

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Test Permit – Pipe Creek Gravel
Proposed Implementation Date:	2011
Proponent:	Libby Unit, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Location:	Sec. 16, T31N, R31W
County:	Lincoln

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Dig approximately 4-6 random test holes, each approximately 20 ft. wide and 20 ft. deep, with mechanized, heavy equipment. From each test hole, approximately 5 gallons of material would be removed. Samples would be taken off-site to determine the feasibility for future gravel pit development as a potential source of revenue for the Common Schools Trust. Each test hole would then be filled back in, and grass seed would be applied to the disturbed area.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

No public scoping was done for this project. In the past, Libby Unit has never had any comment on this type of project. Those involved in the project development from DNRC include: Garrett Schairer, wildlife biologist, Marc Vessar, hydrologist and soil specialist; Dave Marsh, project leader; and Mark Peck, Decision Maker.

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

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

Right-of way from the US Forest Service would be necessary.

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

No Action – Current land management activities would continue. No test holes would be dug, and the feasibility for future gravel pit development, as a potential source of revenue to the Common Schools Trust, would remain unknown.

Action – Random, test holes (4-6 total) would be mechanically dug to determine the feasibility for future gravel pit development as a potential source of revenue to the Common Schools Trust. Holes would be filled back in after samples were removed. Disturbed areas would then be grass seeded.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

The project area in the SE ¼, section 16, T31N, R31W contains landform and soils characteristic of landtype 108 from the *Soil Survey of Kootenai National Forest Area, Montana and Idaho (USDA, 1995)*. This landtype is comprised of lacustrine and glacial outwash terraces. Soils are very well drained due to the coarse texture of the material.

No impacts would be associated with the No Action Alternative. Soil impacts associated with the Action Alternative include reduced productivity on less than 0.1 acres of classified forest land. The reduced productivity would be a result of mixing of the less productive subsoils with the surface soils. Due to the small scale of this test project, additional cumulative effects from this action would be very low.

Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP) would be incorporated where applicable. Mechanized heavy equipment, such as an excavator, would be used to dig random, test holes. Contents from the holes would be assessed.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

No surface water features are located in the SE ¼, section 16, T31N, R31W. Additionally, the project area is on a generally flat and located on a terrace more than 750 feet from surface water (Pipe Creek).

No water quality impacts would be associated with the No Action Alternative. No direct, indirect or cumulative water quality impacts would be expected as a result of the Action Alternative due to (1) the well-drained soils, (2) lack of surface drainage in the project area, and (3) distance from surface water features outside of the project area.

6. **AIR QUALITY:**

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

No impacts would occur.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

To assure protection of sensitive plant species, the Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management; Biodiversity and Silviculture as well as RMS for Sensitive Species would be implemented where applicable.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The proposed project area includes winter range for white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, and moose. Proposed activities could disturb big game on these winter ranges should activities occur during the late winter period, but the disturbance would be of short duration. No appreciable changes to available habitats would be anticipated with the proposed activities. No appreciable changes to the limited snag resources in the project area would be anticipated with the proposed activities, thus limited changes to those species that rely on those habitat attributes. Overall, given the size of the anticipated area, the short duration, and the habitats present, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated to all wildlife species.

No surface water is found in the project area (SE ¼, section 16, T31N, R31W). Due to the lack of surface water, no direct, indirect or cumulative impact to aquatic life or habitats would be expected from the No Action or Action Alternatives.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The proposed project area is outside of the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Ecosystem and “occupied habitat” area as mapped by grizzly bear researchers and managers to address increased sightings and encounters of grizzly bears in habitats outside of recovery zones (Wittinger 2002). Although periodic use of the project area is possible, extensive use would not be anticipated. The proposed project area does not contain any Canada lynx habitats and the project area is generally outside of the elevations where lynx are found in Montana. The proposed project area is approximately 5 air miles from the last known annual home range for the Lost Soul wolf pack. That pack annual home range was last mapped in 2007 and has not been documented in the area since. Wolves not only may move through the area, but could be regularly using the area. Proposed activities would be extremely short-lived, but could occur during the time period when wolves are using their dens or rendezvous sites. Wolves are most vulnerable to disturbance at den or rendezvous sites, thus disturbance to wolves could occur during the time of year when they are most vulnerable to disturbance. Thus there would be negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Canada lynx and grizzly bears and minor to moderate direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to gray wolves would be anticipated.

The proposed project area is in the home range associated with the Pipe Creek-Alley Springs bald eagle territory. Activities would likely occur during the bald eagle nesting period, but this short-term disturbance should not alter the success of the nesting pair. Some potential flammulated owl foraging habitats exists in the proposed project area and activities would alter a limited amount of those habitats. Slight disturbance to flammulated owls would also be possible with the extremely short-lived activities proposed. Overall, minor direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated to bald eagles and flammulated owls. Habitats for other sensitive species are either not present and or would not be affected with the proposed activities.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The DNRC archeologist was consulted prior to the Pipe Creek Timber sale, and the finding was that past disturbances on this tract made it unlikely that intact resources could be located (Pipe Creek Timber Sale Silvicultural Prescription, 1986). If evidence of artifacts is discovered before or during test hole digging, operations may be suspended to investigate and secure the site.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Significant topographic features, terrain or aesthetic values would not be changed by the digging of test holes. There would be a temporary noise increase associated the operation of mechanized, heavy equipment.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No limited resources would be used from the project. There are no other activities nearby that would affect the project.

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.

Cumulative impacts would not be expected to occur.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES</i> potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.• Explain <i>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS</i> 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.

Normal health risks associated with mechanized heavy equipment operation.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

No impacts would occur.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

No effects are expected relative to the employment market, from the digging of test holes.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No effects are expected relative to income tax revenue, from the digging of test holes.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

No effects are expected relative to government services, from the digging of test holes.

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 June 1996, DNRC began a phased-in implementation of the State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP). The management direction provided in the Plan comprises the framework within which specific project planning and activities take place. The Plan philosophy and appropriate Resource Management Standards have been incorporated into the design of the proposed action where applicable.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This project would not influence the recreation potential. There are no wilderness areas within the project area.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

No effects are expected relative to population and housing, from the digging of test holes.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Native communities or lifestyles would not be disturbed.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Cultural uniqueness would not be disturbed.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

No social and economic effects are expected from the digging of test holes.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Dave Marsh	Date: 1/26/2011
	Title: Forest Management Supervisor	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The Action Alternative is selected.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are expected. All projects are being conducted on sites previously reviewed through the timber sale planning process and all current resource management standards will be applied where applicable.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Mark Peck
	Title: Libby Unit Manager
Signature: /s/ Mark Peck	Date: 1/26/2011