



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. Purpose of and Need for Action

1. Project Title: Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA) Shooting Range Enhancement Project.

2. Type of Proposed Action: Range Improvements: Reconstruct, move, repair and pave internal roads

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:

Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA) owns and operates the Deer Creek Shooting Center (DCSC), located in the Hellgate Canyon between East Missoula and Bonner on the N ½ of section 19 and the NW ¼ of section 20, T13, N, R18W, P.M.M. The property, approximately 80 acres, sits on the south side of the railroad track between the Clark Fork River and Deer Creek Road. The site rests along the north slope of Mount Sentinel, a 2,000 ft high mountain that serves as the primary impact area for the entire facility. The west end of the DCSC borders the City of Missoula's Kim Williams riverside recreational trail that parallels the Clark Fork River and dead ends into the Montana Rail Link railroad tracks and DCSC property (See figures 1-3).

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) MCA87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe hunting practices). The 2007 Montana Legislature has authorized funding for the establishment of a Shooting Range Development Program providing financial assistance for the development of shooting ranges for public purposes. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has responsibility for the administration of the program, including the necessary guidelines and procedures governing applications for funding assistance under the program.

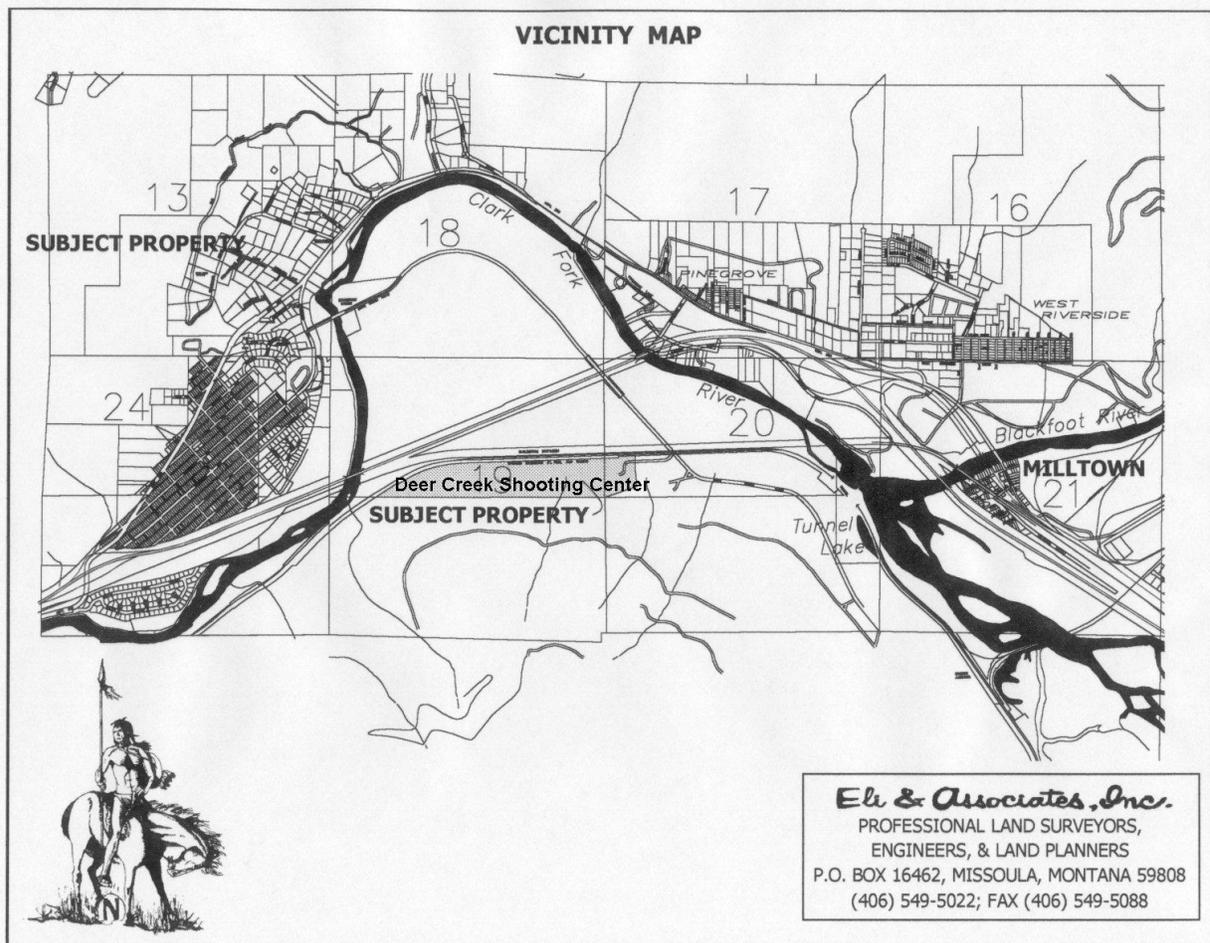
5. Need for the Action(s):

The access road to the DCSC has long been problematic. The frangible surface of the existing access road has long been a major annual expense for the WMFGA. There are also issues with dust from the existing, untreated road and parking lot surfaces. Further, the steep grade of the

access route has made it difficult or impossible to travel during winter months.

