

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

PROPONENT: MOL, LLP (James D. Mildenberger) SITE NAME: MOL Site

LOCATION: NW 1/4 NW 1/4, Sec 29, T 6 N, R 20 W COUNTY: Ravalli

### TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION:

The applicant proposes to permit a new gravel pit and to transport 300,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from the 14.4-acre pit located ½ mile east of the town of Hamilton. To the west, Ravalli County has a permitted site adjoining the proposed operation. The applicant would reclaim the site back to pasture. The site would be approximately 16 feet deep, mining westerly into a gravel bank, and would match the final level of the Ravalli County pit to the north. It would be reclaimed with graded slopes of no more than 3:1, be topsoiled and re-seeded back to grass with trees planted along the west and south sides. Final reclamation would be done by October 2013.

### COMMENTS RECEIVED ON MOL DRAFT EA

[Water](#)

[Asphalt](#)

[Property Values](#)

[Aesthetics](#)

[Noise](#)

[Zoning](#)

1. COMMENT: I am concerned about my water well and our water supply.  
RESPONSE: This operation will not intercept the groundwater and no fuel or asphalt are planned to be stored on site. Water wells in the area will not be affected by this operation.
2. COMMENT: The Draft EA says no asphalt plant will be on site. Where will it be? The current odor is terrible.  
RESPONSE: The EA addressed only this proposed gravel pit where there is no asphalt plant planned. The existing Ravalli County gravel pit adjacent to the north has an asphalt plant that will remain there. Regardless of the decision to issue this permit to the MOL Partnership, the county asphalt plant will stay where it is. Aggregates would be hauled to the plant from pits offsite in any case. The odors coming from an asphalt plant are not regulated by any state or county agency at this time.
3. COMMENT: Will this mine devalue our property?  
RESPONSE: Typically, the taxable value of property surrounding a newly-opened gravel pit is not affected. However, the asking price and the number of individuals who would buy property next to a pit are probably negatively affected. We acknowledge the fact that short-term sales of land near active mining can be affected, but we only have statutory authority to preserve taxable value, which we view as that value associated with long-term, reclaimed land following reclamation. Taxes generated by mining and selling aggregates are also positive factors when looking at the overall tax picture.
4. COMMENT: I would like a better discussion of the aesthetic impacts of this proposal since the current gravel pit is an eyesore. Where will the gravel be hauled to and how will it leave the pit area?  
RESPONSE: The proposed pit is separate from the existing pit on paper and with responsible parties. However, in reality, the two pits will look like a single, combined operation since the mines share common boundaries and gravel from the new pit will be hauled directly into the old pit. There will not be any new access to public roads because the gravel will be hauled out through the old county pit. Reclamation and the overall appearance of the finished pit will be much the same as the existing pit except that there will be some trees planted around the new pit and topsoil covered with grass will cover the entire slopes.

5. **COMMENT:** Your explanation of noise impacts appears to be based on statistical data rather than on human reality.  
**RESPONSE:** The decibel rating used in the Draft EA was taken from federal safety standards. Those standards are based on human hearing loss data and are real workplace safety numbers. The thing that we do not attempt to evaluate is the nuisance value of sounds because they are so subjective. What is irritating to one person is not irritating to another, much the same as barking dogs. While we understand that you may not like to hear the sounds of the working gravel pit, there is nothing in the opencut law that requires the operators to be quiet. The operator has committed to putting up a row of trees between the pit and the nearest residences in a reasonable attempt to mitigate the effects of sight and sound impacts on them.

6. **COMMENT:** What does it mean that county zoning clearance has been obtained, and who will maintain the county easement along the west side of the permit?

**RESPONSE:** Zoning clearance means that the county planning department has signed a document that states the planned operation complies with current county zoning requirements and that the site is not zoned as residential. It does not mean that the county planning office agrees with this proposal, but that the proposal does not violate any existing planning regulations in place at this time. The county easement question is another issue. There is no indication from the application that there is any unacceptable impact on any county easements as far as we know. The applicant, MOL, LLP, has stated that it has the right to mine the property shown on the map and described in its application material. If there is some conflict between the mine plan and the county easement, we would appreciate knowing about it.

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE AND EXAMPLE/GUIDANCE QUESTIONS	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p><b>1. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</b> Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>The proposed mine is located on a gravel bench below the western foothills of the Sapphire Mountain Range. The deposit consists of glacial debris overlying deeper valley bedrock. The site is currently used as an irrigated alfalfa field.</p> <p>Topsoil, which is 10 to 14 inches thick, will be salvaged and stockpiled away from the pit, road and facility area, on the east side above the ditch.</p> <p>Following mining, grading and ripping, the soils will be replaced, disked and seeded back to pasture. There are no fragile, compactible or unstable soils present, no unusual geologic features and no special reclamation considerations.</p>
<p><b>2. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:</b> 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?</p>	<p>The nearest pre-mining surface water is an irrigation ditch, 50 feet east of the site. The pit will not extend into the ditch.</p> <p>There are 24 water wells registered in section 29, with an average depth of 64 feet, average static water levels of 16 feet and with an average yield of 36 gallons per minute. The wells in this area are mostly domestic drinking water wells with a couple of public water supplies for subdivisions and some irrigation wells. These wells are relatively shallow, and they have fairly high yields. This operation will not intercept groundwater and will have no discharge into flowing water.</p> <p>Special precautions will be taken to minimize possible contamination of the ground and surface water. No bulk fuel will be stored onsite. Portable equipment with fuel tanks such as loaders and trucks will be in various places within the facility. Any accidental spills or leaks from equipment will be excavated and disposed of. No waste or trash will be disposed of at the site. With these precautions, the quality and quantity of the groundwater should not be adversely impacted.</p>
<p><b>3. AIR QUALITY:</b> Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>Air quality will be degraded at times and there will be an increase in particulate matter. Dozers, loaders, crushers and trucking equipment typically cause dusty conditions in disturbed soil sites. Dust will be controlled around the site by water truck. The site is not within a Class I</p>

