

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Apex Gravel Permit, Beaverhead County
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	July, 2010
<b>Proponent:</b>	Beaverhead County Road Department
<b>Location:</b>	Section 28, T 5S – R9W
<b>County:</b>	Beaverhead County

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Beaverhead County Road Department has requested the use of State Ground in the NE 1/4 of Section 28, Township 5 South – Range 2 West (approximately 12 miles NW of Dillon, MT) for the mining of gravel. The County currently has a permitted gravel pit on the section in the same area. This proposal would entail the following activities;

Reclaim the existing gravel pit to Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) standards. The existing pit is approximately 11.5 acres in size. Beaverhead County Road Department has identified an area of approximately 44.8 acres in size near the existing pit that they would like to permit for long term (10 years) gravel mining, and use by the County Road Department. The estimated quantity of gravel to be mined will be 80,000 cubic yards. A crusher, screen and grizzly will be the processing equipment used at the site. During the 2010 field season the Road Department would like to excavate and crush gravel from an area of approximately 1.5 acres to perform maintenance work on the Birch Creek County Road. Approximately 10, 000 cubic yards will be crushed for this road improvement project.

The proposed gravel pit is accessed off of the existing Birch Creek County Road. The pit would be reclaimed yearly and would remain open for a ten year period. The County has applied for an open cut mining permit from Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for this project.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

Craig Fager, Wildlife Biologist for MT Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks  
Marchesseau Ranch, Neighboring landowner and current lessee of the section  
Tony Schoonen, Montanans for Access  
Beaverhead County Commissioners  
Skyline Sportsmen's Group  
Patrick Rennie, MT DNRC Archeologist  
David and Jim Hagenbarth, Neighboring Landowners  
James Roberts, Neighboring Landowner  
Dean Ovitt, Neighboring Landowner  
Cory Lamey, Neighboring Landowner  
Jud Hammer, Neighboring Landowner  
Montana Natural Heritage Program  
Public notice of this proposal was placed in the June 16, and the June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 editions of the Dillon Tribune newspaper

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

MT DEQ, Open Cut Permit Required

MT FWP, No Permits Required

**3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

- A. **No Action Alternative:** Deny Beaverhead County Road Department the right to use DNRC State Land for a new expanded gravel permit.
- B. **Action Alternative:** Allow Beaverhead County to reclaim the existing permitted gravel pit (approximately 11.5 acres). Allow the permitting of a new long term gravel pit of approximately 44.8 acres to the County. This new pit would be used for long term use (10 years) and would allow the Beaverhead County Road Department to use the pit as needed for gravel needs in the County. The permit and price paid to the MT DNRC for use of the gravel would need to be re-permitted and negotiated on a yearly basis. The County would also be required to obtain an Open Cut Permit from the MT DEQ and file a reclamation plan for use of the pit. Top soil will be stored on site and will be used to reclaim the mined area. The pit will be reclaimed on a yearly basis. This would include back sloping sides of the pit to a 3:1 ratio and spreading top soil and grass seeding disturbed areas as well as spraying for weeds annually.

**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 soils where the gravel pit would be developed are classified as Bronec- Kalsted gravelly sandy loams as identified by the NRCS soil survey. The area is well drained and rutting is usually not an issue with these types of soils. Soil surveys indicate that the typical profile for such soils are as follows; 0-5 inches soils are gravelly sandy loam, 5-17 inches are very gravelly sandy loam, 17 to 31 "very gravelly sandy loam and 31- 60" Extremely gravelly sandy loam.

Top soils will be scraped and stored on the site for reclamation once the storage site is no longer in use. Native grass seed mixture will be spread over the disturbed areas to prevent erosion of the soils.

Land capability classification is listed at 4e. The soils are well drained and stony.

**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 proposed pit has a water table approximately 15 feet below the ground surface. Tests reveal that the current small gravel permit is excavated to a depth of 10 to 11 feet and the ground water is located 5 feet below the current elevation of the existing pit. The exaction of the proposed new pit will not exceed 10- 11 feet. At this

elevation the excavation will turn into a hard pan of clay and no further excavation will occur. The clay layer is not suitable for gravel use so no excavation will occur once this depth is reached.

It is not anticipated that this proposal would have any short, long term or cumulative effect on water quality.

**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 location of the gravel pit is located near an existing subdivision. Currently there has only been one house constructed and it is approximately 1/2 mile from the pit. The nearest town is Dillon located 12 miles south of the proposed location. This proposal would generate some dust during the excavation, crushing and hauling phases of the operations. The overall impact to the area would be small and would be spread out over a longer duration of time. If excessive dust became a problem to future homeowner's use of the pit could be restricted to times of the year that would create the least amount of dust during operations or dust control measures could be taken such as by using magnesium chloride on the road leading to the pit. This proposal however would not affect long term air quality in Southwest Montana because of the limited size and scope of the proposal.

**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.*

A Montana Heritage search of the proposed gravel pit site didn't identify any rare plants or cover types. A field evaluation was completed by Chuck Maddox, Dillon Unit Land Use Specialist on October 21 of 2008. In his report Chuck lists the majority of cover type to be *Stipa comata*, needle –and –thread grass. The majority of the area north of Dillon was broken and farmed in earlier years, teen's to the 1930's. The lack of *Agropyron spicatum* blue bunch wheat grass remnants on this site indicate that this site was probably farmed as well.

This project would cause disturbance to ground cover over a 45 acre area. If this proposal was to be implemented the County would be required to re-vegetate the disturbed areas with native grasses as well as spray for noxious weeds at the location.

