

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

FOR THE

Prairie Elk/DNRC Land Exchange

Prepared by Chris Pileski
Eastern Land Office-DNRC
May 2011

**Prairie Elk/DNRC Land Exchange
Formal Public Review Distribution List**

N/A

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CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Prairie Elk Land Exchange
Proposed Implementation Date:	June 2011
Proponent:	Eastern Land Office of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the Prairie Elk Colony
Location:	15 miles south west of Wolf Point MT
County:	McCone

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Eastern Land Office (ELO) of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and the Prairie Elk Huterite Colony (PEHC) are proposing a land exchange of approximately 90 acres of state owned trust land for approximately 135 acres of private lands. The exchange is proposed in order to provide greater management flexibility between state and private land. Land management and recreational access would improve as a result of the exchange.

State Land Proposed for Exchange

County	Legal Description	# of Acres	Trust
McCone	That part of the N ½ lying north and west of Highway 528, Section 16 T26N-R46E	90	Common Schools
Total Acres		90	

Private Land Proposed for Exchange

County	Legal Description	# of Acres
McCone	SE ¼ SE ¼ and that part of the SW ¼ SE ¼ lying east of county road , Section 34 T26N-R45E	55
McCone	S ½ SW¼, Section 35, T26N-R45E	80
Total Acres		135

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Letters were sent in January of 2010 to resource professionals, adjacent landowners and other interested parties seeking comment on the proposed action. A public notice was placed in the Wolf Point Herald News and ran for two consecutive weeks. Comments were received from: the USDI BLM Miles City Field Office, MT Dept of Transportation, and Cusker Inc. A public hearing was conducted in Circle MT on May 12th 2011, no comments received at the public hearing.

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

DNRC Water Rights Division, transfer of water rights
 Montana Department of Transportation has a right of way easement with the DNRC for Highway 528 this right of way would be unchanged by this exchange.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

NO ACTION: Current land use activities of grazing and recreation would continue without change.

LAND EXCHANGE ALTERNATIVE: This alternative would exchange approximately 90 acres of state owned trust land for approximately 135 acres of private lands.

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.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to geological or soil resources are anticipated.

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.

DNRC would transfer an existing water right to the Prairie Elk Colony. Prairie Elk Creek flows through the private property that would be transferred to state ownership. No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts are anticipated.

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.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to air quality are anticipated as a result of the exchange.

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.

Existing land use patterns are expected to continue after the exchange on the 135 acres that will become state land. The 90 acres that will become private may be used for expansion of the existing PEHC operation.

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.

Prairie Elk Creek and the surrounding uplands associated with the 135 acres of private land that will be transferred to state ownership provide quality habitat for a variety of game and nongame species. The 90 acres of state land that would be transferred to private ownership is currently used as a sacrifice/feed area and holds little value to wildlife. No cumulative impacts on terrestrial, avian, and aquatic habitats are likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

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 no known threatened and endangered species in this general area. There are no documented studies suggesting the existence of T&E species in this area. There are no limited environmental resources within this area.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

No cultural resources have been identified on either the private or state lands. The DNRC archeologist was consulted regarding the exchange and expressed no concerns.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to historical or archeological sites is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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 proposed land exchange will not affect area aesthetics. No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to area aesthetics is anticipated as a result of the exchange.

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 would not use resources that are limited in the area. No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to historical or archeological sites is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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.

No other state or federal actions are known in this area. No studies or plans are known to exist for these tracts.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.

No adverse direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to human health and safety are anticipated as a result of the exchange.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Existing land use practices are expected to continue after the exchange.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to industrial, commercial or agricultural activities is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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.

The land exchange will not impact employment.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to employment is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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.

State trust land is tax exempt. As a result of the exchange one 135 acre parcel will become tax exempt when transferred from private to state ownership. The 90 acres of land transferred from state to private ownership will become taxable. On balance the exchange may result in a small decrease in taxable value.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to the local or state tax base are anticipated as a result of the exchange.

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 little to no effect on government services as a result of the proposed exchange.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to the demand for government services is anticipated as a result of the exchange

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.

There are no known environmental plans or goals involving the area.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to locally adopted environmental plans or goals are anticipated as a result of the exchange

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.

The 135 acres of private land that would be transferred to the state as a result of the proposed exchange would provide public access to a previously inaccessible block of 440 acres of BLM and an additional 640 acres of state land thus creating a block of legally accessible State and BLM land totaling 1,215 acres. The 90 acres of state land proposed to be transferred to private ownership is accessible to Highway 528 but due to its proximity to inhabited dwellings on adjacent private lands, discharge of firearms is prohibited therefore greatly reducing its recreational use potential. Access to the portion of state section 16 south of highway 528 would be unchanged by this exchange.

