

**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
KOOTENAI SAND & GRAVEL
WINDMILL GRAVEL SITE, EUREKA, MONTANA**

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is required under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). An EA functions to identify, disclose, and analyze the impacts of a proposed action—in this case the addition of area to a permitted opencut mine site. This document may disclose impacts that have no legislatively required mitigation measures, or over which there is no regulatory authority.

The state law that regulates gravel mining operations in Montana is the Opencut Mining Act. This law and the rules adopted thereunder place operational guidance and limitations on a project during its lifetime, and provides for the reclamation of land affected by opencut mining operations.

Approval or denial of the application will be based on a determination of whether or not the proposed operation complies with the Opencut Mining Act, the Rules adopted thereunder, and local laws and regulations--not on the popularity of the project.

PROPONENT: Kootenai Sand & Gravel

SITE NAME: Windmill

LOCATION: SE¼ NW¼ Section 11, T36N, R27W

COUNTY: Lincoln

TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION:

The applicant proposes to mine, crush and haul an additional 150,000 cubic yards of gravel from an existing gravel pit located ½ mile north of Eureka along Highway 93. The site is an older gravel pit, which has been partially reclaimed to a commercial storage business, with a fourth unit under construction. A crusher and a wash plant would be used to process aggregate, and two recycling settling ponds would filter silt and mud from clean sand and gravel. A concrete batch plant is also planned to mix concrete for the local market. The site is a gravel outwash deposit in the foothills of the northern end of the Whitefish Mountain Range at approximately 2640 feet, MSL where groundwater lies at about 65 feet below the ground surface. The site is being mined into a bank 30 feet high in some places, in an area where the topsoil averages 6” with up to 18” of overburden below it. The site is located behind Stoken Logging and Machine Shop and an LP Gas facility south of the Ksanka irrigation ditch in pasture land. It would be reclaimed to grasses at this time, with possible expansion of commercial businesses in the future. The slopes of the reclaimed area would be reduced to 3:1 or flatter and the floor would be graded fairly flat, daylighting out to the draw to the west. The site would be reclaimed by December 2015.

A: Significant Unavoidable Impacts. B: Insignificant as a result of conditioned mitigation. C: Insignificant as proposed.

| | | | | POTENTIAL IMPACTS | | |
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| | A | B | C | LONG TERM | SHORT TERM | EXPLANATION |
| PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT | | | | | | |
| 1. <u>TOPOGRAPHY</u> | | | X | X | | Mining would continue to permanently alter the topography, but with reclamation the site would be leveled and smoothed, grasses would be planted onto the back slopes, and the current view from the highway would be improved. |
| 2. <u>GEOLOGY</u> ; Stability | | | | | | No effect on geology. |
| 3. <u>SOILS</u> ; Quality, Distribution | | | X | | X | Soils would be stripped, saved and replaced after mining is finished. |

