

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Roger Michel-Expiring CRP to Agricultural Land Classification.	Proposed Implementation Date: Fall 2010
Proponent: Roger Michel, 1960 25 th Road NE, Dutton, MT 59433	
Type and Purpose of Action: CRP contract #98-542A containing 314.37 acres is set to expire on 9/30/2010. The lessee, Roger Michel, has request to break 314.37 acres of CRP and return it to small grain production. The tract was last farmed for small grains in 1987.	
Location: Lease #4782, S2, Sec. 16, T26N, R1E Trust: Common Schools	County: Pondera

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS, OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	DNRC-Surface owner Roger Michel-lessee Gary Olson-FWP Montana Salinity Control Association Montana Audubon Society
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	There are no other agencies with jurisdiction on this project.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	Approve the request. Deny the request

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)
4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?	[Y] This tract consists of gently rolling topography. This ground is approximately 96% class 3E with 0 to 8% slopes, 2% class 5W with 0 to 2% slopes, and 2% class 6W, with 0 to 2% slopes. All of the soils are class 4 or better for the WEG. The T factor is 5 on all of the soils. Class 3 soils have severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants and require special conservation practices. Class 5 soils are subject to little or no erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat. Class 6 soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat. The letter "e" shows that there is an erosion hazard unless close-growing plant cover is maintained. The letter "w" shows that water in or on the soil surface interferes with plant growth or cultivation. In some soils the wetness can be partly corrected by artificial drainage. This ground has a relatively high

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

productivity with small grains and should yield more than 40 bu/acre for winter wheat as agricultural land. This ground is susceptible to wind and water erosion but these concerns will be mitigated due to the amount of residue produced being left by the utilization of no-till farming practices. Clearly, the majority of the soils on this tract meet DNRC's land break requirements.

Montana Salinity Control Association (MSCA) was asked to comment on the proposed break and gave the following response: MSCA has no specific information on this land and we have not worked with any salinity issues close to this site either. Based on aerial photos back to 1995, the land shows no sign of salinity but after ±20 years of CRP forage on a half-section there may be no current signs. You should check to see what practice it is enrolled in and why the lessee and DNRC agreed to CRP initially. If the reason was economic, then the land is likely to be suitable for cropping again. Almost all the land in a several mile radius is in successful annual cropping. Thank you for checking with MSCA on these land breaking issues. There are areas, especially in Toole and Teton counties, where MSCA would have reservations about breaking perennial forage land from a salinity perspective. (Jane Holzer, MSCA).

The last noted practice type was CP-10 which is for already established grass. The reason for the initial enrollment in CRP is unclear, but it appears to be for economic reasons. Given the above comments, the tract still meets the DNRC's land break requirements.

<p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] There is no surface or ground water resources present on the tract. Returning the tract to small grain production will not affect water quality, quantity, or distribution.</p>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I air shed)? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed breaking of the CRP and returning it to small grain production will not affect air quality.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[Y] The existing vegetation is introduced species consisting of crested wheatgrass and alfalfa. This tract was last farmed in 1987. The vegetative community will be altered by the reclassification. The conversion of CRP to small grain production will increase the overall productivity of the tract as the current grass stand has very low vigor. There are no rare plants in the area per a search of NRIS. The SE corner of the tract consisting of 4.59 acres is native grass. This area is not part of the break request and will remain unchanged, so the plant community will not be altered.</p>
<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[Y] Gary Olson, Wildlife Biologist-FWP, commented, "I have reviewed the breaking proposal you sent April 2, 2010. An acreage that large that is currently in CRP most likely has considerable wildlife habitat value for big game species, upland birds, as well as non-game. While I understand the lessee's interest in converting to small grain production, the overall</p>

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	<p>effect of removing permanent vegetative cover will not be beneficial for area wildlife species. Additionally, the tract is accessible by county road. Breaking out the CRP will result in a loss of available habitat that presently benefits the public, especially for upland bird hunting,” see attached letter. These concerns will be somewhat mitigated as the proposed action will remove the permanent vegetative cover, but the residue produced in small grains production will still provide limited cover and food for the area wildlife. FWP did not provide any site specific comments regarding this break.</p>
<p>9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted, as well as tract specific requests for wildlife concerns were made to the Montana FWP. Montana FWP did provide site specific comments regarding wildlife, see item #8. There was one animal species of concern identified and no potential species of concern identified on the NRIS survey.</p> <p>The burrowing owl was found to be potentially located in this area. This species is generally associated with habitat consisting of native rangeland. Given the fact that the 314.37 acres of this tract is not comprised of native rangeland, any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects are not expected due to the conversion from CRP to small grain production on the tract. The 4.59 acres of native rangeland in the SE corner of the tract will not be altered so any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects are not expected to the species of concern.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>[N] Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted and he stated that do to the tract being previously farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.</p>
<p>11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] Since the field is currently in CRP, the native rangeland will not be broke, and the surrounding tracts are all farmed, reclassification as agricultural land will not affect the aesthetics of the area.</p>
<p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, and AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed project. The proposed project will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of other private, state or federal current actions w/n the analysis area, or from future proposed state actions that are under MEPA review (scoping) or permitting review by any state agency w/n the analysis area?</p>	<p>[N] Currently, there are no other studies, plans, or projects associated with the proposed project area.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed project will not affect human health or human safety in the area.</p>

<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>[N] The reclassification of this to agricultural land will increase the productivity of this tract. The estimated WW yield is 40 bu/ac X \$4.92/bu X .25%=\$49.20/acre divided by 2 for 50/50 crop fallow equals \$24.60/acre. The current CRP payment is \$21.88/acre, but will not be sustained due to the contract expiring. The Common Schools trust would see an estimated return increase of \$2.72/ac.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number. Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action will not significantly affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed action will not affect tax revenue.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] There will be no excessive stress placed of the existing infrastructure of the area.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed project is in compliance with Federal, State, and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.</p>
<p>20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] This tract is legally accessible and the proposed project is not expected to impact general recreation activities on this State Land.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed project will not change the human population distribution or the housing requirements in the area.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed project will not alter the social structure of the surrounding native communities.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and/or cultural diversity of the area.</p>
<p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES: Is there a potential for other future uses for easement area other than for current management? Is future use hypothetical? What is the estimated return to the trust? Are cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of this proposed action?</p>	<p>[N] The proposed conversion of CRP to agricultural land will greatly improve the productivity on the tract and increase the return to the trust. The current CRP stand has lost its vigor and has very low productivity. The current CRP revenue is \$21.88/acre and the estimated Winter Wheat return is \$24.60/ac. This is an increase in revenue of \$2.72/acre. The N2 of this section has a 7-year average return of \$26.71/acre which is a higher average for the Conrad Unit. No other unique circumstances exist.</p>

EA Checklist Prepared By: _____
Tony Nickol, Land Use Specialist–Conrad Unit

Date: 06/15/2010





04/05/2010 11:14

Nickol, Tony

From: Jane Holzer [msca@3rivers.net]
Sent: Tuesday, April 13, 2010 3:22 PM
To: Nickol, Tony
Subject: CRP breaking request

Tony - in regards to State Lease #4782 in Section 16 T26N R1E. MSCA has no specific information on this land and we have not worked with any salinity issues close to this site either. Based on aerial photos back to 1995, the land shows no sign of salinity but after ± 20 years of CRP forage on a half-section there may be no current signs. You should check to see what practice it is enrolled in and why the lessee and DNRC agreed to CRP initially. If the reason was economic, then the land is likely to be suitable for cropping again. Almost all the land in a several mile radius is in successful annual cropping.

Thank you for checking with MSCA on these land breaking issues. There are areas, especially in Toole and Teton counties, where MSCA would have reservations about breaking perennial forage land from a salinity perspective.

Jane Holzer

Jane Holzer
Montana Salinity Control Association
PO Box 909
Conrad, MT 59425
(406) 278-3071
msca@3rivers.net

Nickol, Tony

From: Gary Olson [grolson@3rivers.net]
Sent: Wednesday, April 14, 2010 11:28 AM
To: Nickol, Tony
Subject: break request T26N, R1E, sec. 16, S 1/2

Tony:

I have reviewed the breaking proposal you sent April 2, 2010. An acreage that large that is currently in CRP most likely has considerable wildlife habitat value for big game species, upland birds, as well as non-game. While I understand the lessee's interest in converting to small grain production, the overall effect of removing permanent vegetative cover will not be beneficial for area wildlife species. Additionally, the tract is accessible by county road. Breaking out the CRP will result in a loss of available habitat that presently benefits the public, especially for upland bird hunting.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

Gary Olson
Wildlife Biologist
MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks
514 S. Front St., Suite C
Conrad, MT 59425
406-271-7033