Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. Purpose of and Need for Action

1. Project Title: Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex (GFSSC)

2. Type of Proposed Action:
Extend the 300yrd to a 600yrd range

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action: The Shooting Sports Complex is three mile north of Great Falls, Montana. Range complex is approximately 942.37 acres off of Ryan Dam Road. Formerly the Beckman property with Black Horse Butte on north edge of the property, but known locally as Radio Tower Hill from the microwave relay towers on top. Of the 942.37 acres, 582.37 are owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and the remaining 360 acres is owned by GFSSC.

FWP: Township 21 North, Range 4 East, M.P.M.
Section 15: NW¼ ; Section 16: NE¼, E½NW¼, N½S½, SW¼SW1/4

GFSSC: Township 21 North, Range 4 East, M.P.M.
Section 15: NE ¼; Section 16: SE¼SW¼, S½SE¼, W½NW¼

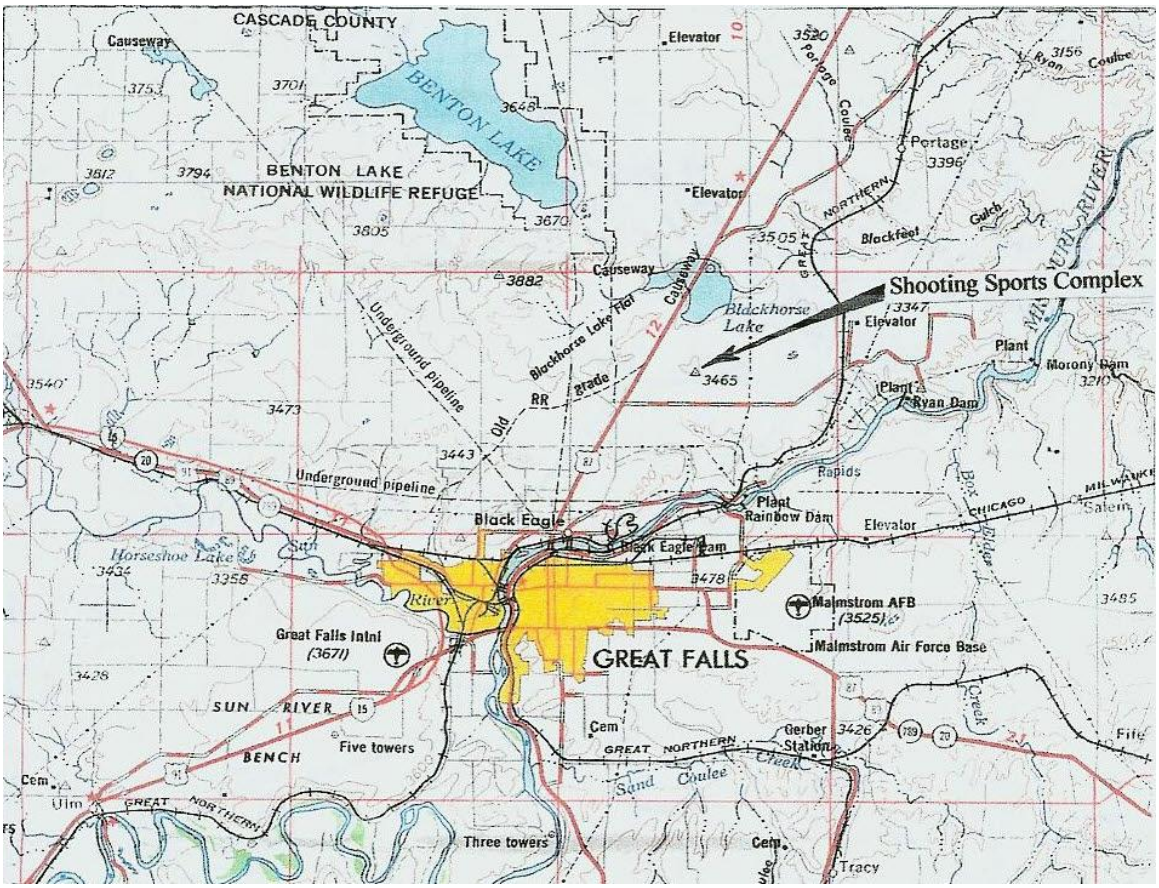
4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) MCA87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe 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): Erosion has been a problem on the 300 yard range, there are no 600 yard ranges available, there are no adequate target pits for protection of target carriers, there is no

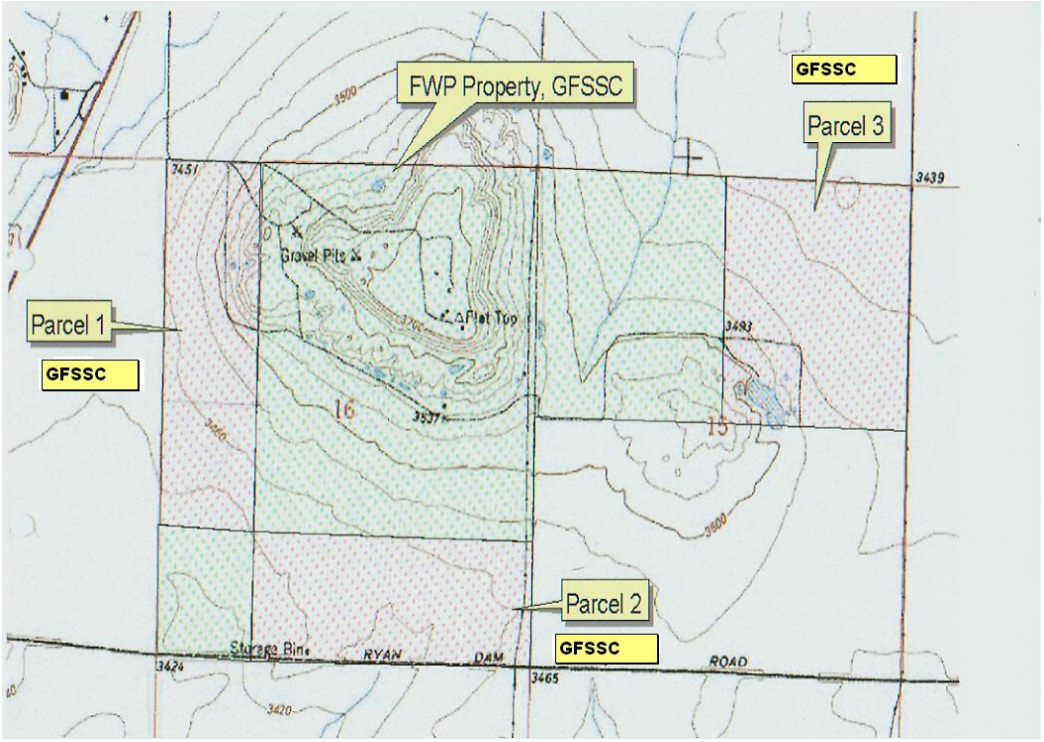
road access to target pits, some berms need to be “heightened” for potential safety problems and road needs to be extended to parking area.

6. Objectives for the Action(s): Reduce erosion on the 300 yard range, provide a 600 yard range opportunity by extending the 300 yard range, provide safe target pits and road access to the target pits, and “heighten” some berms in the area.

7. Maps and Supporting Figures:



Map 1 – Area Map showing GFSSC location .



Map 2 – Black Horse Butte showing land ownership between FWP & GFSSC. Green areas are FWP property and red are GFSSC properties.

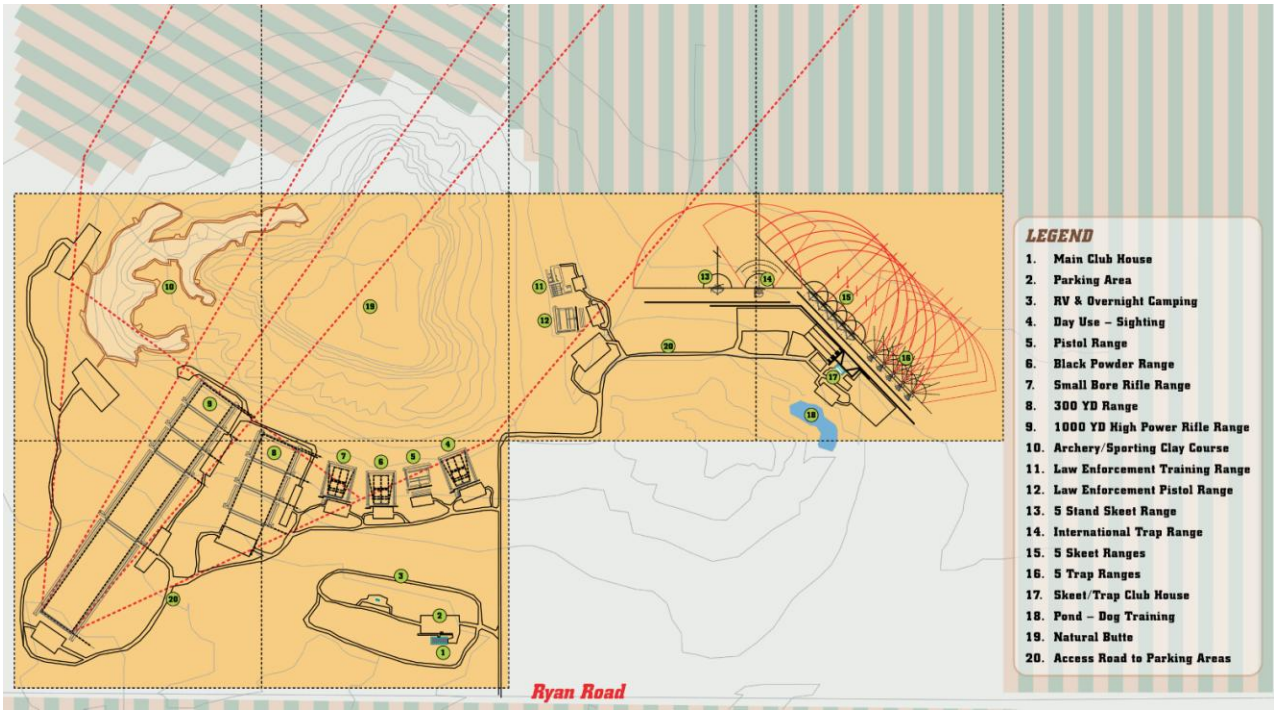


Figure 1 – Original Site Plan for GFSSC (CTA Architects Engineers)

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

The proposed improvements will be safely spread within a much smaller area on the leased properties and contained on the 300 yard range and beyond for the 600 yard range (see Map 1 and Figure 1).

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

The surrounding area and most of range is or was formerly agricultural primarily used for dry land farming. Currently 278.07 acres of the GFSSC properties are characterized as too saline or too steep to farm. The GFSSC is surrounded by one farm operation. There are no delineated wetlands, nor natural water sources within the area proposed for development, but the range complex did contain 3 older man made reservoirs and other "wet" areas that are ephemeral and may occasionally contain water from snow melt.

10. Description of Project: The original 300 yard range, on the south side of the Butte, was completed in November 2004. This project is to re-grade the 300 yard range floor to limit erosion and to accomplish this, the floor of range will be "stepped" in 100 yard increments. This requires relocation of approximately 7,500 yards of dirt. This dirt will be used to increase the side berm heights, and to build an access road to the pits. Re-adjusted range layout will also require moving the firing line about 10 yards to the South. Also there will be construction of target pits with concrete walls, below grade, to protect target carriers. This range modification will continue with construction of a 600 yard firing line, and extending the road 3/8ths mile to a new 50'X100' parking lot at the 600 yard firing line. Both the road and parking area are to be graveled. All disturbed areas will be reseeded to further reduce erosion.

In Accordance With (IAW) contracts agreements with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, all projects are to be completed by June 30, 2010.

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

(a) Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

Agency Name	Permit
N/A	

Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	$28,000.00

12. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups:

(See previously tiered EAs from 2001, 2005 and 2007)

Sportsmen Clubs: Safari Club, National Rifle Association, Montana Wildlife Federation, Mule Deer Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation,

Ducks Unlimited, Walleye's Unlimited.
Shooting Sports: Missouri River Shooters, Sun River Skeet Club, Russell Country Sportsmen, Russell Country Sportsmen, Ed McGiveran Pistol Club, Montana Plainsman Black Powder Club.
Government/Corporate Sponsors: PPL Montana, Cascade County, City of Great Falls, Three Rivers Communication
Law Enforcement: Great Falls City Police, Montana Highway Patrol, US Border Patrol, Montana CIB, Montana Probation & Parole, Malmstrom AFB Security Force, Montana Law Enforcement Academy, Cascade County Sheriff, FWP Law Enforcement, US Marshall Service, FBI, US Customs, US Fish & Wildlife Service, BIA Youth Education: 4H Shooting Program, Olympic Shooting Program, FWP Hunter Safety Program.
Fish Wildlife & Parks as owner of the majority of the property to be leased to a Board of Directors of the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex, Inc.

13. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement:
Additional public involvement was not deemed necessary due to the previous completed EAs addressing future range plans. These previous EAs should be tiered for completion of this EA. Proposed range improvements and safety enhancements had been discussed within the membership of the club and with the associated project vendors and contractors.

14. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

15. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:
John Sprague, 3128 Wells Fargo Dr., Great Falls, MT 59404, 868-6635
grizzsprague@yahoo.com

16. Other Pertinent Information: Previous EAs completed in 2001 (Acquisition of a Community Shooting Range), 2005 (Shooting Range Complex Plan and Construction) and 2007 (Continuation of Shooting Range Complex Plan) considered the building of all of the ranges proposed here. Completion of all the initial construction on those ranges has been completed and the new proposed actions are the follow-on improvements or next phase of construction for these ranges. Consequently the 2005 and 2007 environmental assessment for the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex is applicable here, and appropriate portions should be tiered for this EA. Although both the 2005 and 2007 EAs addressed the specific actions proposed then, a broader analysis of the entire range complex's environment was conducted, with future improvements being addressed. Those broad environmental assessments should be tiered for use in the continuation of this 2009 project. A cultural resources inventory on 582.37 acres of the complex was conducted in November 2005. That inventory discovered five cultural sites and three isolated finds. This information was then published in February 2007. Even though this EA may be tiered with the completed 2001, 2005 and 2007 EAs, to insure proper analysis the current EA checklist is used for these next phases of the development.

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 27, 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		#4
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		#5
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		#7
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		
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 delineated wetlands and no natural water sources within the area proposed for development. There are 24 old reservoirs or waterholes in the area which were identified during the February 2007 Cultural Resources Inventory. During the surveys of August 2005 there was no water found in any of these sites and only wet mud and a small puddle in the largest "pond" east of the bentonite hill. The three "wetter" reservoirs are located in the area of the bentonite hill, and on the north side of Black Horse Butte and southeast side of Black Horse Butte along the access road. Two of these are on FWP property and the largest pond is on GFSSC property. These three man-made reservoirs have some water for most of the wet years and all three had water during this July 2007 survey. The larger pond area, northeast

of the bentonite hill, is designated as the future dog training area. There are no plans to eliminate, nor materially alter any of these ponds in the future. The other "so-called" water holes identified during the cultural inventory are ephemeral and only occasionally collect rain or snowmelt, and none of these are permanent surface water sources. There was no water found in any of these areas during the surveys of August 2005, nor again in July 2007. The majority of these "wetter" sites are on the GFSSC property and outside of the future proposals for development on the range. The primary aquifer is approximately 500 feet beneath the surface with minimal risk of pollution.

4. The proposed projects occupies a very small portion of the individual properties and native vegetation is minimally present anywhere on the property. Therefore it is determined to have an insignificant impact on native vegetation in the area.

7. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures are in effect and disturbed areas are to be reseeded. Reseeding will be with native short-grass prairie & CRP species with some alfalfa added for soil improvement.

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**		**#4**
5. Human health				**X**		**#5**
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**		**#9**
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.)

4. The site is adjacent to surrounding agricultural land. Agricultural leases are being pursued to continue dry land farming on portions of the property. Currently 278.07 acres of the property are characterized as too saline or too steep to farm.

5. Range site plans, construction and the ongoing operational and maintenance plans meet the standards of safety for the range participants and the public at large.

7. Range complex will provide year round controlled access and fulfils a need for a range to accommodate law enforcement training, hunter education, and public shooting.

9. This is a rural area with a low population density. The GFSSC site is completely surrounded by one farm operation. Nearest neighbor is 1/3 mile on the NW corner on opposite side of the butte.

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 Part I paragraph 10 (Description of Project) to reduce erosion on 300 yard range, build safe target pits with access road and construct a 600 yard range with improved berms.

- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Sports Grant money would be denied and the area will remain an active shooting complex without additional erosion control, new target pits and target pit access road, and without a new 600 yard range and improved berms.

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: Two alternatives have been considered, **A** (Proposed Alternative) and **B** (No Action Alternative). There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent.

Neither the proposed alternative (**A**) nor the no action alternative (**B**) would have any significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

- There are beneficial consequences to Acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative (A)** increasing shooting sports opportunities in the Great Falls area by reducing erosion on 300 yard range, constructing new target pits and a target pit access road, and without a new 600 yard range with improved berms on club properties.
- The **No Action Alternative (B)** would be to not provide additional erosion control, new target pits or a target pit access road, and without a new 600 yard range with improved

berms, but to continue on with shooting activities on the 300 yard range without proposed improvements. Land use would remain the same. Therefore the proposed alternative is the prudent alternative.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:
NONE

List and explain proposed mitigative measures (stipulations):
NONE

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:
John Sprague, 3128 Wells Fargo Dr., Great Falls, MT 59404
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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 proposed are on properties leased from The Airport Commission to the Valley County Rifle & Pistol club. The low impact activities proposed, and the increased recreational opportunity, all indicate 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 (A). The Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex's proposed alternative, to provide a safe regulated shooting opportunity is supported by its members and the public. Therefore, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the proposed alternative (**A**) for the expansion proposals outlined in Part I paragraphs 2 & 10.

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

Date Completed: July 13, 2009

PART V. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:

None required.

Describe public involvement, if any:
Announcement for EA comment will be published in the Great Falls Tribune and on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website to allow an opportunity for public review. Additionally the EA will be available for review on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website.