Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. APPLICANT/CONTACT NAME AND ADDRESS:

TOWN OF PLAINS
PO BOX 567
PLAINS MT 59859-0567

2. TYPE OF ACTION:

Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 76N 30171260

3. WATER SOURCE NAME:

Groundwater

4. LOCATION AFFECTED BY PROJECT:

NESESESE of S22, T20N, R26W, Sanders County, Montana.

5. NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF THE PROPSED PROJECT, PURPOSE, ACTION TO BE TAKEN, AND BENEFITS:

The Applicant proposes to divert groundwater at a rate of 750.0 GPM up to 531.0 AF/year by means of proposed well POD-1 (GWIC ID: 319973; Completion depth: 164.0 feet BGS) for municipal use from January 1 to December 31, annually. Proposed well POD-1 is located in the NESESESE of Section 22, Township 20N, Range 26W, Sanders County (Figure 1) and will provide supplemental flow rate only to the Town of Plains municipal PWS system. The Applicant does not propose to appropriate any new volume because all of the 531.0 AF/year of volume required for the Town's municipal PWS system is already authorized under Statements of Claim 76N 6114-00 and 76N 133422-00 and Provisional Permit 76N 30013677. Although no new volume is requested, up to the full 531.0 AF of volume already authorized might be diverted from this well if the two existing wells become inoperable. The place of use is the Town of Plains municipal PWS system service area (Figure 1) in the:

i. S2SE of Section 22, Township 20N, Range 26W, Sanders County;

ii. W2 of Section 26, Township 20N, Range 26W, Sanders County;

iii. Section 27, Township 20N, Range 26W, Sanders County; and,

iv. N2N2 of Section 35, Township 20N, Range 26W, Sanders County.

The proposed well POD-1 is in Water Right Basin No. 76N (the Clark Fork, below Flathead River), in an area that is not subject to water right basin closures or controlled groundwater area restrictions.

The DNRC shall issue a water use permit if the applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

6. AGENCIES CONSULTED DURING PREPARATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): National Wetlands Inventory Wetlands Mapper
- Montana Natural Heritage Program: Endangered, Threatened Species, and Species of Special Concern
- Montana Department of Fish Wildlife & Parks (DFWP): Dewatered Stream Information
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ): Clean Water Act Information Center
- U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS): Web Soil Survey

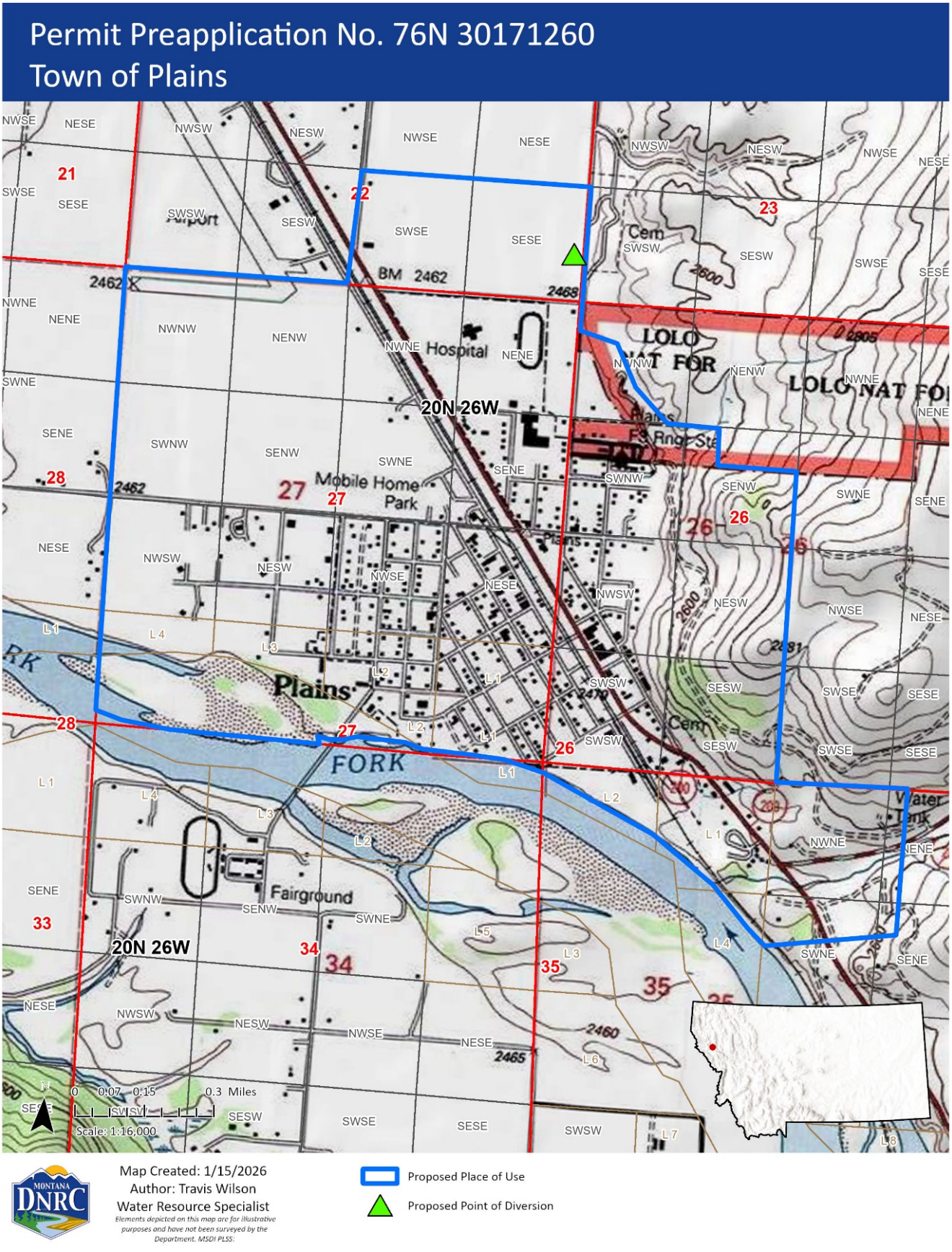


Figure 1. Map of the proposed place of use and point of diversion.

Part II. Environmental Review

1. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT CHECKLIST:**

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1.1 WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water Quantity - *Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.*

The source aquifer is hydraulically connected to the Clark Fork River and Lynch Creek. The Clark Fork River is not listed as chronically or periodically dewatered on the Montana DFWP list of dewatering concern areas. Lynch Creek is listed as chronically dewatered on the Montana DFWP list of dewatering concern areas, however, since no new volume is requested by this water right application, there will be no additional depletions to surface water beyond what has already been authorized under the Town of Plains' existing water rights.

Determination: No significant impact.

Water Quality - *Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.*

Clark Fork River (Flathead River to Thompson Falls Reservoir): MDEQ Clean Water Act Information Center's 2024 Water Quality Information report lists the Clark Fork River as:

i. Water Quality Category 5: Waters where one or more applicable beneficial uses have been assessed as being impaired or threatened, and a TMDL is required to address the factors causing the impairment or threat;

ii. Use Class B-1: Waters classified as suitable for drinking, culinary, and food processing purposes after conventional treatment; bathing, swimming and recreation; growth and propagation of salmonid fishes and associated aquatic life, waterfowl and furbearers; and agricultural and industrial water supply;

iii. "Fully supporting" for agricultural, drinking water, and primary contact recreation uses; and,

iv. "Not fully supporting" for aquatic life with the probable causes for the impairment being fish passage barrier and dissolved gas supersaturation.

Lynch Creek (headwaters to mouth): MDEQ Clean Water Act Information Center's 2024 Water Quality Information report lists the Lynch Creek as:

i. Water Quality Category 4A: All TMDLs needed to rectify all identified threats or impairments have been completed and approved;

ii. Use Class B-1: Waters classified as suitable for drinking, culinary, and food processing purposes after conventional treatment; bathing, swimming and recreation; growth and propagation of salmonid fishes and associated aquatic life, waterfowl and furbearers; and agricultural and industrial water supply;

iii. "Not assessed" for agriculture and drinking water; and,

iv. "Not fully supporting" for aquatic life and primary contact recreation. The probable causes for the aquatic life impairment are alteration in stream-side or littoral vegetative covers, sedimentation/siltation, temperature, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, and flow regime modification. fish passage barrier and dissolved gas supersaturation. The probable causes for the primary contact recreation impairment are total nitrogen and total phosphorus.

The diversion of groundwater for municipal use is not anticipated to significantly affect water quality in these sources because the requested appropriation is for flow rate only with no new volume.

Determination: No significant impact.

Groundwater - *Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.*

The Applicant does not request additional volume in this application. Physical and legal availability of groundwater has been demonstrated by the Applicant's existing water rights that provide the volume to the municipal PWS system (Statement of Claim Nos. 76N 6114-00 and 76N 133422-00 and Provisional Permit No. 76N 30013677) out of the same source aquifer.

The DNRC WSB identified the Clark Fork River and Lynch Creek as the surface water sources that are hydraulically connected to the source aquifer. Since this application is for additional flow rate only with no new volume requested, there will be no increase in consumed volume and thus no increase in depletions from hydraulically connected surface water sources.

Determination: No significant impact.

1.2 DIVERSION WORKS - *Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.*

Proposed well POD-1 (GWIC ID: 319973) was drilled and completed to a depth of 164.0 feet BGS by Coldwater Drilling and Pumps (WWC-624) on June 9, 2022. The well is completed with a stainless-steel screen from 133.0 to 164.0 feet BGS. Proposed well POD-1 is equipped with an 8-inch diameter Grundfos 800S750-3 submersible pump with a 75-HP motor controlled by a VFD. The pump is suspended on a 6-inch diameter drop pipe and will divert water to a pump house via a to a 6-inch Baker pitless adapter. From the pump house, proposed well POD-1 will connect to the existing municipal distribution system via a 10-inch diameter PVC transmission main.

The existing municipal distribution system consists of a network of buried 6-inch diameter asbestos cement and 8-inch diameter PVC water mains that convey water throughout the authorized place of use. The distribution system is configured as a looped municipal network with interconnected water mains, valves, fire hydrants, and individual service connections that distribute water throughout the Town. Water is stored in two municipal storage tanks that provide system storage, maintain operating pressure, and supply peak demand and fire flow requirements. The proposed conveyance infrastructure has been designed to accommodate the requested maximum diversion rate of 750.0 GPM while maintaining adequate pressure and flow throughout the municipal distribution system. The municipal water system operates under SCADA control with VFD pumps that adjust production to match customer demand and maintain storage tank levels. Although the proposed well is capable of producing up to 750 GPM, it is capable operate at lower flow rates as needed to meet daily and seasonal demand while maintaining adequate storage and system pressure. Accordingly, the proposed diversion and conveyance infrastructure is capable of reliably delivering the requested flow and volume throughout the entire year-round period of diversion.

The Applicant provided pump specifications and TDH calculations for proposed well POD-1 demonstrating that the well and pump will produce 750.0 GPM at the calculated 299.34 feet of TDH. The TDH value is based on the sum of friction losses in the system from the well pump to the pump house mechanical room of 25.34 feet, an elevation head of 43.0 feet, and the system service pressure of 100 PSI (equivalent to 231.0 feet of head).

Determination: No significant impact.

1.3 UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and Threatened Species - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants, aquatic species, or any "species of special concern," or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or "species of special concern."*

The Montana Natural Heritage Program website was reviewed to determine if there are any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants, aquatic species, or any "species of special concern" in the project area that could be impacted by the proposed project. Four animal species of concern (Table 1) were identified in the general vicinity of the project area. Of these species, the Grizzly Bear is listed as threatened by the USFWS. It is not anticipated that any species of concern will be further impacted by the proposed project. This project will not create any barriers to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife.

