

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Land Breaking of tame grass, formerly conservation reserve program acreage, for conversion to dryland agriculture. Lease No. 2947	Proposed Implementation Date: May, 2011
Proponent: Linda & Leland H. Bellanger, 634 Madison Way, Great Falls, Montana 59404	
Type and Purpose of Action: Surface lessees, Linda & Leland Bellanger have made a land breaking request to the Glasgow Unit Office of the Department of Natural Resources & Conservation. The surface lessees have requested permission to break 158.0 acres of crested wheatgrass currently listed as conservation reserve program acreage. The land breaking would be a conversion from present use of conservation program acreage that will have an expiring contract date of 9/30/2010, for the purpose of growing small grain or pulse crops. The acreage would be reclassified from conservation reserve program acreage to dryland agriculture.	
Location: Lots 1, 2, E2NE4, Section 19 Township 35 North Range 47 East	County: Daniels

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	Linda & Leland H. Bellanger the surface lessees have made a request to break 158.0 acres (more or less) of crested wheatgrass conservation reserve program acreage on State land Lease Number 2947. The request was sent to the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Glasgow Unit Office for review and evaluation. The request will be reviewed per Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod. The Glasgow Unit Office contacted the following government agency for comments: Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	The other government agencies that may have jurisdiction for this project are the United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency and United States Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Service.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	<p>No Action Alternative: Deny permission to the surface lessees to break 158.0 acres of former conservation reserve program acreage. The new land use will be dryland agriculture to produce small grain & pulse crops.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Grant permission to the surface lessees to break 158.0 acres of former conservation reserve program acreage. The new land use will be dryland agriculture to produce</p>

small grain & pulse crops.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE

POTENTIAL IMPACTS

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?

No Action Alternative: The soils on the State land will remain the same and continue to produce tame grass vegetation. The area will continue to produce vegetation for possible hayland production after conservation reserve program ends.

Action Alternative: This type of project will impact the soils that are currently producing tame grass vegetation. The soils will be broken up for the purpose of producing dryland small grain & pulse crops. The soil type that will be broken for dryland agriculture is: Turner sandy loam, 2 to 8% slopes. The Turner sandy loam is suitable for dryland agriculture. This soil type has some hazard of soil blowing. Farnuf loam 2 to 8% slopes. The Farnuf loam is suitable for dryland agriculture. This soil type has minimal hazard of soil blowing. The onsite inspection of this tract showed no salinity present in the topsoil profile. The 158.0 acres requested for breaking will maintain current soil qualities and soil stability under dryland agriculture management.

Mitigation: There will be no need for a supplemental lease agreement with the lessee. The surface lessee plans to continuous crop this acreage. The annual standing stubble will mitigate any type of soil loss from wind erosion.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative annual precipitation will be utilized by the tame grass plant community. There will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.

Action Alternative: The project will allow the surface lessee to expand his dryland agriculture small grain & pulse crop production. The land breaking for small grain & pulse crops will not use water resources, other than the water associated with the topsoil from annual precipitation.

6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?

No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to air quality under this alternative.

Action Alternative: The breaking of the crested wheatgrass acreage for dryland agriculture purposes will have no impacts to the air

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

quality of the State land.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative the current tame grass plant community will remain intact.

Action Alternative: The breaking of the crested wheatgrass plant community will permanently destroy the current plant community on the project area. The crested wheatgrass community consisting of conservation reserve program acreage contains no known rare plant species. This plant community is currently crested wheatgrass with traces of alfalfa. The project area will produce small grain or pulse crop plant communities after land breaking.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?

No Action Alternative: The habitat types associated with a tame grass plant community will remain intact.

