

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: 4-B Properties Land Exchange
Proposed Implementation Date: 2026
Proponent: DNRC Eastern Land Office and 4-B Properties
Location: 20 miles north of Circle, MT
County: McCone

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Eastern Land Office (ELO) of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and the 4-B Properties are proposing a land exchange of approximately 600 acres of land locked state-owned trust land for approximately 480 acres of private lands. The exchange is proposed in order to provide greater management flexibility between state and private land. Land management, revenue to the trust and recreational access would improve as a result of the exchange.

State Land Proposed for Exchange

County	Legal Description	# of Acres	Trust
McCone	N2NW4, SE4NW4, NE4, S2 Section 16 T23N-R47E	600	Common Schools

Total Acres 600

Private Land Proposed for Exchange

County	Legal Description	# of Acres
McCone	NW4 Section 34, T23N-R47E	160
McCone	W2SW4, SE4SW4, SWSE4 Section 27, T23N-R47E	160
McCone	NW4, T23N-R49E-Sec 3	160

Total Acres 480

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Letters were sent in September 2024 to resource professionals, adjacent landowners and other interested parties seeking comment on the proposed action. A public notice was placed in the Circle Banner and ran for two consecutive weeks. Comments were received from DUCO farms and EG Strand LLC. Further scoping and a public hearing will be scheduled before the final EA.

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

DNRC Water Rights Division, transfer of water rights

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

NO ACTION: Current land use activities of grazing would continue without change.

LAND EXCHANGE ALTERNATIVE: This alternative would exchange approximately 600 grazing acres of land locked state-owned trust land for approximately 480 acres of private lands with public and administrative access.

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.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to geological or soil resources 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 are no recorded water rights on any of the parcels included in this exchange. There is an unrecorded well casing on the parcel located in Section 27. If exchanged the local land office would follow up on updating the water rights of this well if feasible.

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 direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to air quality are anticipated as a result of the exchange.

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.

Existing land use patterns are expected to continue after the exchange on all parcels involved.

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.

No cumulative impacts on terrestrial, avian, and aquatic habitats are likely to occur as a result of the proposed action. All land uses are expected to remain the same.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Database showed occurrences or observations of the following species of concern in the project area.

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) SOC

This project is located within Greater Sage Grouse General Habitat.

There is no foreseeable change in land use expected or disturbance activities associated with this exchange therefore there should be no significant impacts to these species.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class III level review was conducted by DNRC staff 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 portion of the review revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. The pedestrian survey consisted of parallel transects spaced a maximum of 25 m apart. During fieldwork, a low-profile cairn was recorded (24MC746). The site has not been evaluated to determine if it is a Heritage Property. Considering the geographic location and the fact that the landform the site is situated is not conducive to agriculture, it is unlikely that a change in land use will occur into the foreseeable future even if the state tract is transferred to private ownership. If a defined future development will potentially disturb the site, then it should be formally evaluated, photographed, and mapped. A cultural and paleontologic resources inventory report has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC, (Helena) and the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (Helena):

Rennie, Patrick J.

2024 A Cultural and Paleontologic Resources Inventory of a Portion of Section 16, T23N R47E: McCone County, Montana. Report prepared for the DNRC (Helena, MT). Report dated November, 2024.

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.

The proposed land exchange will not affect area aesthetics. No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to area aesthetics is anticipated as a result of the exchange.

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.

The project would not use resources that are limited in the area. No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on limited resources are 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.

DNRC conducted a phase one environmental survey of the proposed acquisition. Two de minimis conditions were noted within the tracts. Two isolated refuse piles including scrap iron, wood and other debris were noted. These sites will be dealt with at a later date. They also noted a non-recorded water well, which the land office staff will research further to see if it can be put back into use and a water right filed on it.

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 adverse direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to human health and safety are anticipated as a result of the exchange.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Existing land use practices are expected to continue after the exchange.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to industrial, commercial or agricultural activities is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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 land exchange will not impact employment.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to employment is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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.

State trust land is tax exempt. As a result of the exchange 480 acres will become tax exempt when transferred from private to state ownership. The 600 acres of land transferred from state to private ownership will become taxable. The positive or negative impact to taxable value on this exchange should be minimal.

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

There will be little to no effect on government services as a result of the proposed exchange.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to the demand for government services is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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 environmental plans or goals involving the area.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to locally adopted environmental plans or goals are anticipated as a result of the exchange

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 480 acres of private land that would be transferred to the state as a result of the proposed exchange would provide public access to 320 acres and administrative access to an additional 160. The 600 acres of state land proposed to be transferred to private ownership is surrounded and land locked by private land and therefore any access would be limited to the digression of the private land owner.

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 proposed exchange would result in no change in population or housing.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to population or housing is anticipated as a result of the exchange

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No impacts would be expected with either alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

No impacts would be expected with either alternative.

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 total appraised land value of the 600 acres to be exchanged to private is \$417,500. The appraised land value of the 480 acres to be exchanged to state is \$587,500. Resulting in a net asset value gain of \$180,000.

Currently the 600 acre of Trust Land parcel is leased for grazing at the minimum of \$26.07 per AUM resulting in a total lease payment of \$3728.01 for 2026.

The 480 acres to be exchanged to Trust Land has approximately 247 acres of dryland farming. At an average bid per acre of \$25.00 a projected agriculture revenue would be \$6175.00. There is also 115 acres of tame grass hay land at an average bid price of \$20.00 per acre would generate \$2300.00. The remainder of the property is grazing with approximately 36 AUM's available at an average bid price of \$35.00 per AUM would generate \$1260.00. Total lease revenue off of this property is estimated at \$9735.00 annually.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Scott Aye	Date: July 9 th 2026
	Title: ELO Land Program Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action, DNRC will recommend approval of exchange of the subject lands to the Board of Land Commissioners

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impact.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Chris Pileski
	Title: Area Manager
Signature: /s/ Chris Pileski	
Date: July 22 nd , 2026	