

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Water Resources Division Water Rights Bureau
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

Note: Instructions to DNRC staff for preparing this EA can be found at:
http://www.dnrc.state.mt.us/eis_ea.html

Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: **Holland Ranch Co
19200 HWY 278
Dillon, MT 59725**
2. Type of action: **Authorization to Change a Water Right No. 411-30017886
(Statement of Claim Nos. 41B 110576 through 110588)**
3. Water source name: **Rattlesnake Creek**
4. Location affected by action: **Sec 29, 30, 31 Twp 7S Rge 9W, Beaverhead County
Sec 25 Twp 7S Rge 10W, Beaverhead County
Sec 6 Twp 8S Rge 9W, Beaverhead County**
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and objectives:

The applicant is proposing to change the place of use for existing water right numbers 41B 110576 through 110588, inclusive. The applicant is removing existing irrigation to compensate for the new place of use. There will be no increase in the historically irrigated acres (1168.4). This change has been submitted because the applicant has converted 750 acres from flood irrigation to three center-pivot irrigation systems to help conserve water. The purpose of use will remain irrigation for growing grass and alfalfa.

**The place of use is 1168.4 acres in the following sections owned by the applicant.
Sec 29, 30, 31 Twp 7S Rge 9W
Sec 25 Twp 7S Rge 10W
Sec 6 Twp 8S Rge 9W**

Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)

**MT Natural Heritage Program - Species of Concern, T/E
MT Dept. of Environmental Quality - 2004 Montana Water Quality Integrated Report
MT Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks - Montana Fisheries Information System
The Montana Noxious Weed Survey and Mapping System**

Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

Rattlesnake Creek, the source of supply is listed by DFWP as chronically dewatered from river mile 0.0 to river mile 7.9. This water right change should not have any effect on the availability of water in this source as the historic diversion amount will remain the same or be decreased due to increased efficiency.

Water quality - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

Rattlesnake Creek is not listed on the DEQ Montana 303(d) list. The proposed project will not affect water quality.

Groundwater - Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

Determination: **No significant impact to groundwater quality or supply.**

DIVERSION WORKS - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

The proposed means of diversion are existing headgates on Rattlesnake Creek. The water is conveyed to the fields and center-pivot irrigation systems in existing ditches. Pumps are used to pull water out of the ditches to run the center-pivot systems.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any "species of special concern," or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or "species of special concern."

Determination: **No significant impact.**

The MT Natural Heritage Program identified the Great Basin Pocket Mouse, Ferruginous Hawk and the Greater Sage-grouse as a species of special concern in the vicinity of the project.

The center-pivot irrigation systems are currently in use and it is unlikely that the proposed project would have any impact on the habitats of the species of special concern. The Ferruginous Hawk does not typically nest in cultivated areas and the proposed project should have no impact on the Hawk. The Great Basin Pocket Mouse tends to prefer higher elevations so it is most likely not found in the area. Any disturbance due to the proposed project should also have little effect on the Greater Sage-grouse.

No plant or fish species of special concern were identified.

Wetlands - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

Determination: **No significant impact. There are no wetlands in the area of the proposed change.**

Ponds - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

Determination: **No significant impact. There are no ponds in the area of the proposed change.**

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE - Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

The Montana Noxious Weed Survey and Mapping System identified Spotted Knapweed in the project vicinity. Since the conversion to Center-pivot irrigation is already complete, there would be minimal disturbance to soils. The landowner is responsible for controlling any establishment of noxious weed as a result of disturbance.

AIR QUALITY - Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project.

Determination: **The State Historic Preservation Office was not contacted about this proposed project. The land has been historically used for pasture and crops and farming in the area would have already disturbed any historic sites. Since the property is located on private property, the decision to conduct a cultural inventory would be at the discretion of the property owner.**

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.

Determination: **The proposed project will not cause any additional impacts on land water or energy resources.**

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

HUMAN HEALTH - Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.

Determination: **No significant impact to human health.**

PRIVATE PROPERTY - Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Yes ___ No X. If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

Determination: **No impact.**

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? **No significant impact.**
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? **No significant impact.**
- (c) Existing land uses? **No significant impact.**
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? **No significant impact.**
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? **No significant impact.**
- (f) Demands for government services? **No significant impact.**
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? **No significant impact.**
- (h) Utilities? **No significant impact.**
- (i) Transportation? **No significant impact.**

- (j) Safety? **No significant impact.**
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? **No significant impact.**
2. Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population: **No adverse secondary or cumulative impacts were identified. The proposed project has already been completed.**
3. Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures: **None.**
4. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider: **Under the no action alternative, the project would continue to be used as it is today. There do not appear to be alternatives.**

PART III. Conclusion

1. Preferred Alternative: **Issue the authorization for the proposed project.**
2. Comments and Responses: **There have been no comments or responses.**
3. Finding:
Yes ___ No X Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action: **An EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this action. There are no significant impacts identified, therefore an EIS is not required.**

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Eric Chase

Title: Water Resource Specialist

Date: January 19, 2006