

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Whiskey Bent Haul Road
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	Summer/Fall 2024
<b>Proponent:</b>	Whiskey Bent Inc
<b>Location:</b>	20N 6E 14, 15 and 22
<b>County:</b>	Cascade

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This amendment is to provide updated information for a previously completed checklist environmental assessment posted to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation public information website May 3, 2024. Due to additional information provided by the Montana Department of Transportation it has been determined to be in the best interest of public safety to move the approach entering the highway approximately 425 feet to the east which would provide ingress and egress to section 14. This change provides for a greater site distance for eastbound traffic as haul trucks enter and exit section 14.

The construction of the approach would add 490.29 feet of newly constructed road within Section 14, increasing the total road length from 0.93 miles to approximately 1.00 mile in length. The change would cause a minimal direct impact of loss to cropland. The disturbance would be minimal, and the surface lessee would realize a minimal loss in acreage used for producing straw or wheat.

Construction of the new segment of road and the approach would be the responsibility of the proponent. The proponent must follow all requirements of the Montana Department of Transportation when constructing the approach. The construction of the segment of new road, the approach, and the change in fencing is anticipated to take several days to weeks.

The changes to the haul road and approach are not expected to have appreciable impacts that would change the previously completed environmental analysis. All impacts identified within the original Environmental Assessment under the action alternative, are still accurate. The significance of impacts are the same as determined in the original Environmental Assessment. The original Environmental Assessment is attached to this amendment document along with an updated map on page 18.

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Whiskey Bent Haul Road
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	Spring 2024
<b>Proponent:</b>	Whiskey Bent Inc
<b>Location:</b>	20N 6E 14, 15 and 22
<b>County:</b>	Cascade

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Whiskey Bent Inc, henceforth referred to as the proponent, has applied for a land use license for the above referenced tracts. The license application is for a haul road that would allow the proponent to transport aggregate (gravel) to and from the pit area and the nearest public road, approximately 0.93 miles. The gravel pit is not located on State of Montana Trust Lands, but rather on adjacent private property. Therefore, this analysis will not evaluate the impacts of a gravel pit, rather just the proposed haul road.

If approved, the proponent would be issued a land use license for a term of ten years, with an option for renewal. The license would allow for the transport of pit vehicles to and from the pit and the nearest public road.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The proponent has submitted a license application to the Montana DNRC's Minerals Management Bureau (MMB). The MMB has notified the Central Land Office (CLO), Helena Unit (HU) of the pending application. Helena Unit staff has spoken with the agency's surface lessee for this tract, who is also the landowner in which the gravel pit will be located. The scoping for this project was limited to agency personnel and the surface lessee on the tract.

To operate a gravel pit in the State of Montana, the operator must obtain a DEQ Opencut Mining permit, one of the requirements of this permit is to notify all landowners within ½ mile of the pit boundaries.

A map of the proposed route is attached to this document as Appendix A.

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

- Montana DNRC – Land Use License
- An approach permit from either the MDT or Cascade County onto the nearest public road.

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**No Action Alternative:** The land use license would be denied, and the proponent would not be allowed to haul gravel across the referenced tracts. This alternative would not create any impacts upon the native or human environment; therefore, it is incorporated herein by reference that the no action alternative will have no impacts upon the resources evaluated in sections 4-24 of this document.

**Action Alternative:** The land use license would be approved, and the proponent would be allowed to haul gravel across the referenced tracts.

### SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

The impacts analysis identifies and evaluates direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts.

- **Direct impacts:** impacts that occur at the same time and place as the action that causes the impact
- **Secondary impacts:** further impacts to the human environment that may be stimulated, or induced by, or otherwise result from a direct impact of the action.
- **Cumulative impacts:** collective impacts on the human environment of the proposed action when considered in conjunction with other past and present actions related to the proposed action by location or generic type. Related future actions must also be considered when these actions are under concurrent consideration by any state agency through pre-impact statement studies, separate impact study evaluation, or permit processing procedures.

Where impacts are expected to occur, the impacts analysis estimates the duration and severity of the impact.

The duration of an impact is quantified as follows:

- **Short-term:** impacts that would not last longer than the proposed operation of the site, including reclamation of the site.
- **Long-term:** impacts that would remain or occur following reclamation of the proposed site.

