CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**CRP Break Request**
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2013
Proponent:	Lessee: R&T Farms Inc
Location:	Lease #6928 T35N R9E N2 Sec. 36
County:	Hill County
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent is requesting permission to break approximately 315.83 acres of classified agland expired CRP on the State Land identified above for dryland small grain production.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The Montana Department of Resources and Conservation/ Trust Lands Management Division (DNRC/TLMD) – Helena, MT and the Northeastern Land Office (NELO) Lewistown, USDA-FSA—Hill County Office, Havre, Lessee/s have involvement in this project. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks has been scoped for species effects.

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

USDA-NRCS—Havre Field Office, Lessees must obtain an updated Conservation Plan to accommodate this renewed cropland acreage.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the DNRC **does not** allow the proponent to break these acres for dryland small grain production.
Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the DNRC **does** allow the proponent to break these acres for dryland small grain production.

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.

There are approximately eighty (80) acres of class 4 soils in the proposed project area. These soils have to potential to erode either by wind or water. The lessee utilizes no-till chemical fallow farming practices in their operation. These practices effectively mitigate any concerns and potential impacts from breaking the class 4 soils.

There is approximately six (six) acres of class 6 soils in this tract. These soils have the potential for flooding and therefore are not suitable for breaking. There will be a 50 foot vegetative buffer around this area.

Using proper conservation techniques no negative effects on the soil quality, stability or moisture 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.

There are no important surface or groundwater resources in the project area. Any watercourse on the tract will remain in permanent cover.

No important groundwater resources are expected to be impacted.

No cumulative effects to the water resources 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.

Sod busting and farm equipment have the potential to generate airborne dust. These activities will minimally affect air quality for a very limited amount of time.

Using proper conservation techniques such as no-till practice 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 proposed break would eliminate the present CRP stand consisting of introduced species Crested Wheatgrass and Alfalfa.

No rare plants or cover types are present.

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.

Any resident wildlife or birds accustomed to this habitat will be redistributed. A Scoping letter was sent to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks for the habitat values and uses by wildlife. Their response as follows:

35N9E36- The habitat surrounding this parcel is already primarily cropland and the conversion of this parcel should not have a significant impact on local wildlife populations. There appears to be some riparian/wetland habitat along the northern edge of the parcel. FWP recommends a 50-foot vegetated buffer around these areas.

No aquatic habitat exists in the project area therefore there will be no effect to aquatic life.

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.

The Burrowing Owl is listed as a species of concern in this township. Currently there are no known active Sage-Grouse Leks in Hill County.
The cumulative effects of the proposed break would be the removal of non-preferred habitat and the dispersal of any resident species into nearby permanent cover.

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

There are no archaeological, historical or paleontological resources present. This all previously farmed land.

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 CRP Break is not located on a prominent topographic feature.

This tract of state land does not provide any unique scenic qualities.

The proposed activity will be conducted in a remote area, so there would be no change to the aesthetics in either alternative.

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 demands on limited resources are required for this project.

No direct or cumulative effects to environmental resources are anticipated.

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 known projects or plans being considered on the tracts 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.

There is always some human safety risks associated with operating heavy machinery. The proponent and their employees accept these risks and will mitigate them as appropriate.

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

The project would greatly increase agricultural production thereby increasing revenues to the School Trusts for this acreage. The Class 3E soil yields generated using the Montana Crop Yield Model show these soils will yield 32-35 bu/acre spring wheat and 36-40 bu/acre winter wheat. These yields can be expected under a high level of management such as that required by a USDA/FSA Conservation Plan.

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.

No jobs will be created.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to the employment market.

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.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue for the proposed project.

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 Montana DNRC requires that the lessees must obtain an NRCS-Conservation Plan for this tract of land. Furthermore, in order to break the proposed acreage, the soils have to pass the strict requirements set by Montana DNRC's Land Breaking Policy. All soils within the project area have passed that criteria set by the policy.

Any watercourses will remain in permanent cover.

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.

There are no wilderness areas or access routes through this 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 break will not affect any unique quality 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 action alternative would increase the return to the trust. Estimated return to the School Trusts could average from $15.00 per acre per year, to $50.00 per acre per year.
Non-action alternative would have the potential to diminish return to the trust from this tract.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Monte McNally Title: Land Use Specialist	
Signature: /s/ Monte N McNally		Date: 6/4/13

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the **Alternative B (Proposed Action),** and recommend that the DNRC **does** allow the proponent to break the expired CRP on this tract as allowed by their conservation plan.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

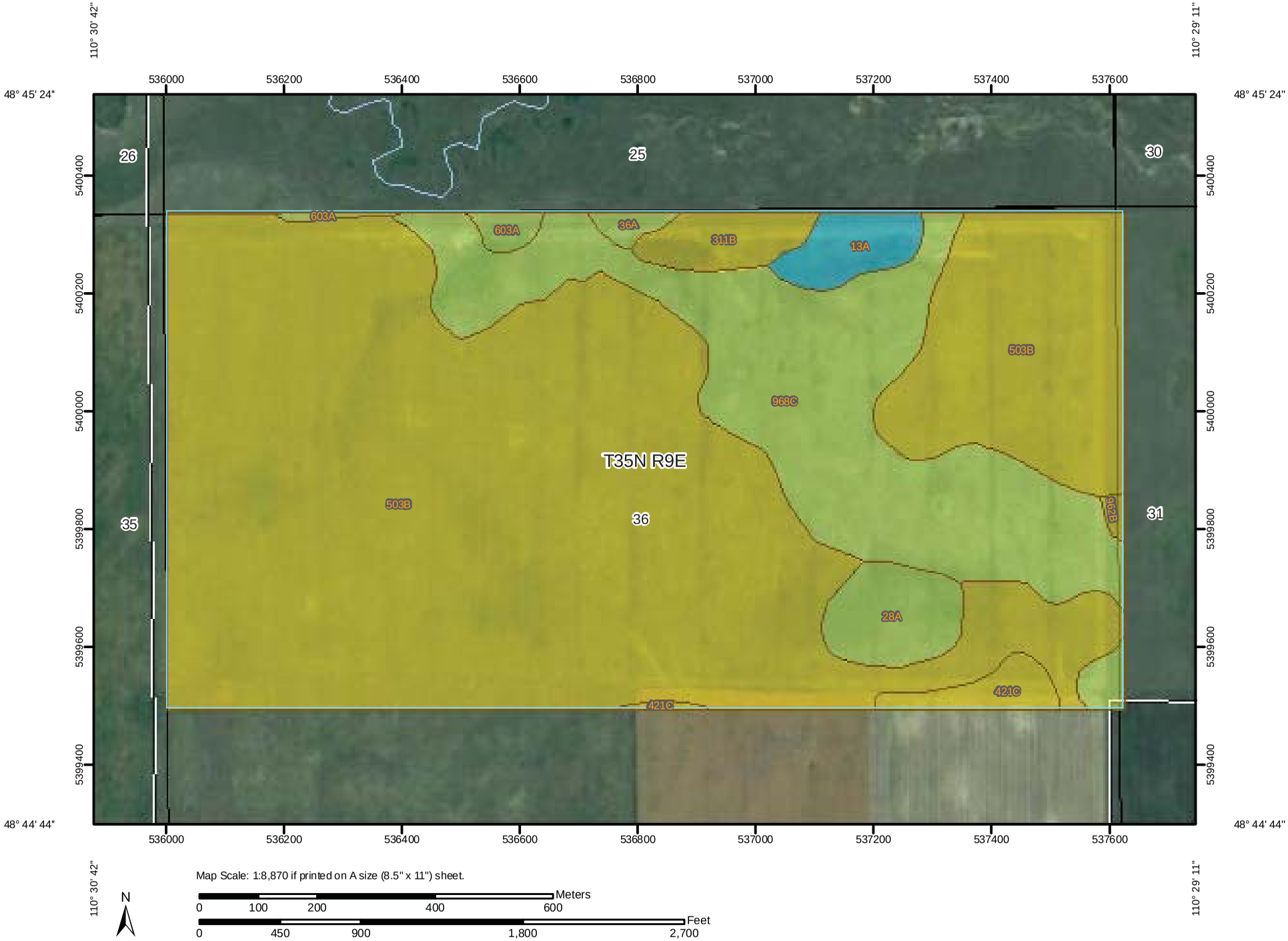
I have evaluated the potential environmental affects and have determined that by using the proper conservation techniques and mitigating habitat loss by utilizing an eligible buffer practice as outlined and planned by the NRCS will result in minimal cumulative long term effects to Air, Soil, and Water Quality, and to important wildlife habitat.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

	EIS		More Detailed EA	XXX	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Barny Smith Title: Unit Manager, Lewistown Unit	
Signature: /s/ Barny D. Smith		Date: 6/4/13

Nonirrigated Capability Class—Hill County, Montana
(L#6928CRP)



MAP LEGEND

Area of Interest (AOI)

- Area of Interest (AOI)

Soils

- Soil Map Units

Soil Ratings

- Capability Class - I
- Capability Class - II
- Capability Class - III
- Capability Class - IV
- Capability Class - V
- Capability Class - VI
- Capability Class - VII
- Capability Class - VIII
- Not rated or not available

Political Features

- Cities
- PLSS Township and Range
- PLSS Section

Water Features

- Streams and Canals

Transportation

- Rails
- Interstate Highways
- US Routes
- Major Roads
- Local Roads

MAP INFORMATION

Map Scale: 1:8,870 if printed on A size (8.5" × 11") sheet.

The soil surveys that comprise your AOI were mapped at 1:24,000.

Warning: Soil Map may not be valid at this scale.

Enlargement of maps beyond the scale of mapping can cause misunderstanding of the detail of mapping and accuracy of soil line placement. The maps do not show the small areas of contrasting soils that could have been shown at a more detailed scale.

Please rely on the bar scale on each map sheet for accurate map measurements.

Source of Map: Natural Resources Conservation Service
Web Soil Survey URL: http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov
Coordinate System: UTM Zone 12N NAD83

This product is generated from the USDA-NRCS certified data as of the version date(s) listed below.

Soil Survey Area: Hill County, Montana
Survey Area Data: Version 12, Jan 12, 2012

Date(s) aerial images were photographed: 7/19/2005

The orthophoto or other base map on which the soil lines were compiled and digitized probably differs from the background imagery displayed on these maps. As a result, some minor shifting of map unit boundaries may be evident.

Nonirrigated Capability Class

Nonirrigated Capability Class— Summary by Map Unit — Hill County, Montana (MT041)				
Map unit symbol	**Map unit name**	**Rating**	**Acres in AOI**	**Percent of AOI**
13A	McKenzie clay, 0 to 1 percent slopes	6	5.9	1.7%
28A	Nishon clay loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	4	8.6	2.5%
36A	Chinook fine sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	4	1.4	0.4%
311B	Ferd-Creed-Gerdrum complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3	6.1	1.8%
421C	Joplin-Hillon loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes	3	4.3	1.3%
503B	Telstad-Joplin loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3	242.2	71.5%
603A	Havre-Harlake clay loams, 0 to 2 percent slopes	4	2.3	0.7%
962B	Fortbenton loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	3	0.6	0.2%
968C	Fortbenton-Hillon complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	4	67.4	19.9%
Totals for Area of Interest			**338.7**	**100.0%**

Description

Land capability classification shows, in a general way, the suitability of soils for most kinds of field crops. Crops that require special management are excluded. The soils are grouped according to their limitations for field crops, the risk of damage if they are used for crops, and the way they respond to management. The criteria used in grouping the soils do not include major and generally expensive landforming that would change slope, depth, or other characteristics of the soils, nor do they include possible but unlikely major reclamation projects. Capability classification is not a substitute for interpretations that show suitability and limitations of groups of soils for rangeland, for woodland, or for engineering purposes.

In the capability system, soils are generally grouped at three levels-capability class, subclass, and unit. Only class and subclass are included in this data set.

Capability classes, the broadest groups, are designated by the numbers 1 through 8. The numbers indicate progressively greater limitations and narrower choices for practical use. The classes are defined as follows:

Class 1 soils have few limitations that restrict their use.

Class 2 soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices.

Class 3 soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices, or both.

Class 4 soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both.

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.

Class 6 soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Class 7 soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to grazing, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Class 8 soils and miscellaneous areas have limitations that preclude commercial plant production and that restrict their use to recreational purposes, wildlife habitat, watershed, or esthetic purposes.

Rating Options

Aggregation Method: Dominant Condition

Component Percent Cutoff: *None Specified*

Tie-break Rule: Higher