

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	SPRING CREEK (Limited Access) TIMBER PERMIT
Proposed Implementation Date:	Winter, 2011
Proponent:	DNRC, Northeastern Land Office
Location:	Section 36, Township 15 North, Range 18 East
County:	Fergus

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Montana DNRC, Northeastern Land Office, plans to harvest up to 700 tons (100M) of saw logs and 500 tons of pulp timber from approximately 100 acres. Harvesting would be done with ground-based equipment during the winter with adequate snow cover or frozen conditions, and would be concentrated in the southern half of the section. No new road construction would be necessary. Two track roads on grass lands would be utilized and log landings would be on ridges far from stream courses. Limited access would be granted by the Miller Ranch. The purpose of the action is to generate income for the Public Common School Trust Fund, increase tree growth rates, and reduce the likelihood of loss due to pine beetles, disease and stand replacement wildfire.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

On December 13, 2010, letters describing the proposed project and requesting comment were sent to the following adjacent landowners: Rick Miller (Miller Ranch), Burleigh Angus Ranch, Inc, Jennilou Emerson Isackson, John & Donna Boarke, Frank R. Thompson, MD, E. Donnal Thomas, MD, Robert & Beverly Skinner, Christine & Richard Taylor, Donald & Cynthia Moen and Delbert Norton.

The only concerns and negative comments were received from Robert & Beverly Skinner. Harvest Unit-1 was reduced in size and volume to help mitigate their concerns about habit impacts on adjacent State property directly to the east of their property.

Montana State Agencies: Montana DNRC, Forest Management Bureau, Montana DNRC, Agriculture and Grazing Management Bureau, Montana DNRC Centralized Services Division, Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Natural Heritage Program.

Others: Friends of the Wild Swan, F. H. Stoltze Land and Lumber, Plum Creek Timber Co., Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Wild West Institute, Stuart Lewin, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Montana Wood Products Association, Fergus County Conservation District.

Individuals Consulted: Patrick Rennie, DNRC, Archaeologist and Jeff Schmalenberg, DNRC Soil Scientist.

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

Montana Idaho State Airshed Group, Fergus County Conservation District, 124 Permit.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No Action Alternative: This alternative would postpone any timber harvest at this time, but would continue current grazing lease agreement. Potential effects of the "No Action Alternative" include reduced tree growth rates, declining forage and grazing potential and increased risk of stand replacement wildfire. Additionally, revenue opportunity may be lost as dead and dying timber is lost to decay, insects, windthrow and wildfire.

Action Alternative: The proposed action would commercially harvest up to 700 tons (100M) of saw logs and 500 tons of pulp timber from approximately 100 acres. The sale of forest products would produce revenue for the Public School Trust Fund, while ensuring the long-term productivity and revenue generating capacity. The sale would utilize selective harvest practices to reduce competition and improve stand and forage productivity while mitigating potential adverse impacts from pine beetles and maintaining desirable stand structure and habitat elements.

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.

Some compactable and unstable soils are present and some degree of cumulative impacts may occur. No unusual geological features are present. There are no special reclamation considerations. Best Management Practices (BMP's) would be implemented to protect soil resources.

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.

There is one stream, which provides surface flow to Big Spring Creek. The stream contains reaches of class I, II and III stream segments. Ann Tews, Fisheries Biologist from FW &P ; Jim Bower, from DNRC Forest Management Bureau and the Montana Natural Heritage Program, all expressed concerns about fisheries Habitat in the NE1/4 of the State section. Therefore, the majority of harvest activities would be confined to the north half of the section, and there would be no activity in the sensitive area. The potential for degradation of water quality will be mitigated by implementing the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) law and DNRC Best Management Practices. Two track roads on grass lands would be utilized and log landings would be on ridges far from stream courses. Please see attached e-mails and Natural Heritage Program report.

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 project area is located within Airshed 9. State Hazard Reduction Standards will be mitigated by initiating slash disposal (by DNRC personnel) during seasonal burning periods and completed by following procedures established by the Montana Idaho Airshed Coordination Group. These measures will ensure that all direct and indirect effects of smoke to air quality will be minimal. No cumulative impacts to air quality are likely to occur as a result of this proposal. Burning would be initiated when there was adequate snow cover and winds from the west to carry smoke away from several local residences.

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.

The timber stands in the project area are composed primarily of Ponderosa pine. Mechanical selective harvest would leave the best quality trees with a 30 foot spacing. No rare plants or cover types have been identified. Prescribed silvicultural treatments are intended to increase forest health, tree growth, and forage productivity while addressing potential adverse impacts. No cumulative impacts to vegetation are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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 project area is frequented by terrestrial game and nongame wildlife and birds common to the area. Displacement of certain species during harvest operations and some reduction of hiding cover will be direct impacts of the project. Mitigations include compliance with Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management, Streamside Management Zones and Best Management Practices.

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 listed the Northern Redbelly Dace as a species of concern whose habitat is known to exist within the project area. Mitigations include restriction of harvest activities and compliance with Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management, Streamside Management Zones and Best Management Practices. No cumulative impacts to sensitive species or species of special concern or their habitat are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by Patrick Rennie, the DNRC staff archaeologist. This entailed inspection the DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office maps, and control cards for potential cultural resources in the proposed project area. That series of searches indicated that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified. Proposed timber harvest activities are expected to have *No Effect to Antiquities*.

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.

The project area is located on and within common topographical features typical of the area. No excessive noise, light or cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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.

The project area will not use resources that are limited in the area. Other activities nearby are not expected to be affected by this project. No cumulative impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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.

The project area is classified grazing land (Lease # 8370, Burleigh Angus Ranch, Inc.) No adverse effects are anticipated to occur in conjunction with activities proposed under the action alternative. No cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of other private, state or federal current actions within the analysis area or state actions currently under MEPA review by any state agency.

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.

Human safety risks may vary with the workers actively involved in "on site" harvest operations. Safety rules and regulations applied through Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and are administered by workers dealing with that program.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

This project is expected to increase forestland and rangeland productivity

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.

People are currently employed in the wood products industry in the region. Due to the relatively small size of the timber sale program, there will be no measurable cumulative impact from this proposed action on employment. No cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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.

People are currently paying taxes from the wood products industry in the region. Due to the relatively small size of the timber sale program, there will be no measurable cumulative impact from this proposed action on tax revenues. No cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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

There will be no measurable cumulative impacts related to demand for government services due to the relatively small size of the timber sale program, the short-term impacts to traffic, the small possibility of a few people temporarily relocating to the area, and the lack of other timber sales in the adjacent area. No cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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.

In March 2003, DNRC adopted new Forest Management Rules and began a phased-in implementation of them. The management direction provided in the Rules comprises the framework within which specific project planning activities take place. The full intent and content of the Rules have been incorporated into the design of the proposed action. No cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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.

This tract receives considerable use due to its proximity to Lewistown and accessibility from the Big Spring Fishing Access site. Removal of beetle kill trees and down fall would improve public safety and help maintain a healthy forest for recreational use. No cumulative impacts to recreational or wilderness activities are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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.

There will be no measurable cumulative impacts related to population and housing due to relatively small size of the timber sale program, and the fact that people are already employed in this occupation in the region. No cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

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.

The estimated return to the trust under the action alternative would be \$3,500.00 for 700 tons of saw logs at \$5.00/ton and \$125.00 for 500 tons of pulp wood at \$0.25/ton, for a total of \$3,625.00. Costs, revenues and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives. They are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return. The estimated stumpage is based on comparable sales analysis. No cumulative impacts are likely to occur as a result of this proposal.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Ron Buck	Date: January 13, 2011
	Title: DNRC-NELO Area Forester	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action Alternative

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

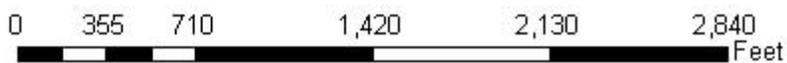
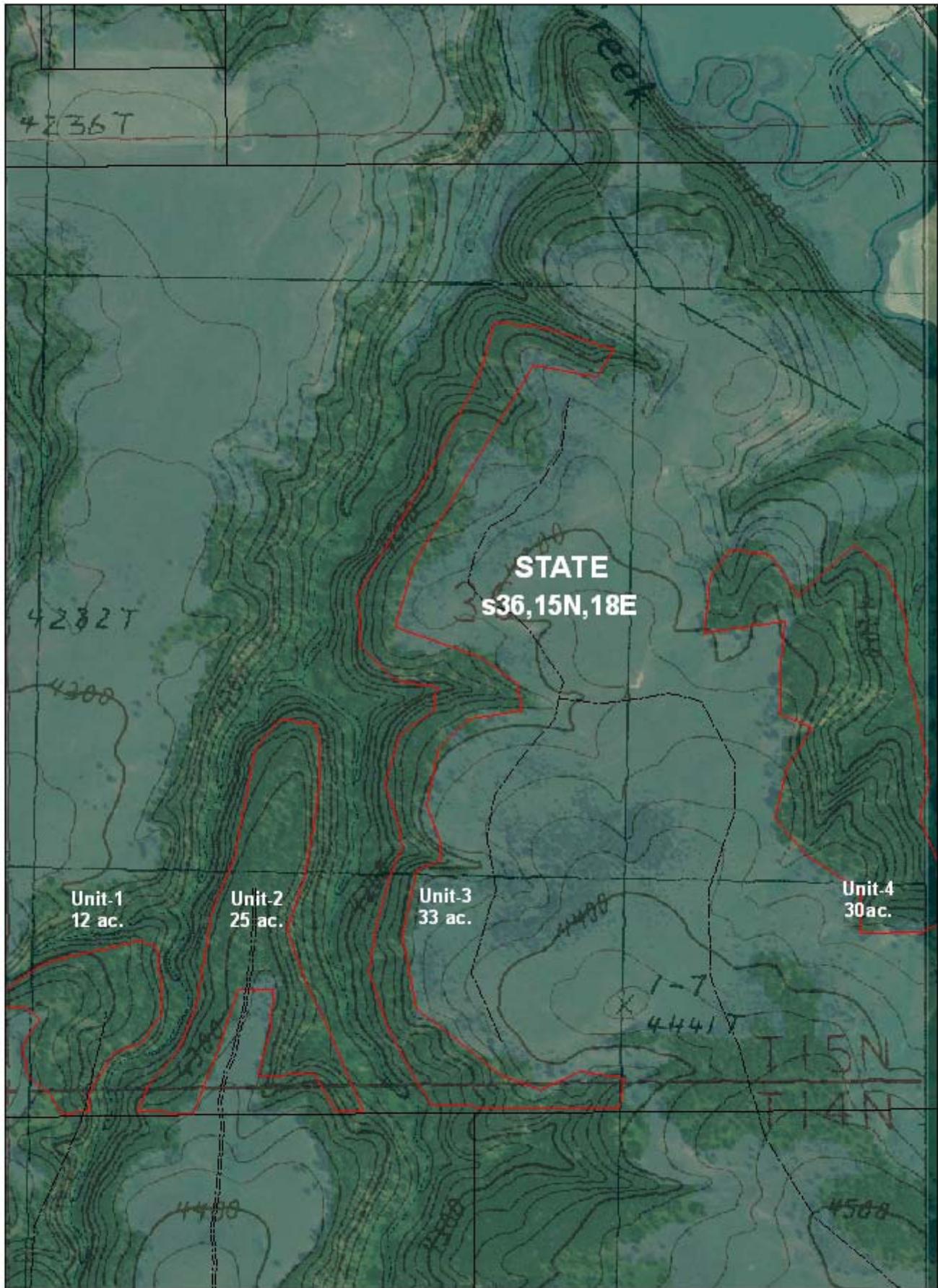
There will be no significant environmental impacts from the action alternative.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Clive Rooney	
	Title: NELO Area Manager	
Signature:		Date: January 13, 2011

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