

Kalispell Regional Office

December 11, 2006

RE: Roaring Lion Ranch
Grant Pond Site
Ravalli County

Dear concerned citizen:

Since you have expressed interest in the activities related to the Roaring Lion gravel pit and pond site by so indicating on a Resident Notification form received by this office, you are being sent this notice directly.

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment, which has been prepared for the site. Original documents are also available for viewing at the Department of Environmental Quality at the Kalispell Regional Office in Evergreen most days between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you wish to contact me, I am available at the address and email address below.

Sincerely,

Rod Samdahl, Reclamation Specialist
Permitting & Compliance Division
Department of Environmental Quality
109 Cooperative Way, Suite 105
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 755-8985 or fax 755-8977
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Encl: Roaring Lion Grant Pond Draft Environmental Assessment

RS/ FILE: RoaringLionCitizenLet.doc

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
ROARING LION RANCH
RAVALLI COUNTY, 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. 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 provide 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: Roaring Lion Ranch, LLC

PROJECT NAME: Opencut Gravel Mining – Grant Pond Site

LOCATION: SE ¼ SW¼ Section 2, T5N, R21W

COUNTY: Ravalli

TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION:

The applicant proposes to mine approximately 50,000 cubic yards gravel from a small 2-acre pit and a total permit area of 7.4 acres and create a pond for diversity of wildlife habitat along their ranch located 2½ miles southwest of Hamilton. The gravel would be crushed, and used to improve roads on the ranch.

The site is a mostly logged-off forest in flat terrain next to Roaring Lion Creek at approximately 3720 feet, MSL, where groundwater lies approximately 3 feet below the ground surface. Fuel would be stored in a 1500-gallon, 5-walled steel tank on a concrete slab. All disturbance would stay back at least 50 feet from the creek to protect the water. Topsoil varies from thin to thick with boulders, averaging 6” in diameter, and all soil would be saved for reclamation of the disturbed areas outside of the pond. The pit would be accessed along an existing ranch road, which intersects Westside Road ¾ miles to the east. The pit area would fill with water to form the pond, and the shores and two small islands would be graded out with 3:1 slopes and planted into grasses. Hours of operation for this project would be 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday. The pond would be finished and the site would be reclaimed by September 2016.

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 permanently alter the topography, but the site would be reclaimed to a level and smooth site with a pond. Grasses would be planted to stabilize the soils. |
| 2. <u>GEOLOGY</u> ; Stability | | | | | | No effect on geology. |
| 3. <u>SOILS</u> ; Quality, Distribution | | | X | | X | Soils would be stripped, saved and replaced on the disturbed land, and slopes and the islands of the pond after mining is finished. |
| 4. <u>WATER</u> ; Quality, Quantity; Distribution | | | | | | The operation would result in a small 2-acre wildlife pond feature in a forested area near Roaring Lion Creek. The groundwater is very close to the surface, and a pond would be a practical reclamation feature. All mining, crushing and stockpiles would be located in a way that any storm water runoff would drain internally into the pond, away from the creek. Fuel would be stored several hundred feet away from the creek and pond. There should be no effect on the ground or surface waters. |
| 5. <u>AIR</u> ; Quality | | | X | | X | Some deterioration of air quality may occur from the crusher and vehicle dust, but episodes would be infrequent. Dust would be controlled on |

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| | | | | | roads around the site with a water truck, and the crusher would use water from the pond. |
| 6. <u>UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE, or LIMITED</u> environmental resources | | | | | No unique, endangered, fragile or limited species or habitat are known at this site. |
| BIOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT | | | | | |
| 1. <u>TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN, and AQUATIC</u> ; species and habitats | | | X | X | Much of the wildlife displaced during active mining would return following reclamation. The pond should be an attractive feature to wildlife. |
| 2. <u>VEGETATION</u> ; Quantity, quality, species | | | X | X | The site was logged but it has the remnants of a conifer forest with pines, grasses and has some infestation with knapweed. The mine area would be replanted into grasses of a compatible type. |
| 3. <u>AGRICULTURE</u> ; grazing, crops, production | | | X | X | The site provides little livestock forage since it was logged off several years ago, and has little value for current timber production. |
| 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 expected on the quantity or distribution of housing due to this gravel pit. |
| 5. <u>HUMAN HEALTH & SAFETY</u> | | | X | X | Some dust and additional traffic would be generated at the site and along the access road but the operator must comply with existing traffic, safety and air quality laws. |
| 6. <u>COMMUNITY & PERSONAL INCOME</u> | | | X | X | The landowner may benefit from value added to his ranch property by 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 this property is upgraded. |
| 9. <u>GOVERNMENT SERVICES</u> ; demand | | | X | X | The site would 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 would be removed from limited grazing and forest use, and used commercially until closure when it would be reclaimed to grassland and a pond designed for wildlife use. |
| 11. <u>HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL</u> | | | | | No historical, cultural or archaeological values are present. |

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| 12. <u>AESTHETICS</u> | | | X | | <p>X</p> <p>The site would sit back inside the ranch and is not visible to the general public. The proposed reclaimed use would be usable as habitat for birds and mammals indigenous to the area.</p> <p>There would be some dust and noise generated by the operation, but water trucks and dust control on the crusher, and the anticipated hours of operation would reasonably mitigate those impacts by limiting activities to normal daytime working hours so that they would not impact people who are trying to sleep at night, or who wish to enjoy evening and weekend activities. Sonic backup alarms are required on mobile equipment for worker safety by the US Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), and those alarms might be heard in surrounding area. The decibel level of the alarms is regulated by MSHA.</p> |
| 13. <u>ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS</u> and <u>GOALS</u> ; local and regional | | | | | <p>The Ravalli County Planning and Zoning Office indicates that this land is not zoned and signed a DEQ Zoning Compliance Form on August 23, 2006.</p> |
| 14. <u>DEMANDS</u> on <u>ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES</u> of land, water, air and energy | | | | | <p>There would be no unusual demands on environmental resources.</p> |
| 15. <u>TRANSPORTATION</u> ; networks and traffic flows | | | X | X | <p>There would be some traffic generated as this borrow pit accesses the nearby ranch road system. There should be no impact on other roadways.</p> |

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 and the county weed control board. This Environmental Assessment was sent to one individual who requested it on the Resident Notifications received, and that person made no comments.

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

