DEQ OPENCUT MINING PROGRAM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Lee Site Proposed Implementation Date: 10/00

Proponent: MK Weeden Construction

Type and Purpose of Action: Proponent has submitted an application to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for a 6-acre permit to mine 20,000 c.y. of borrow. The site is located in a flat filed. The present land use of the site and the surrounding area is pasture. A petroleum tank farm is being constructed next to the site. There are no other significant features in the area.

Proponent has submitted all application materials required under the Opencut Mining Act and the Rules and Regulations governing the Act. They propose to properly prepare the site, remove the mine material from a 3-acre pit up to 5-feet deep, and reclaim the site to a postmining land use of rangeland. Proponent is legally bound through their reclamation permit to reclaim the site. The estimated date for completion of final reclamation is 5/2001.

Location: SW7, T12N, R16E County: Fergus

N = Not present or no impact will occur.
Y = Impacts may occur (explain under Potential Impacts).

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
1. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY, AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactible, or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Is any on-site waste disposal planned? Are any special reclamation features planned? Are there special reclamation considerations?	[Y] Geology and Topography. The proposed site is on the flat valley floor between the Snowy Mountains and the Little Belt Mountains. There are no unusual geologic features. Soil and Overburden. The soil appears to be 6 to 12 inches thick. All soil material will be salvaged and stockpiled for future reclamation use or direct hauled to areas ready for final reclamation. Roads, Waste Disposal, and Grading. The site is accessed from the tank farm construction site and is about 200 feet east of that site. A 200 foot long by about 40 foot wide haul path will be used to take borrow to the tank site. No waste will be buried on site. The site will be reclaimed to pasture and hayland with 5:1 sideslopes and a relatively flat pit floor. It does not appear that surface water or groundwater needs to be taken into consideration in the grading plan. The site will be blended into the surrounding topography.
2. 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?	[N] Surface Water. The site is located in a flat field with no surface water in the area. Groundwater and Wells. Groundwater does not appear to be a factor at this site. There are no wells in the area that could be affected. Other. The operator has committed to proper on-site fuel storage and to taking appropriate measures to protect surface and groundwater.
3. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	[N] Pollutants and particulates will be produced when the operation is active. Proponent is required to comply with state air quality regulations. They have committed to spraying as needed to suppress dust.

4. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY, AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	[Y] Premining Vegetation. The site vegetation consists of seeded pasture. Postmining Vegetation. The landowner wants the site seeded to pasture/hayland mix consisting of orchardgrass, intermediate wheatgrass, and alfalfa. Site Protection and Weed Control. Proponent will implement adequate site protection and management measures until seeded vegetation is established. They will control noxious weeds as specified by the local weed district. The Montana Natural Heritage Program reports no occurrences of plants of special concern on record for the area. Abundant similar habitat exists in the area.
5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN, AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds, or fish?	[N] The Montana Natural Heritage Program reports no occurrences of animals of special concern on record for the area. Abundant similar habitat exists in the area.
6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE, OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or an endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Species of special concern?	[N] None of the mentioned resources appear to be present. Similar habitat is abundant in the area. No wetland, riparian, or other uncommon habitat will be affected.
7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources present?	[N] The site was walked and no cultural resources were found. If cultural resources are found during mining and reclamation operations, proponent has committed to promptly notifying the State Historic Preservation Office and routing the operation around the site of discovery for a reasonable time until salvage can be made.
8. 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?	[N] The site is in a rural area and will be used on a short-term basis. There are no nearby residences. The aesthetic impact will be minimal.
9. 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?	[N] The operation will not use resources that are limited in the area. The operation should not affect or be affected by other activities in the area.
10. IMPACTS ON OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are there other studies, plans, or projects on this tract?	[N] Author is not aware of any environmental studies, plans, or projects on this tract.

IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
11. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	[N] This project should not significantly increase health and safety risks in the area if the proponent and landowner manage the operation and site in a responsible manner. Proponent is required to comply with OSHA and MSHA regulations.
12. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	[N] Six (6) acres will be temporarily taken out of agricultural production.
13. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move, or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	[N] No significant impacts are anticipated.
14. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	[N] Tax revenues have not been significantly affected by similar projects in the state.
15. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to	[N] No government services should be significantly affected.

existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	
16. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	[N] Author is not aware of any other environmental plans or goals. The local zoning authority has been contacted and clearance obtained.
17. 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?	[N] There are no wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through the site. There is minimal recreational potential within the tract.
18. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	[N] No significant impacts are anticipated.
19. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	[N] No significant impacts are anticipated.
20. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	[N] No significant impacts are anticipated.
21. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	[N] Author is not aware of such circumstances.

22. Alternatives Considered: The department would deny an application for a proposed operation if the application is incomplete or does not comply with the requirements of the Opencut Mining Act and the Rules and Regulations governing the Act. The operator could then withdraw the application, submit a modified application for the site, or submit an application for another site.

23. Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups or Individuals Contacted: Agencies and individuals involved in the process include the Montana Natural Heritage Program, State Historic Preservation Office, local zoning authority, county weed control board, and landowner.

24. Other Governmental Agencies with Jurisdiction, List of Permits That May Be Needed: Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Air and Waste Management Program regarding air quality and Water Protection Bureau regarding water discharge, and MSHA and OSHA regarding mine safety.

25. Magnitude and Significance of Potential Impacts: If permits and plans are followed, any impacts should be temporary or relatively insignificant and confined to the permit area. Implementation of the Mining and Reclamation Plan should return the permit area to an aesthetically pleasing and useful condition.

26. Regulatory Impact on Private Property: The analysis conducted in response to the Private Property Assessment Act indicates no impact. The Department does not plan to deny the application or impose conditions that would restrict the use of private property.

Recommendation for Further Environmental Analysis:

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

EA Checklist Prepared By: Mark Carlstrom Title: Mine Reclamation Specialist Date: 10/13/00

Approved By: Jerry Burke Title: Opencut Mining Program Supervisor, IEMB

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Signature Date