

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Water Resources Division  
Water Rights Bureau

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact**

**Part I. Proposed Action Description**

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: **NorthWestern Energy  
40 E Broadway St  
Butte MT 59701-9350**
2. Type of action: **Application to Change a Water Right No. 30021708-76G  
Statement of Claim No. 91716-76G**
3. Water source name: **Rock Creek**
4. Location affected by action: **Twp 9N, Rge 10W, Secs 34 & 35 – Twp 8N, Rge 10W,  
Secs 2, 3 & 11**
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and objectives:  
**This application proposes to temporarily change the point of diversion, place of use and purpose of an irrigation water right. The application proposes to divert 1500 gpm up to .4 acre-feet per year to hydrostatically test a NorthWestern Energy natural gas pipeline. Hydro testing is a requirement to ensure the integrity of the high-pressure natural gas transmission pipeline.**

**The testing will take place sometime between May 2006 and September 1, 2006, when this authorization would expire. The factors considered in determining the time schedule were construction of the pipeline and having the work completed before Rock Creek Cattle Co. starts construction of the proposed golf course.**

**The DNRC shall issue an Authorization to Change if the Criteria in 85-2-402, MCA are met**

Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:  
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)

**None**

## Part II. Environmental Review

### 1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

<b>PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>
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#### WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

**Water quantity** - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

**The water will be diverted only to hydrostatically test a NorthWestern Energy pipeline. The testing will be done as soon as possible. Irrigation will not be taking place during the testing. There will be no adverse affect to the quantity of water in the stream. Rock Creek is not considered dewatered by DFWP.**

**Water quality** - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

**The water will be diverted only to hydrostatically test a NorthWestern Energy pipeline. The testing will be done as soon as possible. Irrigation of 290 acres will not be taking place during the testing. After the pipeline is tested and determined to be sound the water will be sprayed onto the land.**

**Groundwater** - Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

Determination: **This change will not impact groundwater quality or supply and will not have an impact on adjacent surface water flows.**

**DIVERSION WORKS** - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.

Determination: **A trailer mounted motor driven pump will divert the water from Rock Creek. The water will be pumped into the pipeline for testing. The proposed project will not impact well construction, dams riparian areas, barriers, flow modifications or channel impacts.**

#### Unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources

**Endangered and threatened species** - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any "species of special concern," or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or "species of special concern."

Determination: **No significant impact.**

The agency was not contacted this time. In 2004 for natural gas pipeline testing by NorthWestern Energy a search found one plant species the one fish species of special concern. It was determined at that time neither species was present on the project site. A pipeline already exists in this area. The construction adds a loop onto the already existing line.

**Wetlands** - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

Determination: **This project does not involve wetlands**

**Ponds** - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

Determination: **This project does not involve ponds.**

**GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE** - Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.

Determination: **No significant impact. There is already an established pipeline. This is a loop. The soil content and geology were not researched.**

**VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS** - Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.

Determination: **No significant impact. There is already an established pipeline. A loop has been added for additional transportation of natural gas. The project is on private land. The landowner is responsible for controlling the spread of noxious weeds.**

**AIR QUALITY** - Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.

Determination: **No significant impact. The current project will not result in a deterioration of air quality.**

**HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES** - Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project.

Determination: **No significant impact. This project involves constructing a loop onto an existing pipeline. Any degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity would have already been noted or destroyed.**

**DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY** - Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.

Determination: **No additional impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed were identified.**

## HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

**LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS** - Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

**ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES** - Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

**HUMAN HEALTH** - Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.

Determination: **No significant impact.**

**PRIVATE PROPERTY** - Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Yes \_\_\_ No X.

**OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? **No significant impact.**
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? **No significant impact.**
- (c) Existing land uses? **No significant impact.**
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? **No significant impact.**
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? **No significant impact.**
- (f) Demands for government services? **No significant impact.**
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? **No significant impact.**
- (h) Utilities? **No significant impact.**
- (i) Transportation? **No significant impact.**
- (j) Safety? **No significant impact.**
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances?

2. Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:

Secondary Impacts **No secondary impacts have been identified. The project is necessary to determine if the new pipeline is safe to carry high-pressure natural gas.**

Cumulative Impacts **No cumulative impacts have been identified from this project.**

3. Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures: **No mitigation or stipulation measures have been discussed concerning this project.**
4. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider: **There are no alternatives. This transmission pipeline loop will be carrying high-pressure natural gas. Hydrostatic testing is a requirement to ensure the integrity of the pipeline before use.**

### **PART III. Conclusion**

1. Preferred Alternative: **Issue the temporary change.**
2. Comments and Responses: **No comments or responses have been received.**
3. Finding:  
Yes \_\_\_ No **X** Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action: **An EA is sufficient for this level of action. The possible impacts from this project are not significant and do not warrant an EIS.**

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: **Kathy Arndt**  
Title: **Water Resources Specialist**  
Date: **May 2, 2006**