Table 1. Species of Concern		
Species Group	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**
Mammals	Grizzly Bear*	*Ursus arctos*
Birds	Great Blue Heron	*Ardea herodias*
Birds	Evening Grosbeak	*Coccothraustes vespertinus*
Birds	Lewis's Woodpecker	*Melanerpes lewis*

**Listed as "Threatened" by the USFWS.*

Determination: No significant impact.

Wetlands and Ponds - *Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted. For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.*

Determination: N/A, project does not involve any wetlands or ponds.

1.4 GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE - *Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.*

The proposed municipal use is not anticipated to negatively impact the soil quality, stability, or moisture content. The soil type in the project area is Gird silt loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes, formed from Alluvium parent material. This soil has a moderately high to high capacity to transmit water and is nonsaline to very slightly saline and thus is not likely susceptible to saline seep.

Determination: No significant impact.

1.5 VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - *Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.*

Proposed well POD-1 is drilled in an agricultural field where any existing native vegetative cover has already been impacted due to historical agricultural production. It is not anticipated that issuance of a water use permit will contribute to the establishment or spread of noxious weeds in the project area. Noxious weed prevention and control will be the responsibility of the landowner, who must follow local noxious weed regulations.

Determination: No significant impact.

1.6 AIR QUALITY - *Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.*

There will be no impact to air quality associated with issuance of the proposed permit for beneficial use of groundwater.

Determination: No significant impact.

1.7 HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - *Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.*

Determination: N/A, project not located on State or Federal Lands.

1.8 DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - *Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water, and energy not already addressed.*

All impacts to land, water, and energy have been identified and no further impacts are anticipated.

Determination: No significant impact.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

1.9 LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - *Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.*

This project is consistent with planned land uses.

Determination: No significant impact.

1.10 ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.*

The proposed project will not inhibit, alter, or impair access to present recreational opportunities in the area. The project is not expected to create any significant pollution, noise, or traffic congestion in the area that may alter the quality of recreational opportunities. The proposed place of use and diversion do not exist on land designated as wilderness.

Determination: No significant impact.

1.11 HUMAN HEALTH - *Assess whether the proposed project impacts human health.*

This proposed use will not adversely impact human health.

Determination: No significant impact.

1.12 PRIVATE PROPERTY - *Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights. If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights*.

There are no government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Determination: No impact.

1.13 OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - *For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.*

Impacts on:

(a) *Cultural uniqueness and diversity?* None identified.

(*b)* *Local and state tax base and tax revenues?* None identified.

(c) *Existing land uses?* None identified.

(*d)* *Quantity and distribution of employment?* None identified.

(e) *Distribution and density of population and housing?* None identified.

(f) *Demands for government services?* None identified.

(g) *Industrial and commercial activity?* None identified.

(h) *Utilities?* None identified.

(i) *Transportation?* None identified.

(j) *Safety?* None identified.

(k) *Other appropriate social and economic circumstances?* None identified.

2. SECONDARY AND CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN POPULATION:

Secondary Impacts: None identified.

Cumulative Impacts: None identified.

3. DESCRIBE ANY MITIGATION/STIPULATION MEASURES:

None.

4. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION, INCLUDING THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE, IF AN ALTERNATIVE IS REASONABLY AVAILABLE AND PRUDENT TO CONSIDER:

The only alternative to the proposed action would be the no action alternative. The no action alternative would not authorize the diversion of groundwater at this location.

Part III. Conclusion

1. PREFFERED ALTERNATIVE:

Issue a water use permit if the Applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

2. COMMENTS AND RESPONSES:

None.

3. FINDING:

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? **No**

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

No significant impacts related to the proposed project have been identified.

4. NAME OF PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARATION OF EA:

Name: Travis Wilson

Title: Water Resource Specialist

Date: October 22, 2026