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**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

FEB 24 2005

LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804-3101
February 24, 2005

Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801

Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704

*Dept. of Environmental Quality, PO Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901

*Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, POB 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601

*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Website, Commission Secretary, Division Secretaries, Regional Office Managers, Region 2
Information Officer

*State Historic Preservation Office, PO Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

*MT State Library, PO BOX 201800, Helena, MT 59620-1800

Jim Jensen, MT Environmental Information Center, POB 1184, Helena, MT 59624-1184

Mayor Joe Petrusaitis, City of Hamilton, 223 S.2, Hamilton, MT 59840

*Mailed electronically

Dear Interested Citizen:

Enclosed you will find for your review the Draft Environmental Assessment for the Fish Creek Merriam's Turkey Transplant. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to trap wild Merriam's turkeys, probably in eastern Montana, and transplant them to the Fish Creek area west of Alberton, Mineral County, Montana. FWP expects that 10-50 turkeys might be initially transplanted, followed by 2-3 subsequent transplants of similar magnitude over a 10-year period. The purpose would be to provide additional wildlife viewing, improve hunting opportunities and increase species diversity.

This draft EA is available for review in Helena at FWP's Headquarters, the State Library and the Environmental Quality Council. It also may be obtained from Region 2 FWP Headquarters at the above address, or viewed on FWP's Internet website: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Recent Public Notices").

Comments will be accepted until 5:00 pm on April 4, 2005, and should be mailed to Bob Henderson, MT FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula, MT 59804-3101 or emailed to bhenderson@mt.gov. If you have questions, please contact Henderson at 406-542-5515.

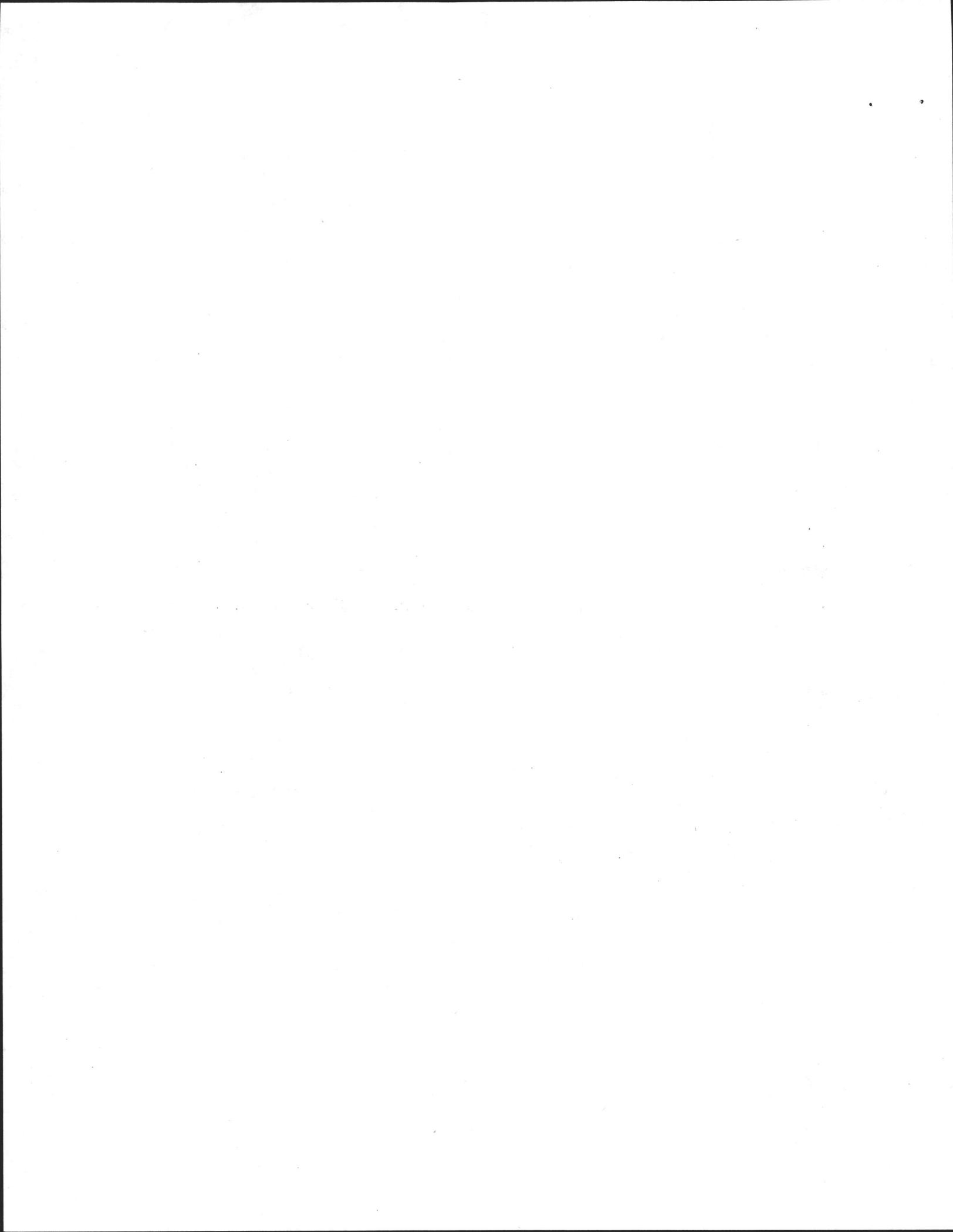
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mack Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mack" and last name "Long" clearly distinguishable.

Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

ML/sr

Enclosure: Fish Creek Merriam's Turkey Transplant EA



DRAFT FISH CREEK MERRIAM'S TURKEY TRANSPLANT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

CHECKLIST FORMAT

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed State Action Merriams Turkey Transplant
2. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks:1999 State of Montana Statutes 87-5-713 and 87-5-714
3. Name of Project Fish Creek Merriam's Turkey Transplant
4. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency)
NA
5. If Applicable:
Estimated Construction/Commencement Date NA
Estimated Completion Date NA
Current Status of Project Design (% complete) NA
6. Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)
Mineral County. Portions of T14N,R24W;T15N,R24W;T15N,R24W and T15N,R25W
7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acre		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	_____
residential.....	_____		
industrial.....	_____	(e) Productive:	
		irrigated cropland ..	_____
(b) Open	_____	dry cropland	200
		Forestry	360
	25	Rangeland	_____
8 Wetlands/Riparian Areas.....	_____	Other	_____

3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
 < Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
 α Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
 α Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

8. **Map/site plan:** attach an original 8 2" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.

See Figure 1.

9. **Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action or Project including the Benefits and Purpose of the Proposed Action.**

The purpose of this proposed action is to transplant Merriam's Turkeys to suitable habitat in the Fish Cr. area in order to provide additional wildlife viewing, improve hunting opportunities and increase species diversity. An initial transplant of 10 to 50 wild turkeys may be followed by 2-3 follow up transplants over a 10 year period. A major landowner has agreed to the conditions of a transplant, including reasonable use of the habitat and public access for hunting and viewing wild turkeys.

10. **Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.**

- (a) **Permits:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
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- (b) **Funding:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
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- (c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
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11. **List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the EA:**

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Lolo National Forest

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 < Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
 < Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
< a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		x				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?		x				
< c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		x				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		x				
f. Other (list)						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
 < Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
 α Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
 α Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
< a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))		x				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		x				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		x				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		x				
e. <u>For P-R/D-J projects</u> , will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		x				
f. Other						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- < Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
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- α Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³			Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³			
< a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		x				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		x				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		x				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		x				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		x				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		x				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		x				
I. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		x				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		x				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		x				
l. For P-R/D-J , will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		x				
m. For P-R/D-J , will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		x				
n. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

< Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

α Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

α Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		x				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		x				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?	x					4d
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		x				
f. Q For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		x				
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4d. Depending on how well the turkey population does, there is the potential for some type of crop damage. Based on distribution of crops in the project area and often limited crop use in other areas, the chances of reduction in acreage or productivity of agricultural land is remote.

- 3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- < Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
- α Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- α Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

< 5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentiall y Significan t		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		x				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			x			5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		x				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?			x			5d
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		x				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?	x					5f
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		x				
h. For P-R/D-J , will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)	x					5h
i. For P-R/D-J , will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		x				
j. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

5b. and 5d. The proposed action will result in placing Merriam's turkeys into the Fish Creek area. Diversity of bird species will increase.

5f. and 5h. Grey wolves, Canada lynx and Bald Eagles are known to use the Fish Creek drainage. It is unlikely that the presence of turkeys will result in any changes in those populations or their distributions.

3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

< Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

α Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

α Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?			X		yes	7a
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. In severe winters turkeys may consume grain and grain crops, of which little is available in the area. A major landowner has agreed to the introduction(see attached Turkey Transplanting Agreement) and the same landowner has agreed to plant grain crops so that turkeys may sustain themselves in the winter. Should the population expand, FWPs Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program could be used to encourage other landowners to provide forage and/or winter cover for the turkeys.

3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
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8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		x				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		x				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		x				
d. (For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)						
e. Other: <u>public safety</u>			x			8d

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed)

8d. If the proposed action results in a huntable population of turkeys, the slight increase in hunting activity may pose a safety problem in those portions of the project area where housing exists. Much of the area is undeveloped and safety should not be a problem. Landowner permission is required to hunt on private land.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?						
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		x				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		x				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		x				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		x				
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

< Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

z Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

z Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:			x			10a
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		x				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		x				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		x				
< e. Define projected revenue sources						
< f. Define projected maintenance costs.						
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a. Implementing the proposed action and monitoring the transplanted turkeys will require some additional time and operating dollars for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Also, some expenditures from the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program may be required to provide improved cover and food sources.

- 3 Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
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< 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		x				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?			x			11b
<c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)			x			11c
d. For P-R/D-J , will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)						
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11b. and 11c. The aesthetic character of the area as well as the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities will be improved. Viewing and hunting opportunities will increase as turkey populations increase. Conflicts between those wanting to view turkeys and those who harvest turkeys may occur. However, people are generally aware that FWP expenditures of sportsmen's dollars have the objective of increasing hunting opportunities, as well as viewing opportunities.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT ³				Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³	Potentially Significant		
<a. Destruction or alteration of any site structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		x				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		x				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		x				
d. For P-R/D-J , will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		x				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT ³			Can Impact Be Mitigated ³	Comment Index
	Unknown ³	None	Minor ³		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		x			
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		x			
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		x			
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		x			
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		x			
f. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		x			
g. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , list any federal or state permits required.					

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

- 1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:**

There are two reasonable alternatives to this proposal. No action would result in no changes and no increased aesthetic, viewing or hunting opportunities. The proposed action of introducing Merriam's turkeys to the project area can improve aesthetic, viewing and hunting opportunities. This action would be implemented by the capture of wild Merriam's turkeys, as they become available in other Montana sites, and their subsequent release in the project area. Supplemental transplants would ensure sufficient numbers were transplanted.

- 2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? YES / NO. If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:**

No, an EIS is not required. The EA Checklist is the appropriate level of analysis because the primary effects are beneficial and potentially negative effects can be mitigated.

- 2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

This project has been discussed with the Montana Chapter of the Wild Turkey Federation, several sportsmen in Mineral County and landowners in the project area. The project appears to have widespread support and few concerns were expressed. This project is unlikely to produce negative environmental impacts. Therefore, the level of public involvement is appropriate.

3. **Duration of comment period if any:**

Comment period will end 5:00 PM, April 4, 2005 (a period of more than 30 days from EA release)

4. **Name, title, address and phone number of the Person(s) Responsible for Preparing the EA:**

Robert Henderson
Wildlife Biologist
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804-3101

406-542-5515

Email to bhenderson@mt.gov

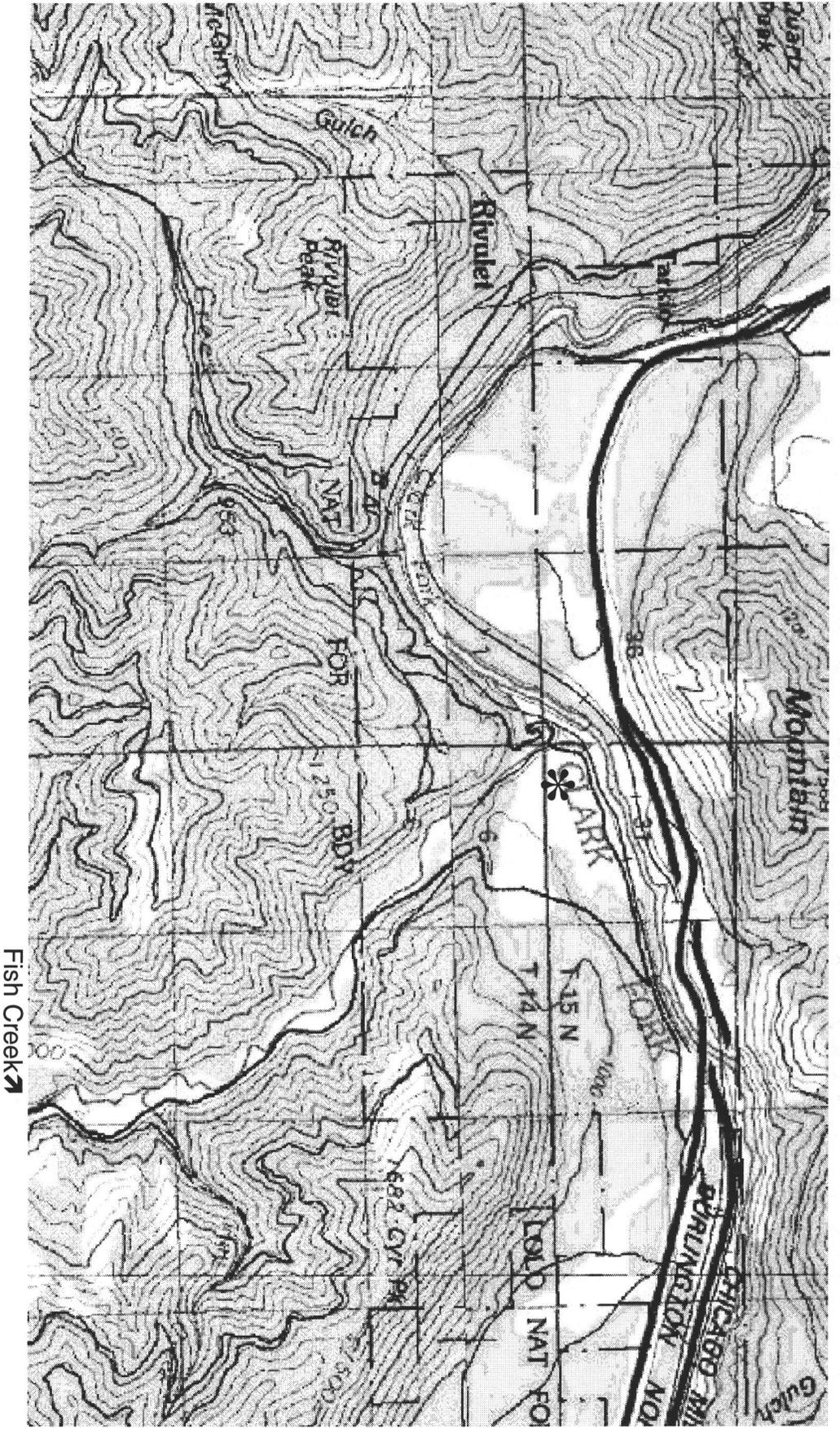


Figure 1. Proposed site (*) for Merriam's turkey release west of Alberton, Mineral County, Montana.

