CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Havre Sand & Gravel Inc. Test Pits
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2023
Proponent:	Havre Sand & Gravel Inc.
Location:	T33N-R18E-Sec 32 (Common Schools Trust)
County:	Blaine
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Havre Sand & Gravel Inc. will be henceforth referred to as the proponent, has applied for an aggregate test permit on Trust Lands on the above referenced tract in Blaine County. This project would utilize an excavator to dig test pits for aggregate prospecting to explore for a Fresno Reservoir dam project material.
. Testing and documenting would be performed by employees of Trust Lands and Havre Sand & Gravel Inc. or hired contractors on behalf of Havre Sand & Gravel Inc.

If approved, the proponent would be issued a test permit to determine the suitability of the aggregate contained within the above referenced tract. Any disturbance created would be reclaimed upon completion of test holes.

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 Northeast Land Office has been notified of application.
Ag & Grazing Lease #9624 Hill Grain Inc.

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

The DNRC and NELO have jurisdiction over this project.

The proponent is responsible for acquiring all required permits for the proposed project.
The proponent is responsible for settling all surface damages with the surface lessees.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No Action Alternative – The Department would not grant permission to dig test holes.

Action Alternative – The Department would grant the test permit to allow the proponent to conduct test holes survey on State Trust Land.

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.

Blaine County and Part of Phillips County Area, Montana (MT608)			
Map Unit Symbol	**Map Unit Name**	**Acres in AOI**	**Percent of AOI**
2	Assinniboine fine sandy loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	40.9	12.7%
5	Attewan-Wabek complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	16.4	5.1%
14	Bearpaw-Waltham complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	27.9	8.7%
24	Cabba-Zahill association, steep	8.0	2.5%
34	Cozberg fine sandy loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	78.2	24.3%
142	Williams-Vida loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	87.0	27.0%
143	Williams-Vida loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes	63.2	19.7%
Totals for Area of Interest		**321.6**	**100.0%**

These soils exhibit the following properties.

K factor – These soils exhibit a mid rating for soil-to-sheet and rill erosion from water.

Soil compatibility risk – All soils exhibit a medium rating for soil compatibility.

Soil restoration potential – All soils exhibit a high potential for soil restoration.

Soil rutting hazard – All soils exhibit a moderate to severe soil rutting hazard.

The project would be limited to only when soils are dry, and testing would be conducted in areas with mild topography. This should mitigate the risk of displacing, compacting or otherwise impacting the soils beyond the direct areas of testing.

Care would be taken to preserve the soil prior to collaring the drilling rig by separating the soil from the underlying material.

No Action Alternative – The current geology and soils in the project area would remain undisturbed, as they currently exist.

Action Alternative – The proponent would be granted a permit to test for gravel. Work will be done in either dry or frozen conditions to avoid soil rutting. Any disturbances resulting from testing in the area would be backfilled

and seeded prior to leaving the project area. No cumulative effects to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture are anticipated.

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.

There is one perennial stream, Clear Creek, 1 east of testing site.

A search of the Montana Ground Water Information Center website found there are 3 water wells within a half mile of the project area.

Latitude	Longitude	Surface Elevation	GWIC ID
48.579731	-109.414596	~2550	916880
48.579726	--109.422438	~2550	916749
48.577914	--109.422438	~2550	916697

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – The proponent would be granted a permit to test aggregate, where testing would sit at an approximate elevation of 2385 - 2485 feet above sea level. Static water level was not listed for these particular wells but static water level for wells ~1 mile away ranged from 6-18 ft. There would be no anticipated impacts to the quality or quantity of the surface water or groundwater by implementing the action alternative.

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.

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – Some dust particulates from traveling to the test sites and the digging of test holes may affect air quality temporarily during operations. There are no anticipated long term affects to 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 cumulative effects to vegetation.

The proposed testing area within section 32 is covered by previously broken agricultural land.

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – Vegetation communities would be affected by this project mostly by the short-term tracks from the excavator used to do the testing as well as the areas in which the test pits are conducted. These disturbances should recover quickly due to the surrounding vegetation being almost entirely crested wheatgrass. No long-term cumulative effects to vegetation are anticipated. Damage to the agricultural land should be lessened by only conducting testing during dry or frozen conditions. Per the stipulations of the permit, the proponent would be responsible for the management and mitigation of invasive weeds due to project activities. The proponent will reclaim all disturbances to the NELO's standards. Once testing is completed the proponent will contact Havre field office or NELO for an onsite inspection and direction on reclamation.

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.

This area only provides marginal for habitat for a variety of big game, large and small mammals, raptors, and a variety of other birds. Project is far enough away from streams and will have no impact to fluvial aquatic species.

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – The proponent would be granted a permit to test aggregate and impacts to habitats are expected be negligible. The size of the project area and length of the action alternative are not substantiative enough to permanently disrupt wildlife in the area. Similar habitat and forage can be found throughout the surrounding area and could sustain the wildlife species.

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.

The project area is not considered critical wildlife habitat and a search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program found species of concern in the general area including: Northern Redbelly Dace, Iowa Darter, Northern Pearl Dace, Little Brown Myotis, Eastern Red Bat, Hoary Bat, Great Blue Heron, Sprague's Pipit. Long-billed Curlew, Ferruginous Hawk, White-faced Ibis, Franklin's Gull, and Sauger.

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – The proponent would be granted a permit to test for aggregate. This activity may create a temporary disruption to species present. Agricultural lands are abundant in the project vicinity and animals could utilize surrounding areas during the temporary disturbance with the ability to return to the site upon completion and reclamation of activities.

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.

Because the topographic setting and geology suggest a low to moderate likelihood of the presence of cultural or palaeontologic resources, proposed test permit 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.

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – No effects on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources are anticipated by issuing the proponent a permit to test for aggregate.

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 Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – The proponent would be granted a permit to test for aggregate. Minimal disturbance may occur during testing operations. However, there are no long-term effects to aesthetics 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 Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – Negligible impacts expected.

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.

None known

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 Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – Typical safety risks for laborers working with mechanized equipment would be present, but the potential risk would be minimal with proper safety efforts.

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

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – No impacts expected.

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 Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – This project would have no effects on creating, moving, or eliminating jobs.

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 Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – No impacts expected.

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 Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – No impacts expected.

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.

There are no known zoning or management plans overlying the project area.

No Action Alternative – No Impact

Action Alternative – Negligible impacts expected

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.

No Action Alternative – No Impact

Action Alternative – There would be no impact to recreational activities anticipated on this section. This site is not designated as a wilderness 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.

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – No impacts expected.

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

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – No impacts expected.

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

No Action Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – No impacts expected.

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 Alternative – No impact

Action Alternative – This project will provide the trust with the potential for future development of aggregate resources and royalty income. The permit fee for the action alternative is $25. No other expected cumulative economic or social effects expected by selecting this action.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Daniel Pendergraph	**Date:**	March 16, 2023
	Title:	Land Use Specialist		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action Alternative – The Department would grant the test permit to allow the proponent to conduct test holes survey on State Trust Land.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The granting of the requested aggregate test permit pits on this tract of state-owned trust lands should not result in, nor cause significant negative environmental impacts. The proposed action satisfies the trusts fiduciary mandate and ensures the long-term productivity of the land. An environmental assessment checklist 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. Permit holder shall be in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, including but not limited to those concerning safety, environmental protection, reclamation, drone flight requirements for photography and topographic mapping over the site, and sage grouse requirements.

2. Topsoil/sod will be stockpiled separately from subsoil for reclamation. Licensee shall fill holes with subsoil before covering with topsoil and sod. All holes must be filled and reclaimed immediately prior to moving on to the next hole.

3. DNRC will contact and coordinate with DNRC's surface lessee.

4. Geologic, geochemical/geophysical information (including but not limited to detailed sample site locations, areas disturbed by drill and sample results for each corresponding sample site) if collected for the tract will be provided to Minerals Management Bureau, TLMD MT-DNRC annually with a report on exploration activities. The lessee shall also concurrently provide GPS, GIS, or other data, detailed maps and/or aerial photos associated with the associated permit to MMB. Licensee should advise the department if they consider this information confidential.

5. Permit holder agrees to avoid and not disturb historic buildings, foundations or other cultural features on this tract.

6. Testing will be limited to occur only under dry or frozen ground conditions, in order to prevent unnecessary impacts to soils.

7. The proponent will seed disturbances with a Northeast Land Office approved seed mix.

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27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Jocee Hedrick
	Title:	Lewistown Unit Manager
Signature: 	**Date**:	March 16, 2023