DS-252

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	
Project Name: Additional Hewitt Lake Compressor Station for Natural Gas.	Proposed Implementation Date: April 29, 2004
Proponent: Bitter Creek Pipelines, L.L.C., 1250 West Century Avenue, Bismarck, North Dakota 58503	
Type and Purpose of Action: Bitter Creek Pipelines, LLC is proposing to construct an additional compressor station on State land. The purpose and location of the compressor station is that this tract of State land is located where the gathering system has the highest pressures. The area to be disturbed for the compressor station is .18 acres.	
Location: NE4, Sec. 16 Twp. 32N Rge. 32E	County: Phillips

I. 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 Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) has been petitioned by Bitter Creek Pipelines, LLC to construct an additional compressor station on State land. The compressor station will lower the overall system pressure in the northwest and southwest Nelson units of the Bowdoin natural gas field. The Montana DNRC sent out scoping letters to Arthur Kaasa, State surface lessee, Fritz Prellwits, Wildlife Biologist, Department of the Interior, Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge; Lou Hanebury, Wildlife Biologist, Ecological Services, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The DNRC, Trust Lands Management Division (TLMD) discussed the proposed project with Darin McMurey and Alan Steinle, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE), and DNRC Regional Office, Water Resources Division.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	The Montana DNRC (Trust Lands Management Division & Board of Oil & Gas), USFWS, USACE (401 permit), and the Phillips County Conservation District (310 permit)

	are the agencies with permitting responsibilities for this project. This project involves surface ownership of the State of Montana/DNRC School Trust Land; USFWS, McNeal Slough Waterfowl Production Area (WPA); and private land owned by Stuart Robinson and the Y3 Cattle Company. The DNRC Special Use Bureau/TLMD is the responsible authority for issuing permits for this type of activity. The USFWS is the responsible agency for permitting the lands administered by their agency. The Y3 Cattle Company and/or Stuart Robinson are responsible for permitting lands under their control.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	No Action Alternative: Bitter Creek Pipelines, LLC will not be permitted to construct a gas compressor station on State land. Action Alternative: Bitter Creek Pipelines, LLC will be granted a permit to construct a gas compressor station on state land.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?	No Action Alternative: The soils located throughout the project area will not be disturbed if the gas compressor station is not constructed. Action Alternative: The soils will be disturbed with the construction of a compressor station. <u>Compressor Station</u>: The topsoil on any area to be disturbed will be stockpiled separately. The topsoil will be located in a location to

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
	safeguard the material from erosion and other external influences. Initially a compressor pad area of 100' by 200' approximately .18 acres will be disturbed for construction purposes. The area will be referred to hereinafter as the Construction area. The .18 acres will be classified as ``other'' lands and will be withdrawn from classified grazing lands. This area, or classified other lands, will be issued to the proponent as a State land lease. The compressor pad area will be kept void of vegetation. The DNRC will require the area contained within the construction area, that is not classified as `other' be contoured to the surrounding topography in such a manner that will be redistributed across the recommended area. This area will be reseeded with a mixture of slender wheatgrass (Agropyron trachycaulum) (3 lbs. PLS/Acre), western wheatgrass (Agropyron smithii) (3 lbs. /Acre) and needle-and-thread grass (Stipa comata) (5 lbs. /Acre). The proponent will seed the area prior to May 15, 2005. Noxious and annual weeds are known to thrive in this habitat type. The license will be required to shred the weedy vegetation by August 16, 2005. <u>Compressor Station:</u> The proponent will be required to monitor and control all annual weeds and weeds categorized as noxious on the following areas; the access road into the compressor station and the compressor station area.
5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking	No Action Alternative: The water quality, quantity, and distribution will not be impacted if this project is not undertaken. Action Alternative: There are

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?	important water resources present in McNeil Slough and the Milk River. At no time, will the proponent be allowed to extract, dispose, introduce, or extract material from the wetlands.
6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	No Action Alternative: No influences to the present air quality will take place. Action Alternative: The project is expected to have a minimal impact on air quality. Due to the increase in traffic during the initial stages of construction some particulates may be produced in the immediate area of disturbance. However, after the compressor station has been completed and fitted with a `state of the art muffler', noise levels will be reduced to acceptable levels for the surrounding community.
7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	No Action Alternative: The vegetative communities will not be disturbed and rare cover types will not be permanently altered if this project does not take place. Action Alternative: The vegetative communities in the immediate area of disturbance will be permanently altered with the construction of a compressor station. Reclamation efforts will ensure that any vegetative communities to be disturbed will be restored to their natural state. The reclamation plan will provide erosion protection, support for the surrounding habitat types and the return of the grazing land to its native potential.
8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?	No Action Alternative: The terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and their habitats will not be affected, if this project is not completed.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
	Action Alternative: USFWS raised concerns with the noise levels produced by the compressor station. In order to try and keep noise levels from disturbing or relocated the animal species a ``hospital'' grade muffler will be installed on the compressor station engine. The muffler known as the Vanac Model 141 Exhaust Quieter is designed to suppress the exhaust noise to a community acceptable level for dwellings located further than 200 feet from the exhaust tail pipe. The muffler outlet will be pointed in a southerly direction, so that it is not pointing at Hewitt Lake National Wildlife Refuge, McNeil slough WPA or Nelson Reservoir.
9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?	No Action Alternative: The unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources found in the area of the proposed disturbance will not be impacted if the compressor station in not constructed. Action Alternative: There are sharp tailed dancing grounds located approximately one-half mile to the northwest of project. A black tailed prairie dog town is located in the proposed project area. The Piping Plover has been documented to nest on the shores of Nelson Reservoir since 1986. The project is short term and the overall disturbance to existing habitat types and ecosystem will be minimal.
10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?	No Action Alternative: The historical and archaeological resources will not be disturbed if the proponent is not allowed to construct the compressor station. Action Alternative: The Montana DNRC has surveyed the proposed

