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# CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Project Name:** The Nature Conservancy – Pine Butte Swamp Prescribed Burn

**Proposed Implementation Date:** Spring of 2004

**Proponent:** The Nature Conservancy, C/O Dave Hanna, Pine Butte Swamp Preserve Manager, HC58, Box 34B, Choteau, MT 59422, ph# 466-5526

**Type and Purpose of Action:** The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has requested permission to perform a prescribed burn on 15 acres of state land. The overall prescribed fire goals include: 1) to restore limber pine stands to near historic density and structure, 2) to manage forage availability and quality, 3) to reduce fuel loading to minimize wildfire severity and containment difficulties, and 4) to maintain the area in good ecological condition. Specific burn objectives include 1) to reduce accumulations of standing dead litter, 2) to reduce limber pine and Douglas fir encroachment and coverage, and 3) to increase forage availability for elk and wildlife. The burning unit consists of a total of 745 acres of which approximately 15 acres are state land. The location of the burn unit is an open *Festuca scabrella* rough fescue grassland. The burn will be completed in the early spring of 2004.

**Location:** SE¼SE¼, Sec 13, T24N, R8W

**County:** Teton

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LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL  
POLICY OFFICE

## I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	Dave Hanna, Manager, Pine Butte Swamp FWP
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	TNC will be responsible for securing all federal, state, and local fire permits.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	Approve the requested prescribed burn.  No action. Do not approve the prescribed burn.

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)
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? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?	[N] Soils in this area are shallow, gravelly and from a glacial origin. The proposed fire will remove existing vegetative cover and may temporarily expose topsoil to erosion. However, increased erosion rates are only expected to be short term. Following the early spring burn, grass species will begin to recover and regrow immediately and provide soil protection. Therefore, cumulative impacts on geology and soil resources are not expected.
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? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?	[N] The proposed action will not have adverse affects on the quality, quantity, or distribution of water resources in the immediate or surrounding areas.

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class 1 airshed)? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action will temporarily put smoke into the air, but should dissipate in a short time frame. Overall smoke impacts should be minimal given light fuel loads, small acreage burned, and low density of use in the area. The proponent will comply with all state regulations regarding smoke management.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] Existing vegetation on the 15 acre state land portion of the burn is an rough fescue grassland. The existing grassland has high amounts of decadent biomass because the area has had limited grazing pressure over the past twenty years. The prescribed fire will remove old decadent material, which will restart rangeland successional pathways and improve forage quality. The burn will occur when the grasses are primarily dormant (early spring), minimizing the loss of active growing points, meristems, and axillary buds. Minimizing the loss of growing points, coupled with rest from livestock grazing for one to two years will allow grass plants adequate recovery. No rare plants or rare plant communities are present in the proposed area. Overall, the prescribed fire is expected to have a positive impact on the vegetational communities in the long-run.</p>
<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action is located along the eastern Rocky Mountain front and is generally considered excellent wildlife habitat. Limited amounts of browse may be removed by fire, but are expected to regenerate over time. No wildlife cover (thermal or security) is present on state land. Burning the rough fescue grassland will likely improve forage quality and palatability, which may benefit some wildlife species. The prescribed fire activities may temporarily displace wildlife in the area. FWPs did not provide specific comments on this project, but did not oppose this burn because significant amounts of limber pine cover or browse would not be impacted. Overall, no long-term negative affects on existing wildlife species and/or wildlife habitat are expected.</p>
<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? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed prescribed fire is located in the grizzly bear recovery zone. The area may be used occasionally by grizzly bears. Grizzly bears may be temporarily displaced form the fire activities. However, overall, no long-term negative affects on grizzly bears and/or grizzly bear habitat are expected. There are no other species of special concern or any other sensitive habitat types associated with the proposed project area.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>[N] Cultural resources will not be impacted by this proposed project. No mechanical disturbance will occur on state land within the burn unit.</p>
<p>11. 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? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The prescribed fire will temporarily change the aesthetics of the landscape by turning it black in color. However, no long term changes to the aesthetics character of the land area expected.</p>

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<p>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? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of other private, state or federal current actions w/n the analysis area, or from future proposed state actions that are under MEPA review (scoping) or permitting review by any state agency w/n the analysis area?</p>	<p>[N] Currently, there are no other studies, plans, or projects associated with the proposed project area. However, TNC plans on monitoring several ecological attributes on this site.</p>

## III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed prescribed fire will not affect human health or human safety in the area provided that it is completed within the parameters of the burn prescription.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>[Y] The proposed prescribed fire will increase forage quality and improve livestock utilization and distribution.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number. Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed prescribed fire will not affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action will not affect tax revenue.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] No additional governmental services will be need as a result of the proposed action provided the burn prescription is followed.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>[Y] The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws regarding fire. County fire personnel are aware of the proposed burn. No other management plans are in effect for the area.</p>
<p>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? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed burn area is of high recreational value for hiking, site seeing and hunting. This tract of State Land is somewhat isolated and it is legally accessible to the public. The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational activities on this State Land.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action will not change the human population distribution or the housing requirements in the area.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action will not alter the social structure of surrounding native communities.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness and/or the cultural diversity of the area.</p>