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| 4. <u>WATER</u> ; Quality, Quantity; Distribution | | | X | X | The operation will not affect ground or surface waters including the nearby Ksanka irrigation ditch. The direction of future mining would be away from the ditch to the south and east. No mining activity would occur any closer than 50 feet from the ditch. The settling ponds from the wash plant would provide recycled water to the plant and would contain only clean water and earthen sediment from sand and gravel at the site. Groundwater is substantially lower than the mine floor and settling ponds, and no bulk fuel would be stored on site. |
| 5. <u>AIR</u> ; Quality | | | X | X | Some deterioration of air quality would occur, but episodes would be infrequent. Dust would be controlled around the site with water from an onsite well. The crusher would operate under an air quality permit, which limits the amount of allowable dust and requires spray bars on transfer points. |
| 6. <u>UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE, or LIMITED</u> environmental resources | | | | | No unique, endangered, fragile or limited species or habitats are known at this site. |
| BIOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT | | | | | |
| 1. <u>TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN, and AQUATIC</u> ; species and habitats | | | X | X | Wildlife displaced during active mining will return following reclamation. |
| 2. <u>VEGETATION</u> ; Quantity, quality, species | | | X | X | Existing pasture would be replanted into grasses of a compatible type. |
| 3. <u>AGRICULTURE</u> ; grazing, crops, production | | | X | X | Some grassland would be temporarily taken out of production, but will be replanted with grasses. |
| HUMAN ENVIRONMENT | | | | | |
| 1. <u>SOCIAL</u> , structures and mores | | | | | No Social impacts are anticipated. |
| 2. <u>CULTURAL</u> ; Uniqueness, diversity | | | | | No unique or diversified cultural values exist. |
| 3. <u>POPULATION</u> ; quantity and diversity | | | | | No effect on the population is anticipated. |
| 4. <u>HOUSING</u> ; quantity and distribution | | | | | No effects are anticipated on housing. |
| 5. <u>HUMAN HEALTH & SAFETY</u> | | | X | X | Some dust and additional traffic may be generated at the site but the operator must comply with existing traffic and air quality laws. |
| 6. <u>COMMUNITY & PERSONAL INCOME</u> | | | X | X | The landowner may benefit from additional income from this operation. |
| 7. <u>EMPLOYMENT</u> ; quantity and distribution | | | X | X | No additional employees would be hired to assist in daily operations. |
| 8. <u>TAX BASE</u> ; local and state tax revenue | | | X | X | Additional taxes may be generated for the state and county as aggregates are hauled and sold. |
| 9. <u>GOVERNMENT SERVICES</u> ; demand | | | X | X | The site will be monitored through its permit life along with other sites in the area. |
| 10. <u>INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL and AGRICULTURAL</u> activities | | | X | X | The site will be removed from pasture and ranch use, and used commercially until reclamation when it will be reclaimed to grazing land. |
| 11. <u>HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL</u> | | | | | No historical, cultural or archaeological values are present. |

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| 12. <u>AESTHETICS</u> | | | X | X | The site sits back 300 feet from Highway 93 and is visible to the general public. Land adjacent to the site is heavily commercial with a mix of trailer homes and commercial businesses including an LP Gas distributor, a mini-storage, an automotive gasoline station, a logging company and machine shops. Hours of operations for the pit and all associated activities are from 7 AM to 5 PM, 7 days a week. Topsoil berms would be constructed along the south and west sides to provide visual and noise impact reduction. |
| 13. <u>ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS and GOALS</u> ; local and regional | | | | | There are no known land use plans for this site. |
| 14. <u>DEMANDS on ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES</u> of land, water, air and energy | | | | | There are no unusual demands on environmental resources. |
| 15. <u>TRANSPORTATION</u> ; networks and traffic flows | | | X | X | There will be some additional traffic added as this gravel pit accesses the state highway. |

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED: **The Department would deny an incomplete application or one that does not comply with the Act or Rules. The proponent could then submit a modified application or submit an application for another site.**

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: **Agencies and individuals involved in the process included the Montana Natural Heritage Program, State Historic Preservation Office, local zoning authorities, county weed control board, and the landowner. Nearby residents and businesses were contacted by the applicant and Resident Notification Forms were received from six individuals, four of which expressed a desire to see the EA. Copies were sent to them on 05/31/06 and DEQ received no comments. The concerns expressed in the returned notifications include dust, noise, hours of operation, access road location, and effects on the Ksanka Ditch. These concerns are addressed in the text above.**

OTHER GROUPS OR AGENCIES CONTACTED OR WHICH MAY HAVE OVERLAPPING JURISDICTION: **DEQ's Air Resources Management Bureau regarding air quality, DEQ's Water Protection Bureau regarding water discharge, MSHA and OSHA regarding mine safety.**

REGULATORY IMPACT ON THE APPLICANT'S PRIVATE PROPERTY: **The analysis done 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 so as to constitute a taking.**

INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS EA: **None**

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS: **No further analysis is required.**

Approved By _____
(Signature)

(Date)

Prepared by Rod Samdahl

