ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Platt Pit. **Proposed Implementation Date:** In Progress
Proponent: Richard Platt
Type and Purpose of Action: The applicant proposes to mine, stockpile and haul a total of 70,000 cubic yards of gravel from a 2 acre site which is located 1½ miles southeast of the town of Heron. The start-up date was 1987 and has been in operation for the last decade. The topsoil will be stripped to a depth of 18" and stockpiled during the mining phase. Reclamation will result in a graded site to blend in with the surrounding topography with slopes graded to 3:1 or flatter. The site will be topsoiled and seeded to pasture grass and timberland in the year 2010.
Location: NW¼ NE¼ Section 2, T26N, R34W **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. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?	**[N] Up to 10 inches of well fairly well drained, clayey silt loam topsoil overlies the glacial sands and gravels. Local terrace slopes demonstrate reasonably good stability, and ripping after activities are complete should alleviate soil compaction. All soil material will be salvaged and stockpiled away from the affected land. Following mining, grading and ripping, the soils will be replaced, disked and seeded to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion. Microbes are expected to re-colonize the soil.**
2. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: 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 10 water wells in sections 2 & 3 that average 400 feet in depth and yield an average of 15 gallons per minute. Groundwater is deep in the area and will not be affected by mining.** **The nearest water is Elk Creek located ½ mile east of the site but will not be affected by the mine. All fuel, lubricants and chemicals will be kept out of the permit area, and any accidental spills or major leaks from equipment operating in the pit will immediately be excavated and removed from the site. Therefore, potable ground and surface water is not expected to be adversely impacted.**
3. AIR QUALITY: 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. Dozers, loaders and trucking equipment typically cause dusty conditions in disturbed soil sites. The site is not located within a Class 1 airshed. No crusher or wash plant is proposed.**

4. VEGETATION COVERS, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	**[Y] Vegetation covers 100% of the ground and consists of forest with Douglas fir, Western larch and Ponderosa pine which lies on a north-facing slope, and all will be removed during mining. The ground will be re-planted with grasses for grazing and to protect the replaced soils. Some native seed may remain viable in the salvaged topsoil and may regenerate. Trees will be allowed to invade the site for future timber production. Under ideal conditions, other desirable native species from un-disturbed adjacent land may re-invade the site. 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.**
5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?	**[Y] Although the area is used primarily for gravel mining and grazing, it also supports populations of whitetail deer, moose, black bear, mountain lion, waterfowl, rodents, song birds, coyotes, foxes, insects and various other animal species. There are rookeries of Great Blue Herons all along the Clark Fork River and osprey nest in trees nearby. Population numbers for these species is not known. The mine site is frequented by those animals and they will be temporarily displaced as the mine is operated. The mine is not expected to significantly degrade wildlife populations.**
6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Species of special concern?	**[N] Site evaluations have not revealed any other endangered or threatened plant or animal species on site that would be significantly impacted. The Natural Heritage Program literature search have not revealed any endangered or threatened plant or animal species that would be directly affected. Bald Eagles 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.**
7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?	**[N] Although there are important cultural values in the general area, this site has been previously disturbed by modern man, thus destroying the integrity of resources that may have existed. A surface reconnaissance did not discover any cultural, historical or archeological resources. 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.**

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?	**[Y] There will be a deterioration of aesthetics while the operation is under way. There is also noise from truck traffic hauling to various projects. However, reclamation will leave the site in a landscape condition that is compatible with the surrounding area. There is and has been an alteration of the viewshed as a result of the existing sand and gravel mine, farming and ranching, high tension power lines and use and maintenance of the county road.** **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. The site is visible by homes in the local area and to traffic along the county road. Floodlights from dark period operations would increase visibility and awareness of the operation.** **These impacts are intermittent and of relatively short duration but are in addition to the noise created by the increased truck traffic hauling to various projects.**
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 the project?	**[N]**
10. IMPACTS ON OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	**[N]**

IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	**POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**
11. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	**[Y] Heavy equipment and facilities including crusher, asphalt plant, 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. The operator may employ proper precautions to prevent accidents, especially during typical**

	hours of school bus operation. 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?	**[Y] 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 grassy site useable by livestock.**
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. However, these evaluations are usually performed in conjunction with other area operations. The site will add further traffic to the county road during times of operation and may cause need for county road department and sheriff services.**
16. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	**[N]**
17. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this 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] This area contains a very old gravel pit and has been in service off and on for many years.**
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:

No Action: The pit has already been mined. If the permit is not granted, there will be no legal oversight or regulation of reclamation on the site. The landowner would be denied further development of his minerals at this time.

Approval of Application as submitted: The pit would be reclaimed as requested.

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

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

25. Magnitude and Significance of Potential Impacts:

Impacts of this permit are unlikely to be significant on the environment because of lack of human population density and lack of significant or critical wildlife habitat or species.

26. Regulatory impact on private property: The analysis conducted in response to the Private Property Assessment Act indicates no impact since this Plan of Operations would not require "Special Stipulations" in order to comply with the Opencut Mining Act.

Recommendation for Further Environmental Analysis:

[ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis

EA Prepared By: Rod Samdahl Title: Reclamation Specialist

Approved By: Jerry Burke Title: Supervisor, Opencut Program, IEMB

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Signature Date