

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Land Breaking of native rangeland for conversion to dryland agriculture.

Proposed Implementation Date: November 16, 2004

Proponent: George E. Asleson, P O Box 286, Opheim, MT 59250

Type and Purpose of Action: Surface lessee, George E. Asleson has made a written request to the Glasgow Unit Office of the DNRC and requested permission to break 63.14 acres of native rangeland currently listed as grazing land. The land breaking would be a conversion from present use for the purpose of growing small grain crops. The acreage would be reclassified from grazing land to dryland agriculture.

Location: S2NE4, SE4, Sec. 16 Twp. 34N Rge. 40E

County: Valley

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

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George E. Asleson the surface lessee has made a written application to break approximately 63.14 acres (more or less) of native rangeland on State land Lease No. 3699. The application was sent to the DNRC Glasgow Unit Office for review and evaluation. The application will be reviewed per DNRC land breaking criteria for native rangeland. The Glasgow Unit Office contacted the following government agencies and special interest groups for their comments concerning the land breaking request. Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Nature Conservancy, MT Native Range Society. The agencies that responded are the U S Fish and Wildlife Service and MT Fish Wildlife & Parks. There response is as follows: "The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be opposed to converting this land to agriculture. Breaking this land for cropland production would be detrimental for wildlife and would lead to increased soil erosion. From the aerial photo you provided it appears that there are several wetlands and drainages within this tract. Conversion of this land would not only lead to an increase in down-slope erosion but, during wet years, the net gain of farmable land would be minimal. Even if the native vegetation in these low areas is left intact while the rest of the tract is broken up, the resulting effect to ground nesting would be disastrous as those small strips of native vegetation would act as beacons to nest predators such as fox and skunks. Breaking up native rangeland could destroy any cultural features that might exist in the area. A cultural inventory should be taken of this tract and any sites protected, which would lead to further fragmentation of the tract should be converted. In an era where farmers are being encouraged to reduce the number of acres in agriculture production to reduce farm surpluses and increase crop prices, it seems counterproductive to convert more precious native rangeland to crops." MT Fish Wildlife & Parks: "This tract consists of native

	<p>habitat that contains several wetland depressions. We would strongly encourage you to deny the proposed breaking for this important wildlife habitat. The majority of the surrounding area has been broken and this tract serves as an important linkage between extensive rangelands located a few miles to the west and upper Porcupine drainage to the east. This tract has suite of native plant species that provide for both resident and migratory wildlife, including snowberry and silver sagebrush. This tract most notably serves as nesting and brood rearing habitat for upland nesting birds and security for white-tailed deer. It serves as habitat for small mammals and amphibians in and around the wetland depressions''.</p>
<p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>	<p>The other government agencies that may have jurisdiction for this project are the USDA Farm Service Agency and USDA Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Service.</p>
<p>3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: Deny permission to the surface lessee to break 63.14 acres of native rangeland for dryland agriculture to produce small grain crops.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Grant permission to the surface lessee to break 63.14 acres of native rangeland for dryland agriculture to produce small grain crops.</p>

<p>II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</p>	
<p>RESOURCE</p>	<p>POTENTIAL IMPACTS</p>
<p>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>	<p>No Action Alternative: The soils on the State land will remain the same and continue to produce native grass and forb vegetation. The area will continue to produce vegetation for grazing livestock.</p> <p>Action Alternative: This type of project will impact the soils that are currently producing native grass and forb vegetation. The soils will be broken up for the purpose of producing dryland small grain crops. The soil type that will be broken for dryland agriculture is: Phillips-Scobey complex, 2 to 9% slopes. The Phillips-Scobey complex soil type is a suitable soil type for dryland agriculture. This soil type has medium surface runoff erosion hazards. The hazard of wind and water erosion is moderate. The on site inspection of this soil types showed no salinity present in the topsoil profile. The 63.14 acres requested for breaking will maintain current soil qualities and soil stability under dryland agriculture management.</p>
<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>	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative annual precipitation will be utilized by the native rangeland plant community. There will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will allow the surface lessee to expand his dryland agriculture small grain production. The land breaking for small grain crops will not use water resources, other than the water associated with the topsoil from annual precipitation.</p>

