

**Draft**  
**Environmental Assessment**

**FORT PECK INDIAN RESERVATION**  
**SWIFT FOX TRANSLOCATION**



***Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks***

# Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

## PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) propose to translocate up to 20 swift foxes from northeastern Montana to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation within the state.

2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:**  
Montana state statute 87-5-713 provides FWP with the authority to transplant or introduce controlled species that is listed under statute 87-5-714 or after FWP Commission approval when a management plan has been completed to ensure the species' population can be controlled if any unforeseen harm should occur.

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, under 87-1-201 of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA), has the authority to “ *supervise all the wildlife, fish, game, and nongame birds waterfowl, and game and fur-bearing animals of the state and may implement voluntary programs ....*”

4. **Anticipated Schedule:**  
Capture of Swift Foxes: Late August through October, 2010  
Release of Swift Foxes on the Reservation: Late August through October, 2010

5. **Location affected by proposed action:**  
  
Swift fox will be captured in portions of all or several of the following counties in Montana north of US Highway 2: Hill, Phillips, Valley, Blaine, and Roosevelt. All releases will take place on Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

See Appendix A for capture and release map.

6. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

	<u>Acres</u>			<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:			(d) Floodplain	<u>  0  </u>
Residential	<u>  0  </u>			
Industrial	<u>  0  </u>		(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)			Irrigated cropland	<u>  0  </u>
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	<u>  0  </u>		Dry cropland	<u>  0  </u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>  0  </u>		Forestry	<u>  0  </u>
			Rangeland	<u>  0  </u>
			Other	<u>  0  </u>

**7. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.**

**(a) Permits:**

**(b) Funding**

**(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**  
Fort Peck Tribes Fish and Game Department

**8. Narrative summary of the proposed action:**

Swift fox are the smallest and most fossorial canid in North America. Historically, they inhabited shortgrass and mixed-grass prairies across the western United States and Canada. Records indicate swift fox were present in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and south through Montana, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas (Allardyce and Sovada 2003). Since the late 1800s, swift fox populations have declined in the northern portion of their range, possibly due to dramatic changes in the prairie ecosystem associated with the demise of the buffalo (*Bison bison*), conversion of prairie habitat to agriculture, inadvertent poisoning, and interspecific competition with red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and coyotes (*Canis latrans*) (Allardyce and Sovada 2003; Herrero 2003). The swift fox was declared extinct in Montana in 1969, though records indicate the species was probably not present since 1953 (Hoffmann et al. 1969). The last record was reported in 1918 on the eastern edge of Glacier National Park, adjacent to the Blackfeet Reservation.

In 1998 the Blackfeet Nation, in conjunction with *Defenders of Wildlife*, began a reintroduction program, transplanting 123 individuals on to tribal land by 2002. The foxes were obtained from Cochrane Ecological Institute, Canada. Subsequent monitoring located natal dens and wild-born kits every year since 1998 with the highest number of kits (n = 38) found in 2003 (Ausband 2003). The reintroduction has successfully established swift fox on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation (Ausband 2003).

The purpose of this proposed action is to translocate swift fox from within FWP Administrative Region 6 in northeast Montana to suitable habitat on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation (FPIR). The proposed translocation project to restore swift foxes to the Fort Peck grassland is a cooperative effort that includes members of the Swift Fox Conservation Team that includes state and federal agencies and several conservation groups.

Swift fox currently exist on FPIR at low densities. This translocation is a final population augmentation to facilitate establishment of a resident population of swift fox on FPIR. This action will provide additional wildlife viewing, assist Tribal officials to restore a culturally important species to the reservation, increase species diversity on the reservation, and facilitate range expansion of swift fox in the state

A translocation of 10 juvenile swift fox in 2006 and another translocation of 30 mostly juveniles swift fox in 2009 was conducted on to FPIR. This is an augmentation to those translocation efforts. Up to 20 swift fox, mostly juveniles, 50/50 sex ratio are planned to be captured by local trappers in north central Montana beginning in late August and continuing through October if needed. Juvenile swift fox would be made available to tribal wildlife officials for soft release to suitable habitat on Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Approximately even numbers of swift fox would come from the Theony, Whitewater, and the Chinook areas. All adult or a combination of adult and juvenile swift fox would be made available if juveniles are unavailable.

Fort Peck wildlife officials have agreed to the terms of this translocation.

**9. Alternatives:**

**Alternative A: No Action**

FWP would not pursue translocation efforts of swift foxes onto the Fort Peck Indian Reservation (FPIR). The existing swift fox population would continue to struggle to expand its population and reestablish the species in northeastern Montana. Alternative A would result in no changes and no increased aesthetic, cultural, or viewing opportunities.

**Alternative B: Proposed Action** - The proposed action of translocating swift fox to the project area can improve aesthetic, cultural, and viewing opportunities. This action would be implemented by the capture of wild swift fox and their subsequent release in the project area.

## **PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST**

**Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.**

### **A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

1. <b><u>LAND RESOURCES</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

The proposed translocation project does not require the displacement of any soil nor does it require disturbances to any unique geological features or changes to river or stream channels. However, swift foxes use burrows when they are inactive; either dug by themselves or made by other mammals (marmot, prairie dog, badger). The burrows are usually located in sandy soil on high ground such as hilltops in open prairies, along fencerows, or occasionally in a plowed field. An individual may use several different dens throughout the year (Montana Field Guide, [http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail\\_AMAJA03030.aspx](http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail_AMAJA03030.aspx)).

2. <b><u>AIR</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		N/A				

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

The proposed action will not affect existing ambient air quality at either the capture or release sites.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		N/A				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		N/A				

The proposed project will not change any existing water patterns or water resources at the capture or release sites.

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\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		N/A				

The proposed project will not change the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species in either the capture or release areas.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

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** 5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X			5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X			5c
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		N/A				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		N/A				

5b. The proposed action will result in removal of 20 swift fox from the northern portion of region 6. The last census of the area, indicated a minimum of over 500 swift fox in the area. All scientific data, and incidental reports indicate an expanding swift fox population. It is unlikely removal of 20 juvenile or adult swift fox will have any negative impact on the species. The abundance of swift fox will increase on Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

5c. The diet in Montana is not known, but studies from other areas suggest the diet includes mammals (jack rabbits, cottontails, ground squirrels, mice), birds, invertebrates, and vegetable matter (grasses and berries). Mammals (often especially cottontail rabbits) and insects comprise the bulk of the diet, but feeding is opportunistic. (Montana Field Guide, [http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail\\_AMAJA03030.aspx](http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail_AMAJA03030.aspx))

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

The proposed project will not change any existing noise levels at the capture or release sites.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

The proposed project will not change any existing land uses at the capture or release sites.

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\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

<b>8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</b> Will the proposed action result in:	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		N/A				

The proposed project will not create any new hazards to local residents.

<b>9. COMMUNITY IMPACT</b> Will the proposed action result in:	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

The proposed project will not change any existing community plans or commercial resources nor increase traffic hazards in the areas affected by the translocation effort.

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\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources						
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f

10f. Implementing the proposed action will require a minor increase in time and operating dollars for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Monitoring the success of the translocation will be the responsibility of the Fort Peck Tribal wildlife officials.

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<b>** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION</b> <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X			11a
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?			X			11b
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)			X			11c
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		N/A				

11a/b/c. The aesthetic character of the area as well as the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities and cultural aspects will be improved. Viewing and perhaps harvest opportunities will increase as the swift fox population increase. Swift fox are an important species to Native Americans of the area.

<b>12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</b> <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		N/A				

The proposed translocation effort of swift foxes onto the Fort Peck Reservation is not expected to impact any physical historic or cultural resources. However, the continuing effort to restore swift foxes to their historic territory will provide native peoples in the area the ability to observe one of the species closely linked to their belief system.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

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## SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>  Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		N/A				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		N/A				

**Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Significance Criteria (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):**

- \* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- \*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- \*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- \*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

### **PART III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

1. **Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Public notices in each of these papers: *The Glasgow Courier*, *Wolf Point Herald-News*, and *Wotanim-Wowapi* (tribal newspaper);
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

This project has been discussed with tribal wildlife officials, members of the scientific community, and local trappers. The project appears to have local support and few concerns have been expressed. This project is unlikely to produce negative environmental impacts. Therefore, the level of public involvement is appropriate.

2. **Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period will extend for a minimum (14) fourteen days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., July 8, 2010 and can be mailed to the address below:

Swift Fox Translocation  
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
54078 Hwy 2 West  
Glasgow, MT 59230

or email at [rtauscher@mt.gov](mailto:rtauscher@mt.gov)

### **PART IV. EA PREPARATION**

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? No**  
**If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

Based on the criteria provided by MEPA Model Rule III to assess if an EIS is required, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts would be created from the proposed action. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an EA is the appropriate level of analysis.

**2. Person responsible for preparing the EA:**

Ryan Rauscher, Wildlife Biologist  
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
54078 Hwy 2 West  
Glasgow, MT 59230  
406-228-3725

**3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:**

Fort Peck Tribes Fish and Game Department  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
    Fish and Wildlife Division  
    Legal Bureau  
U.S. Bureau of Land Management

**APPENDICE**

A. Swift Fox Capture and Release Site Location Map

# APPENDIX A