Action Alternative: This type of activity will disturb the habitat types on the State land. The area of impact is a crested wheatgrass plant community with traces of alfalfa. This type of tame grass plant community has limited habitat resources. There will be minimal impacts to the wildlife and upland bird resources associated with the State land. There will be some areas of tract that will continue to produce a native rangeland plant community. The remaining native plant community will provide some habitat resources for song birds, upland game birds, waterfowl, and whitetail deer. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks were asked for their comments concerning this proposal. Scott Thompson Fish Wildlife & Parks made the following written statement concerning this project: "Plant species diversity has apparently declined in the stand making it less valuable to wildlife. Because there is ample nesting cover in the general area, I see no major impacts to wildlife species by the making the conversion". I have attached a copy of the letter from Scott Thompson to the environmental assessment.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no change to the current environmental resources.

Action Alternative: The project area contains no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources. The project area consists of bench areas, with crested wheatgrass vegetation. There are small areas of native rangeland located on other areas of tract. These areas are not part of the project site and will not be impacted by the land breaking process.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: The project area has no known historical or archaeological sites and existing status would remain.</p> <p>Action Alternative: There are no known historical or archaeological sites on the project area that will be impacted. The project area was inspected by Glasgow Unit Office personnel for archaeological, historical and paleontological resources. There were no historical or archaeological sites identified during the on-site inspection.</p>
<p>11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts that would occur to the aesthetic values associated with the State land under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project site is located in a rural area and is visible to the general public from a county road. The project will have no impacts to the aesthetic values associated with the State land involved with this project or other surrounding lands.</p>
<p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There will be no demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy occurring under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will place no demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no changes to existing plans, studies or projects that the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation may have occurring on the State land.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The breaking of the crested wheatgrass vegetation will not impact other projects or plans that the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation may have occurring on this tract of State land.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: No human health or safety risks would occur under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The breaking of crested wheatgrass vegetation for dryland small grain or pulse crop production has minimal human health or safety risks.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no changes to current agriculture activities.</p>

	<p>Action Alternative: The project will enhance the surface lessee's ability to produce small grain and pulse crops on his State land lease. The production of dryland small grain and pulse crops will also enhance the revenue generated for the School Trust.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the quantity and distribution of employment. The land breaking will be accomplished by the surface lessee and no other labor force will be hired.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: No local and state tax base and tax revenues would be impacted under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the local or state tax base.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no demands for government services.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will place no demands for government services.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: No impacts would occur to the locally adopted environmental plans or goals under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative; The project will not impact locally adopted environmental plans and goals. The United States Department of Agriculture agencies (Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources and Conservation Service) will review this land breaking request by our lessee. The writer of this document envisions that they will approve of the land breaking request with there specific management plan of operation.</p>
<p>20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: No impacts would occur to access and quality or recreation associated with the State land under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project area has minimal recreational values (upland bird hunting) in its current status. The land breaking project will have minimal impacts to the recreational values associated with this tract of state land. There will be no impacts to recreational values on other bordering lands.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to density and distribution of population and housing under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the density and distribution of the population</p>

	and housing on this rural area.
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to native or traditional lifestyles or communities under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the social structures of the local communities.
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the State land.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no social or economic impacts that would occur Action Alternative: The cumulative affects of this project provides economic benefit to the surface lessee and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The dryland agriculture acreage on the State land will increase lessee's annual revenue from his State land lease holdings. The Department of Natural Resources will see additional revenue generated from this tract of State land for the School Trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By: _____ \S\ _____ Date: _____

Randy Dirkson

Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	No Action Alternative: The no action alternative; was not selected by the Glasgow Unit Office, Unit Manager. Action Alternative: Grant written permission to surface lessee Linda and Leland Bellanger to break 158.0 acres of crested wheatgrass vegetation located on this tract of State land. The 158.0 acres will then be converted to dryland agriculture for small grain and pulse crop production.
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	Action Alternative: The project will enhance the natural resources capabilities to produce dryland small grain and pulse

crops on the State land. The land breaking project will increase revenue for the surface lessees and the School Trust.

27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By: R. Hoyt Richards GUO manager 5/20/11
Name Title

/s/
Signature

Date: