

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Faw Gravel Site Proposed Implementation Date: 9/96
 Proponent: Empire Sand & Gravel, Inc., Box 1215, Billings MT 59103

Type and Purpose of Action: The operator has applied for an 18.32-acre borrow site where they propose to salvage all available soil material, remove 50,000 cubic yards of gravel, and reclaim the site to native grassland. The estimated date for final reclamation is fall of 1997.

Location and County: SE13 & SW18, 1N, 15E, Sweetgrass County

N = Not present or insignificant impact.
 Y = An impact may occur (explain).

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
1. LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY, AND GEOLOGIC AND EDAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, SUITABILITY, AND STABILITY: Are there unusual geologic features? Are fragile, compactible, or unstable soils present? Is the proposed soil material handling adequate? Are there special mining and reclamation considerations?	N - The site is located just west of the east Big Timber interchange. It's on a flat bench above the confluence of the Boulder and Yellowstone Rivers, about 1 mile from each river. The surrounding topography is open river valleys lined by continuous benches and hills. The site is in the sedimentary plains portion of the state and no unusual geologic features are apparent. According to the operator, there's about 1 foot of soil over 2 feet of overburden. The operator is committed to salvaging and replacing all soil material. There are no special mining and reclamation considerations.
2. WATER RESOURCE LOCATION, QUANTITY, QUALITY, AND PROTECTION: Are surface or ground water resources present? Is there the potential for degradation of water quality or quantity? Could water wells be affected? Are there special mining and reclamation considerations?	N - It does not appear that there are surface water or groundwater resources or wells in the immediate area that could be affected by this operation. No surface water features are apparent on or near the site. In a new excavation in the reclaimed pit on the east side of the proposed site there is groundwater; however, this water table appears to be lower than the proposed depth of mining. There is a well just west of the proposed site that the landowner drilled for a house location that he has since abandoned. The landowner now has a house well several hundred feet northwest of the site that has a water level at 40.0 feet, well below the depth of mining. There are no special mining and reclamation considerations.

<p>3. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Do air quality regulations apply?</p>	<p>N - Pollutants and particulates will be produced on a temporary basis by mining and reclamation operations. Operators are required to comply with state air quality regulations.</p>
<p>4. PRESENT LAND USE, VEGETATIVE COMPOSITION AND COVER, AND PROPOSED POSTMINING LAND USE: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or vegetative communities present? Are there special mining and reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>N - The present land use is idle grassland. The vegetative composition is seeded reclamation grasses dominated by wheatgrass. The proposed postmining land use is native grassland.</p> <p>The Montana Natural Heritage Program reports a bluebunch wheatgrass/western wheatgrass habitat type in the area. This is of no concern for this project since the site vegetation is seeded reclamation from a previous operation.</p> <p>The Department will notify the county weed control board about the operation. The operator has committed to controlling any on-site noxious weeds.</p> <p>There is knapweed on site and the county weed control board has been notified.</p> <p>There are no special mining and reclamation considerations.</p>
<p>5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN, AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by common or rare mammals, birds, fish, or other animal species?</p>	<p>N - There does not appear to be significant use of the area by common or rare species.</p> <p>The Montana Natural Heritage Program reports the occurrence of bald eagles in the area. This is not a concern for this project since the site is not, nor is it next to , bald eagle habitat.</p>
<p>6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE, OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Species of special concern? Wetlands?</p>	<p>N - The author is not aware of any unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources in or around the site.</p>
<p>7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Has the site been surveyed by a cultural resource professional or paraprofessional? Are any historical or archaeological resources present?</p>	<p>N - A previous site check in 1991 by Anthro Research revealed no cultural resources. If such resources are found, the operator has committed to routing the operation around the site of discovery for a reasonable time until salvage can be made, and to promptly notifying the State Historic Preservation Office.</p>

<p>8. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?</p>	<p>N - The site next to but not visible from the interstate, next to but offset from the frontage road, and next to but above and back from a golf course. It is not readily visible from populated or scenic areas. Noise or light should not be a problem.</p>
<p>9. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR, OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect or be affected by the project?</p>	<p>N - There will not be a significant demand or impact on environmental resources or other projects as a result of this operation.</p>
<p>10. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OR IMPACTS: Are there other studies, plans, or projects on this tract? Will waste disposal be properly handled? Is reclamation guaranteed by a bond?</p>	<p>N - The author is not aware of any other environmental aspects or impacts. The operator has committed to proper waste disposal. The operator has posted sufficient bond to guarantee reclamation.</p>

IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>11. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>N - The site is fairly isolated. The project should not add to the health and safety risks in the area if the operator and landowner manage the site in a responsible manner. The operator is required to comply with OSHA and MSHA regulations.</p>
<p>12. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>N - Industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities in the area will not be significantly affected by the project.</p>
<p>13. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move, or eliminate jobs?</p>	<p>N - The quantity or distribution of employment in the project area will not be significantly affected by the project.</p>
<p>14. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>N - Local and state tax revenues have not been significantly affected by similar operations in the state.</p>
<p>15. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial changes in road use occur? Will other facilities and services (e.g., fire protection, police, schools) be affected or needed?</p>	<p>N - Trucks will use the frontage road to haul mineral to the project area. No other government services should be affected or needed.</p>
<p>16. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there federal, state, county, city, tribal, and/or private zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>N - The author is not aware of any other environmental plans or goals. The local zoning authority has been contacted and clearance obtained.</p>

17. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are recreational or wilderness areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	N - Access to or the quality of recreational lands and activities on site and in the area will not be affected by the project.
18. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the area's population and require additional housing?	N - Population or housing density and distribution will not be significantly affected by the project.
19. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	N - The local social structure or mores will not be significantly affected by the project.
20. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	N - The local cultural uniqueness or diversity will not be significantly affected by the project.
21. OTHER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	N - Other significant social or economic circumstances are not apparent.

22. Alternatives Considered: Denial. The owner of the mineral resource would be denied full utilization of his property at this time.

23. Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups or Individuals contacted: Montana Natural Heritage Program, county weed control board, State Historic Preservation Office, and local zoning authority.

24. Other Governmental Agencies with Jurisdiction, List of Permits (that may be) Needed: Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality for Air Quality Permit and Water Quality for Stormwater Discharge Permit; United States Department of Labor, Mine Safety and Health Administration for safety permit; Montana Department of Labor & Industry, Safety Bureau for safety permit.

25. Magnitude and Significance of Potential Impacts: Negative impacts during mining should be insignificant and implementation of the mining and reclamation plan should return this area to an aesthetically pleasing and useful condition.

26. Regulatory Impact on Private Property: The analysis conducted in response to the Private Property Assessment Act indicates no impact.

Recommendation for Further Environmental Analysis:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Prepared By: Mark Carlstrom Mine Reclamation Specialist
Name Title

Approved By: Steve Welch Opencut Mining Bureau Chief
Name Title

Signature Date