	air shed. There would be no asphalt plant directly on this new permit, although an existing plant adjacent to the north will continue to receive gravel from this and other pits.
<b>4. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:</b> Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	There are no known rare or sensitive plants in the site area. Vegetation consists of alfalfa and covers 80% of the ground. It will be removed and planted with grass species compatible with the proposed reclaimed use. There are no rare plants or cover types present.
<b>5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</b> Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?	Although the area is used primarily for hay production, it also supports populations of deer, rodents, song birds, coyotes, foxes, raptors, insects and various other animal species. Population numbers for these species are not known. The proposed mine is not expected to significantly degrade wildlife populations.
<b>6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</b> Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Species of special concern?	The Natural Heritage Program and site evaluations have not revealed any endangered or threatened plant or animal species that would be directly affected. Bald eagles are known to range all along the Bitterroot River Valley, but no nesting sites are known on or near the proposed permit area. No adverse effects are anticipated on the eagles as a result of this proposed action.
<b>7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:</b> Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?	Although there are cultural values in the general area, this site has been previously disturbed by modern man, thus destroying the integrity of resources that may have existed. A surface reconnaissance did not discover any cultural, historical or archeological resources. The operator will give appropriate protection to any values or artifacts discovered in the affected area. If significant resources are found, the operation will be routed around the site of discovery for a reasonable time until salvage can be conducted. The State Historic Preservation Office will be promptly notified.
<b>8. AESTHETICS:</b> Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?	<p>The site is located in a scenic, but not unique area. There will be a temporary deterioration of aesthetics while the operation is under way. However, reclamation will return the area to a visually acceptable landscape.</p> <p>The site is visible by homes and roads in the local area. Hours of operation for the site are 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, Monday through Friday, except that they may be extended slightly for special projects.</p> <p>Noise levels generated by a crusher, loaders and truck traffic hauling to various projects at the pit are generally within the range of 60 to 90 decibels measured on-site, decreasing with distance. As a comparison, sound levels for ordinary activities such as close conversation at 60 decibels and music from a radio at 70 decibels are considered to be moderate. Levels above 90 decibels are severe, and prolonged exposure to employees on site without hearing protection could lead to hearing loss. These impacts would be intermittent and of relatively short duration. Trees would be planted to the east and south to provide a sight and sound barrier.</p>
<b>9. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:</b> Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	No
<b>10. IMPACTS ON OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</b> Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	No

**IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION**

<b>RESOURCE</b>	<b>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES</b>
<p><b>11. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:</b> Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p><b>Heavy equipment and facilities including crushers, trucks and loaders will create hazards, but the operator must comply with all MSHA and OSHA regulations. The operator must employ proper precautions to avoid accidents.</b></p> <p><b>Excessive and prolonged noise and light could increase stress for nearby residents and induce difficulty sleeping, but ongoing operations are not planned for nighttimes. Both of these effects may be considered harmful to human health if the activities are continuous. This proposed operation should not significantly affect human health.</b></p>
<p><b>12. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:</b> Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p><b>The acreage listed in the Type and purpose of Action will be taken out of agricultural/grazing and put into industrial/commercial use. Upon completion of mining, the land will be reclaimed to rangeland with possible commercial development.</b></p>
<p><b>13. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:</b> Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>14. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:</b> Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>15. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:</b> Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?</p>	<p><b>The operation will require periodic site evaluations by DEQ staff until such time as the site is successfully reclaimed to the required post-mining use. However, these evaluations are usually performed in conjunction with other area operations.</b></p>
<p><b>16. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:</b> Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p><b>City/County zoning clearance has been obtained.</b></p>
<p><b>17. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:</b> Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?</p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>18. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:</b> Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>19. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:</b> Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p><b>The area has generally been a gravel pit next to a hay field with some housing development near the county airport in the past. The county gravel pit adjacent on the north side has been mined and asphalt has been produced for years, although the mine is reaching depletion. Some had anticipated that the pit would be reclaimed, but will now notice the life of the pit expanded. They will notice a continuation of equipment working and truck traffic coming and going as it has for years. Upon reclamation, the site would be reclaimed to pasture with possible commercial development.</b></p>
<p><b>20. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:</b> Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>21. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</b></p>	<p><b>No</b></p>

**Alternatives Considered:**

- A. **Denial:** The pit would not be permitted and the owner of the gravel resource would be denied full utilization of his property at this time.
- B. **Approval of the application with mitigating conditions:** The Plan of Operation has been written with mitigating conditions including hours of operation, water protection, soil salvage and full reclamation.

**Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups, or Individuals contacted:**

State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Heritage Program, Ravalli County Weed Control District, Ravalli County Planning for zoning. The EA was distributed to local residents for comments and were given until December 19th to respond. Comments were received and responses are incorporated into this document.

**Other Governmental Agencies with Jurisdiction, List of Permits Needed:**

Mine Safety and Health Administration for safety permit; DEQ for Air Quality Permit.

**Magnitude and Significance of Potential Impacts:**

Impacts are unlikely to be significant on the general environment because of the scope and location of the project, the lack of significant or threatened wildlife or habitat, and because of the mitigation measures placed in the Plan of Operations.

**Regulatory Impact on Private Property:**

The analysis conducted in response to the Private Property Assessment Act indicates no impact is expected on the applicant.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

- EIS                       MORE DETAILED EA                       NO FURTHER ANALYSIS

INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS EA: None

Written By: Rod Samdahl Date: Reclamation Specialist  
(Signature)

Approved By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)