

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Judith Musselshell Rural Water System Phase 3A
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2026-Spring 2027
Proponent:	Central Montanan Regional Water Authority
Location:	Section 36 T7N R18E
County:	Wheatland
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This action would authorize an easement for the installation of a drinking water pipeline 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 Montanan 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 an easement for the construction of a drinking water pipeline.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – The Department would grant permission for an easement for the 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 and being somewhat to very limited for shallow excavations. 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 trenching techniques, but no long-term soil degradation is expected. All disturbed areas will be reclaimed and reseeded using the seed mix specified in Appendix B. With these mitigation measures in place, no significant adverse effects to soils 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.

This project will improve the quality and quantity of drinking water for both rural families and small communities within the Musselshell River Valley. No additional water will be made available for use on State Trust Lands. No significant impacts to local or regional water resources are anticipated.

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 approximately 3.93 acres of vegetation. Disturbed areas will be reseeded using the seed mix specified in Appendix B. No rare plants or unique cover types are present within the project area. 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.

The project area supports a variety of wildlife, including resident and migratory species associated with grasslands, sagebrush, wetlands, riparian areas, and forested habitats. Key species observed or known to occur in the area include greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) and a range of migratory songbirds, and raptors. Several aquatic species are listed in the project area, however, all work will be taking place in upland areas and will not affect aquatic habitats.

Potential habitat disturbance will be minimized by restricting construction to dry periods, limiting equipment to designated work areas, and reclaiming disturbed vegetation per Appendix B. 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 minimizing soil disturbance and restoring native vegetation, are expected to prevent significant impacts.

A complete species list, including habitat and distribution data, is provided in Appendix C. Temporary displacement of wildlife may occur during construction, 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.

There are no other projects or plans currently being considered on the tracts identified in this EA Checklist.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

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 easement will generate a one-time fee of \$2,751.00 payable to the Common Schools 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 an easement for the 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 ☒ No Further Analysis

**EA Checklist
Prepared By:**

Name: Seth Oetken
Title: Land Use Specialist

Signature:



Date: 8/31/26

**EA Checklist
Approved By:**

Name: Josh Stoychoff
Title: Lewistown Unit Manager

Signature:



Date: 8/31/26

Appendix A: Soil Ratings

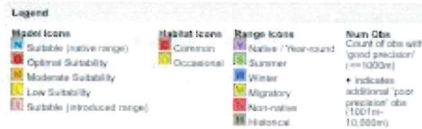
Table - Shallow Excavations - Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Very limited		271.9	72.2%
Somewhat limited		103.7	27.6%
Null or Not Rated		0.7	0.2%
Totals for Area of Interest		376.4	100.0%

Table - Soil Rutting Hazard - Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe		375.6	99.8%
Null or Not Rated		0.7	0.2%
Totals for Area of Interest		376.4	100.0%

Appendix B: Reclamation Seed Mix

Species	% of Seed mix	Pounds PLS/ac
Western Wheatgrass	35	2.8
Slender wheatgrass	35	2.8
Bluebunch Wheatgrass	15	1.2
Green Needlegrass	10	0.8
Lewis flax or purple prairie clover	5	0.4

Appendix C: Species of Concern

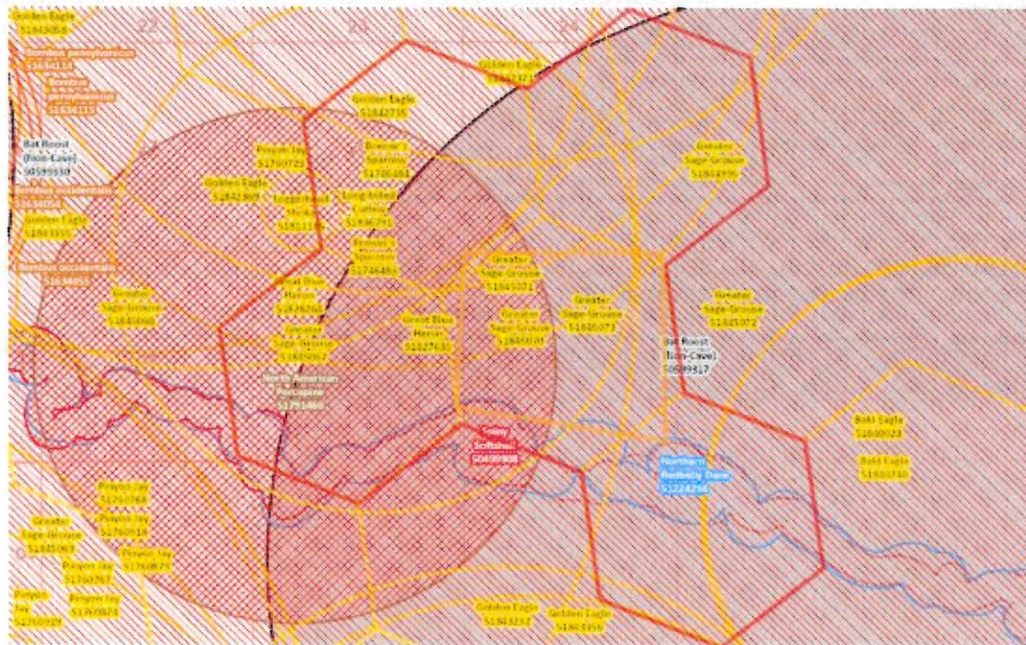


Native Species

Summarized by: (Custom Area of Interest)

Filtered by:

Native Species reports are filtered for Species with MT Status = Species of Concern



Species Occurrences

Spec	Range	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
F - Northern Redbelly Dace (<i>Chrosomus eos</i>) SOC		1			
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G5 State: S2 FWP SWAP: SGCN Delineation Criteria: Stream reaches and standing water bodies where the species presence has been confirmed through direct capture or where they are believed to be present based on the professional judgement of a fisheries biologist due to confirmed presence in adjacent areas. In order to reflect the importance of adjacent terrestrial habitats to survival, stream reaches are buffered 100 meters, standing water bodies greater than 1 acre are buffered 50 meters, and standing water bodies less than 1 acre are buffered 30 meters into the terrestrial habitat based on PACFISH/INFISH Riparian Conservation Area standards. (Last Updated: Feb 18, 2026) Predicted Models: 60% Suitable (native range) (deductive)					
B - Great Blue Heron (<i>Ardea herodias</i>) SOC		2	6		
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G5 State: S3 USFWS: MBTA FWP SWAP: SGCN Delineation Criteria: Confirmed nesting area buffered by a minimum distance of 6,500 meters in order to be conservative about encompassing the areas commonly used for foraging near the breeding colony. If the locational uncertainty associated with the observation is greater than 5,000 meters, the observation is not valid for creation of a species occurrence. (Last Updated: Jun 17, 2026) Predicted Models: 80% Moderate (inductive), 20% Low (inductive)					
B - Pinyon Jay (<i>Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus</i>) SOC		1			
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G3 State: S3 USFWS: MBTA ; BCC10 ; BCC17 FWP SWAP: SGCN Delineation Criteria: Observations with evidence of breeding activity buffered by a minimum distance of 4,500 meters in order to be conservative about encompassing the home ranges reported for flocks and otherwise buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Mar 18, 2026) Predicted Models: 80% Moderate (inductive)					
R - Spiny Softshell (<i>Apalone spinifer</i>) SOC		1	1		
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G5 State: S3 BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN Delineation Criteria: Stream reaches and impounded streams within the species' native range where the species naturally occurs and their presence has been confirmed through direct capture or where they are believed to be present based on the professional judgement of a biologist due to confirmed presence in adjacent areas. In order to reflect the importance of adjacent terrestrial habitats to survival, stream reaches are buffered 100 meters and impounded streams 50 meters into the terrestrial habitat based on PACFISH/INFISH Riparian Conservation Area standards. (Last Updated: Jan 30, 2025) Predicted Models: 40% Moderate (inductive), 60% Low (inductive)					

B - Long-billed Curlew (<i>Numenius americanus</i>) SOC	1	2							
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps									
Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G4 State: S3B USFWS: MBTA ; BCC11 BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN PIF: 2									
Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 200 meters in order to approximate the breeding territory size reported for the species in Idaho and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Jun 23, 2026)									
Predicted Models: 40% Moderate (inductive), 60% Low (inductive)									
B - Golden Eagle (<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>) SOC	15	16							
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps									
Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G5 State: S3 USFWS: BGEPA ; MBTA BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN									
Delineation Criteria Confirmed nesting area buffered by a minimum distance of 3,000 meters in order to be conservative about encompassing the entire breeding territory and area commonly used for roosting and otherwise buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Jul 07, 2026)									
Predicted Models: 1% Moderate (inductive), 99% Low (inductive)									
B - Greater Sage-Grouse (<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>) SOC	55	7	6						
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps									
Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G3 State: S2 USFS: Sensitive - Known in Forests (BD) Species of Conservation Concern in Forests (CG) BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN PIF: 1									
Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, juveniles, or adults on a lek. Point observations are mapped in the center of a one-square mile hexagon to protect the exact locations of leks. The outer edges of this hexagon are then buffered by a distance of 6,400 meters in order to encompass a body of research indicating that females typically nest within this distance of a lek and that lek numbers are negatively impacted by fossil fuel drilling activities within this distance of a lek. If the locational uncertainty associated with the observation is greater than 5,000 meters, the observation is not valid for creation of a species occurrence record. (Last Updated: Jul 08, 2026)									
Predicted Models: 1% Moderate (inductive), 99% Low (inductive)									
B - Brewer's Sparrow (<i>Spizella breweri</i>) SOC	2								
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps									
Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G5 State: S3B USFWS: MBTA BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN PIF: 2									
Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 100 meters in order to encompass the maximum territory size reported for the species and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Mar 15, 2026)									
Predicted Models: 1% Moderate (inductive), 99% Low (inductive)									
B - Loggerhead Shrike (<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>) SOC	11								
View in Field Guide View Predicted Models View Range Maps									
Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G4 State: S3B USFWS: MBTA BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN PIF: 2									
Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 300 meters in order to encompass the maximum breeding territory size reported for the species in Alberta and Idaho and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Apr 07, 2026)									
Predicted Models: 100% Low (inductive)									