

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Huntley Gravel Pit
Proposed
Implementation Date: Spring 2011
Proponent: Ralph Huntley and Sons, Inc. (Blake Huntley)
Location: Section 16, Township 4 South, Range 15 West (Big Hole Valley)
County: Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Ralph Huntley and Sons, Inc. (Blake Huntley) of Wisdom, MT have requested use of State School Trust Land for the removal of gravel in the SE ¼ of Section 16, Township 4 South, Range 15 West. This project will include the removal of approximately 15,000 cubic yards of gravel over the next 20 years. The material removed will be used primarily on the Huntley Ranch for irrigation ditch improvements and the general maintenance of ranch roads.

It is important to note that this pit is already in existence and has been in use by the Huntley Ranch for several years. In an effort to bring the pit into compliance with DNRC and DEQ standards, the Dillon Unit of the Montana Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation is completing this Environmental Assessment.

Upon

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 the Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Dick Hirschy, Local Landowner
Hirschy Livestock-Jack Hirschy, Neighboring Landowner
Beaverhead County Commissioners
Big Hole Watershed Committee
Patrick Rennie, MT DNRC Archeologist
Montana Natural Heritage Program An NRIS search was done for this proposal.
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

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

Montana Department of Environmental Quality- Open Cut Permit

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

- A. No Action Alternative: Deny Ralph Huntley and Sons the right to extract gravel from State Land.
- B. Action Alternative: Allow Ralph Huntley and Sons, Inc. to extract 15,000 cubic yards of gravel from an existing pit located on State Land (Township 4 South, Range 15 West section 16). Material removed will be used solely for ranch purposes. The price paid per cubic yard of gravel removed will have to be negotiated on a biennial basis by DNRC.

Ralph Huntley and Sons, Inc. will be responsible for reclaiming the pit annually, including re-sloping the sides of the pit to a 3:1 grade, re-planting with native vegetation and spraying for noxious weeds.

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.

According to a custom NRCS web soil survey, the soils within the project area have been classified as a Lebeg-Adel complex. This soil profile is characterized as a well drained soil with a restrictive feature depth of greater than 80 inches and slope of 0-2%. The typical profile for this soil includes a gravelly loam at 0-10", a very gravelly sandy clay loam at depths of 10-17", a very gravelly clay loam at 17-24" and an extremely gravelly sandy clay loam from 24-60"

If approved the pit will have to be reclaimed annually, storing top soils to be spread on disturbed areas, contouring the cut slopes to a 3:1 grade, and re-seeding with native vegetation to help provide soil stability.

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 NRCS custom soil report lists groundwater at a depth greater than 80". The current pit has a depth of approximately 60". Further excavation below this depth is not expected due to the amount of material already available within the pit. Further impacts on water quality, quantity and distribution are not likely.

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.

Minimal impacts to air quality are expected due to the small size of this project. Dust generated from loading and hauling material will be infrequent and have a modest impact on the surrounding area. Most of the material that will be removed has already been screened and piled within the pit further limiting any impacts on air quality.

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 field visit to the site on September 20, 2010 to survey vegetation revealed that disturbed soils within the pit are predominately occupied by annual grasses and undesirable forbs. Vegetation surrounding the pit is listed in fair to good condition and mostly comprised of mountain big sage-*Artemisia tridentata*, Idaho fescue-*Festuca idahoensis* and bluebunch wheatgrass-*Pseudoroegneria spicata*

Disturbed soils within the site will have to be re-vegetated with native vegetation and sprayed annually by the permittee to limit and prevent the spread of undesirable/noxious species.

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.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program identified four species of concern with habitats near the the project area including: The Greater Sage-Grouse *Centrocercus urophasianus*, Arctic Grayling *Thymallus arcticus*, Pygmy Rabbit *Brachylagus idahoensis* and the Gray Wolf *Canis lupus*. Given the small size of this project and the fact that it has been in existence for several years, no impact to these species is anticipated.

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.