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
	location of the compressor station site for existing cultural resources. DNRC staff observed a series of rock cairns (Field Name: Hewitt Lake Cairn Line) located on the rim above the wetlands. Patrick Rennie, Environmental Impact Specialist, DNRC, has cleared this project for cultural resources.
11. 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?	No Action Alternative: The aesthetics will not be affected if the proponent is not allowed to construct the compressor station. Action Alternative: The compressor station will be a visible feature located on the upland bench south of McNeil slough. The proposal calls for a 340 horsepower natural gas engine to run the compressor station. This type of engine can produce excessive noise unless properly muffled. The proponent will install an engine exhaust silencer to keep noise levels acceptable to dwellings located further than 200 feet from the exhaust tail pipe. The specific module the gas company will use in the Vanec Model 141 Exhaust Quieter, which is considered to be ``hospital'' grade. The exhaust pipe outlet will be faced to the southerly direction so as not to be pointed at Hewitt Lake NWR, McNeil Slough WPA, or the piping plover habitat on Nelson Reservoir.
12. 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?	No Action Alternative: There will be no demands on the environmental resources of land, water, air or energy if the project is not approved. Action Alternative: The area of the proposed project is highly developed with natural gas wells and pipelines. The project will increase the demand on the

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
	environmental resource of land with the addition of more land taken up for the compressor station site and access road. The grazing land will be impacted by a decrease in the potential stocking capacity and the possibility of the introduction of noxious weeds. The gas company will compensate the State's surface lessee for the initial loss of forage production due to the disturbance of the native rangeland. The gas company will also be responsible for monitoring and controlling any plants categorized as noxious weeds by the State of Montana.
13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	No Action Alternative: No further studies, plans, or projects will be needed if this project is denied. The Montana DNRC/TLMD will continue to perform field evaluations on the State School Trust every ten years to set stocking rates for the grazing land and monitor the environmental impacts of the existing natural gas wells and associated pipelines on this tract. Action Alternative: The NW4 of Section 16, Township 32N Range 32E on this tract is part of the Hewitt Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Plans for the refuge system need to be considered by the DNRC when evaluating this project. The DNRC will continue to monitor mineral and surface management activities on the State land to assess the impacts of this project on the surrounding ecosystem and prairie dog communities.

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will	No Action Alternative: The human

this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	health and safety risks found in this area will continue to remain the same. Action Alternative: The gas company, subcontractors, and/or their employees understand the risks involved in this project. They assume the risks of constructing a compressor station. Once the construction of the compressor station has been completed, the northwest and southwest Nelson units in the Bowdoin natural gas field will be more productive from the standpoint of the lowering the overall system pressure in the Bowdoin field.
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	No Action Alternative: The industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities will remain the same in this area. Production of more natural gas will not occur as a result of denying this project and revenue may be lost to the State of Montana and to the gas company. Action Alternative: The project will increase the industrial and commercial gas activity on this tract, during the initial phases of construction and throughout the remainder of pumping the Bowdoin field. The agricultural activities will remain the same. Livestock will continue to graze these lands surrounding the project, except for the McNeil Slough WPA, which is isolated by deep water in slough. The compressor station will increase the overall natural gas production from the Bowdoin field. There will be minimal decrease in native forage production will, as the compressor station will have taken up otherwise available forage to livestock. The total loss in grass production will be small in scope and will not affect the overall grazing management or future stocking capacity of the

