Water Projects boundaries on the North and East Dams of Martinsdale Reservoir in Wheatland County, to protect existing infrastructure and to assist in maintenance activities at both dams.

No Action Alternative: The no action alternative would be to not fence the State Water Projects infrastructure at the North and East Dam of the Martinsdale Reservoir.

The no action alternative will propagate encroachment on existing infrastructure and could lead to future hinderance of maintenance and operation of Martinsdale North and East Dam.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Are fragile, compatible or unstable soils present?

Are there unusual geologic features?

Are there special reclamation considerations?

The bedrock geology of the area is dominated by sedimentary Judith River Formation and Claggett Shale. Soils in the project area are Reedwest-Roundor-Cabba complex, 2 to 8% slopes foothills; Varney gravelly loam, 8 to 15% slopes; Cabbart-Rentsac complex, 15 to 60% slopes; Depoint-Marmarth-Cabbart complex 2 to 8% slopes. These soil units are well draining and moderately to well suited for rangeland fencing.

Action Alternative: The fencing project will involve placing new metal and wooden fence posts. Only very minor, localized soil disturbance is anticipated from post hole digging and/or post installment. No significant adverse impacts are expected.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the geology, soil quality, stability, or moisture are expected.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Are important surface or groundwater resources present?

Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?

Action Alternative: The proposed project will not impact the reservoir, tributaries, or wetlands, therefore there will be no impact to water quality, quantity, or distribution.

No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to water quality, quantity, or distribution.

<p>6. AIR QUALITY:</p> <p>Will pollutants or particulate be produced?</p> <p>Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I air shed)?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: With the proposed project there is a chance for a temporary introduction of airborne pollutants from the equipment used to bring in materials and install the fencing. These impacts will be minimal and temporary only occurring during implementation of the proposed action. The project area is not in an airshed with regulations or special zones.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under the no action alternative there will be no pollutants or particulates produced.</p>
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<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:</p> <p>Will vegetative communities be permanently altered?</p>	<p>Vegetation in the area includes Western Wheatgrass, Thick Spike Wheatgrass, Bluebunch Wheatgrass, Columbia Needlegrass, Needle and Thread, Green Needlegrass, Threadleaf Sedge, Idaho Fescue, Prairie June Grass, Big Sagebrush, Plains Prickly Pear, Cottonwood, Dogwood, Willow, and Aspen. Vegetation on the East Dam is poorly distributed due to overgrazing, and rodent burrowing/predation. Loess is common in the area and has also impacted plant communities. The vegetative communities might actually recover from the over grazing that is taking place where livestock are restricted, especially on and around the existing North and East Dam infrastructure.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Installation or replacement of fencing will not permanently alter the vegetative communities. Minor, temporary impacts to vegetation will occur related to fence installation equipment and tracked vehicles. Maintenance and spray for noxious or invasive plant species in the area will be the responsibility of the Upper Musselshell Water Users Association.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There are possible long-term impacts to vegetative cover, quantity, quality or permanent alteration to vegetative communities if the proposed action doesn't occur. Range animals have been allowed to graze in areas that have previously been disturbed (i.e. dam faces), this is having a negative impact on the local plant communities. Fencing off these areas will hopefully allow the plant communities to recover.</p>
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8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?

The area contains habitat for common wildlife and aquatic species.

Action Alternative: The proposed action will follow best management practices for wildlife friendly fences. It will be a four stranded wire fence 42" tall., The bottom wire will be set 18" from the ground to ensure adequate space for young animals. These are commonly accepted methods to minimize any impact to wildlife and birds. Since the project is entirely terrestrial there will be no impacts to fish.

No Action Alternative: The no action alternative will have no impacts to terrestrial, avian or aquatic life and habitats.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

**Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present?
Any wetlands?**

Any sensitive species or Species of Special Concern?

The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists several Species of Concern in the proposed project area these include: Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Long-billed Curlew, Great Blue Heron, Golden Eagle, Bobolink, Sprague's Pipit, Thick-billed Longspur and the Grizzly Bear.

The Grizzly Bear is the only species of concern in the area that is listed federally as threatened species.

Action Alternative: The installation of new or replacement fencing will not impact unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

No Action Alternative: The no action alternative will not impact unique, endangered fragile or limited environmental resources.

10. HISTORICAL / ARCHAEOLOGICAL :

Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?

In 2003 a Historic Cultural Resource Site Form was recorded by Patrick Rennie (DNRC Archeologist) and James Domino (SWPB Environmental Scientist). They conducted a general visual inspection and detailed literature review of the Martinsdale Project in addition to a series of deep shovel tests along the downstream sides of both dams. They discovered no evidence of associated buried, or surficial cultural materials. Additionally, the Montana National Register of Historic Places shows no area of interest near the project area. Action Alternative: Historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources uncovered during new or replacement fence installation would be reported to the DNRC Archeologist and to the State Historic Preservation Office of Montana.

No Action Alternative: The no action alternative will have no impact on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources.

11. AESTHETICS:

**Is the project on a prominent topographic feature?
Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas?**

Will there be excessive noise or light?

The project location does not reside on a prominent topographic feature but will be visible to reservoir recreators and people who use adjacent fishing access sites.

Action Alternative: Installation of new or replaced fence will not alter the aesthetic of the surrounding area or produce excessive noise or light. Minor short-term impacts of increase noise levels will occur related to fence installation equipment. Long term aesthetic impacts are the introduction of new fences on the landscape this should be a negligible impact.

No Action Alternative: No impact to aesthetics.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Will the project use resources that are limited in the area?

Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?

Action Alternative: Installation of new or replacement fencing will not change the demand/use of land, water, air, or energy in the area.

No Action Alternative: No new demands placed on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.

<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:</p> <p>Are there other studies, plans or projects on this site?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: Installation of new or replacement fences will not impact any other plans or studies. Currently there aren't any other environmental documents pertinent to the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: No impact to other environmental documents pertinent to the area. There are no other studies, plans, or projects at the site.</p>
<p>III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</p>	
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:</p> <p>Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed project will not add to health and safety risks in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: The no action alternative will not add to health and safety risks in the area.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION</p> <p>Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: Installation or replacement of fencing will not impact industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities and production.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: No impacts to industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities and production.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:</p> <p>Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p>Action Alternative: New and or replacement fence will not impact the quantity or distribution of employment in the project area. Short-term employment by a hired contractor is expected during the installation of fencing activities and will end once the project is completed.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:</p> <p>Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not impact local and state tax base and tax revenues.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: No impacts to local and state tax base or tax revenues.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:</p> <p>Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads?</p> <p>Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc.) be needed?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not increase traffic or add to demand for government services.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: No additional demands for government services.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:</p> <p>Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>There are no known zoning or management plans in effect at the project area.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not affect locally adopted environmental plans.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: No impact to environmental plans and goals.</p>

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Is wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through the project location?

Is there recreational potential within the project location?

The project is located near a DNRC leased recreational public Fishing Access Site, operated and maintained by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not alter access to, or quality of recreational facilities associated with Martinsdale Reservoir.

No Action Alternative: No impact to access and quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?

Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not increase population or require additional housing.

No Action Alternative: No impact to density and distribution of population and housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?

Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not disrupt social structures or mores.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to social structures or mores.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?

Action Alternative: The proposed fencing project will not cause any shifts in cultural uniqueness and diversity in the area.