**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 NRIS search identified the area as possibly being used by two species of Vertebrate that the BLM has identified as sensitive species; The Sage Thrasher *Oreoscoptes montanus* and Brewer's Sparrow *Spizella breweri*. This project is not anticipated to have any direct, indirect or cumulative effects to these species due to the projects small footprint.

**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 Montana Natural Heritage program identified two sensitive species of concern; Sage Thrasher *Oreoscoptes montanus* and Brewer's Sparrow *Spizella breweri*.

**Sage Thrasher** *Oreoscoptes montanus* and **Brewer's Sparrow** *Spizella breweri* have been identified as using an area of approximately 6,400 acres in size just north of this proposal. The two birds have not been identified in

the existing pit or the new proposal area. Because the size and scope of this proposal is relatively small (45 acres) compared with the 6,400 acres of suitable habitat acres north of this proposal no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects are not anticipated..

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

Patrick Renee Montana DNRC archeologist was contacted concerning this proposal. His search didn't identify any cultural resource concerns associated with this project.

**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.*

This proposal will be visible from the I-15 interstate as one drives North and South near mile marker 74. It will also be visible from the Birch Creek County Road. There is a sub division to the north of Birch Creek County Road and one new house is currently being constructed on the subdivided land. The developer has excavated a pit on his property for gravel extraction of approximately 5 acres for road development. Because excavation on State land has been relatively shallow (approximately 10 feet) the impacts on aesthetics of the existing pit to people passing by is minimal. A larger pit on this section could affect the overall aesthetics of this proposal. The current area (11 acres) that was excavated holds water for wildlife and livestock. The plan is to keep the area that holds water as a storage area for livestock and wildlife. Prior reclamation work in the pit looks good. The sides have been back sloped and grass reseeded.

The biggest impact will be on the Hagenbarth Livestock acres to the east of the property. Hagenbarths have been approached about selling their land for development and the size of the pit along their property boundary could affect the future property value.

I met with the Beaverhead County Commissioners, the lessee, (Tex Marchesseau, of Marchesseau Ranch) Mike Schaffer of the Beaverhead County Road Department and Jim Hagenbarth of Hagenbarth Livestock to discuss modifying the size of the pit or leaving a portion of the pit along the east property line to reduce visual impacts to the Hagenbarth Ranch property and reduce any aesthetic impacts to future home owners. All parties agreed that this would be a good idea. Because the pit needs to be renewed by the DNRC on a yearly basis all parties involved will discuss the Counties yearly plans for the pit prior to any excavation being done. This will help determine a mutual decision on when and where to suspend any future gravel removal to the east side of the pit. This would also allow other possible parties living near this gravel pit to voice concerns with extraction of gravel from the pit as well.

**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.*

As discussed above this project could affect the visual resource of the people that build homes in the existing subdivision and possible future subdivisions. Prior excavation in this area however has identified a layer of clay at about 10-11 feet deep that is not desirable for use as a gravel source. Thus excavation has been somewhat shallow for a gravel pit and visual impacts are minimal in nature.

**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.*

Montana DNRC Dillon Unit doesn't know of any other projects planned for this area.

#### 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.*

This proposal will increase large truck traffic on the Birch Creek road temporarily for extended periods of time. Birch Creek Road is heavily used by recreationists and wood gathers in the spring and summer and hunters in the fall. Truck hauling signs would need to be erected to warn traffic of heavy truck traffic on the road if the project is permitted. The area is flat and visibility is excellent. The risks to human health and safety associated with this proposal are low, but do exist.

#### 15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

If all 44.8 acres of land was excavated for gravel the current lessee Marchesseau Ranch Inc would lose a total of 7AUM from the total of 98 AUM on the section. The pit however will be reclaimed and sloped to a 3:1 ratio allowing cattle to graze the areas once the area has re-vegetated with grass. Long term affects to the lessee are not anticipated and a reduction in AUM will be short term.

#### 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.*

This proposal will not affect employment in the local area.

#### 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.*

Beaverhead County would be responsible for maintaining the gravel pit. This would include spraying for noxious weeds, and reclaiming the site once all of the gravel has been excavated. Reclamation work would include spreading the topsoil that has been stockpiled on the disturbed areas and broadcast seeding the pit yearly.

The County would also install a temporary cattle guard at the gate to allow the gate to remain open during hauling operations. The Cattle Guard would be removed when operations are suspended.

#### 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.*

None

**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.*

None

**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.*

If all 80,000 cubic yards of gravel was excavated and removed from the pit and Beaverhead County pays the state \$0.75/ cubic yard which is the current price DNRC is charging the County for gravel this proposal would generated \$60,000.00 for the trust.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Tim Egan	<b>Date:</b> 6/25/2010
	<b>Title:</b> Dillon Unit Manager	

**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

I have selected Alternative B, Action Alternative which would authorize Beaverhead County expansion of gravel operations on T5S-R9W-Section 28

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

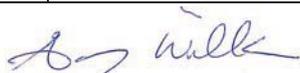
Significant impacts are not expected to occur as a result of the proposed activity. The gravel pit is in an area of an existing pit. The area is well suited for gravel production provided excavation is limited to a depth of 10-11 feet to avoid water table impacts. There will be an annual review on the progress of the pit excavation to adjust operations related to impacts on adjacent lands and the boundary of the excavation will be modified along the east property line to reduce visual impacts. There are no unique or critical habitats associated with the area.

**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Garry Williams
	<b>Title:</b> Area Manager, Central Land Office
<b>Signature:</b> 	<b>Date:</b> 7/14/2010