	rangeland.
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	No Action Alternative: The quantity and distribution of employment will not be impacted if the project is not approved. Action Alternative: The proposed project may create new jobs for the gas company, by constructing a compressor station. The distribution of the employees for the gas company will be increased, since they will have to monitor this site more often. However, the area located in the northwest and southwest Nelson units of the Bowdoin natural gas field is constantly being expanded. New jobs may be created for the gas company as a direct result to this. Natural gas companies and the associated jobs that go with operating these natural gas fields are extremely important in this area.
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	No Action Alternative: The local and state tax base will remain the same. There will be no increase in tax revenue in Phillips County due to any overall increases o natural gas production. Thus, Phillips County stands to lose additional tax revenue. Action Alternative: The project will create additional tax revenue in Phillips County. The local and state tax base will be affected with this type of activity. The project will increase gas production throughout the northwest and southwest Nelson units thus, increasing tax revenue in Phillips County.
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	No Action Alternative: There will be no demand for additional government services on this tract of State land, if the project is not approved. Action Alternative: Substantial traffic will be added to the gravel

	roads leading into the area of the proposed project. A majority of this traffic will come from the employees of the gas company constructing the compressor station, with monitoring once the project is completed. However there will not be a demand for other services such as fire protection, police, or schools.
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the locally adopted environmental plans or goals that the USFWS and the Montana DNRC/TLMD have for the described lands within this Environmental Checklist Assessment. Action Alternative: The goal of the Montana DNRC/TLMD is to manage the State of Montana's trust land resources to produce revenue for the trust beneficiaries, while considering environmental factors and protecting the future income-generating capacity of the land. The implementation of the action alternative will allow the Department to maximize revenue off this tract of School Trust Land, while mitigating measures listed throughout this Environmental Assessment Checklist will protect the future income-generating capacity of the land. The USFWS is in a joint cooperation with the Montana DNRC/TLMD to make sure that the land resources are protected for present and future generations.
20. 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?	No Action Alternative: The access to and quality of the wilderness and recreational activities found in this area will continue to remain, as the public perceives them, if this project is not approved. Action Alternative: The proposed location of the project has a high recreational potential. The State land does have a perfected legal

	access for recreational activities. The McNeil Slough WPA and the State land provide an optimal wilderness experience for all types of recreation. Upland game bird hunting, waterfowl hunting, big game hunting, bird watching, prairie dog watching, and biking are just some of the types of recreation activities that take place in this area. The proposed activity will have an impact on these recreational activities. The quality of the recreational activities will decrease some due to the presence of the compressor station and the noise produced from the compressor station engine. However, the exhaust muffler that will be placed on the compressor engine will substantially decrease the noise that the engine produces. The compressor station will reduce the overall serenity of the landscape. However, there are compressor station engines throughout the surrounding area and people who live and visit this area have mixed feelings about there presence. These compressor stations provide a valuable attribute to increasing the overall natural gas production throughout the Bowdoin natural gas field.
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	No Action Alternative: The density and distribution of population and housing will not change in this area, if the Montana DNRC does not approve the project. Action Alternative: The density and distribution of population and housing will not be impacted with the approval of the proposed project. The proposed activity will increase traffic on the designated roads into the area of the project, during the initial phase of construction. Traffic on these roads will continue to be somewhat substantial after the project is completed, since the gas company

	employees will have to monitor the compressor station and existing natural gas wells. The gas company will monitor and control the area described in the above reclamation plan for noxious weeds. The location of the proposed project is rural area and primarily consists of scattered ranching and farming communities.
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	No Action Alternative: The social structures and mores will continue to stay the same. The native and traditional lifestyles found in the area will not be disrupted in this area, even if the proposed project is not approved. Action Alternative: Natural gas companies provide the surrounding economy with jobs and in some cases free energy. The people in this area have become very well adjusted to the natural gas activity that occurs in this area. The gas companies provide additional income through second-jobs for people that farm and ranch in the surrounding area. The Exhaust Quieter muffler on the compressor station engine will greatly reduce the noise produced by the compressor station. This project will have minimal impact on the traditional lifestyles in this area, since natural gas production provides a boost to the economy through jobs that would otherwise not exist in this rural area of Northeastern Montana.
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	No Action Alternative: The cultural uniqueness and diversity of the land will not be impacted, if the Montana DNRC does not approve this project. Action Alternative: The proposed action will cause a shift in the cultural uniqueness of this area. The construction of a compressor station and installation will

	impact the diversity of the area. Natural gas production is already very high in the surrounding area. This area is primarily used as grazing lands for livestock and agricultural production of cereal grains and oil crops. Natural gas production is a large part of the economy in this area. Natural gas companies contribute royalties from the sale of natural gas to state, federal, and private landowners alike.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	No Action Alternative: The Montana DNRC will not approve this project and there are no other appropriate social and/or economic circumstances to discuss in this Environmental Assessment Checklist. Action Alternative: The overall system pressure in the northwest and southwest Nelson units of the Bowdoin natural gas field will be lowered. Thus, the project will increase the overall natural gas production from this area.

EA Checklist Prepared By: Randy Dirkson Land Use Specialist Date: 4/30/04
Randy Dirkson Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	The Action Alternative was selected as it provides income to the School Trust.
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	The project will have no significant impacts to the State land natural resource.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:	

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

EA Checklist Approved By:

Name Title

R. Hoyt Richards 5-14-09

Signature Date: