ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
KOOCANUSA EXCAVATING, INC.
INDIAN SPRINGS SUBDIVISION GRAVEL PIT
LINCOLN 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 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: **Koocanusa Excavating, Inc.**

PROJECT NAME: **Opencut Gravel Mining – Indian Springs Subdivision Site**

LOCATION: **W ½ NE¼ Section 36, T37N, R27W**

COUNTY: **Lincoln**

TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION:

The applicant proposes to mine approximately 80,000 cubic yards gravel from two pits that encompass 21.6 acres within their Indian Springs Subdivision located 4 miles north of Eureka in the foothills of the Whitefish Mountain Range. Some of the gravel would be crushed. All product would be used to build and improve roads and parking areas in the subdivision. The smaller site is a hayfield in fairly flat lowlands across the road from Indian Creek at an elevation of approximately 2700 feet, MSL. The second, larger site, would sit south of Burma Road and is less productive pastureland in rolling, hilly and bouldery terrain up on a bench above the Tobacco Plains at approximately 2780 feet, MSL. The upper site is well above any known groundwater. The lower site is in an area where groundwater lies at least 15 feet below the ground surface and the proposed excavation is 10 feet in depth. There are no plans to mine into the groundwater at either site. Fuel would be supplied by delivery truck as needed and none would be stored on site. All crushing and temporary stockpiling would be done up on the bench in the larger pit, mostly out of sight to the public.

Topsoil varies from thin to thick, averaging 8 inches with boulders on the bench area 2' to 3' in diameter, and all would be salvaged for reclamation. Access to the north pit would be along Burma Road, which intersects Highway 93 approximately ½ mile to the northwest. Access to the south pit would be from an existing ranch road, which also intersects with Highway 93 to the west. The pit areas would be graded out with 3:1 slopes and planted into grasses for residential lots and open space. Hours of operation for this project would be 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The site would be reclaimed by January 2008.

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

				POTENTIAL IMPACTS		
	A	B	C	LONG TERM	SHORT TERM	EXPLANATION
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT						
1. TOPOGRAPHY			X	X		**Mining would permanently alter the topography, but the site would be reclaimed to a level and smooth, grassy site. Grasses would help to stabilize the soils.**
2. GEOLOGY; Stability						**No effect on geology.**
3. SOILS; Quality, Distribution			X		X	**Soils would be stripped, saved and replaced on the disturbed land after mining is finished.**
4. WATER; Quality, Quantity; Distribution			X		X	**The upper (north) pit would be located up on a bench substantially above the water table and would have no effect on surface or ground water. The lower pit would be located in a flat hayfield across a ranch road from Indian Creek. The groundwater is below the surface, and prospect pits dug in that area did not intercept the water table. All mining in the lower pit would be located in a way that any storm water runoff would drain internally into the site, away from the creek. No fuel will be stored on the site. There should be no effect on the ground or surface waters.**
5. AIR; 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 roads around the site with a water truck, and the crusher would use water as required by the air quality permit from DEQ.**
6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE, or LIMITED environmental resources						**No unique, endangered, fragile or limited species or habitats are known at this site.**
BIOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT						
1. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN, and AQUATIC; species and habitats			X		X	**Much of the wildlife displaced during active mining would return following reclamation. The impact on wildlife from the subdivision and golf course would be far greater than the temporary gravel pits. Several species of concern have been reported in this area including the Grasshopper Sparrow, Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse, Brewer's Sparrow, Canada Lynx, Grizzly Bear and the Olive-sided Flycatcher. Sharp-tailed Grouse strutting grounds are located in Sections 23 and 26, approximately 1.5 miles northwest of this site. No occurrences of these species have been reported at this site.**
2. VEGETATION; Quantity, quality, species			X		X	**The sites are used for hayfield and pasture, covered with grasses and some infestations of knapweed. The mine areas would be replanted into grasses of a compatible type. One threatened plant species reported in this general area is the Spalding's Catchfly. No occurrences of this species have been**