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 I airshed)?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to air quality under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The breaking of the grazing land for dryland agriculture purposes will have no impacts to the air quality of the State land.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative the current native rangeland plant community will remain intact.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The breaking of the native rangeland plant community will permanently destroy the grazing land vegetation on the project area. The native rangeland area requested for breaking contains no known rare plant species. The project area will produce small grain crop vegetative type communities.</p>
<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: The habitat types associated with a native rangeland plant community will remain intact.</p> <p>Action Alternative: This type of activity will disturb the habitat types on the State land. The area of impact is native rangeland grass and forb community used for grazing land. There will be minimal impacts to the wildlife and upland bird resources associated with the State land. There will be some areas of tract that will continue to produce a native rangeland plant community. The remaining native plant community will provide some habitat resources for song birds, upland game birds, waterfowl, and whitetail deer.</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?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no change to the current environmental resources.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project area contains no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources. The project area consists of a bench area, with native grass and forb vegetation. There are semi-arid wetlands located on this tract of native rangeland. These areas are not part of the project site and will not be impacted by the land breaking process.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: The project area has no known historical or archaeological sites and existing status would remain.</p> <p>Action Alternative: There are no known historical or archaeological sites on the project area that will be impacted. DNRC Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie has given his departmental approval for the land breaking project. The project area was inspected by Glasgow Unit Office personnel for archaeological, historical and paleontological resources.</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?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts that would occur to the aesthetic values associated with the State land under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project site is located in a rural area and is visible to the general public from</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	a county road. The project will have no impacts to the aesthetic values associated with the State land involved with this project.
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?	No Action Alternative: There will be no demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy occurring under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will place no demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.
13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no changes to existing plans, studies or projects that DNRC may have occurring on the State land. Action Alternative: The breaking of native rangeland, classified for grazing livestock will not impact other projects or plans that DNRC may have occurring on this tract of State land.

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	No Action Alternative: No human health or safety risks would occur under this alternative. Action Alternative: The breaking of native rangeland for small grain production has minimal human health or safety risks.
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no changes to current agriculture activities. Action Alternative: The project will enhance the surface lessee's ability to produce small grain crops on his State land lease. The production of small grain crops will also enhance the revenue generated for the School Trust.
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the quantity and distribution of employment.
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	No Action Alternative: No local and state tax base and tax revenues would be impacted under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the local or state tax base.
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no demands for government services. Action Alternative: The project will place no demands for government services.
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM,	No Action Alternative: No impacts would occur to the locally adopted environmental plans or goals under

Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	this alternative. Action Alternative; The project will not impact locally adopted environmental plans and goals.
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?	No Action Alternative: No impacts would occur to access and quality of recreation associated with the State land under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project area has minimal recreational values (upland bird hunting) in its current status. The land breaking project will have minimal impacts to the recreational values associated with the state land.
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to density and distribution of population and housing under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the density and distribution of the population and housing on this rural area.
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to native or traditional lifestyles or communities under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the social structures of the local communities.
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the State land.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no social or economic impacts that would occur Action Alternative: The cumulative affects of this project provides economic benefit to the surface lessee and DNRC. The dryland agriculture acreage on the State land will increase lessee's annual revenue from his State land lease holdings. The DNRC will see additional revenue generated from this tract of State land for the School Trust. The revenue will exceed the current grazing land rental received on the 63.14 acres.

EA Checklist Prepared By: Randy Dirkson Land Use Specialist Date: 11-29-04
Randy Dirkson Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	No Action Alternative: The no action alternative; was not selected by the Glasgow Unit Office personnel. Action Alternative: Grant written permission to surface lessee George E. Asleson to break 63.14 acres of native rangeland located on this tract of State

land. The 63.14 acres will then be converted to dryland agriculture for small grain production.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Action Alternative: The project will enhance the natural resources capabilities to produce dryland small grain crops on the State land. The land breaking project will increase revenue for the surface lessee and the School Trust.

27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:

Name
R. Hoyt Richards
Signature

Title

Date: 11/29/04