Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

PO Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-9939

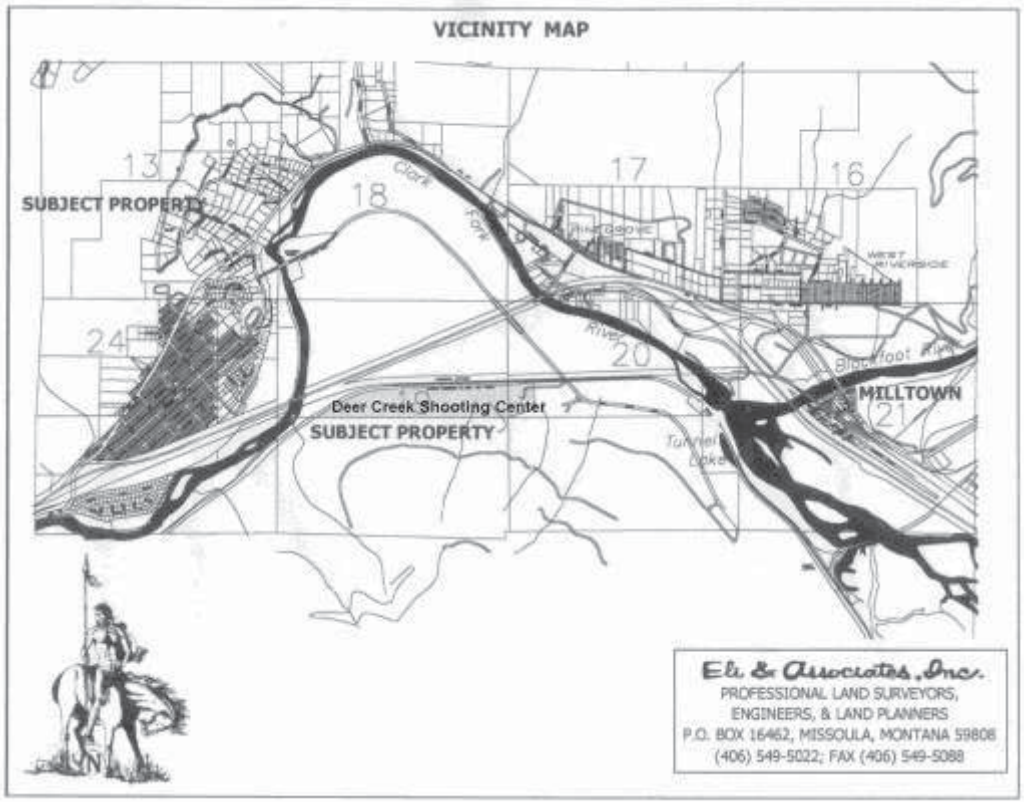
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA) Shooting Range Enhancement Project.

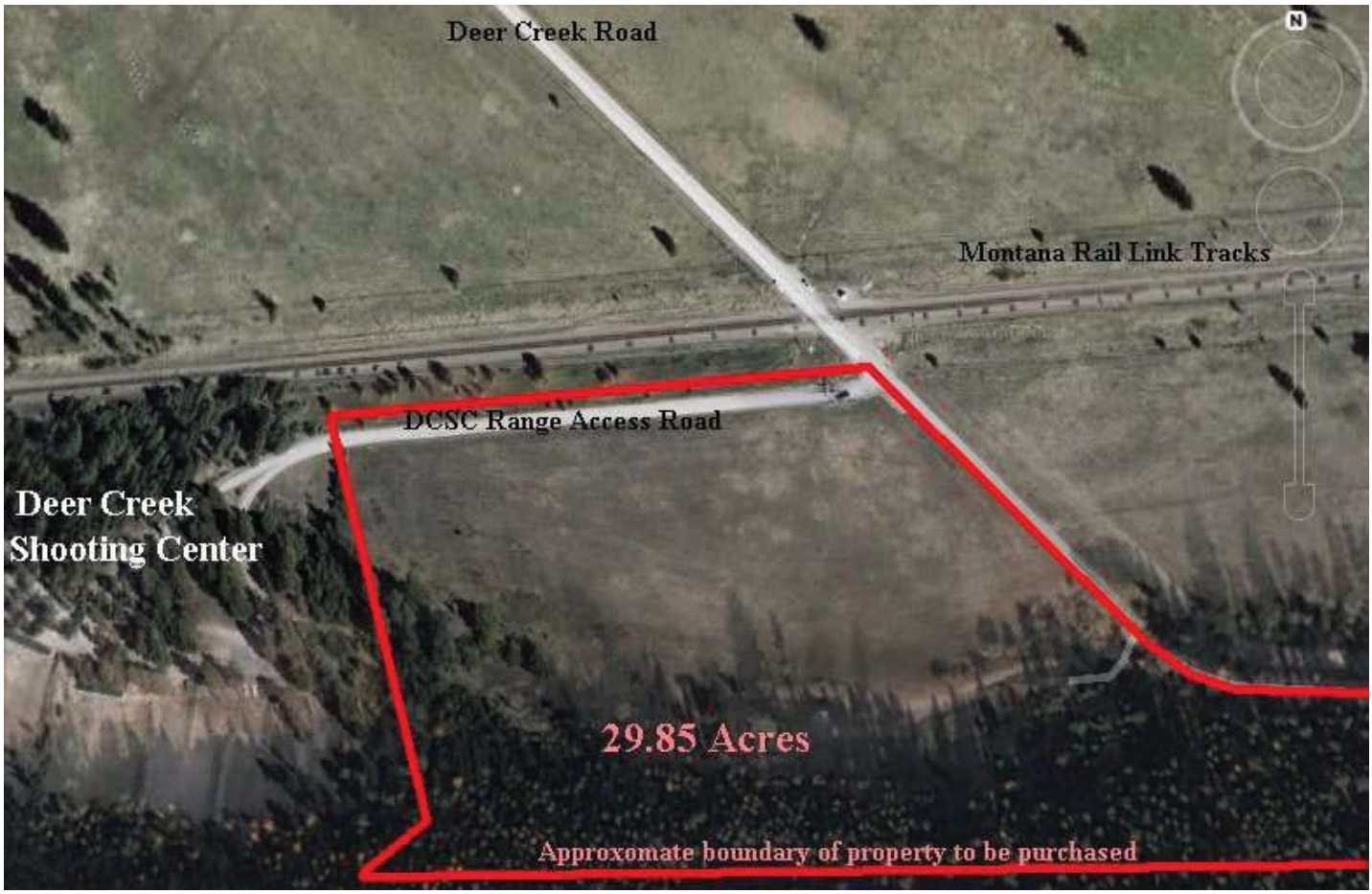
2. Type of Proposed Action: Purchase of adjoining property to the Deer Creek Shooting Center (DCSC)

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:
Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA) owns and operates the Deer Creek Shooting Center (DCSC), located in the Hellgate Canyon between East Missoula and Bonner on the N ½ of section 19 and the NW ¼ of section 20, T13, N, R18W, P.M.M. The property, approximately 80 acres, sits on the south side of the railroad track between the Clark Fork River and Deer Creek Road. The site rests along the north slope of Mount Sentinel, a 2,000 ft high mountain that serves as the primary impact area for the entire facility. The west end of the DCSC borders the City of Missoula's Kim Williams riverside recreational trail that parallels the Clark Fork River and dead ends into the Montana Rail Link railroad tracks and DCSC property (See figures 1-3).

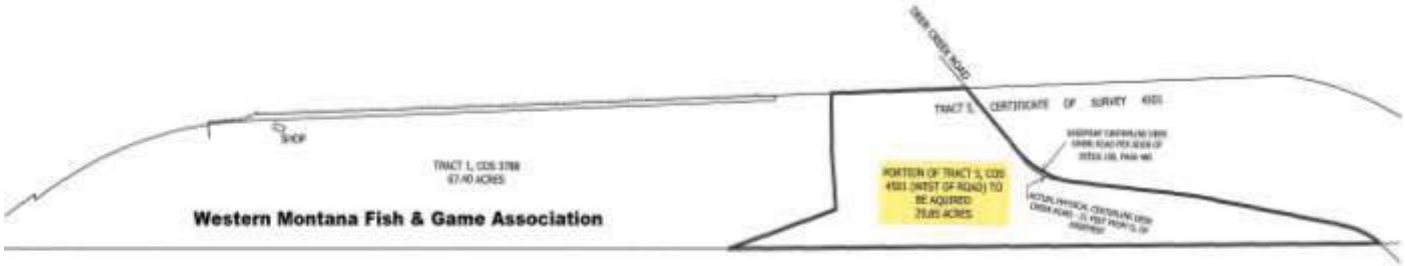


Map 1 – Vicinity Map for the Deer Creek Shooting Center

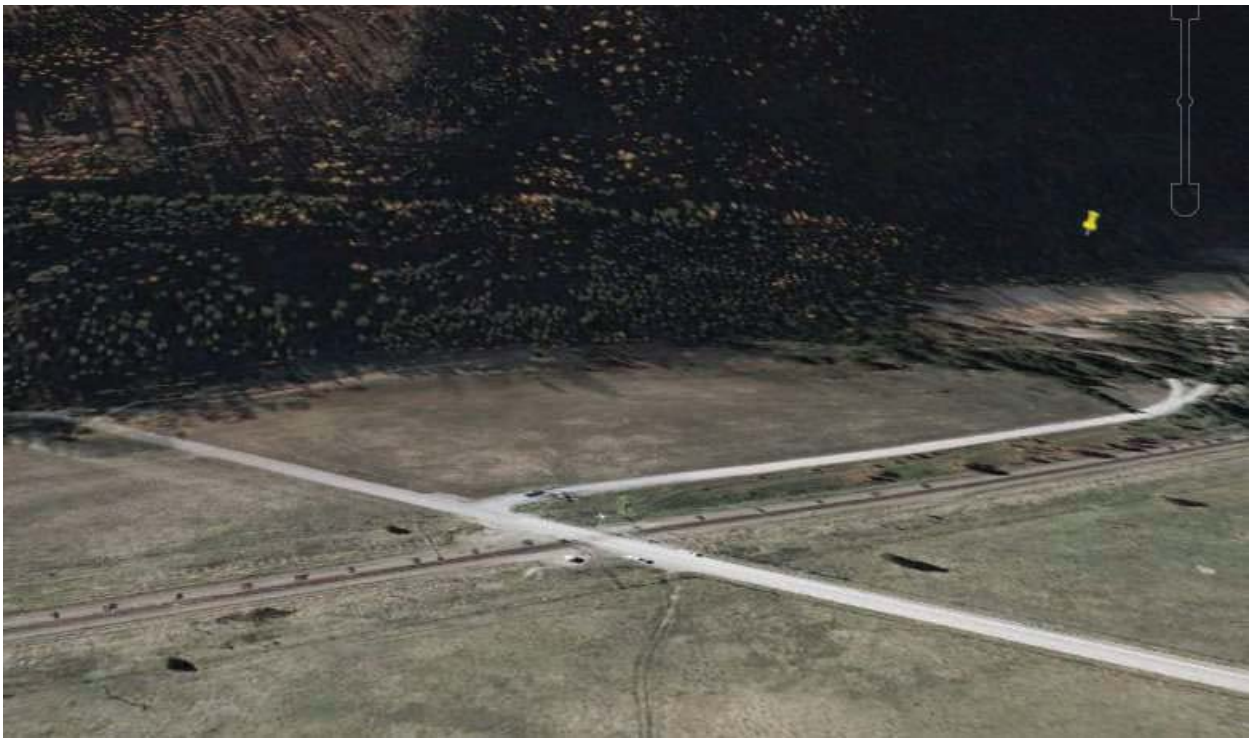
Map 2 - Aerial Photo of the Deer Creek Shooting Complex (DCSC lettering).



Map 3 – Proposed property addition looking north.



Map 4 – Proposed 29.85 acre addition east of main property line between main entrance with Deer Creek Road running along north and east border of proposed site. Proposed site east of current site with dark border and highlighted annotation.



Map 5 - A view of the parcel looking southwest across the intersection of the Deer Creek Road, the Montana Rail Link tracks, and the DCSC access road (going to the right). The parcel is the open field beyond the intersection, plus part of the wooded hillside above. (about to the road line visible in the trees).

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA 87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) and MCA 87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe hunting practices). The Montana Legislature has authorized funding for the establishment of a Shooting Range Development Program providing financial assistance for the development of shooting ranges. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has responsibility for the administration of the program, including the necessary guidelines and procedures governing applications for funding assistance under the program.

To be eligible for grant assistance, a private shooting club or a private organization:
(a)(i)shall accept in its membership any person who holds or is eligible to hold a Montana hunting license and who pays club or organization membership fees;
(ii)may not limit the number of members;
(iii)may charge a membership fee not greater than the per-member share of the club's or organization's reasonable cost of provision of services, including establishment, improvement, and maintenance of shooting facilities and other membership services; and
(iv)shall offer members occasional guest privileges at no cost to the member or invited guest and shall make a reasonable effort to hold a public sight-in day each September, when the general public may use the shooting range for a day-use fee or at no cost; or
(b) shall admit the general public for a reasonable day-use fee.

5. Need for the Action(s):
There is a need to provide a safety buffer zone for the DCSC and to prevent future incompatible development to the east of the complex.

6. Objectives for the Action(s): To prevent incompatible use of land adjacent to the DCSC that could create future use conflicts. Provide a buffer between the DCSC shooting areas, and the public, creating a safety zone. Secondary objective is to provide additional parking for large events and possible locations for future facility expansion.

7. Project Size: estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:
The area of the range owned by WMFGA is approximately 80 acres. The proposal will increase the range by another 29.85 acres to the east.

8. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):
Open pasture on northern portion with a forested area of predominantly new growth Ponderosa Pine to the south. The northern end of the property is bounded by the Montana Rail Link line and along the eastern border by Deer Creek Road. The current and proposed properties lie within an important ungulate and large carnivore movement corridor (see Part III, Table 1, #2), and to the east of the new Milltown State Park and their proposed acquisitions. The current use of the property is as a grazing lease and WMFGA will accept the terms of the current lease along with the purchase until the lease expires.

9. Description of Project: Purchase of adjoining property (29.85 acres) to the east of the current WMFGA property (See Maps 3, 4 and 5).

In Accordance With (IAW) contracts agreements with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, all projects are to be completed by June 30, 2012.

10. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:
None

(a) Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

Agency Name	Permit	Date Filed/#
N/A		

Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	$67,500.00

11. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups: FWP- Hunter Education Program, Missoula Police Department, Army ROTC at the University of Montana

12. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement: The Western Montana Fish and Game Association (WMFGA) has a meeting of its Board of Directors on the first Thursday of each month in the conference room of the Region 2 FWP headquarters and an Annual Meeting on the first Thursday in January of each year. All of WMFGA meetings are open to the public and all of WMFGA's +1,500

members are specifically invited. It is not unusual to have non-member visitors to these meetings. The proposed land purchase was discussed at the Annual Meeting and at Board of Directors meetings. The purchase and reasons for purchasing the additional property were discussed in the January 2011 WMFGA newsletter and posted on their website at http://www.wmfg.org/index.html. In addition to the project being announced in newsletters to the WMFGA membership it has also been listed on the Montana Shooting Sports Foundation website at http://www.marbut.com/wmfga2/. On May 18, 2011 the Missoula County Board of Adjustments (MCBOA) met and approved WMFGA's application relating to the RR1 zoning of the Deer Creek Shooting Center (DCSC) and is a matter or public record with the Missoula County Board of Adjustments. Although WMFGA has not sought community publicity specifically for this proposed project (e.g., on television or in the newspapers), the Board of Directors have been open about their intentions.

13. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Western Montana Fish & Game Association project managers

14. Names, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:
Mr. Jim McDonald, WMFGA, PO Box 4294, Missoula, MT 59806
(406) 251-3800 ext. 2222

15. Other Pertinent Information:
Shooting range applications require the participant's governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range-funding assistance. Resolution Date: April 28, 2011.

PART II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

The proposed alternative A, alternative B and the no action alternative were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is as described in Part I, paragraph 10 (Description of Project). Purchase of adjoin property for a safety buffer zone.

- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Range Development Grant money would be denied and the area will remain as an active shooting range without purchase of adjoining property.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented: Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent. Neither the proposed alternative nor the no action alternative would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative (A)** for purchasing of adjoining property to provide a safety buffer zone.

The **No Action Alternative** (B) would be to not fund the improvements and the range will continue on with present conditions. Land use would remain the same.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study: None
List and explain proposed mitigating measures (stipulations): None

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmental sensitive areas.

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		#2
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		#9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

Comments (A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

2. "Even with the relatively high level of human presence and being bisected by I-90 and a Montana Rail Link railroad line [which runs along the north boundary of the WMFGA], the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers confluence area is within an important ungulate and large carnivore movement corridor between the Salmon-Selway ecosystem southwest of Missoula and the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem northeast of Missoula" (DRAFT Fish Wildlife & Park's Environmental Assessment, Milltown State Park Proposed Parcel Acquisitions, 2011). The WMFGA is aware of the necessity for maintaining critical wildlife corridors and plans to manage their properties to minimize any potential impediments to wildlife movements and to ensure connectivity between wildlife habitats. The proposed purchase will not significantly change land usage for the length of the current grazing lease. The club's future plans do

describe expansion of range facilities, however, those are beyond the scope of analysis for this EA.

9. This project uses no federal funds nor does it take place on state owned or controlled property; therefore, the Federal 106 Regulations and the State Antiques Act do not apply.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

Comments (A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. None of the project reviewed were complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being implemented are already on an existing range/altered areas that together with the insignificant environmental effects of the proposed action, indicates that this should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative. The 100 year history of the Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA) and the long relationship that WMFGA has with sportsmen, hunter education, youth groups, local law enforcement all indicate support of the proposed alternative. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the proposed alternative for the improvements of the range complex of the WMFGA.

PART V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? NO

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? This proposed action has no impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:
There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative; therefore an EIS is not required.

PART VI. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:
Western MT Fish & Game Assoc.
MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

EA prepared by: GENE R. HICKMAN
MS Wildlife Management
Ecological Assessments
Helena, MT 59602

Date Completed: May 28, 2011; Revised on June 24, 2011

Describe public involvement, if any:
This draft EA will be advertised on FWP's web site and through a legal ad in the **Missoulian** newspaper announcing a public comment period. A press release will also announce the project and comment period which will end on August 1, 2011.