CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Musselshell Judith Rural Water Project-Phase 3A Pipeline Project
Proposed Implementation Date:	June-August 2026
Proponent:	Central Montana Regional Water Authority
Location:	S36 T7N R18E
County:	Wheatland
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This action would authorize the drilling of boreholes for geotechnical investigation for the future installation of a water pipeline for drinking water on Montana State Trust Lands, including all associated construction, maintenance, and use activities.

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 Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Northeastern Land Office (NELO) & Lewistown Unit Office
Proponent: Central Montana Regional Water Authority
Surface Lessees: Taber Ranch LLC
Other: Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT)

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

The DNRC and its Northeastern Land Office (NELO) have jurisdiction over the proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for acquiring all necessary permits for the proposed project and settling all surface damage with the surface lessees.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant permission for the drilling of boreholes for geotechnical investigation of the subsurface for future construction of a drinking water pipeline.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – The Department would grant permission for the drilling of boreholes for geotechnical investigation of the subsurface for future construction of a drinking water pipeline.

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 soils in the project area are classified as having a severe hazard for rutting, being very to somewhat limited for shallow excavation, and having a medium susceptibility to compaction. Rutting risk is primarily associated with the use of heavy equipment under wet conditions. To minimize impacts, all construction activities will be scheduled during dry periods when soils are least susceptible to compaction and rutting, and equipment traffic will be confined to designated work areas.

The limitation for shallow excavation may affect boring techniques, but no long-term soil degradation is expected. All boreholes will be backfilled immediately following investigation and no long-term impacts to soils or geology.

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.

This project will provide information for the future construction of a drinking water pipeline that will provide drinking water for the Deadman's Cabin Association and the town of Ryegate. The project will have no effect on nearby terrestrial water sources or groundwater.

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 significant impacts to air quality are anticipated from this project.

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 project will result in minor disturbance to vegetation with only the four borehole locations removing any vegetation and limited driving over vegetation to reach these locations. Vegetation should recover naturally in a short amount of time. Therefore, no significant impacts to vegetation are anticipated.

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.

Potential habitat disturbance will be minimized by restricting construction to dry periods and limiting equipment to designated work areas. No significant long-term impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic habitats are anticipated.

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.

Several species of concern are present in the project area, including sage-grouse in Core Habitat and lek buffer areas, as well as other migratory and resident species dependent on sagebrush, grassland, riparian, and forested habitats. Mitigation measures, including limiting disturbance to defined areas, minimizing soil

disturbance, and avoiding any bird nest sites that are found during implementation, are expected to prevent significant impacts.

A complete species list, including habitat and distribution data, is provided in Appendix B. Temporary displacement of wildlife may occur during implementation, but no significant long-term impacts to unique, endangered, or sensitive species are anticipated.

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

A Class I (literature review) level assessment was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the Area of Potential Effect (APE). This review included inspection of project maps, the DNRC sites/sites leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I assessment revealed that no antiquities have been identified within the APE. No additional archaeological investigations are planned in association with this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are discovered during project activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of the resources can be conducted.

No significant effects on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources are anticipated.

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 significant impacts on visual or aesthetic qualities 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 limited environmental resources are expected to be significantly impacted by this project. Additionally, the project will not contribute to any significant cumulative demands on environmental resources.

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.

The construction of a pipeline for drinking water for surrounding housing and population centers will take place at some point following this project and a separate Environmental Analysis will be conducted before implementation. No cumulative effects are expected at this time.

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.

During construction, equipment operation may pose temporary hazards. The proponent will be responsible for implementing mitigation measures. No ongoing hazards are anticipated following construction.

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

The project will not alter existing industrial, agricultural, or commercial activities in the 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.

The project will not create or eliminate jobs. No significant effects on the employment market are anticipated.

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.

The project will not have direct or cumulative effects on tax revenues.

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

The project will not result in significant increases in traffic or demand for government services such as schools, fire, or police protection.

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 zoning regulations or agency management plans that would affect this project.

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 project will not significantly affect access to, or the quality of, recreation and wilderness activities.

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

The project will not affect population density or housing demand.

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

The project will not significantly affect native, traditional, or community lifestyles.

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

The project will not significantly affect cultural uniqueness 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.

This license will generate a one-time fee of $200.00 payable to the School Trust. No significant cumulative economic or social effects are anticipated.

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (Proposed Action): The Department will grant permission for the drilling of boreholes for geotechnical investigation of the subsurface for future construction of a drinking water pipeline.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After evaluating potential environmental effects, it is determined that the project will not result in significant impacts to the environment.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Seth Oetken **Title:** Land Use Specialist	
Signature:		**Date:** 6/8/26

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Josh Stoychoff **Title:** Lewistown Unit Manager NELO	
Signature:		**Date:** 6/2/26

Appendix A: Soil Ratings

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	258.6	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**258.6**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Very limited	203.3	78.6%
Somewhat limited	55.3	21.4%
Totals for Area of Interest	**258.6**	**100.0%**

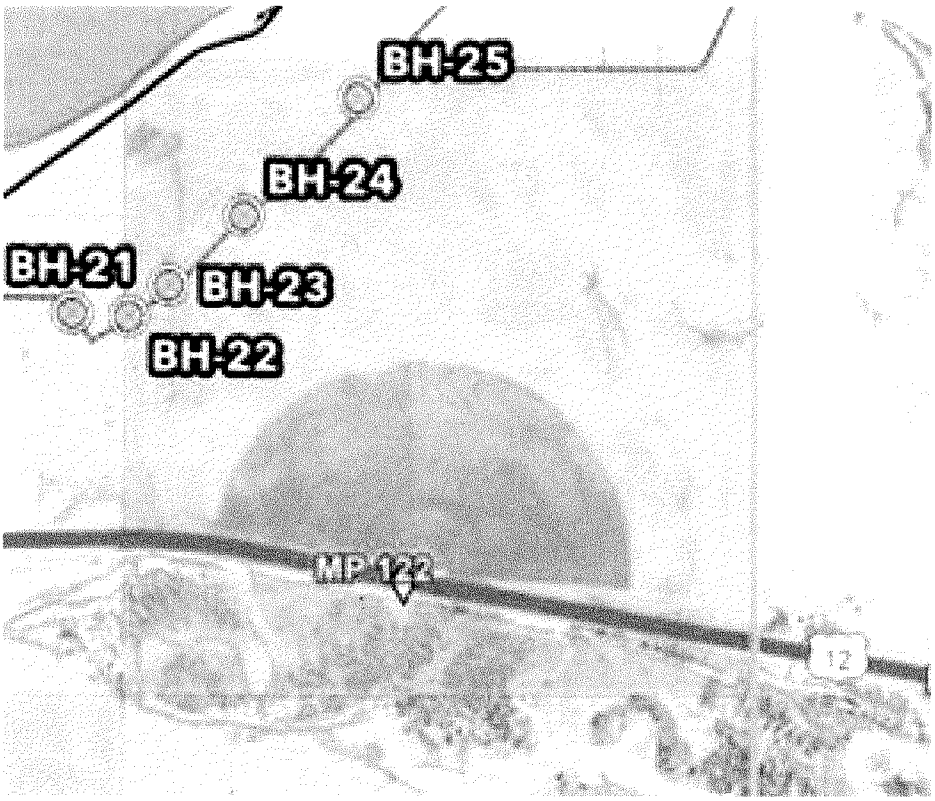
Table — Soil Susceptibility to Compaction — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Medium	258.6	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**258.6**	**100.0%**

Appendix B: Species of Concern

Sort Or	Field Guide ELCODE	Species Gro	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Field Guid AMAFB06010	Mammals	Black-tailed Prairie Dog	Cynomys ludovicianus
1	Field Guid AMAFJ01010	Mammals	North American Porcupin	Erethizon dorsatum
2	Field Guid ABNKC10010	Birds	Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus
2	Field Guid ABPBX94040	Birds	Brewer's Sparrow	Spizella breweri
2	Field Guid ABNSB10010	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia
2	Field Guid ABNKC22010	Birds	Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos
2	Field Guid ABNGA04010	Birds	Great Blue Heron	Ardea herodias
2	Field Guid ABNLC12010	Birds	Greater Sage-Grouse	Centrocercus urophasianus
2	Field Guid ABPBR01030	Birds	Loggerhead Shrike	Lanius ludovicianus
2	Field Guid ABNNF07070	Birds	Long-billed Curlew	Numenius americanus
2	Field Guid ABPAV07010	Birds	Pinyon Jay	Gymnorhinus cyanocephalu
2	Field Guid ABPBJ18080	Birds	Veery	Catharus fuscescens
3	Field Guid ARACF12080	Reptiles	Greater Short-horned Liza	Phrynosoma hernandesi
3	Field Guid ARAAG01030	Reptiles	Spiny Softshell	Apalone spinifera
6	Field Guid IIHYM24252	Invertebra	Western Bumble Bee	Bombus occidentalis
6	Field Guid IIHYM24260	Invertebra	American Bumble Bee	Bombus pensylvanicus
99	Field Guid OBATROOST1	Other	Bat Roost (Non-Cave)	Bat Roost (Non-Cave)



Bore hole locations along proposed pipeline route on State Section 36 7N 18E.