						reported at the sites.
3. AGRICULTURE; grazing, crops, production			X		X	**The lower site provides a hay crop, which would be discontinued. The upper site provides little livestock forage. This site is droughty and rocky. It will become part of the subdivision.**
HUMAN ENVIRONMENT						
1. SOCIAL, structures and mores						**No social impacts are anticipated.**
2. CULTURAL; Uniqueness, diversity						**No unique or diversified cultural values exist.**
3. POPULATION; quantity and diversity						**No effect on the population is anticipated.**
4. HOUSING; quantity and distribution						**No effects are expected on the quantity or distribution of housing due to this gravel pit.**
5. HUMAN HEALTH & SAFETY			X		X	**Some dust and additional traffic would be generated at the site and along the access roads but the operator must comply with existing traffic, safety and air quality laws.**
6. COMMUNITY & PERSONAL INCOME			X		X	**The landowner may benefit from value added to his property by this operation.**
7. EMPLOYMENT; quantity and distribution			X		X	**No additional employees would be hired to assist in daily operations.**
8. TAX BASE; local and state tax revenue			X		X	**Additional taxes may be generated for the state and county as this property is upgraded.**
9. GOVERNMENT SERVICES; demand			X		X	**The site would be monitored through its permit life along with other sites in the area.**
10. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL and AGRICULTURAL activities			X		X	**The site would be removed from grazing and hayfield use, and used commercially until closure when it would be reclaimed to grassland and a subdivision.**
11. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL						**No historical, cultural or archaeological values are present.**
12. AESTHETICS			X		X	**The sites sit back inside the ranch but are visible to the general public. The proposed reclaimed use would be compatible with the long-range plans to build a golf course and an upscale subdivision. The public has been made aware of these plans and the owner has conducted several public meetings to provide information.** **There would be some dust and noise generated by the operation. Water would be used to control dust at the crusher and on roads. The anticipated hours of operation would reasonably mitigate noise 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. Alarms might be heard in surrounding area.**

13. ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS and GOALS; local and regional						**The Lincoln County Planning and Zoning Office indicates that this land is not zoned and signed a DEQ Zoning Compliance Form on July 22, 2006.**
14. DEMANDS on ENVIRON-MENTAL RESOURCES of land, water, air and energy						**There are no unusual demands on environmental resources.**
15. TRANSPORTATION; networks and traffic flows			X		X	**There would be no new external traffic generated as these pits access the subdivision road system. There should be no impact on other roadways.**

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 will include the Montana Natural Heritage Program, State Historic Preservation Office, local zoning authorities and the county weed control board.**

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

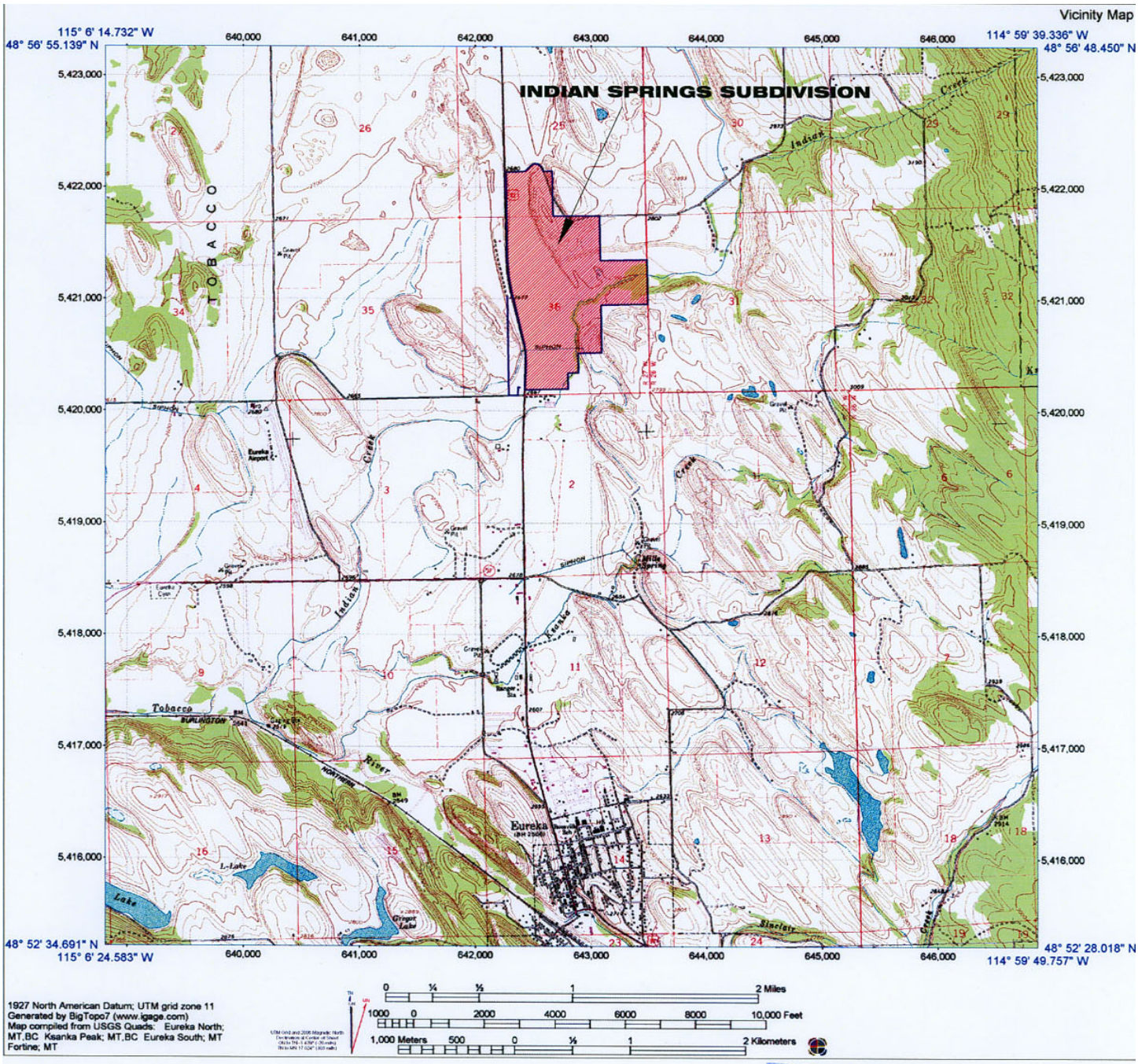
REGULATORY IMPACT ON THE APPLICANT'S PRIVATE PROPERTY: **The analysis done in response to the Private Property Assessment Act indicates no impact. The Department does not plan to deny the application or impose conditions that would restrict the use of private property so as to constitute a taking.**

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

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

Approved By: _____ Date: _____
(Signature)

Prepared by: **Rod Samdahl**



1927 North American Datum; UTM grid zone 11
Generated by BigTopo7 (www.igage.com)
Map compiled from USGS Quads: Eureka North; MT,BC Ksanka Peak; MT,BC Eureka South; MT Fortine; MT


Burma Road
KOOCANUSA EXCAVATING
INDIAN SPRINGS SITE
W2 NE4 SECTION 36
T37N, R27W
LINCOLN COUNTY
AUGUST 24, 2006
PERMIT AREA - 21.6 ACRES
soils
mine area
5.0 acres
North Pit
16.7 acres
crusher
mine area
1.2 acres
LEGEND
mine area
permit perimeter
soil
South Pit
4.9 acres
mine
2.4 acres
Indian Creek
250 0 250 500 750 1000 1250 ft
1" - 300'
SCALE IN FEET