

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**Project Name:** Plains Ready Mix Site.

**Proposed Implementation Date:** 1998

**Proponent:** Polson Ready Mix Concrete, Inc.

**Type and Purpose of Action:** The applicant proposes to mine, crush, wash, stockpile and haul a total of approximately 85,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from a 3.5 acre pit which is located 2 miles west of the town of Plains. The start-up date will be June, 1998. Topsoil will be removed and stockpiled. At the conclusion of the project, approximately 2008, the pit will be reclaimed to homesites and a pond. The pit itself will be graded to conform with departmental pond guidelines and the banks will be seeded to grasses. The date of final reclamation would be the fall of 2008.

**Location:** SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, Sec. 16, T20N, R26W

**County:** Sanders

**N = Not present or No Impact will occur.**

**Y = Impacts may occur (explain under Potential Impacts).**

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
1. <b>GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</b> Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?	[N] The topsoil is approximately eight inches of silty loam. Local terrace slopes demonstrate fair stability. All soil material will be salvaged and stockpiled away from the affected land. Following mining, grading and ripping, the soils will be replaced on the pit slopes and seeded. Microbes will re-colonize the soil.
2. <b>WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:</b> Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?	[N] There are approximately 12 water wells in the area in section 16 that average 75 feet in depth and yield an average of 25 gallons per minute. Groundwater is shallow in the area and will be intercepted by mining to form the desired pond. The Clark Fork River is located 1/4 mile to the west which will not be impacted by mining. The site will be mined to a depth of 20 feet which is well into the groundwater.  Special precautions will be taken to minimize possible contamination of the groundwater. Material removed from the site is hauled to the batch plant located 1/4 mile to the north, so no fuel storage or other potential water contaminants will be located near the pond. Any accidental spills or leaks from equipment will be excavated and disposed. No crusher or batch plants are planned for the site. With these precautions, the quality and quantity of the groundwater should not be adversely impacted.
3. <b>AIR QUALITY:</b> Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	[Y] Air quality will be degraded under this operation. Loaders, dozers and trucking equipment typically cause dusty conditions in disturbed soil sites. The operator must take whatever action necessary to reduce dust during hot, dry periods. The site is not located within a Class 1 airshed. No crusher or wash plant is proposed for the pit site.
4. <b>VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:</b> Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	[Y] Vegetation in the area consists of planted pasture. Vegetation covers 100% of the ground and consists of pasture grass which lies on a level slope, and will be removed during mining. The ground around the excavated pond will be re-planted with grasses for aesthetics and to protect the replaced soils. Some native seed may remain viable in the salvaged topsoil and may regenerate. There is a moderate infestation of spotted knapweed, a legally defined noxious weed. No rare plants or cover types were identified and none were identified during a ground search. There are no known rare or sensitive plants in the area. No mining will be done within 100 feet of any live stream, riparian or isolated wetland habitat areas.

<p>5. <b>TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</b> Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>[N] Although the area is used primarily for grazing, it also supports populations of deer, bears, rodents, song birds, coyotes, foxes, insects and various other animal species. The proposed mine will displace these species during mining activity, but most use will resume use of the area upon reclamation. Mining activities are not expected to significantly degrade wildlife populations. Seed head gall flies have been introduced to the tract to provide biological control of noxious weeds.</p>
<p>6. <b>UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</b> Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Species of special concern?</p>	<p>[N] Bald eagles and blue herons are known to range all along the Clark Fork River Valley, but no nesting sites are known on or near the proposed permit area. No adverse effects are anticipated on the eagles as a result of this proposed action. The Natural Heritage Program literature search have not revealed any endangered or threatened plant or animal species that would be directly affected.</p>
<p>7. <b>HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:</b> Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>[N] Although there are important cultural values in the general area, a surface reconnaissance did not discover any cultural, historical or archeological resources. The operator will give appropriate protection to any values or artifacts discovered in the affected area. If significant resources are found, the operation will be routed around the site of discovery for a reasonable time until salvage can be conducted. The State Historical Preservation Office will be promptly notified.</p>
<p>8. <b>AESTHETICS:</b> 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] There will be a deterioration of aesthetics while the operation is under way. There is also noise and light from truck traffic hauling to various projects. The site is slightly visible by traffic along State Highway 200 and to local traffic. However, reclamation will return the area to a visually acceptable landscape.</p> <p>Noise levels are generally within the range of 60 to 90 decibels measured on-site, decreasing with distance. As a comparison, sound levels for ordinary activities such as close conversation at 60 decibels and music from a radio at 70 decibels are considered to be moderate. Levels above 90 decibels are severe, and prolonged exposure can lead to hearing loss. Floodlights from dark period operations would increase visibility and awareness of the operation. There is noise from equipment such as dozers, loaders and truck traffic hauling to various areas. These impacts are intermittent and of relatively short duration.</p>
<p>9. <b>DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:</b> Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?</p>	<p>[N]</p>
<p>10. <b>IMPACTS ON OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</b> Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p>[N]</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</b></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RESOURCE</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES</b></p>

11. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	[N] Heavy equipment and facilities including trucks and loaders will create hazards, but the operator must comply with all MSHA and OSHA regulations. The operator will employ proper precautions to avoid accidents. Signage and flaggers would reduce traffic dangers during times of heavy truck traffic entering and leaving the site. Excessive and prolonged noise and light could increase stress and induce difficulty sleeping. Both of these effects may be considered harmful to human health if the activities are continuous. This proposed operation is expected to create these impacts sporadically and for short periods; it therefore should not significantly affect human health.
12. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	[N] The site is currently used for grazing. The acreage listed in the Type and purpose of Action will be taken out of grazing and put into industrial/commercial use. Upon completion of mining, the land will be reclaimed to a pond with homesites surrounding it.
13. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	[N]
14. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	[N]
15. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	[Y] The operation will require periodic site evaluations by DEQ staff until such time as the site is successfully reclaimed to the required post-mining use. However, these evaluations are usually performed in conjunction with other area operations.
16. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	[Y] Zoning has been approved by the county.
17. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	[N]
18. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	[N]
19. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	[N]
20. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	[N]
21. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	[N]

**22. Alternatives Considered:**

1. **No Action:** The site would not be permitted and further impacts would not occur at this location. The landowner would be denied use of his mineral deposit at this time.
2. **Approval of the Application as submitted:** The permit would be granted with the existing Plan of Operation.

**23. Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups or Individuals contacted:** State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Heritage Program, Sanders County Commissioners.

**24. Other Governmental Agencies with Jurisdiction, List of Permits Needed:** None

