

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: First Peoples
Proposed: February 10th, 2012
Implementation Date: March 11th, 2012
Proponent: DNRC 8001 N. Montana Ave. Helena MT 59602
Location: mostly in T20N, R1E, Sec. 13 N ½ and a some of FWP lands in S ½ of 13
County: Cascade
Trust: Common School

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The parcel is currently being managed as CRP. The lessee has made several attempts to manage this and has been unsuccessful. It currently is over grown with weeds and other invasive species. In its current condition the DNRC is proposing to burn approximately 295 acres (240 DNRC and 55 FWP). By burning, we would be removing the thick duff layer which would make the parcel more receptive to future weed management treatments and possible seeding.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

In January of 2012 the DNRC, Helena Unit was approached by FWP to see if a prescribed fire could be performed on the First Peoples State Park. On January 31st 2012 Helena Unit Fire staff took a field visit to survey the accessibility of performing the prescribed fire. On February 24th, 2012 a scoping letter was sent out to the following people.

Kevin Chappell, Ag. & Grazing Bureau Chief, MT DNRC
Pat Rennie, Archaeologist MT DNRC
Richard Hopkins, Park Manager, MT FWP
Gary Olson, Wildlife Biologist, MT FWP
Ed Hastings, Local neighbor
Fairhaven Colony, Joe
Matt Crampton NRCS
Scott Hitchcock, NRCS

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

A burn permit is required. In Cascade county burn permits are required.
Smoke Management is regulated by the Montana / Idaho Smoke Management Group.
Some of the fire will be on FWP ownership and we will make contact with Richard Hopkins, Park Manager

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No action alternative: No prescribe burning would leave lessee with a weed infested CRP.
Proposed alternative: A prescribe fire conducted over two days. One of black lining the unit and another of burning the rest of the proposed area. (Follow-up CRP management is the lessee's responsibility and is not part of this EAC.)

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.

Soils on this site are mostly clay loam with some stoney loam in the center of the project area. Slopes are gentle, soils have some potential for compaction if operated on when wet, though site conditions would need to be dry to execute the burn so this should not be an issue. No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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 no water features on this site, only dry ephemeral draws. No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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 burning produces smoke. We are a member of the air shed group and we plan our burns on good dispersion days. The project is proposed for the spring period when no airshed restrictions are typically in place.

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 objective of the proposal is to use prescribed fire to remove much of the surface litter weeds and thatch from previous years. The burning itself would have no effect to the vegetation, as the weeds and other invasive species would regenerate. (The lessees follow-up actions which are not part of this EAC would be to control weeds to help get good vegetation established under the CRP contract.) No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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.

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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.

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

This area does have some historical and archaeological sites. FWP archaeologists have stated that have fire over the top of the surface would have little impact to them.

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.

This site can be seen from the county road and from the visitor center on top of the cliffs. With just burning of the surface fuels the area should be green and grassy within one year.

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.

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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.

There are no other actions under review which require DNRC decision.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i> |
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14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The only area of health and safety would be from smoke due to visibility on county road and inhalation. If smoke is thick and would be a problem for drivers we would put road tenders to direct traffic. With light fuels the times of heavy smoke should be of short duration.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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.

This would not create any new jobs.

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.

The project would have no effect on the tax base or revenues.

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

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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.

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

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 tract is accessible for recreation from the adjacent County road. Persons with a Conservation license could hunt here, those with a State Land Recreational Use license could conduct other general recreational uses. The project would not adversely affect recreation. In the long run, if the lessee follows through with CRP management, better grass cover and wildlife habitat may result, which could improve recreational use.

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.

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No direct or cumulative adverse affects are expected.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

While the First Peoples Buffalo Jump is a very unique feature in this area, the project would have no direct or cumulative adverse affects.

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 project would be completed as part of an Intermediate Fire training exercise with Volunteer Departments in Cascade County (and possibly other north central counties). DNRC, through the Forestry Division, Fire and Aviation Management Bureau has entered into Cooperative Fire Management agreements with all Counties in the State. As part of this agreement, DNRC provides (among other things) training to County Firefighters. It is through this context that DNRC is funding the state crews which would be part of this project. Other personnel taking part in the project are the Volunteer Firefighter trainees. No Trust funding is allocated for the project. The benefit for the Trust Lands is an indirect effect which would come from improved vegetation conditions when the lessee is able to bring the CRP acres into compliance with that contract.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: John Huston	Date: 3/7/2012
	Title: Helena Unit Fire Supervisor	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the alternative to conduct the prescribed burn as part of a fire training exercise with the local county volunteer firefighters.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The project will have no significant direct, indirect or cumulative adverse effects as proposed. The project will create conditions favorable for more successful weed control by the lessee, which would increase the likelihood of successful grass establishment under the CRP contract. The follow-up actions by the lessee to achieve this are not part of this decision, as they are already contractual requirements the lessee has on the CRP Contract through the FSA office in Cascade County. It is a fortunate coincidence that the joint objectives of fire training and land management are able to come together at this time and place.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: D.J. Bakken	
	Title: Helena Unit Manager	
Signature: 	Date: 3/8/2012	

First Peoples Prescribed Fire