The severity of an impact is measured using the following:

- **No impact:** There would be no change from current conditions.
- **Negligible:** An adverse or beneficial effect would occur but would be at the lowest levels of detection.
- **Minor:** The effect would be noticeable but would be relatively small and would not affect the function or integrity of the resource.
- **Moderate:** The effect would be easily identifiable and would change the function or integrity of the resource.
- **Major:** The effect would alter the resource.

### 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.*

##### Current Conditions:

**Geology:** The geology in the proposed project area is an alluvial terrace deposit according the USGS and MBMG surface geology layers.

**Soils:** According to the USDA's Web Soil Survey, the project area is comprised of two soil types.

- Danvers silty clay loam
- Judith loam

These soils exhibit the following properties:

*K Factor* – The K factor ratings indicate the susceptibility of a soil to sheet and rill erosion by water. The soils present in the project area have low to medium susceptibility to erosion by water.

*Shallow excavations* – This rating measures the ease of digging and resistance to sloughing. These soils exhibit a somewhat limited rating to shallow excavations.

*Soil compactibility risk* – Soils found in the project area exhibit a medium risk to soil compactibility.



*Wind erodibility group* – Soils found in the project area exhibit a moderate susceptibility of wind erosion.

*Soil restoration potential* – Soils found in the project area exhibit a high potential for soil restoration.

*Soil rutting hazard* – Soils found in the project area exhibit a severe soil rutting hazard.

## **Alternatives**

### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary or cumulative impacts to the geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The proponent would use an existing route to haul gravel mined from neighboring lands. Access to the established route would come from Montana Highway 228 and would cross the W1/2, SE1/4 of section 14, the SE1/4, SE1/4 of section 15 and through the E1/2, NW1/4 of section 22. Light-duty and large haul trucks would use the route. The established road may at times need maintenance which may include adding gravel or grading.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts expected to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture are not expected to change from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: Impacts from the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short term.

### **Mitigations**

The potential selection of action alternative would include the following stipulation in the permit to test for aggregate:

- The road shall be maintained by the proponent.
- Any topsoil removed from the road surface shall be placed immediately adjacent to the road, and shall be seeded with the native mixture prescribed in this license. This topsoil must be saved for the reclamation of the road upon the end of use.
- At the end of the 10-year term the licensee shall apply for a renewal of the license or reclaim the road to the satisfaction of the DNRC or its lessee.

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## **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.*

### **Current Conditions**

Surface Water: Section 22 contains a perennial pond in the SW1/4 of the NE1/4. Section 15 also has a perennial pond in the SE1/4 of the SW1/4.

Ground Water: A search of the Montana Ground Water Information Center's website yields one water well within 1/2 mile of the road. GWIC 33623 has a static water level of 12' below ground surface and sits at an approximate surface elevation of 3675' ASL. Inaccurate reporting, less refined legal descriptions and poor mapping accuracy may lead to inconsistencies between the reported and physical location of groundwater wells.

## **Alternatives**

### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to water quality, quantity, and distribution.

### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The average calculated groundwater elevation from a nearby water well is approximately 3663 feet above sea level. The current project area elevation ranges from approximately 3678-3719 feet above sea level, which has an approximate range of 15 - 56 feet greater than the average calculated groundwater elevation.

Groundwater would not be expected to be encountered during construction of the road or hauling activities. There may be some turbidity in surface waters adjacent to the project area during moisture events. The stormwater would be expected to carry sediment from the road and adjacent undisturbed ground to lower lying areas where it would settle. Overall, direct impacts to groundwater or surface water in the project area are expected to be negligible.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to surface or ground water quality or quantity, resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: The cumulative impacts to surface or groundwater quality or quantity from the selection of the action alternative are not expected to change.

Duration: Impacts from the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short-term.

### **Mitigations**

The potential selection of action alternative would include the following stipulation in the permit to test for aggregate:

- All equipment utilized in hauling activities must be regularly maintained and inspected to ensure it is not leaking fluids, spreading noxious weeds, or creating an undue fire hazard.

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## **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.*

### **Current Conditions**

Currently, emission sources in the project area include vehicles travelling on adjacent county roads and agricultural producers. Fugitive dust from vehicle travel on other adjacent gravel roads contributes small amounts of airborne particulate matter in the area. Farming activity including plowing may also create seasonal fugitive dust in the area.

## **Alternatives**

### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impact to air quality.

### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: Fugitive dust may be generated from hauling activities. Greenhouse gas emissions including carbon dioxide from hauling activities would be expected and would be variable based on when gravel is being hauled and the number of trucks needed to complete it. These sources of air contamination may impact air

quality in the direct vicinity of the project temporarily in a negligible manner. Impacts to air quality resulting from the selection of the action alternative are expected to be negligible.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to air quality resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no cumulative impacts expected to air quality from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: Impacts to air quality are expected to be intermittent and short-term.

### **Mitigations**

The potential selection of action alternative would include the following stipulation in the permit to test for aggregate:

- The licensee shall utilize dust mitigation measures along the haul route if deemed necessary by the Department.

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## **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.*

### **Current Conditions**

According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program the area is comprised of lowland/prairie and cultivated crops. The lowland/prairie grassland system is dominated by western wheatgrass and includes other species such as thickspike wheatgrass, green needlegrass, blue grama and needle and thread. The haul road would travel through the cultivated crop hay, which may include either wild prairie grasses or alfalfa.

An inventory of the Montana Natural Heritage Program's Species of Concern database was conducted for the project area. The search yielded no vegetative species of concern.

### **Alternatives**

#### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary or cumulative impacts to vegetation.

#### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: Vegetation communities would see some increase in disturbance from the increase of truck traffic using the haul road. The road is already established, but it would likely be widened and built up. Per the stipulations of the permit, the proponent would be responsible for the management and mitigation of invasive weeds along the haul road. The proponent would also be responsible for reseeding the affected areas with a native range mixture as provided within this document. Overall, the impacts to vegetation cover, quantity and quality would be expected to be minor. No appreciable changes to vegetation are expected to occur resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Secondary Impacts: Secondary impacts may occur in the form of noxious weed propagation from the site. Weed impacts can be mitigated to negligible with proper efforts.

Cumulative Impacts: Short term, negligible cumulative impacts are expected to vegetation cover, quantity and quality from the selection of the action alternative. The additional impacts are not expected to appreciably change vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Duration: Impacts to vegetation cover, quantity and quality are expected to be short-term.



## Mitigations

The potential selection of action alternative would include the following stipulation in the permit to test for aggregate:

- The proponent will be responsible for the management, mitigation and elimination of invasive weeds introduced or propagated from hauling activities.
- The Proponent will be responsible for reseeding the disturbed areas with the certified weed free seed mixture seen below. Any other proposed seed mix must be approved by the Helena field office.

Species	Full stand Seed rate (lbs/ac)	Clayey			
		% of Mix	lbs/ac PLS for Drill Seeding	Drill Seeding Depth	Broadcast Seeding Rate
Slender Wheatgrass	7	30	2.1	0.5	4.2
Western Wheatgrass	10	25	2.5	0.5	5
Sandberg Bluegrass	2	25	1.8	0.25	3.5
Blue Grama	9	10	0.9	0.4	1.8
Prairie Coneflower	2	5	0.1	0.25	0.20
Annual Sunflower	13	5	0.7	0.8	1.3
Total PLS Lbs/ac			8.0		16

Notes: 1. Seed mix based on seed available at Circle 5 seeds in Three Forks, MT. Any licensed seed vendor or certified weed seed is allowable. 2. This seed mix follows the reclamation guidelines for both the Sage Grouse Executive order 12-2015 and the MSU Extension/ NRCS Revegetation guidelines (November 2022). 3. For varying seed depths use the middle value in the case of three depth recommendations or the shallower value in the case of only two depth recommendations. 4. Alternative species may be requested due to lack of availability or prohibitive expense but must be approved by the field office. 5. Yellow Sweet Clover may be used in place of Annual sunflower at a rate of .2 lbs PLS per acre at a depth of .25

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## 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.

### Current Conditions

The proposed project area serves as habitat for a variety of big game, large and small mammals, raptors, and a variety of other birds. Proximity to local roads has likely altered the usefulness of the haul road area by wildlife.

### Alternatives

#### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary or cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats.

#### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The action alternative would create minor audible and visual disturbances for short and varying time frames to any animals that may occupy the project area or its surroundings. Similar habitat and forage can be found throughout the surrounding area and could sustain the impacted wildlife species temporarily. Grazing by domestic animals would continue. Impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to be short-term and minor.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats would not be expected to appreciably change from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: Impacts from the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short-term.

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## 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.

### Current Conditions

An inventory of the Montana Natural Heritage Program's Species of Concern was completed for the project area. The project area is adjacent to occurrences of two species of concern that includes Long-billed Curlew and Grizzly Bear habitat areas.

Long-billed Curlew are summer residents of Montana and can be found in mixedgrass prairie habitats. The greatest threat to this species is the degradation or loss of grassland breeding habitat. An observation was noted within a half mile area in 2015.

Grizzly Bear habitat occurs in the proposed haul route, there have been no observations of species of concern within a half mile area.

### **Alternatives**

#### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

#### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: Temporary, visual and audible disturbances would be increased along the haul road area. Some minor, short-duration disturbance to individuals of any of the species of concern listed, may occur if they are in the vicinity of the project area during hauling activities. However, there are no appreciable changes to the population of any of these species expected from the selection of the action alternative. Minor impacts to the habitats of these species may occur from visual or audible disturbance.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

Cumulative Impacts: There are existing disturbances near the project area. Which includes adjacent roads and agricultural activities. These factors are disturbances that have been present for long periods of time. The proposed activity would add to the disturbance, in a negligible and short-term manner at varying degrees throughout the year. The additional impacts introduced from the selection of the action alternative are not expected to appreciably change the impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

Duration: Impacts from the selection of the action alternative are expected to last the length of the license.

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### **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 results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, but it should be noted that Class III level inventory work has not been conducted there to date.

### **Alternatives**

#### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to historical or archaeological sites.

#### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The selection of the action alternative would have no impact to antiquities as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. If previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work would cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.



Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to historical and archaeological sites.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts to historical and archaeological sites would not be expected to appreciably change from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts expected.

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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 cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

### **Current Conditions**

The project area is currently comprised of vegetation as described in section 7 of this document, an area of open lowland prairie and cultivated crops. The project area has been managed by an agriculture and grazing lease with the Department. The project area is located approximately 10 miles east of Malmstrom Air Force Base. Hauling operations may be visible from adjacent roads and lands.

### **Alternatives**

#### **No Action Alternative:**

The selection of the no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to aesthetics.

#### **Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: Recreationists, residents, and motorists in the area would see an increase in truck traffic along the haul road. Hauling activities would be expected to happen on an intermittent basis when gravel is needed by the proponent. After the expiration of the license, any additional disturbance that is left from hauling gravel will be reclaimed. A road would be left in place as it currently is today. As revegetation is established, the areas of road that may have been widened will become less apparent and are expected to return to a pre-hauling level of aesthetics. Minimal disturbances to aesthetics are expected during operations. However, there are no long-term impacts to aesthetics anticipated if the action alternative is selected. Increased noise levels will also occur from the proposed action. Noise levels from hauling activities are expected to be similar to those produced from motorists travelling on adjacent roads. Increases in noise levels are expected to be minor and short-term.

Secondary Impacts: Noise and visual impacts will occur outside of the project area. However, these impacts are expected to be minimal and short-term.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts to aesthetics would not be expected to appreciably change from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: Impacts to aesthetics from the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short-term and intermittent during the term of the license.

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## **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.*

### **Current Conditions**

The composition of land, water and air is described within other sections of this document. Energy sources that would be required by the project are abundant in the area.

### **Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to the demands of environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The overall disturbance created within the project area would be expected to have minor and short-term impacts on the environmental resources of the land. The expected impacts to water and air were identified earlier in this document. Energy resources required for hauling activities, such as fuel and oil, in the area are abundant and any impact to energy resources would be expected to be negligible.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts for land, water and air are evaluated in their respective sections. There are no appreciable changes to cumulative impacts expected to energy resources resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: Impacts of the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short-term.

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**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.*

**Current Conditions**

The hauling route has an overlying agricultural and grazing lease.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to other environmental documents or projects pertinent to the area.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The grazing lessee would realize a short-term negligible loss in vegetation within their lease. Upon reclamation the impacted areas would return to native rangeland. The proposed project would have a temporary, negligible impact to the surface lease agreement. Any future development in the area would likely be restricted to utility or agricultural use.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no changes to cumulative impacts expected from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: Impacts of the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short-term.

#### 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.*

##### **Current Conditions**

The current condition of the site poses no risk to human health or safety.

##### **Alternatives**

###### **No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to human health or safety.

###### **Action Alternative:**

**Direct Impacts:** The proposed project is expected to have a negligible impact to human health or safety, other than the occupational risks typically associated with hauling activities. The site is in a rural area away from residences. Impacts to air quality and water quality are evaluated in their respective resource sections of this document. During hauling activities there would be a minor increase in truck traffic within the haul road, the impact to human health and safety resulting from the selection of the action alternative is expected to be short-term and negligible as the activities would occur for one to two days with minimal increases in traffic.

**Secondary Impacts:** There are no secondary impacts expected to human health and safety resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

**Cumulative Impacts:** There are no cumulative impacts expected to human health and safety resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

**Duration:** Impacts of the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short-term.

##### **Mitigations**

The potential selection of action alternative would include the following stipulation in the permit to test for aggregate:

- The licensee shall install trucks entering signage on both sides of the approach to Highway 228.

#### 15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

##### **Current Conditions**

The hauling route is in a rural area where agriculture is the most prominent industry.

##### **Alternatives**

###### **No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative would not be expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impact to industrial, commercial, and agriculture activities and production.



**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The action alternative would not be expected to have any significant impacts upon the industrial, commercial, or agriculture activities currently present.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no changes to cumulative impacts expected to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts identified.

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**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.*

**Current Conditions**

The closest town and employment center is Great Falls, Montana. The workforce consists mainly of farmers, ranchers and oil and gas refinery, and Air Force Base.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to the quantity and distribution of employment.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: No direct impacts are expected to quantity and distribution of employment from the selection of the action alternative.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to quantity and distribution of employment resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no changes to cumulative impacts expected to quantity and distribution of employment from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts identified.

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**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.*

**Current Conditions**

Trust land is exempt from local property tax. Operators and lessees conducting business on Trust Lands must pay business taxes.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impact on local and state tax bases or tax revenues.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: No direct impacts to local and state tax base and tax revenue are expected from the selection of the action alternative.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to local and state tax base and tax revenue resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no changes to cumulative impacts expected to local and state tax base and tax revenue from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts identified.

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**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*

**Current Conditions**

The traffic sources in the area are mostly contained on Highwood Road and other adjacent gravel roads. Emergency services would likely come from Highwood or Great Falls, MT.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts on the demand for government services.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The proposed action is not anticipated to have any impact on demand for government services.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected on the demand for government services resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no changes to cumulative impacts expected on the demand for government services resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts identified.

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**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.*

**Current Conditions**

There are no known environmental plans or goals for this tract or in the project vicinity.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary or cumulative impact on locally adopted environmental plans or goals.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: No impacts expected, there are no known zoning or management plans.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals expected resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no changes to cumulative impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals expected resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts identified.

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**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.*

**Current Conditions**

The project area is not designated as wilderness, nor does it provide access to wilderness. Montana State Trust Lands are accessible for public use by purchasing the necessary conservation license through Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impact on the access to and quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The project area does allow for public use. Public recreation on this tract is expected to be minimal. Direct impacts to recreationists would occur when gravel is being hauled. An increase in noise and visual impacts would occur for anyone in the vicinity of the haul road.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts to access to and quality of recreation and wilderness activities expected resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no cumulative impacts to access to and quality of recreation and wilderness activities expected resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: Impacts of the selection of the action alternative are expected to be short-term.

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**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.*

**Current Conditions**

The closest major population center to the project area is Great Falls, Montana.



**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impact the density and distribution of population and housing.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: No direct impacts are expected to the density and distribution of population and housing from the selection of the action alternative.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to the density and distribution of population and housing resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no cumulative impacts expected to the density and distribution of population and housing resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts identified.

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**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

**Current Conditions**

There are no known native or traditional lifestyles near the project area.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impact to social structures, native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: There are no direct impacts expected to native or traditional lifestyles.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to native or traditional lifestyles resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no cumulative impacts expected to native or traditional lifestyles resulting from the selection of the action alternative.

Duration: No impacts are expected; therefore, duration is not applicable.

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**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

**Current Conditions**

There are no known unique qualities of the area.

**Alternatives**

**No Action Alternative:**

The no action alternative is not expected to have any direct, secondary, or cumulative impact to cultural uniqueness or diversity.

**Action Alternative:**

Direct Impacts: There are no direct impacts expected to cultural uniqueness and diversity.

Secondary Impacts: There are no secondary impacts expected to cultural uniqueness and diversity.

Cumulative Impacts: There are no cumulative impacts expected to cultural uniqueness and diversity.

Duration: No impacts are expected; therefore, duration is not applicable.

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**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 return to the trust would be a one-time application fee of \$25.00 and a rental of 0.10 cents per cubic yard hauled across sections 14, 15 and 22. Hauling activities should not impede the existing utilization of the current lessee.

Upon reclamation, vegetation would be reestablished, and the area returned to grazing and agricultural ground.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Thomas Palin	<b>Date:</b> August 2, 2024
	<b>Title:</b> Mineral Resource Specialist	

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**V. FINDING**

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**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

**Action Alternative:** Allow the proponent to haul gravel across the referenced lands.

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**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

The granting of the requested land use license on these tracts of State Trust Lands is not expected to result in, nor cause significant environmental impacts. The proposed action satisfies the Trust's fiduciary mandate and accounts for the long-term productivity of the land. An environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action.

I conclude that all identified potential impacts will be mitigated by utilizing permit requirements, including the stipulations listed below.

1. The licensee shall be in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws, rules, and regulations, including but not limited to those concerning safety, environmental protection, and reclamation.
2. If any cultural or paleontological resources are encountered during hauling, all operations must stop, and the proponent shall contact the DNRC.
3. Hauling activities will be limited to occur only under dry or frozen conditions, to mitigate impacts on soils.
4. All equipment utilized in hauling must be inspected prior to testing to ensure it is not leaking fluids, spreading noxious weeds, or creating an undue fire hazard.

5. The licensee shall utilize dust mitigation measures along the haul route if deemed necessary by the Department.
6. The proponent will be responsible for the management, mitigation and elimination of invasive weeds introduced or propagated from hauling activities.
7. The proponent will seed disturbances with the below certified weed free seed mix, any other proposed seed mix must be approved by the Helena unit office.

Species	Fullstand Seed rate (lbs/ac)	% of Mix	lbs/ac PLS for Drill Seeding	Drill Seeding Depth	Broadcast Seeding Rate
Parrot Grass	1	20	2.0	0.3	0.2
Western Warmgrass	10	20	2.0	0.3	0.2
Parrot Grass	2	20	2.0	0.3	0.2
Blue Grama	3	20	0.2	0.4	0.2
Ornamental Sunflower	1	20	0.2	0.3	0.2
Annual Sunflower	10	20	0.2	0.3	0.2
<b>Total PLS lbs/a:</b>			<b>8.0</b>		<b>1.0</b>

Notes: 1. Seed mix based on seed available at Circle K seeds in Three Forks, MT. Any licensed seed vendor or certified seed seed distributor. 2. This seed mix follows the reclamation guidelines for both the Sage-Grouse Executive Order 12-2018 and the 105U Extension/NRCS Reclamation guidelines (November 2022). 3. For varying seed depths use the middle value in the case of three depth recommendations or the shallower value in the case of only two depth recommendations. 4. Alternative species may be requested due to lack of availability or prohibitive expense but must be approved by the field office. 5. Yellow Sweet Clover may be used in place of Annual sunflower at a rate of 2 lbs PLS per acre at a depth of .25

8. If any damage(s) to fences or gates are incurred the proponent will fix the damage(s).
9. The road shall be maintained by the Licensee.
10. At the end of the 10-year term the Licensee shall reclaim the road to its present-day use.

**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

EIS

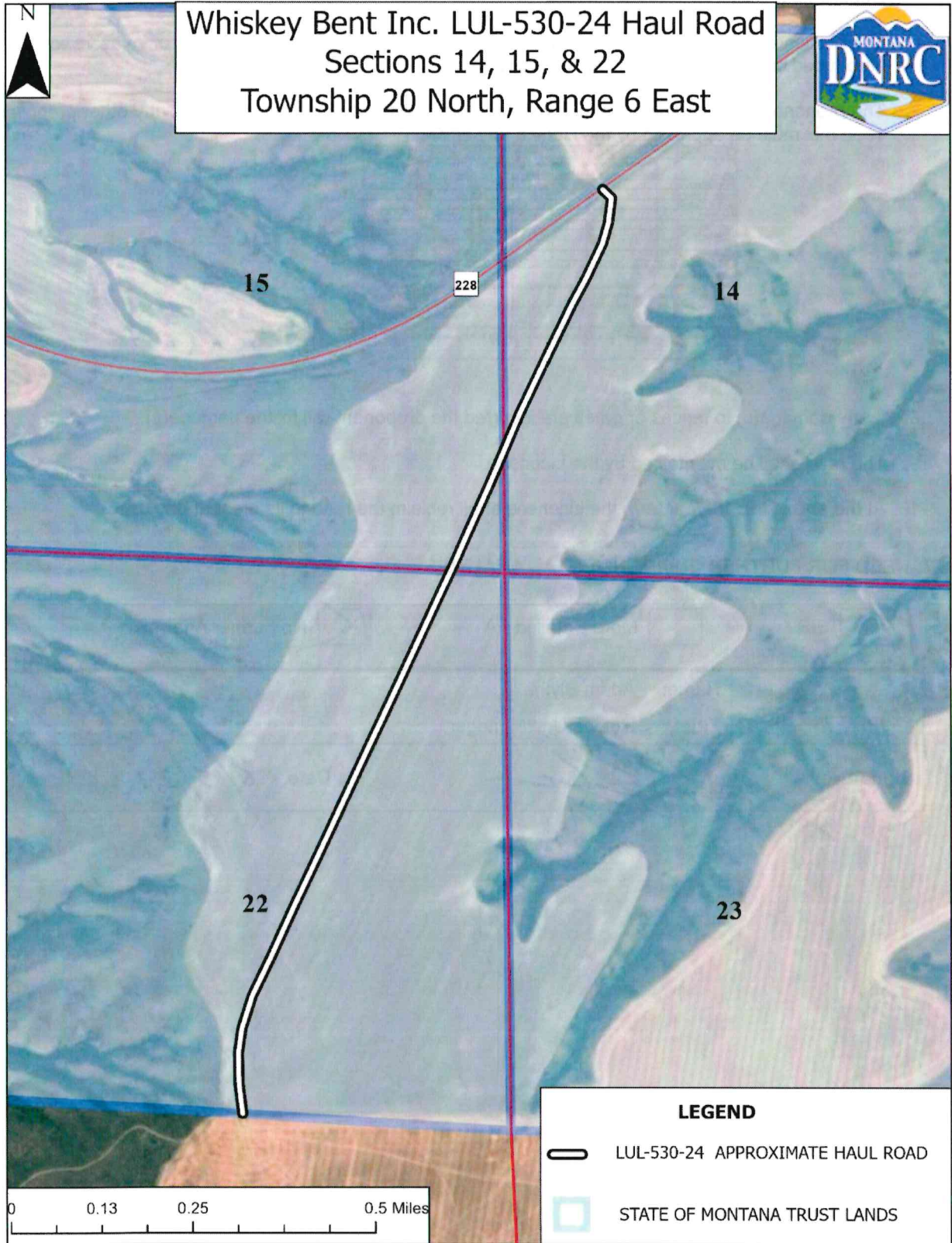
More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Adam Blythe
	<b>Title:</b> Helena Unit Manager
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b> 8/5/24



Appendix A



Appendix B – Updated map with approach