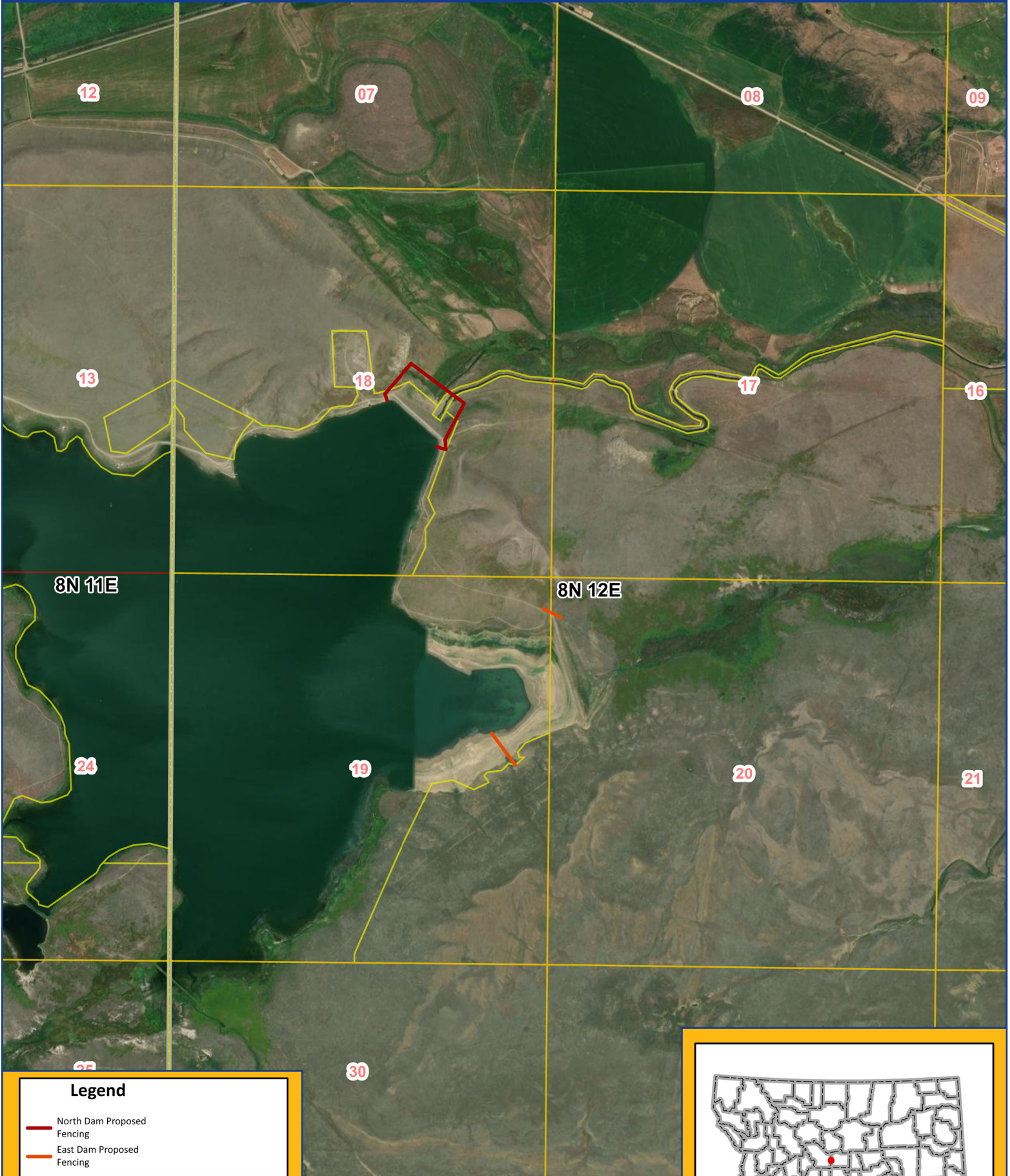
No Action Alternative: No impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Action Alternative: The replacement of existing fence or new fence installation will have no effect on social and economic conditions. The purchase of fencing materials could contribute to the local economy, but the impact will be short-term and will end with the conclusion of the project.

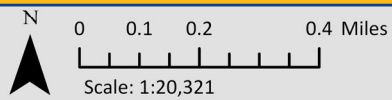
No Action Alternative: No impacts to economic and social circumstances.

Martinsdale Proposed Fencing 2024



Legend

- North Dam Proposed Fencing
- East Dam Proposed Fencing



Map Created: 7/16/2024
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