

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**PROPONENT:** Helena Sand & Gravel, Inc.  
**LOCATION:** W1/2, Sec. 20, T10N, R3W

**SITE NAME:** Airport Property Site  
**COUNTY:** Lewis & Clark

**TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION:** Helena Sand & Gravel submitted an application to the Opencut Mining Program for a 42.4-acre permit to mine about 300,000 cubic yards of borrow material east of Interstate I-15 and west of Washington Street within an area owned by the Helena Regional Airport. The airport must keep this area as open space as it is adjacent to the west end of its main runway. The site would be mined and reclaimed in four phases to reduce the amount of disturbance at any one time. The first phase of mining would coincide with building of the Sportsman Warehouse retail store. All mining and reclamation of the permit area would be complete by 2015. All application materials required under the Opencut Mining Act and the rules adopted thereunder have been submitted. The proponent commits to properly conducting opencut operations and reclaiming past and present disturbances to a postmining land use of cropland. The proponent would be legally bound by its permit to reclaim the site as well as site conditions and available resources allow.

A = significant unavoidable impacts. B = insignificant as a result of conditioned mitigation. C = insignificant as proposed.

	<b>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIVE MEASURES</b>					
	A	B	C	LONG TERM	SHORT TERM	EXPLANATION
<b>PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>						
1. <u>TOPOGRAPHY</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A small incised (less than 5' deep) ephemeral channel runs from the west to the east through the proposed site. The drainage appears to have not flowed water for many years. The drainage basin above the channel has been significantly altered through urban development and I-15. Removal of material would alter the topography. The gradient of the ephemeral channel would change but there are plans to replace the feature. All surfaces would be graded to 5:1 (h:v) or flatter as requested by the landowner.
2. <u>GEOLOGY</u> : stability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The site would be located within the Helena Valley. Potential impacts due to the removal of borrow material have been reviewed. The Department has determined that the proposed disturbance could be reclaimed to a condition that is at least as stable as pre-mine conditions.
3. <u>SOILS</u> : quality, distribution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Approximately 9" of soil and 12" of overburden would be salvaged and used for reclamation of the disturbed area. Good salvage and redistribution within one year of soil salvage would reduce the impact to the resource.
4. <u>WATER</u> : quality, quantity; distribution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	All surface water run-off from disturbed ground would be contained within the excavation. Mining activities would not intersect the groundwater table.
5. <u>AIR</u> : quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Prevailing strong winds would carry dust directly from the affected land down the heaviest used runway at the airport. In addition, the Independent Record's printing building is directly south of the east end of all proposed disturbances. This building has a filtration system but there are many hours each day when the warehouse delivery doors must be left open. The equipment associated with the printing of the

						<p>newspaper could be impacted by dust from this operation. The Independent Record and Helena Sand &amp; Gravel developed a good neighbor policy to mitigate this impact. The agreement is attached to this EA.</p> <p>There would be some degradation of air quality while operations are in progress. The proponent must comply with state air quality regulations. Limiting active disturbance to small 10 acre sites, dust abatement efforts to a degree tolerable to adjacent businesses, and the fact that this is a borrow site (no crushing, screening, and minimal stockpiling of material) would reduce the potential for dust.</p>
6. <u>UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE, OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None identified.
<b>BIOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>						
1. <u>TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN, AND AQUATIC SPECIES AND HABITATS</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Montana Natural Heritage Program reported three species of concern in the area: Brewer's sparrow, bobolink, Lewis's woodpecker. None of these species were noted during the inspection and the habitat on the proposed site is marginal. Abundant similar habitat exists in the area.
2. <u>VEGETATION</u> : quantity, quality, species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Montana Natural Heritage Program reported four species of concern in the area: state champion tree (acer negundo), wedge-leaved saltbush, small yellow lady's slipper, and lesser rushy milkvetch. None of these species were identified during the pre-mine inspection. Abundant similar habitat exists in the area.
3. <u>AGRICULTURE</u> : grazing, crops, production	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact.
<b>HUMAN ENVIRONMENT</b>						
1. <u>SOCIAL</u> : structures, mores	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact.
2. <u>CULTURAL</u> : uniqueness, diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact.
3. <u>POPULATION</u> : quantity, diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact as a result of the proposed mine.
4. <u>HOUSING</u> : quantity, distribution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact as a result of the proposed mine.
5. <u>HUMAN HEALTH &amp; SAFETY</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The area surrounding the proposed site is quickly developing into a large commercial center for the City of Helena. Large trucks carrying borrow material, aggregates, asphalt, concrete and other construction material will be traveling the public roads in this area with or without this site; however, since this site is centrally located within the emerging commercial area, approval of the site could reduce the amount of time these trucks are on the public roads through greatly shortened haul distances.

6. <u>COMMUNITY &amp; PERSONAL INCOME</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7. <u>EMPLOYMENT</u> : quantity, distribution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Product from this site would be used in the construction of near-by retail businesses. These businesses will provide employment for many years after reclamation of the site.
8. <u>TAX BASE</u> : local, state tax revenue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
9. <u>GOVERNMENT SERVICES</u> : demand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
10. <u>INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, &amp; AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
11. <u>HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) conducted a search of its records and found no recorded historic or archaeological sites within the proposed permit area and therefore felt a cultural resource inventory was unwarranted. Nothing was noted during the pre-mine inspection.
12. <u>AESTHETICS</u> : noise, visual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>There is public access along all sides of the permit boundary: Home Depot to the north, I-15 to the west, Washington Street to the east, and Cedar Avenue/Helena Independent Record to the south.</p> <p>The operator proposes to operate throughout the off shifts to avoid public road traffic and associated inefficiencies and safety issues. Typical hours of operations during Phase I of the proposed project would be from 9:00 pm to 6:00 am. As per Van Hildreth, Project Manager for Helena Sand &amp; Gravel, company policy is to use audible backup alarms on all mobile equipment unless in sensitive areas. The company would switch to strobe light backup devices if needed.</p> <p>Impacts due to noise would be insignificant due to background levels. In addition, there would be no crushing or screening of material. The airport and I-15 are both significant contributors to background noise. The closest residences are on the other side of I-15. Backup alarms from equipment at the site could be heard by residences but the US Post Office which operates 24 hours per day is directly adjacent to the residences.</p> <p>Light pollution would increase as a result of this project. To avoid interference with traffic, all lights would be adverted away from high traffic roadways.</p>
13. <u>ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS</u> : local, regional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The proposed operation complies with county zoning regulations.
14. <u>DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES</u> :	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
15. <u>TRANSPORTATION</u> : networks, traffic flows	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Traffic outside the permit area would have to comply with all traffic laws.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:** The Department would deny an incomplete application or one that does not comply with the Act and 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 authority, county weed control board, landowner, near-by businesses. A good neighbor agreement was reached between the Helena Independent Record and Helena Sand & Gravel over the control of potential fugitive dust.

**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 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.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:** NO FURTHER ANALYSIS

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

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EA prepared by: Peter Mahrt