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.

The proposed exchange would result in no change in population or housing.

No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to population or housing is anticipated as a result of the exchange

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No impacts would be expected with either alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

No impacts would be expected with either alternative.

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 approximate 30 acres of private dryland farm ground, if leased as a cash lease would yield an estimated \$16/acre. The 105 acres of grazing land would support approximately 31 AUM's valued at the state minimum rental of \$6.97. Thus, the dryland farm ground is expected to bring \$480 and the grazing land \$216 for a total projected annual income of \$696.

The 90 acres of state land supports approximately 13 AUM's. The 13 AUM's at the current grazing rate for this parcel of \$6.97 yields an annual income of \$90.61

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Chris Pileski	Date: May 24, 2011
	Title: Area Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action, DNRC will recommend approval of exchange of the subject lands to the Board of Land Commissioners

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

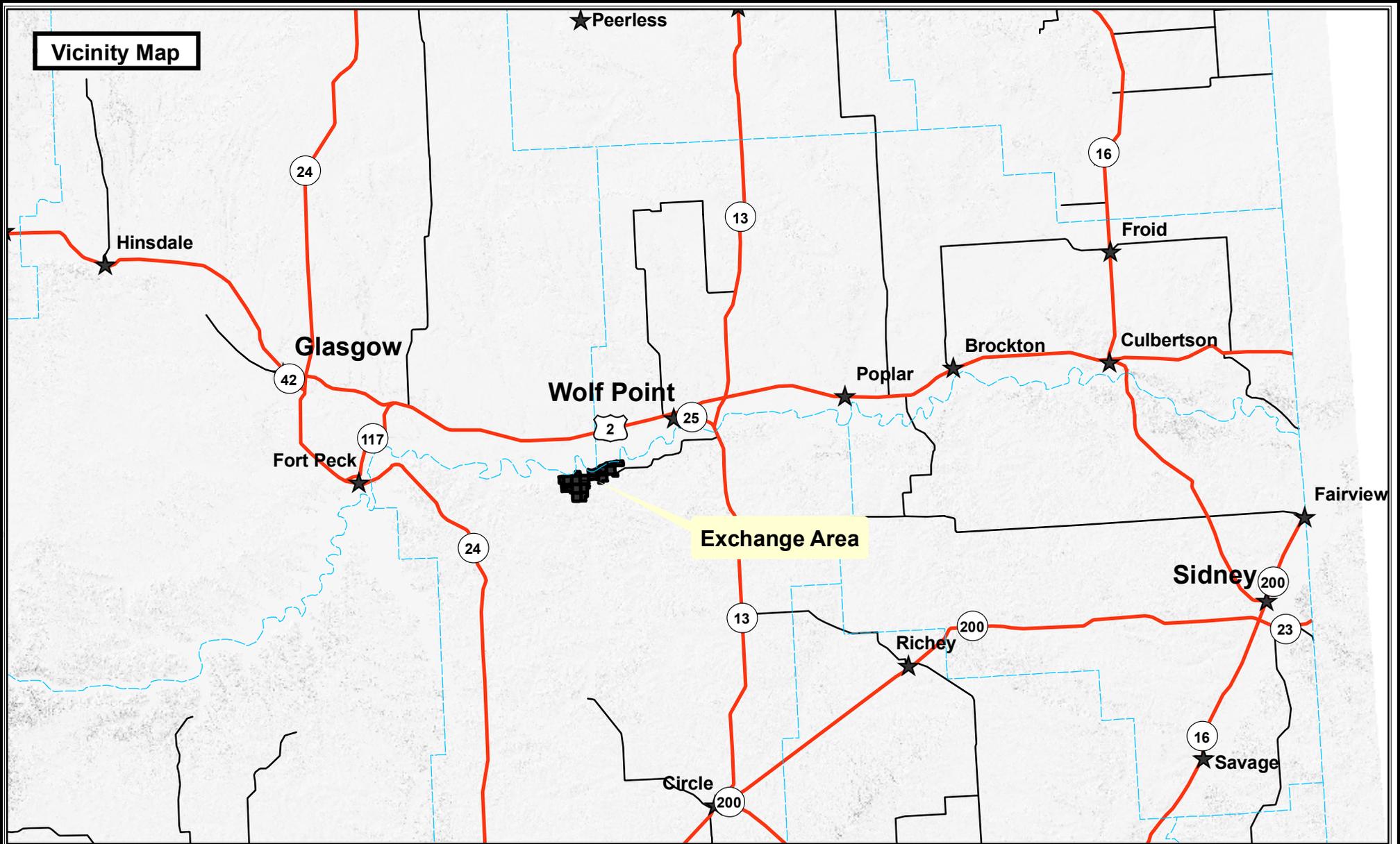
No significant impact.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Chris Pileski
	Title: Area Manager
Signature: /s/ Chris Pileski	Date: May 24, 2011