6. Objectives for the Action(s): Improved all-weather range access, with new road surfaces, re-grading or road, and the re-routing portions of the access road.

7. Area Maps



Map 1 – Vicinity Map for the Deer Creek Shooting Center



Map 2 - Aerial Photo of the Deer Creek Shooting Complex identified by the DCSC lettering on the photo.

8. Project Size: estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:

The area of the range owned by WMFGA is approximately 80 acres, with improvements spread out within the owned properties. All work will occur within the boundaries of the WMFGA.

9. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):

The project is on an existing shooting range in a forested area of predominantly new growth Ponderosa Pine. There are no year round flowing streams, irrigation ditches or ponds on the site. No delineated wetlands; however, there exists a low depression on the property that due to seasonal run-off sometimes collects water in the spring but dries up in the summer months. A 2003 *MCS Environmental Inc.* investigation determined that the site did not meet criteria that would qualify the area as a Jurisdictional wetland regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

10. Description of Project:

The access road to the DCSC has long been problematic. The frangible surface of the existing access road has long been a major annual expense for the WMFGA. There are also issues with dust from the existing, untreated road and parking lot surfaces. This road is essential a one-way loop to and from the longer entrance road. Further, the steep grade of the access route has made it difficult or impossible to travel during winter months. The WMFGA proposes to reroute the incoming road to increase the length of the climb up to the level of the shooting bays, and thereby

decreasing the grade from about 8% to about 4%. The plan also reconstructs and paves the entrance road from the existing pavement at the entrance gate (marked on Map 2 and Figure 3), to the ranges 100-A and 50-A (including the parking areas), in addition to the exit loop of the road. This will be a total of about 60,000 square feet of asphalt. The expected contractor is Knife River.

The reduced grade of the incoming road and the dark surface should make this road much more passable during winter months, addressing the complaints of some members that they simply cannot get to the range facilities during winter months. The mostly heavily trafficked internal roads will have an asphalt coating, which will dramatically decrease on-going issues with dust, both on and off the DCSC property. The surface treatment of roads and parking lot will further decrease erosion and substantially reduce the need for annual maintenance of the roads. Existing road will be removed and returned to a natural condition.

Project includes: New Road W/6" Gravel, 2" Asphalt Paving for 60,300 sq. feet, 3,000 yds. Screen Gravel (Provided from WMFGA on-site).



Figure 1 – Existing fork in roads, seen from main entrance/exit road, with road on right to be removed and moved further to the right to decrease the grade (See Figure 2). Traffic from the fork will be one way up to the right road and back down and out from the left road.



Figure 2 – Aerial view of proposed road reconstruction showing old road in the middle and new road to the upper left.

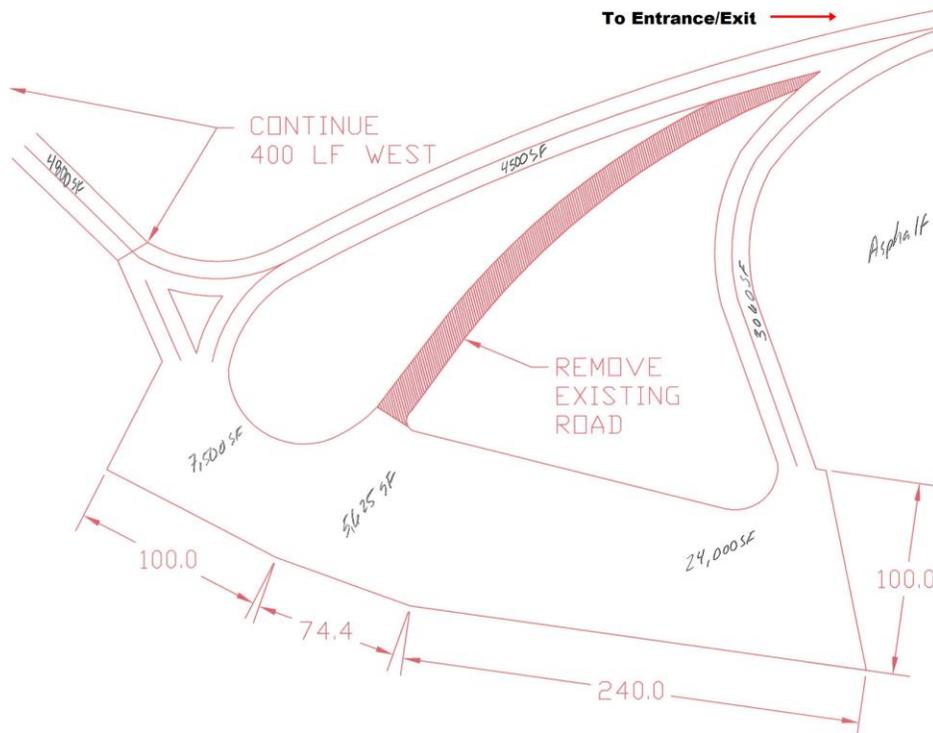


Figure 3 – Road Construction showing road removal and replacement, converging on main entrance/exit road. Movement from main road will continue to be a one-way loop from the fork on the main entrance/exit road.

11. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

None

(a) Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
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N/A

Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

\$66,780.00

(Does not include a 50/50 match from the Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA)).

12. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups: FWP-Hunter Education Program, Missoula Police Department, Army ROTC at the University of Montana

13. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement: The Western Montana Fish and Game Association (WMFGA) has a meeting of its Board of Directors on the first Thursday of each month in the conference room of the Region 2 FWP headquarters and an Annual Meeting on the first Thursday in January of each year. All of these meetings are open to the public. Our 1,500 members are specifically invited. It is not unusual to have non-member visitors to these meetings. The proposed road project and conference center expansion were discussed at the Annual Meeting and at Board of Directors meetings. The project has been announced in newsletters to the WMFGA membership and has been listed on the Montana Shooting Sports Foundation website at <http://www.marbut.com/wmfga2/>. Although WMFGA has not sought community publicity for this proposed project (e.g., on television or in the newspapers), the Board of Directors have been open about their intentions. In addition, the Board of Directors has solicited participation from local contractors for the proposed projects.

14. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Western Montana Fish & Game Association project managers

15. Names, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

Mr. Jim McDonald, WMFGA, PO Box 4294, Missoula, MT 59806

(406) 251-3800 ext. 2222

16. Other Pertinent Information:

Shooting range applications require the participant's governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range-funding assistance. Resolution Date: April 29, 2009.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmental sensitive areas.

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		#2
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		#5
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		#9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

Comments (A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

2&5. There are no live streams, irrigation ditches, or ponds on the site. There exists a low area on the property that due to seasonal run-off sometimes collects water in the spring but dries up in the summer months. In 2003 MCS Environmental Inc. investigated the area and determined that the site did not meet criteria that that would qualify the area as a Jurisdictional wetland regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

9. This project uses no federal funds nor does it take place on state owned or controlled property; therefore, the Federal 106 Regulations and the State Antiques Act do not apply.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		#7
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

Comments (A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

7. Range will provide year round access and handicapped accessibility. Cooperating organizations are aware of the improved range options and WMFGA has a history of cooperation with hunter education classes, Missoula city police department, U of M ROTC and other shooting groups.

Part III. Environmental Consequences

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? NO

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? This proposed action has no impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Identification of the Preferred Alternatives:

The proposed alternative A, alternative B and the no action alternative were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is as described in paragraph 10 (Description of Project). An overall improvement projects that involves Reconstruct, moving, repairing and paving internal roads.
- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Range Development Grant money would be denied and the area will remain as an active shooting range without proposed improvements.

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: Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent. Neither the proposed alternative nor the no action alternative would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences. There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the proposed alternative for road improvements, such as increased human safety and accessibility to recreational opportunities. The no action alternative would be to not fund the improvements and the range will continue on with present conditions. Land use would remain the same. Therefore the proposed alternative is the prudent alternative.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:

NONE

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:

Western MT Fish & Game Assoc.

MT Fish Wildlife and Park

PART IV NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. None of the project reviewed were complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being implemented are already on an existing range/altered areas that together with the insignificant environmental effects of the proposed action, indicates that this should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative. The long relationship that Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA) has with hunter education, youth groups, local law enforcement all indicate support of the proposed alternative. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the proposed alternative for the improvements of the range complex of the WMFGA.

EA prepared by: GENE R. HICKMAN
Ecological Assessments
Helena, MT 59602

Date Completed: July 10, 2009

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:

None required.

Describe public involvement, if any:

This draft EA will be advertised on FWP's web site and through a legal ad in the **Missoulian** newspaper on August 6, announcing the 30-day public comment period. A press release will also announce the project and comment period.