

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	DNRC Heliport Relocation
Proposed Implementation Date:	3/1/2010
Proponent:	MT DNRC, CLO, 8001 N. Montana Ave., Helena, MT 59602
Location:	SWNW sec. 8, T11N, R3W
County:	Lewis & Clark
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Due to the pending construction of a new CLO office building (which will be built within the easement area already in place for this office campus), it will be necessary to relocate the concrete landing pads for the helicopters. The proposal is to relocate the two landing pads to an area just north of the office easement area, where there will be safer approach and departure flight paths for the aircraft.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

The lessee was contacted and did not respond with any concerns. Aviation staff on the CLO were consulted to provide comments on the location which provides the safest flight paths.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None, this location is already designated as a helibase and the relocation proposed is minor.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No Action Alternative A – Leave the landing pads in their existing location. This is not a selectable alternative, given the new office building location.

Proposed Alternative B – Locate two landing pads just to the north of the existing office easement area, gravel a driveway for the fueling truck, and construct a fence to temporarily exclude stock from the landing area, when aircraft are actually present. (Fence would be gated so that grazing could take place around the pads when aircraft were not present.)

Briefly considered was an Alternative C – In this alternative, the pads would be located east and outside of the existing easement area. Flight paths in this option were not as favorable as those in alternative B. Beyond this, the effects of C & B are the same. Alternative C is not considered further.

Alternative D – in this alternative, the helicopter operations would be completely relocated to a different area, perhaps the Helena Airport. Under this Alternative, there would be no increased land use on the Trust land, and no added effects to the Trust land. There would however be effects to the human environment, which this EAC will attempt to address.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The rangeland area on this tract is a silty loam top soil over gravel.

Alternative B includes graveling of a driveway to the landing pads. Without graveling, traffic would eventually rut and compact the traveled way, and once the vegetation became beaten down, the bare silty soil would create dust problems. Graveling of the driveway provides weight bearing support for the fuel truck, defines the travel way, and if suitable compactable road mix is used, reduces dust problems.

Alternative D has no soil effects.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

There is no water in this area of the tract.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Refer to the discussion about dust in section 4 above. Eventually, a graveled driveway for the fueling trucks would be required, so this has been included in Alternative B.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

This area (just outside the office easement area) is tame pasture, mostly Crested Wheatgrass. Alternative A would cover less than ½ acre with the 2 concrete pads and the gravel driveway. There would be no definable change to the vegetative community under Alternative B, and no effects under Alternative D.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Mule Deer, Sharptail Grouse, Hungarian Partridge, and Cotton Tail Rabbits as well as various non-game birds utilize the CLO complex and shelterbelt and the area just outside the easement area at this time. There would be no change to this use under either Alternative.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

There are no known threatened or endangered species in the proposal area.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

There are no know historical or archaeological sites on the proposal area. The entire proposal area is tame pasture, originating after the N. Hill Fire in 1984, when the area around the complex was used as a fire camp and was later reclaimed.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Under Alternative B, the helicopter pads would be slightly more visible from Montana Avenue, though they are visible already so the change would be minimal. Alternative D would have no aesthetic effects. However, during fire initial attack, even if the primary helibase were to be moved off site, there would be times when the helicopter would need to stop at CLO to pick up fire fighters.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No effects under either alternative.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

The Department received funding to construct a new office building. Site planning for the new building renders the existing pad locations unusable, so they must move and the no action alternative is not selectable.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i> |
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14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The safety of the existing helicopter pads, given the dominant approach and departure flight paths has always been marginal. Within the office complex easement area, there is no location which provides for safe flight paths. Thus, there is no available Alternative keeping the landing pads inside the office easement area.

Under Alternative B, the landing pads would be located outside the easement area. All other relocation sites for helibase support would be within the existing easement area. The flight paths for this alternative are open to the North and East, and far enough back from power lines along Montana Avenue to be considered open to the West. Alternative B provides safer approach and departure flight paths than existing currently.

Alternative D would locate the helibase operations off the Trust land, perhaps at the Helena Regional Airport. While this would certainly provide for no effects to the state land, it does provide three levels of increased safety concern.

1. Take off and landing of the helicopters would be within the more congested air space around the airport,
2. Helitac staff would be traveling many increased miles back and forth between the CLO and the airport. Increased road travel having a corresponding increased potential for traffic accidents. And

3. During Initial Attack there would inevitably be times when the helicopter would need to land at the CLO to pick up extra fire fighters, and to do so within the existing easement area would no longer be safe, once the new office building is in place. (Due to the congested approach and departure flight paths which would require the helicopter to go into transitional lift in an unsafe area, over buildings.)

Alternative B is the safest overall option.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Use of a fence to provide temporary exclusion of live stock when the helicopter(s) were present would have no measurable effect on the grazing carrying capacity of this lease. (Less than ½ acre would be occupied by landing pads and a graveled driveway to them. Gates would be opened whenever aircraft were not present, so stock could graze around the landing pads. The fenced enclosure might surround up to 4 acres, but does not detract in any way from the existing leased use.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

There would be no effects under any alternative.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

There would be no effects under any alternative.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

There would be no effects under any alternative.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

There would be no effects under any alternative.

There are no zoning restrictions affecting this proposal.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Accessible state trust land is available for general recreational use, excepting the administrative sites are categorically closed to such use. Thus, there is no recreational use within the office complex easement area. There is recreational use, mostly walking and dog walking, on the state land on the remainder of the tract. The proposed Alternative B would not have any effect on this use.

Due to the proximity of surrounding houses, and the ¼ mile no shooting restriction in the recreational use rules, there is no firearm hunting opportunity on this tract, and thus no effect to this form of recreational use.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

Housing developments surrounding the CLO have increased in density over the years, and housing density continues to increase. These developments have all taken place with the knowledge that the CLO complex functions as a helibase in the fire season. The relocation of the landing pads by approximately 660 feet from their existing location would have no effect to the noise or visuals from the surrounding developments. The relocated pads would be located farther from occupied housing than currently exists.

At some future time, if development density becomes too congested, DNRC may need to reconsider Alternative D. This is why the proposal is to operate the relocated helibase landing pads under a Land Use License, as opposed to increasing the easement area of the compound.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There would be no effects under any alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

There would be no effects under any alternative.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Alternative B would return rental from DNRC operating budgets to the Common School trust in the form of Land Use License rentals. Land value is potentially \$2000/acre, the area occupied by pads and driveway would be less than ½ acre, but for this analysis ½ acre will be used. A rental of 6.5% of ½ acre of \$2000/acre land calculates to an annual rental of only \$65. The minimum rental recommended of \$150/year, as described in DNRC fee schedules should be assessed.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: D.J. Bakken	Date: 11/17/2009
	Title: Helena Unit Manager	

V. FINDING CLO Helibase Relocation

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected Alternative B, the proposal to relocate the CLO helibase landing pads to a location just north of and outside of the existing CLO easement area. A Land Use License will be used to compensate the Common School Trust for this use.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Alternative B has no significant adverse effects, directly, indirectly or cumulatively to the surrounding natural or human environments. The selection of Alternative B provides the safest overall situation for Department staff, and no changed effects to the public.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Gavin Anderson
	Title: Forest and Lands Program Manager - CLO
Signature: 	Date: 11/23/09

CLO, 8001 N. Montana, Helena, MT