Vicinity Map



Legend

★ Cities and Towns	Interstate Highway	County Boundary
State Highway	PROJECT AREA	
U.S. Route		
Secondary Highway		

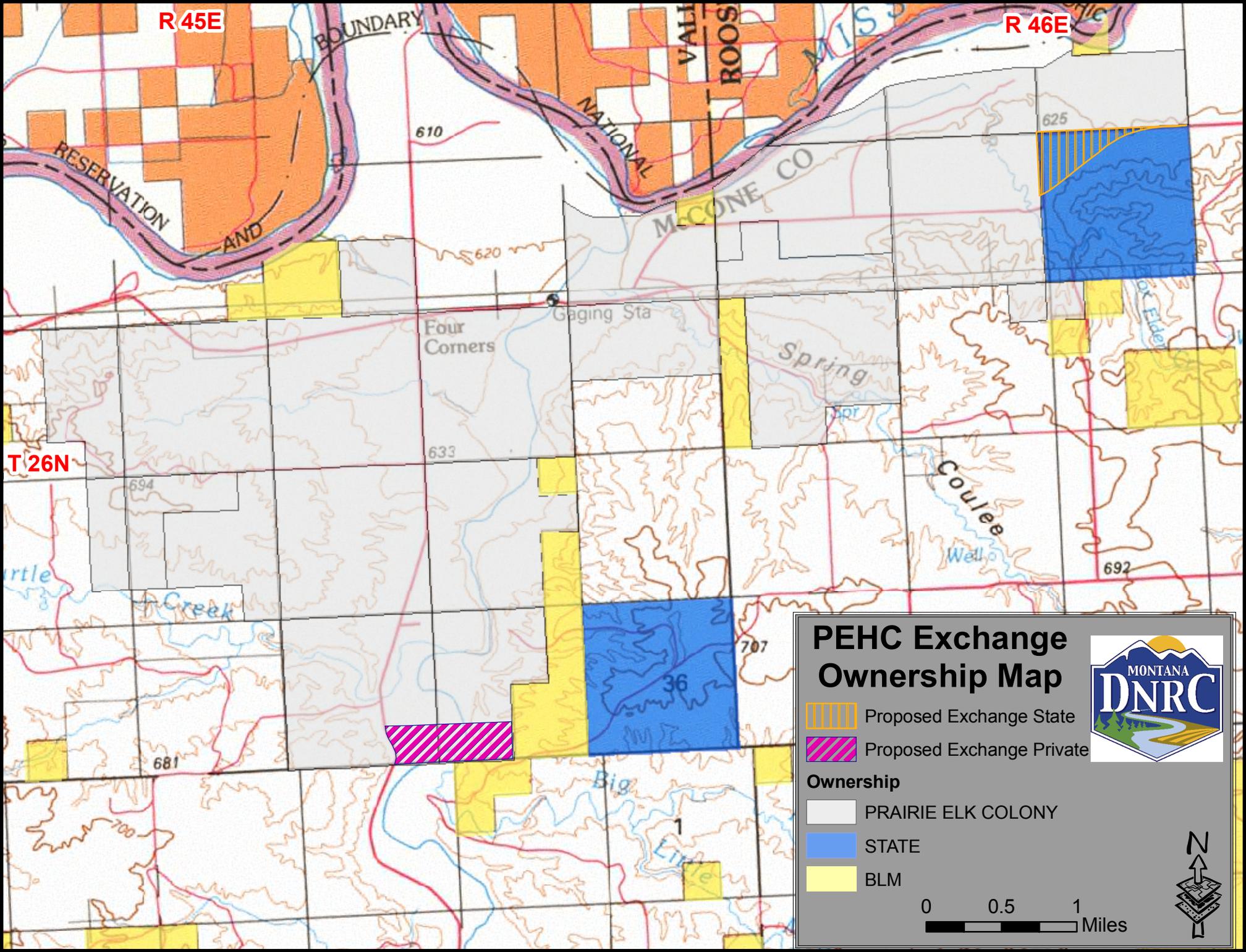


Map created 03/30/2010
DNRC/ELO/CP

R 45E

R 46E

T 26N



PEHC Exchange Ownership Map



-  Proposed Exchange State
-  Proposed Exchange Private

Ownership

-  PRAIRIE ELK COLONY
-  STATE
-  BLM



R 45E

T 26N

34

35

36

24 Acres

12 Acres

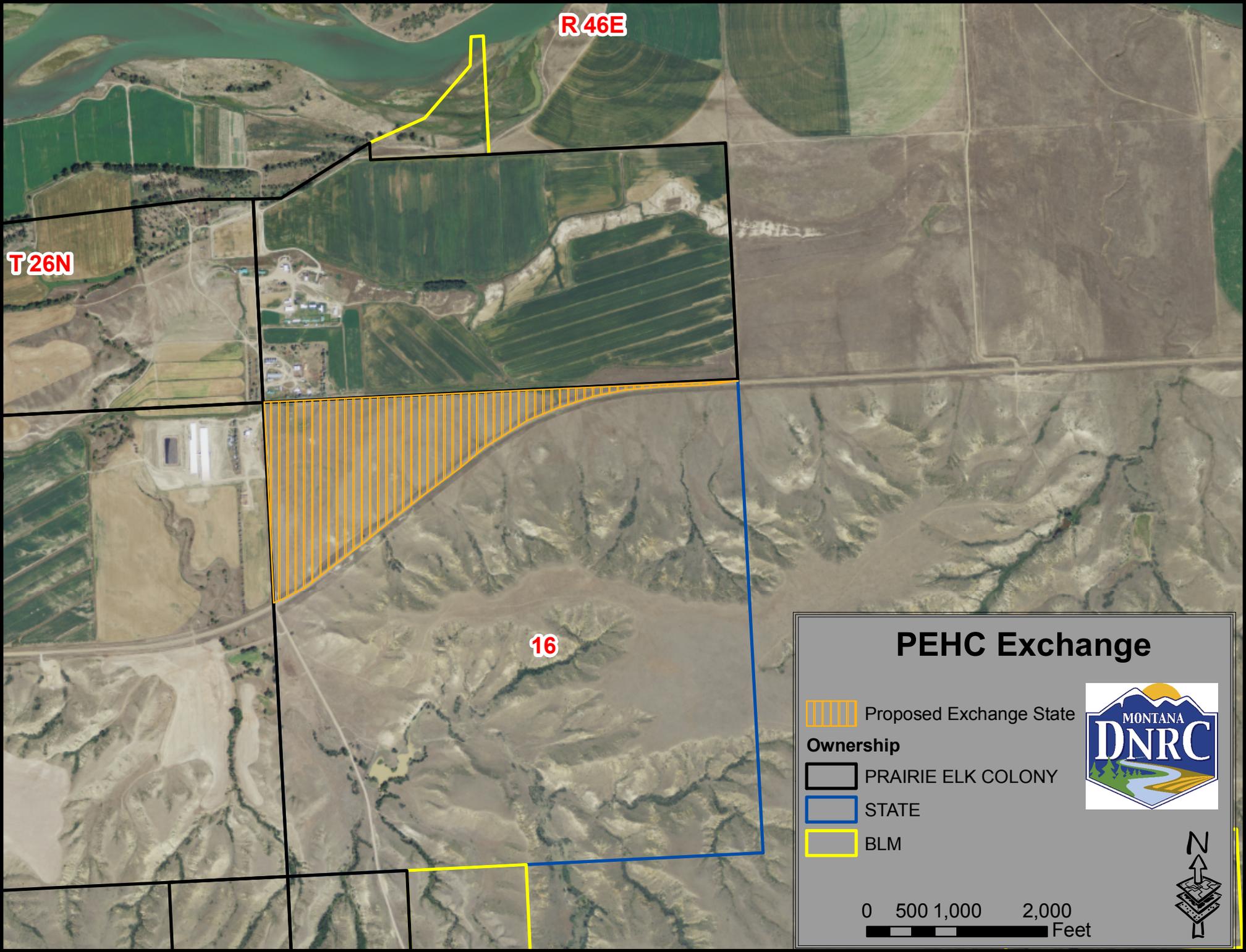
PEHC Exchange

-  Dryland Ag
-  Proposed Exchange Private

Ownership

-  BLM
-  STATE
-  PRAIRIE ELK COLONY





R 46E

T 26N

16

PEHC Exchange

 Proposed Exchange State

Ownership

 PRAIRIE ELK COLONY

 STATE

 BLM

