

# CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

## MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

Project Name: Obrecht Wetland Restoration Project

Proposed Implementation Date: 5/2002

Proponent: Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)

Type and Purpose of Action:

### The Overall Project

This project involves two parts which will occur on School Trust Land: 1) wetland restoration and 2) constructing a powerline. These activities are part of a larger project (referred to as the *overall project*) involving a total of 135 wetland restorations and running power to a well and pipelines to supply livestock water to 7 pastures. The overall project encompasses approximately 13 square miles of BLM and 2 square miles of State School Trust Land, all leased to the Obrechts. The project is funded by Bureau of Land Management, the Obrechts, Montana Migratory Bird Stamp Program, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and a grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

*This EA reviews only impacts to State School Trust Land.* Bureau of Land Management will prepare a separate environmental review document covering activities affecting property which they administer.

### School Trust Land

The wetland restoration part of this project involves plugging 12 man made ditches on School Trust Land which were excavated in the 1960's to drain 12 wetlands totaling approx. 10 wetland acres. Each of 8 ditch plugs will require approximately 25 cubic yards of fill and each of the remaining 4 ditch plugs will require approximately 50 cubic yards of fill. The original purpose for draining the wetlands was to consolidate water into pits for use by livestock. The overall project will provide livestock water in tanks via pipelines, thus, livestock will no longer rely on pits or their associated drainage ditches for supplying water.

Constructing a power line will be necessary for providing electricity to a well pump. This will be used to supply water to 7 pastures via pipelines. Although the entire length of the powerline is 2.3 miles, approx. 0.9 miles of power line crosses School Trust Land. No well, pipelines or water tank are planned on School Trust Land.

Of the two sections of State School Trust Land which occur in the overall project area, only one section will have actual construction impacts. That is, all of the wetland restorations and power line construction impacting School Trust Land occurs on section 36, T37N R26E.

Location: Section 36, T37N R26E

County: Blaine County

### I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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| <p>1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.</p> | <p>This project is a result of the lessee, BLM, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., DNRC, and Montana Fish, Wildlife &amp; Parks working together to achieve a win-win solution for watering livestock and restoring wetland habitat. All affected parties have been involved in brining this project together.</p> |
| <p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>   | <p>This EA specifically reviews impacts to State School Trust Land. BLM is involved in the overall project. No state or federal permits will be necessary for either aspect of this project.</p>   |

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	<p>Preferred Alternative: Proceed with the Obrecht Wetland Restoration Project as described.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Maintain the existing condition without power line construction or wetland restorations.</p>
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II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
4.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>N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)</p> <p>[n] As much as possible, spoils from when ditches were originally excavated will be used for constructing ditch plugs to restore wetlands. Soils are a glacial till with no special requirements for reclamation.</p>
5.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>[n] Wetland restorations may actually improve water quality by capturing sediments and subsurface water supply may benefit as captured water will percolate into the ground.</p>
6.AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	<p>[n]</p>
7.VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	<p>[n] There are no known rare plants in this area. All construction work will require conserving top soils with associated dormant seed. Overall soil disturbance will be very limited (i.e. up to 50 cubic yards of fill for the 4 largest ditches). Restoring wetlands will, however, return the landscape to a natural system which may benefit some of the native species of wetland vegetation.</p>
8.TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?	<p>[y] This area has a high wetland density which is an important breeding area for early nesting waterfowl, northern pintails and mallards. These shallow wetland habitats also provide excellent feeding and breeding areas for many species of shorebirds, some of which area experiencing declining populations.</p>
9.UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?	<p>[y] This project would result in returning natural wetland habitats to their original condition.</p>
10.HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?	<p>[y] There are known tepee rings in this area. A certified archaeologist will review the construction sites to assure no cultural sites will be jeopardized by this project.</p>
11.AESTHETICS: Is the project on a	<p>[n] The end result of this project will be</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?	restoration of approximately 10 acres of wetlands which will add to the aesthetic value. The powerline will detract from the overall aesthetics of the area. This is considered to be minor as this area is remote and seldom visited people other than the lessee's.
12.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] Wetland restorations will return drained wetlands to their natural water-holding capacity.
13.OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	[n] As described above, this project is part of a larger overall project to restore 135 drained wetlands and to construct water pipelines for supplying livestock water to 7 pastures. There are no additional plans beyond this overall project.

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	[n]
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	[n] This project will actually benefit the grazing operation by providing a reliable source of livestock water.  The restored temporary wetlands generally provide greater forage content than adjacent uplands because of the additional moisture these sites capture. This results in greater overall carrying capacity for grazing stock.
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	[n] All of the work associated with this project will likely employ area business on a very temporary basis. Funds associated with this project will benefit local businesses.
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	[n]
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	[n]
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	[n]
20. 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?	[y] The School Trust Land associated with this project are both accessible from adjacent public land (BLM). The primary recreational use of these lands is fall hunting.
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to	[n]

the population and require additional housing?	
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	[n]
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	[n]
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	[none]

EA Checklist Prepared By: Rick Northrup, Wildlife Biologist Date: April 2, 2002

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis: <input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By: \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: April 4, 2002  
Signature