

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Stillwater County Fuel Reduction Stockpile Site
Proposed Implementation Date:	November 2009
Proponent:	Columbus Rural Fire District #3/ Stillwater County, P.O. Box 285, Columbus, MT 59019 Ph: 406-322-4302
Location:	Section 36-T2S-R20E
County:	Stillwater

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Proponent has applied to the DNRC Southern Land Office for a Land Use License for the purpose of stockpiling woody material from a fuels reduction project. The proposed project area is on Common School Trust State land in Section 36-T2S-R20E. The woody material would be burned in the winter by the Proponent when conditions are appropriate and snow cover is adequate. Less than one acre of land would be utilized. The Proponent would have access through an existing gate and use an existing non-motorized two-track road in this same section to access the proposed site.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Southern Land Office Area Manager Richard Moore and Land Use Specialist Gary Brandenburg conducted a field review in October 2009. Scoping notices were sent to DNRC Archaeologist (Patrick Rennie) and the Montana Natural Heritage Program. There is no AGMB Lessee on this parcel.

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

The Stillwater County Weed Board administers the State weed laws in Stillwater County.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: A Land Use License would be granted for the purpose of stockpiling woody material and burning said material when conditions warrant in Section 36-T2S-R20E.

No Action Alternative: No Land Use License would be granted. Current non-motorized recreational use and wildland fire suppression activities would continue.

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 proposed project area would be located on Countryman's Bluff, approximately 225' above and approximately ¼-mile to the northeast of the Yellowstone River. A railroad track currently exists between the river and the proposed site. The proposed project area is located where a large tire pile fire occurred in September 2005 and the vegetation has been slow to recover. Access would be off of Highway 10 on an existing two-track road, for less than ¼-mile. Should any sign of erosion occur as a result of proposed activities, Columbus Rural Fire District #3/Stillwater County would implement erosion control measures to stabilize the site and seed the affected area with native grasses. Minimal impacts are anticipated.

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.

The Yellowstone River is located approximately ¼-mile to the southwest of the proposed project area. There are no other rivers, streams, creeks, or wetlands within or immediately near the proposed project area. No significant impacts are expected.

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.

The burning of the woody material would occur only when conditions are appropriate and snow cover is adequate. Minimal impacts are expected.

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.

Some vegetative disturbance during delivery of woody material to the proposed project area would be expected. The proposed project area is flat and located where a large tire pile fire occurred in September 2005 and the vegetation has been slow to recover. Delivery of woody material to the proposed area would occur during dry or frozen soil conditions only. Disturbed areas caused by deliveries and any other visits to the site would be seeded with native grasses by the Licensee. Should any noxious weeds occur in the proposed project area, Columbus Rural Fire #3/Stillwater County would spray for weeds. Minimal impacts are anticipated.

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.

A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors, and songbirds use this area. The proposed project's random deliveries to the site could disrupt wildlife movement and patterns. Due to the short duration of the proposed deliveries (< one hour), minimal area of impact, and no new road construction, minimal impacts are anticipated.

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.

The proposed project area is within the Yellowstone River Corridor and the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified two vertebrate animal species of concern near the proposed project area: bald eagle and common sagebrush lizard.

Bald Eagles are known to nest within one mile of and undoubtedly fly over the proposed project area. Due to the area's proximity to existing active railroad tracks and an interstate freeway (I – 90), the short duration of the proposed deliveries (< one hour), and subsequent burning during the winter months, the additional occasional proposed activities should not pose a significant impact. Also, the use of an existing road for access and a small area of impact (< 1 acre) should minimize any potential impacts.

Common sagebrush lizards probably exist within the proposed project area. Due to the use of an existing road with access controlled by the Licensee and a minimal (< 1 acre) area of impact, and short duration of the proposed deliveries (< one hour), minimal impacts are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

There are Native American cairns and stone circles located approximately ½-mile to the southeast of the proposed project area. An existing road would be used for access and no other motorized travel would be allowed. The DNRC Archeologist has no other cultural sites documented and no other archaeological sites have been observed during many snow-free field visits. No significant impacts are anticipated.

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.

Due to the distance from the proposed project area to the nearest residences in a sparsely populated area, no significant impacts are anticipated.

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.

None.

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 DNRC Southern Land Office conducted a range evaluation on this parcel in 1997.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *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.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The proposed project would occupy less than an acre of land. Burning activities would be conducted under the professional oversight of the Columbus Rural Fire #3. No impacts are anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The proposed project would occupy less than an acre of land. No significant impacts are expected.

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.

None.

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.

None.

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.

None.

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.

The DNRC Administrative Rules for State Land Leasing ARM 36.25.101 through 36.25.141.

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.

The proposed project area is currently closed to all forms of motorized recreation. The proposed project would allow the Proponent motorized access for 1/4-mile on a current non-motorized road to access the proposed project area for licensed activities only. No impacts are anticipated.

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.

None.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

None.

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.

The proposed action has provided \$25 via a Land Use License application fee and would provide a \$150 annual rental fee. There is no AGMB Lease on this parcel.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Richard A. Moore	Date: November 2, 2009
	Title: SLO Area Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

After reviewing the EAC, I have selected the Action Alternative, to issue a Land Use License to the Proponent. I believe this alternative can be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the long-term sustainable natural resource management of the area and generating revenue for the common school trust.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I conclude all identified potential impacts will be avoided by utilizing the mitigations listed below and no significant impacts will occur as a result of implementing the selected alternative.

Mitigation measures:

- 1. Delivery of woody material to the site will occur only during dry or frozen soil conditions.
- 2. Should any sign of erosion occur as a result of licensed activities, erosion control measures will be implemented as designated by the DNRC and the affected area will be seeded with native grasses.
- 3. Any and all disturbed areas will be seeded with a native grass species.
- 4. All necessary permits will be secured by the Licensee before any licensed activity begins.
- 5. Licensee will control access to the site by not giving out any gate keys and escorting Contractors to the site or, by giving out a minimal amount of keys to the gate and monitoring deliveries. One of these options will minimize the potential of any other items other than woody material to be stockpiled at the site.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Jeff Bollman
	Title: SLO Area Planner
Signature:	Date: