ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

On an Application for an

OPENCUT MINING PERMIT

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is required under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). An EA functions to identify, disclose, and analyze the impacts of a proposed action. This document may disclose impacts that have no legislatively required mitigation measures, or over which there is no regulatory authority.

The state law that regulates gravel mining operations in Montana is the Opencut Mining Act. This law and the rules adopted hereunder place operational guidance and limitations on a project during its lifetime, and provide for the reclamation of land affected by opencut mining operations.

Local governments and other state agencies may have authority over different resources and activities under their regulations. Approval or denial of this Opencut Application will be based on a determination of whether or not the proposed operation complies with the Opencut Mining Act and the rules adopted thereunder.

APPLICANT: Plum Creek Timberlands, LP **SITE NAME:** McGinnis 2 Site

LOCATION: Section 7&8, T26N, R28W **COUNTY:** Lincoln

DATE: January 2010

PROPOSAL: The proponent proposes to mine 375,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from a 15.4 acre site 64 miles west of Kalispell and 2.8 miles south of Highway 2. Once mining is complete the site would be reclaimed to forest land. An acceptable Plan of Operation has been submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and a reclamation bond of $37,807.00 would be held by DEQ to ensure the final reclamation use of forest land by December, 2019 is accomplished.

This application contains all items required by the Opencut Act and Rules. Proponent commits to properly conducting opencut operations and would be legally bound by the permit.

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	**POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**
1. TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:	The site is located at an existing gravel mine surrounded by forested terrain on a glacial outwash terrace. *Impacts:* An irreversible and irretrievable removal of gravel from the site would occur. A small impact to the quantity and quality of soils from salvaging, stockpiling, and resoiling activities also would occur, but this would not impair the capacity of the soils to support full reclamation. There are no unusual topographic, geologic, soil, or special reclamation considerations that would lead to reclamation failure.
2. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION	The only water use would be for dust suppression and is being provided by the operator from an off-site source. *Impacts:* The proposed activities would have a minimal effect on the quantity and quality of the surface and groundwater resources. *Cumulative:* The proposed activities would have a minimal effect on the quantity and quality of the surface and groundwater resources. The

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	**POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**
	site would be mined to a depth of 35 feet which is 65 feet above the estimated seasonal high water table of 100 feet from ground surface.
3. AIR QUALITY	Air quality standards are based upon the Clean Air Act of Montana and pursuant rules and are administered by the DEQ Air Resources Management Bureau (ARMB). Its program is approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These rules and standards are designed to be protective of human health and the environment. Air quality permits would be required on the processing equipment before installment. Machinery, such as generators, crushers and asphalt plants, are individually permitted for allowable emissions. Best Available Control Technology (BACT) is the usual standard applied. Fugitive dust is that which blows off the pit floor, stockpiles, gravel roads, farm fields, etc. It is considered to be a nuisance but not harmful to health. *Impacts:* Air quality standards as set by the federal government and enforced by the ARMB would allow minimal detrimental air impacts.
4. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY	*Impacts:* No long term detrimental impacts to the vegetation would occur.
5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:	The area supports populations of deer, elk, moose, black bear, rodents, birds, coyotes, foxes, raptors, insects and various other animal species. Population numbers for these species are not known. *Impacts:* The proposed mine is expected to temporarily displace some individual species and it is likely that the site would be re-inhabited following reclamation to similar habitat.
6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:	The Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) lists 6 species of concern: The Torrent Sculpin (*Cottus rhotheus*), Columbia River Redband Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss gairdneri*), Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Fisher (*Martes pennanti*), Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) *Impacts:* None of the listed species have been found on this site. Even if suitable habitat did exist on this site, the disturbance area would be small and large areas of similar or identical habitat surrounds the site. The possible impact to these species would be minimal.
7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES	The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was notified of the application. It reported no sites have been discovered previously on this property. A pedestrian survey of the area by DEQ personnel did not reveal any artifacts or signs of occupation. No signs were evident at depth in the previously disturbed area.
8. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY	*Impacts:* Negligible impacts to land, water, air, or energy would occur.

IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	**POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**
9. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS	The site is currently not zoned.
10. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING	As seen on the aerial photo of the surrounding area, there is minimal population density. A new 69.57 acre, 6 lot residential subdivision has recently been approved near the site. The closest lot boundary in this subdivision is located approximately 600 feet east of the proposed mine on the opposite side of McGinnis Creek. *Impact:* This pit is being sited in this area because of the location of the resource, and to service the growing population in this area of the county.
11. AESTHETICS	There are currently no nearby residents. Hours of Operation will be restricted to 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM Monday - Friday, and occasional Saturdays depending on demand.
12. QUANTITY/ DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT	*Impacts:* New employment opportunities would be limited. This is a relatively small operation.
13. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION	*Impacts:* This site is located at an existing gravel mine. Once the project is complete, the post mining land use will be forest land.
14. LOCAL, STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES, PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY INCOME	Local, state and federal governments would be responsible for appraising the property, setting tax rates, collecting taxes, etc., from the companies, employees, or landowners benefitting from this operation. Following reclamation, it is assumed the tax base would revert to pre-mine levels
15. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES	Limited oversight by DEQ officials that are generally conducted in concert with other area activity would occur.
16. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY	Any industrial activity will increase the opportunities for accidental injury. Other government agencies (e.g. MHSHA, OSHA) require specific safety measures. As a result, there is no reason to believe that significant safety issues would be present.
17. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES	This activity would not inhibit the use of the identified resources.
18. NATIVE CULTURAL CONCERNS	*Impacts:* None.

19. Alternatives Considered:

A. Denial Alternative: The Department would deny an application that does not comply with the Act and Rules. No impacts to the natural or human environment would occur.
B. Proposed Action Alternative

20. Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups or Individuals contacted: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Lincoln County.

21. Other Governmental Agencies which May Have Overlapping or Sole Jurisdiction: Lincoln County Planning Department (zoning compliance), Lincoln County Weed Control Board, MSHA and OSHA regarding mine safety. Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Local County Floodplain Administrator, Local Conservation District, Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Possible permits required from other programs or agencies: DEQ's Air Resources Management Bureau regarding air quality, DEQ's Water Protection Bureau for stormwater or discharge permits, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation for water rights permit.

22. Regulatory Impact on Private Property: The analysis done in response to the Private Property Assessment Act indicates no impact. The Department does not plan to deny the application or impose conditions that would restrict the use of private property so as to constitute a taking.

23. Magnitude and Significance of Potential Impacts: This proposal is not likely to create impacts of significance due to mitigation, restrictions, and oversight mandated by the Opencut Mining Act and pursuant rules and the Montana Clean Air Act.

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24. Recommendation for Further Environmental Analysis: [ ] EIS [X] No Further Analysis

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Name Title

EA Reviewed By: Chris Cronin Opencut Mining Program Supervisor
Name Title

PRIVATE PROPERTY ASSESSMENT ACT (PPAA) CHECKLIST

DOES THE PROPOSED AGENCY ACTION HAVE TAKINGS IMPLICATIONS UNDER THE PPAA?

YES	NO	
X		1. Does the action pertain to land or water management or environmental regulation affecting private real property or water rights?
	X	2. Does the action result in either a permanent or indefinite physical occupation of private property?
	X	3. Does the action deprive the owner of all economically viable uses of the property?
	X	4. Does the action deny a fundamental attribute of ownership?
	X	5. Does the action require a property owner to dedicate a portion of property or to grant an easement? (If answer is NO, skip questions 5a and 5b and continue with question 6.)
		5a. Is there a reasonable, specific connection between the government requirement and legitimate state interests?
		5b. Is the government requirement roughly proportional to the impact of the proposed use of the property?
	X	6. Does the action have a severe impact on the value of the property?
	X	7. Does the action damage the property by causing some physical disturbance with respect to the property in excess of that sustained by the public generally? (If the answer is NO, skip questions 7a-7c)
		7a. Is the impact of government action direct, peculiar, and significant?
		7b. Has the government action resulted in the property becoming practically inaccessible, waterlogged, or flooded?
		7c. Has the government action diminished property values by more than 30% and necessitated the physical taking of adjacent property or property across a public way from the property in question?

Taking or damaging implications exist if YES is checked in response to question 1 and also to any one or more of the following questions: 2, 3, 4, 6, 7a, 7b, 7c; or if NO is checked in response to questions 5a or 5b.

If taking or damaging implications exist, the agency must comply with § 5 of the Private Property Assessment Act, to include the preparation of a taking or damaging impact assessment. Normally, the preparation of an impact assessment will require consultation with agency legal staff.