

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

6/8/99

Project Name: Sheldon sand pit

Proposed Implementation Date: June 15, 1999

Proponent: John L. Sheldon

Type and Purpose of Action: The applicant proposes to Assign to the Mark and Elsie Holcomb his permit to mine and haul 120,000 cubic yards of sand from a 3 acre pit located 6 miles east of the town of Kalispell. There will not be any changes from the original permit other than a change of permittee. Mining will result in a smooth-bottomed agricultural site with gentle backslopes reclaimed to sub-irrigated cropland after grading the backslopes to a 4:1, replacing all topsoil and re-seeding the bottom to alfalfa and grain and the slopes to grass.

Location: SW¼ SE¼ Section 6, T28N, R20W

County: Flathead

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
<p>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?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed mine is located in rolling foothills of glacial outwash left from the last retreating glacier during the late Pleistocene around 10,000 years ago. The deposit consists of stratified aeolian sand that cover the deeper Tertiary valley fill. The billion year old Precambrian rock of the Belt Series sandstone, mudstone and limestone rocks surround the deposit in towering walls sculpted by alpine glaciers that form an intermountain, fault block basin known as the Rocky Mountain Trench. The Whitefish Range to the east and the less dramatic Salish Range to the west border this flat-lying valley that is generally pock-marked with sink holes created when large blocks of glacial ice were buried in the outwash and later melted.</p> <p>Four inches of fairly well drained, silty loam topsoil overlies the glacial sand. Local slopes demonstrate a tendency to erode in wind. 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.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>[Y] Groundwater at the site is approximately 3 feet below the floor of the finished pit. No water is anticipated in the pit area. The nearest surface water is the wetland that follows along the bottom of the sand bench to the west of the pit. The site will be graded and maintained with internal drainage to prevent stormwater from flowing off-site and into state waters. Any accidental spills or major leaks from equipment operating in the pit will immediately be excavated and removed from the site. Therefore, the quality and quantity of the groundwater should not be impacted.</p>
<p>3. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p> <p>4. VEGETATION COVERS, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>[Y] Dozers, loaders and trucking equipment typically cause dusty conditions in disturbed soil sites. Watering will be used as necessary to control dust in the pit. The site is not located within a Class 1 airshed.</p> <p>[Y] Vegetation at the site consists of brome, bluegrass, cottonwoods, knapweed and leafy spurge and all will be stripped off. Vegetation covers 100% of the un-disturbed ground and will be removed and planted with species compatible with the proposed reclaimed use. There are no known rare or sensitive plants in the area. Weeds will be sprayed as required by the Flathead County Weed Board.</p>
<p>5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>[N] The area is used primarily for agriculture and mining. Human use of the area has intensified in the past two decades with the increase in</p>

	commercial activity. The mine should not 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] There are not expected to be any impacts on those species or any unique habitat from the ongoing mining operation. The Natural Heritage Program literature search and site evaluations have not revealed any other endangered or threatened plant or animal species on site that would be significantly impacted. The site has been impacted by previous mining activities.
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.
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 is a deterioration of aesthetics while the operation is under way. 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 previous mining, farming, homesite development, road construction and other man made modifiers. The site is visible by traffic along Holt Stage 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 moderate. Levels above 90 decibels are severe, and prolonged exposure can lead to hearing loss. These impacts are intermittent and of relatively short duration, but can be quite noticeable at times, especially at night.
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 trucks and loaders, will create hazards, but the operator must comply with all MSHA and OSHA regulations. Trucks pulling out onto the county road may cause traffic safety problems, but drivers must comply with state and county road rules. 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 agricultural use, and put into industrial/commercial use. Upon completion of mining, the land will be reclaimed to farming.
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?	[Y] The operation will require periodic site evaluations by DEQ staff. However, these evaluations are usually performed in conjunction with

Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	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?	[N] This site according to the Flathead County Planning Office is unzoned.
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:

No Action: The permit would not be transferred and the current operator would continue to operate the site. **Approval of Application as submitted:** The permit would be transferred as applied for and regulated under existing laws.

23. Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups or Individuals contacted:

State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Heritage Program, Flathead County Planning Office.

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

25. Magnitude and Significance of Potential Impacts:

Impacts are unlikely to be significant on the general environment because of the location of the project, the lack of rare or unique wildlife species or habitat, and because of special requirements written into the Plan of Operations to protect air and water quality.

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

No Further Analysis

EA Prepared By: Rod Samdahl

Title: Reclamation Specialist

Approved By: Jerry Burke

Title: Supervisor, Opencut Mining Program, IEMB

Signature

Date