CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Robert & Terry Lee Carney-Expiring CRP to Agricultural Land Classification
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2012
Proponent:	Robert & Terry Lee Carney, PO Box 3, Dutton, MT 59433
Location:	Lease #3610, ALL, Section 33, T26N, R1E
County:	Teton
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

CRP contract #947B containing 642.20 acres expires on 9/30/2012. The lessees, Robert & Terry Lee Carney, have requested to break these expiring CRP acres. The CRP acres were not offered for re-enrollment. The tract was last farmed in 1988. The estimated acres that will be broke and returned to small grain production is 640.00 acres. The lessee plans to spray the CRP on July 1st and direct seed the proposed break area to winter wheat the fall of 2012. This will result in a payment reduction for early outing the CRP which the lessee has agreed to pay for.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

DNRC-Surface Owner
Robert & Terry Lee Carney-Lessees
Graham Taylor-MFWP
Montana Salinity Control Association
Montana Audubon Society

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

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny Robert & Terry Lee Carney permission to break the expiring CRP and return it to small grain production.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Robert & Terry Lee Carney permission to break the expiring CRP and return it to small grain production.

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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.

This tract consists of gently rolling topography. The below table outlines the soil types that will be broke.

Slope	Class	T-Factor	WEG	Estimated WW Yield	Acres	Section
0-4%	3E	5	6	41 bu/acre	203.20	33
4-8%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	403.60	33
0-2%	5W	5	6	0 bu/acre	33.20	33
TOTAL	3E				606.80	
TOTAL	5W				33.20	
TOTAL	BREAK				640.00	

Class 3 soils have severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants and require special conservation practices. Class 5 soils are subject to little or no erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat. The letter "e" shows that there is an erosion hazard unless close-growing plant cover is maintained. The letter "w" shows that water in or on the soil surface interferes with plant growth or cultivation. In some soils the wetness can be partly corrected by artificial drainage.

The class 3E soils have an expected yield of 40-41 bu/acre for winter wheat are susceptible to wind and water erosion. These erosion concerns will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. Clearly, the majority of the soils on this tract meet DNRC's land break requirements.

The class 5W soils have an expected yield of 0 bu/acre due to water on the soil surface. This year has been extremely wet and no water was on the soil surface. This soil should have relatively the same productivity as the 3E soils and is likely inaccurately mapped. The yield concerns for this soil type will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. The no-till farming practice aides in absorbing excess water and not allowing it to runoff onto this soil type. No-till farming will allow this soil type to become productive and have an equivalent yield to the adjacent soil.

The last noted practice type was CP CP-10 which is for already established grass. The reason for initial enrollment in CRP is for increased revenue and due to the lessee not wanting to pay a higher crop share due to the lease being competitively bid.

Jane Holzer, Montana Salinity Control Association commented, "State Lease #3610 Entire Section 33 T26N R1E Teton County. MSCA has no direct information regarding this site, but the aerial photos do not indicate any salinity problems." (See attached E-mail)

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 are no documented and/or recorded water rights associated with the tract. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

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 cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

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 existing vegetation is introduced species consisting of primarily tall, slender, and pubescent wheatgrass and alfalfa. The tract was last farmed in 1988. The vegetative community will be altered by the reclassification. The conversion of CRP to small grain production will increase the overall productivity of the tract as the current grass stand has very low vigor.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted and there were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

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.

Graham Taylor, Regional Wildlife Manager-FWP, commented, “I have made a cursory review of these leases (3610, 2141, and 4217) by review of aerial photos and with knowledge of the area/landscape and wildlife habitats involved. Did not make ground checks of same. Again, these CRP stands appear to represent good and excellent islands of upland bird, antelope and deer habitat in what is otherwise a sea of small grain fields. Loss of these CRP acres and the nesting and brood rearing habitats they represent will deal significant and detrimental blows to upland bird production and survival, large ungulate habitat security and forage and nongame species diversity. That being said, I can offer no alternative(s) and as such, cannot argue further for any other action, given the constraints of the CRP sign-up.”, See attached E-mail. FWP did not provide any site specific comments regarding this proposed break

Converting existing CRP acres to agricultural land will decrease wildlife thermal and hiding cover. This reduction of cover may adversely impact various wildlife species including songbirds, upland game birds, waterfowl, antelope, white tailed deer, and mule deer. Agricultural land may provide a limited food source for wildlife species including deer, antelope, upland game birds and migrating waterfowl. No comments were received from the Montana Audubon Society.

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 threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern associated with the proposed project area. Montana FWP did not provide site specific comments regarding wildlife, (see item #8). At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area. The project is a 640.00 acre CRP tract, which is only a very small portion of the total CRP acres held within Teton County.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted. There was zero animal species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

With the use of the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan, minimum cumulative effects are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted and he stated that due to the tract being previously farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.

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.

Since the field is currently in CRP and the surrounding tracts are all farmed, reclassification as agricultural land will not affect the aesthetics of the area.

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 demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed 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.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

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.

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The reclassification of this to agricultural land will increase the vegetative productivity of this tract. The estimated WW yield is 0-41 bu/acre so the weighted average estimated yield is 39 bu/acre. 39 bu/acre X $4.92/bu X 25% = $47.97/acre divided by 2 for 50/50 crop fallow equals $23.99/acre. The current CRP payment is $46.39/acre with a 44.56% share, but will not be sustained due to the contract expiring. The Common Schools trust would see an estimated return increase of $3.32/ac. In addition, the Common Schools trust will receive 25% of the FSA Direct Contract Payment (DCP).

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 proposed action will not significantly affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.

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 proposed action will increase the tax revenue due to the increased revenue generated in small grain production.

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 increases in traffic, no changes in traffic patterns, and no need for additional fire protection, or police services.

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on government services.

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.

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

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 of state land is rural and generally has low recreational value. This tract is legally accessible and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this state tract.

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 proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

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 proposed conversion of CRP to agricultural land will greatly improve the productivity on the tract and increase the return to the trust. The current CRP stand has lost its vigor and has very low productivity. This tract was not offered for renewal of the CRP contract due to its relatively high productivity. Therefore, converting this acreage to small grain production will provide the Common Schools trust with an estimated return of $23.99/acre. This is based on the expected 39 bu/acre yield, the 10 year average selling price of $4.92/bu, and a 50/50 crop/chemical fallow rotation. The expected return is in line with the adjacent Section 34, T26N, R1E that has a 9-year average return of $24.24/acre. No other unique circumstances exist.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Tony Nickol	**Date:** April 2, 2012
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Robert & Terry Lee Carney permission to break the expired CRP and return it to small grain production.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This tract of state land is adjacent to productive crop land. All acres meet current Departmental breaking policy, which indicate that soils are suitable for small grain production under no till farming practices. The lessees must work with FSA and NRCS and obtain a Conservation Plan and comply with all sod busting regulations. Breaking these acres will help meet TLMD objectives by increasing revenue to the school trust. An average of 39 bu/acre winter wheat or near $24.00 per acre annual return is expected for this acreage. Significant negative impacts are not expected with this 642.2 acre land break.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Erik Eneboe **Title:** Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC
Signature:	**Date**: April 4, 2012

29
28
27
25TH Road NE
17TH Lane NE
26N 1E
All, Section 33
T26N, R1E
32
33
34
Expiring CRP
640.00 acres
Proposed Break Area
Producing Oil
Wells (3)
24TH Road NE
Oil Tank Battery
05
04
03
25N 1E

Nickol, Tony

From: Jane Holzer [msca@3rivers.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 21, 2012 10:00 AM
To: Nickol, Tony
Subject: CRP breaking

CRP Breaking

State Lease #2141 N 1/2 T31N R2E Toole County
MSCA has no direct information regarding this site, but the aerial photos do not indicate any salinity problems.

State Lease #3610 Entire Section 33 T26N R1E Teton County
MSCA has no direct information regarding this site, but the aerial photos do not indicate any salinity problems

State Lease #4217 Numerous parcels
MSCA has no salinity projects near this north side of the Teton River (many south of the river for future reference), and the aerial photos do not indicate any salinity problems. As a note of caution, these soils are marginal which delayed good CRP forage establishment, we especially remember west of I-15.

Jane Holzer
Montana Salinity Control Association
PO Box 909
Conrad, MT 59425
(406) 278-3071
msca@3rivers.net

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Nickol, Tony

From: Taylor, Graham
Sent: Thursday, March 22, 2012 3:39 PM
To: Nickol, Tony
Subject: CRP break of leases 3610,2141 and 4217

Tony,
I have made a cursory review of these leases (3610, 2141, and 4217) by review of aerial photos and with knowledge of the area/landscape and wildlife habitats involved. Did not make ground checks of same. Again, these CRP stands appear to represent good and excellent islands of upland bird, antelope and deer habitat in what is otherwise a sea of small grain fields. Loss of these CRP acres and the nesting and brood rearing habitats they represent will deal significant and detrimental blows to upland bird production and survival, large ungulate habitat security and forage and nongame species diversity.

That being said, I can offer no alternative(s) and as such, cannot argue further for any other action, given the constraints of the CRP sign-up.

Graham Taylor
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