There are four species of concern identified by NRIS including: The Greater Sage-Grouse *Centrocercus urophasianus*, Arctic Grayling *Thymallus arcticus*, Pygmy Rabbit *Brachylagus idahoensis* and the Gray Wolf *Canis lupus* that may located within the greater Big Hole Valley.

-The Greater Sage-Grouse and the Pygmy Rabbit primarily utilize a sagebrush dominated habitat (greater than 30% cover) which is located around the proposed project area. Short term effects on these two species are possible with pit operations but given the vast amounts of habitat in the area, no major impacts are expected.

-The Gray Wolf has a range including most of the Big Hole Valley and Western Montana. No impact on this species is expected.

-Arctic Grayling are present within the Big Hole River and its tributaries. To protect the habitat of Arctic Grayling a buffer of 100 meters is preferred. This project lies well outside of 100 meters of any stream or body of water so no impacts are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Montana DNRC Archeologist, Patrick Rennie was contacted regarding this proposed project and no cultural, archaeological or paleontological resources were identified within the project area.

Some of the irrigation ditches located within the state tract have been documented as cultural resources but the proposed pit will not affect these sites.

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 project is located in the sparsely populated Big Hole Valley which is generally regarded for its excellent scenery, outdoor recreation and wildlife viewing opportunities. This gravel pit will be visible from Montana Highway 278 but is not in close proximity to any dwellings or other county roads. Given the relatively small size of this project and its duration, major impacts to the aesthetics of the Big Hole Valley are not anticipated.

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.

Other than minimal visual effects, this project is not anticipated to have an effect on environmental resources.

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.

At the time of this assessment the Montana DNRC-Dillon Unit is unaware of any other projects within the project 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.

Access to this site is off of Montana Highway 278. It is possible that large, slow moving vehicles could be entering/leaving the highway during hauling operations. This area of the road has excellent visibility from both directions and serious hazards are not anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

. This project includes the disturbance of 2.6 acres of Trust Lands. Previous DNRC grazing evaluations have not subtracted this from the total AUM's available on the section. No further impacts are expected.

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 should 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.

None

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 approved, this project will generate an estimated \$11,250 for the trust over the next 20 years at the current rate of .75/cubic yd currently charged by DNRC for gravel in Beaverhead County.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Cory Calnan	Date: 11/22/2010
	Title: Senior Engine Boss/Range Tech.	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action Alternative: Allow Ralph Huntley and Sons, Inc. to extract 15,000 cubic yards of gravel from an existing pit located on State Land (Township 4 South, Range 15 West section 16). Material removed will be used solely for ranch purposes. The price paid per cubic yard of gravel removed will have to be negotiated on a biennial basis by DNRC.

Ralph Huntley and Sons, Inc. will be responsible for reclaiming the pit annually, including re-sloping the sides of the pit to a 3:1 grade, re-planting with native vegetation and spraying for noxious weeds.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has not identified any significant long term or cumulative impacts associated with the future extraction of gravel from this state section. Ralph Huntley and Sons Inc. have applied for an open cut permit from the Montanan DEQ and are in the process of obtaining this permit. Mitigation

measures include the permittee being responsible for performing all reclamation requirements of the DEQ permit as well as the stipulations associated with the DNRC's gravel permit. A noxious weed plan will be filed with the Beaverhead County Weed Board. All reclamation work associated with the current illegal pit will be performed prior to removing any future gravel.

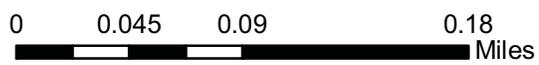
Once the gravel and Open Cut permits are in place the pit will be more closely monitored and reclamation work will need to be performed annually to stay in compliance. In addition the DNRC can cancel the gravel permit at any time for non-compliance.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Timothy Egan
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan	Date: 11/22/10

Section 16, Township 4 South - Range 15 West Ralph Huntley & Sons Inc Proposed Gravel Permit



1:4,814

