

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Mauer Mountain Rd Repeater Access LUL#3073227
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	July 2012
<b>Proponent:</b>	Northwestern Energy
<b>Location:</b>	N ½, S ½, Sec. 9; NE ¼, Sec. 13, T10S R10W & NW ¼, Sec. 18, T10S, R9W
<b>County:</b>	Beaverhead

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent has requested the DNRC issue a Land Use License for approximately 2.15 miles of road that crosses School Trust land for access to a communication site on Mauer Mountain.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

Scoping notices were sent to lessees, adjacent landowners, DNRC Archaeologist Patrick Rennie, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Natural Heritage Program, and the BLM, Dillon Field Office.

#### 2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No Action Alternative: A Land Use License would not be granted. Current recreational use, grazing leasing, and wildland fire suppression activities would continue.

Action Alternative: A Land Use License would be granted to Northwestern Energy.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

#### 4. **GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:**

*Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.*

Existing road has rolling drain dips which will reduce the impact of soil erosion. Drain dips will be maintained to reduce further impacts. Northwestern Energy will be required to seed the road bed with native grasses after major use or road maintenance. No increase in soil erosion or instability is expected as a result of this Land Use License.

#### 5. **WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:**

*Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.*

Maintenance of drain dips and other drainage measures should improve current run-off conditions on the road. No adverse effects are anticipated as a result of this project.

#### 6. **AIR QUALITY:**

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.*

Dust will be produced when the road is in use. Minimal impacts to air quality are anticipated from this proposal. No long term or cumulative impacts associated with air quality are anticipated from the issuing of this LUL.

#### 7. **VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:**

*What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.*

Due to the open terrain and lack of vehicle-limiting vegetation within the proposed project area, the potential for vehicles and ATVs leaving the existing roads and utilizing cross-country travel exist. Rutting and soil compaction may occur during thawing conditions. This activity could reduce the vegetative cover in the proposed project area and increase the likelihood of introducing noxious weeds to the area. Motorized vehicles potentially carrying noxious weed seed from other locations would also increase the likelihood of noxious weeds being introduced into the proposed project area. Minimal impacts are anticipated. Current accesses to road segments are blocked by private landowners. Northwestern Energy will insure vehicles they use on the road will be clean and weed free before use. Northwestern Energy will be required to spray for weeds as necessary, and will seed the roadbed with native grasses after major use or maintenance.

#### 8. **TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

*Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.*

A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors, songbirds, and grouse use this area. No significant impacts are anticipated. No fisheries are present within the proposed project area.

**9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:**

*Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

The Montana Natural Heritage Program identified Northern Goshawk, Ferruginous Hawks, and Greater Sage-Grouse as sensitive species in the project area. In addition Black-tailed Jackrabbits and Gray Wolves use the area as well.

Northern Goshawk and Ferruginous Hawk have both been observed in the project area. DNRC is not aware of any nesting sites within the project area. The project is not expected to alter any habitat.

Gray Wolves are mobile and have been observed passing through the project area. The project is not expected to alter this use by wolves.

Black-tailed Jackrabbits have been observed across the project area. Project is not anticipated to affect Jack rabbit habitat.

Greater Sage-Grouse have been observed in the project area. DNRC is unaware of any leks, and project is not expected to affect the birds' habitat.

The proposed project is for an existing road; no new road construction is anticipated. An increase in current use is not anticipated due to this Land Use License. No impacts to sensitive species are expected as a result of the proposed project.

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

There is a Native American rock alignment that passes through the NW corner of Section 9, T10S, R10W, but nothing near the road to be used under this license. State Archeologist Patrick Rennie found no cultural resources issues for this Land Use License.

**11. AESTHETICS:**

*Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

Road currently exists, no change in aesthetics is expected due to the use of this road.

**12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:**

*Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

None.

**13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:**

*List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

The Dillon Unit conducted a DNRC range evaluation in 1993 on Section 18-T10S-R9W and in 2003 on Section 9-T10S-R10W. An EAC was completed in Section 9 for a spring development for livestock water. Currently Section 9 is leased for grazing by Clark Canyon Ranches, and Section 18 is leased for grazing by Turner Ranch Properties.

The Bureau of Land Management is in the process of granting Northwestern Energy the use of the road on BLM lands as well as the use of the communication site. They will be under NEPA review through the BLM process.

**IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION**

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

None

**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

Currently Section 18-T10S-R9W is leased for grazing by Turner Ranch Properties. Production on this section is 231 AUMs. Section 9-T10S-R10W is leased for grazing by Clark Canyon Ranches. Production on this section is 77 AUMs. No adverse effects to grazing use are expected due to road use.

**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

*Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.*

None.

**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

*Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.*

None.

**18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

*Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.*

Beaverhead County road department would be responsible for road maintenance. No likely cumulative effects will occur as a result.

**19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:**

*List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*

The DNRC Administrative Rules for State Land Leasing ARM 36.25.101 through 36.25.141.

**20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:**

*Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

None

**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.*

None.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

None.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

None.

**24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:**

*Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

The proposed action has provided \$25 via a Land Use License application fee and would provide \$400 annual revenue to the Trust over the course of the 10-year Land Use License. Existing grazing lease in Section 36 would continue to provide \$2,137.52 annual revenue to the Trust (2006 rates).

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Donald E. Cople	<b>Date:</b> August 7, 2012
	<b>Title:</b> Dillon Unit Fire Supervisor	

## V. FINDING

### 25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action Alternative: A Land Use License would be granted to Northwestern Energy.

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Timothy Egan
	<b>Title:</b> Dillon Unit Manager
<b>Signature:</b> /S/ Timothy Egan	<b>Date:</b> 8/8/12

### 26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

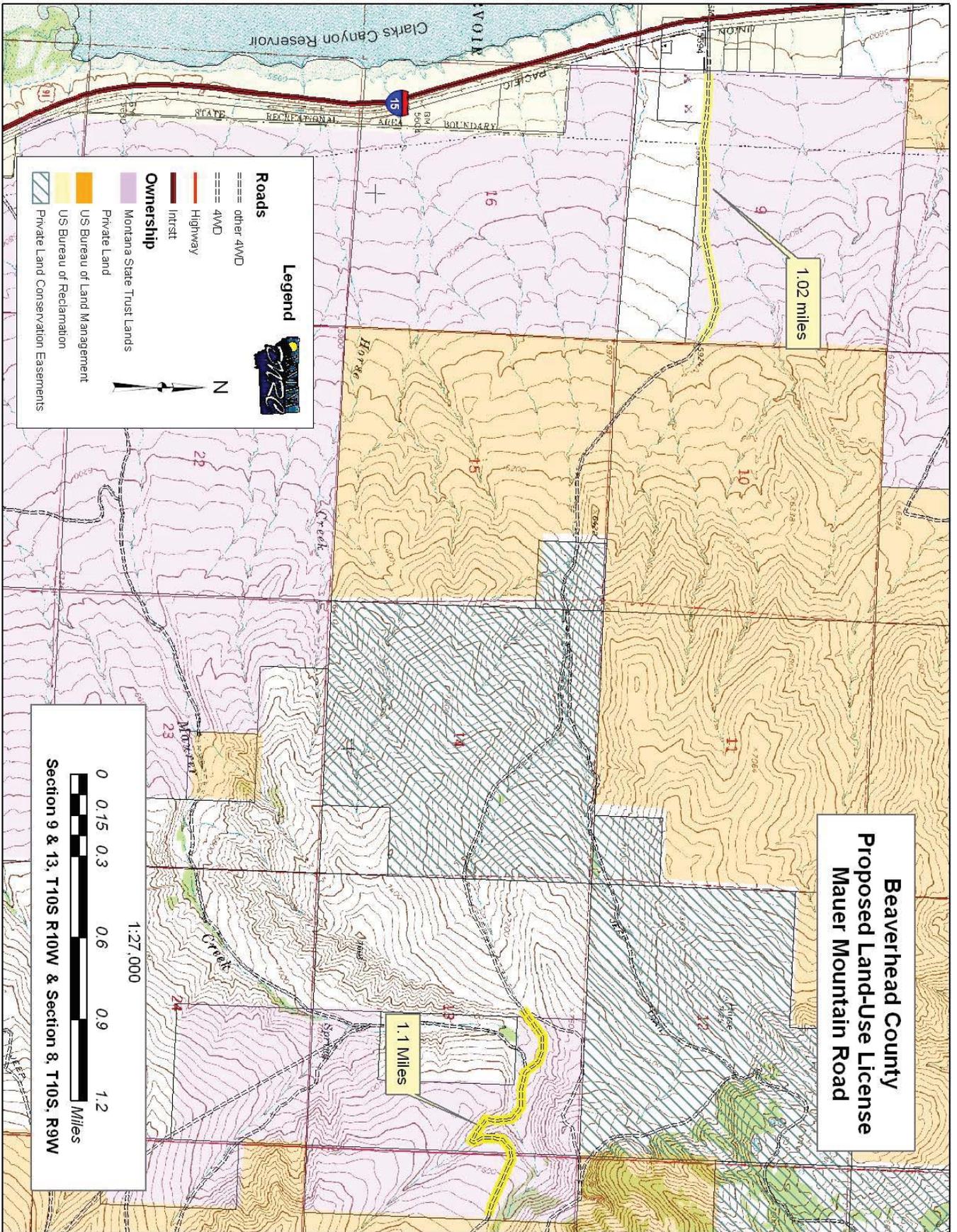
LUL will be issued for use on an existing road that Beaverhead County is already using to access communication towers on the top of Mauer Mountain. Amount of travel on the road will not significantly increase from its current level. The greatest impact could be the introduction of noxious weeds which will be addressed by spraying of the route by users of the road.

### 27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis



**Northwestern Energy  
Proposed Land-Use-License  
Maur Mountain Road**

1.02 miles

1.1 Miles

**Legend**

**Roads**

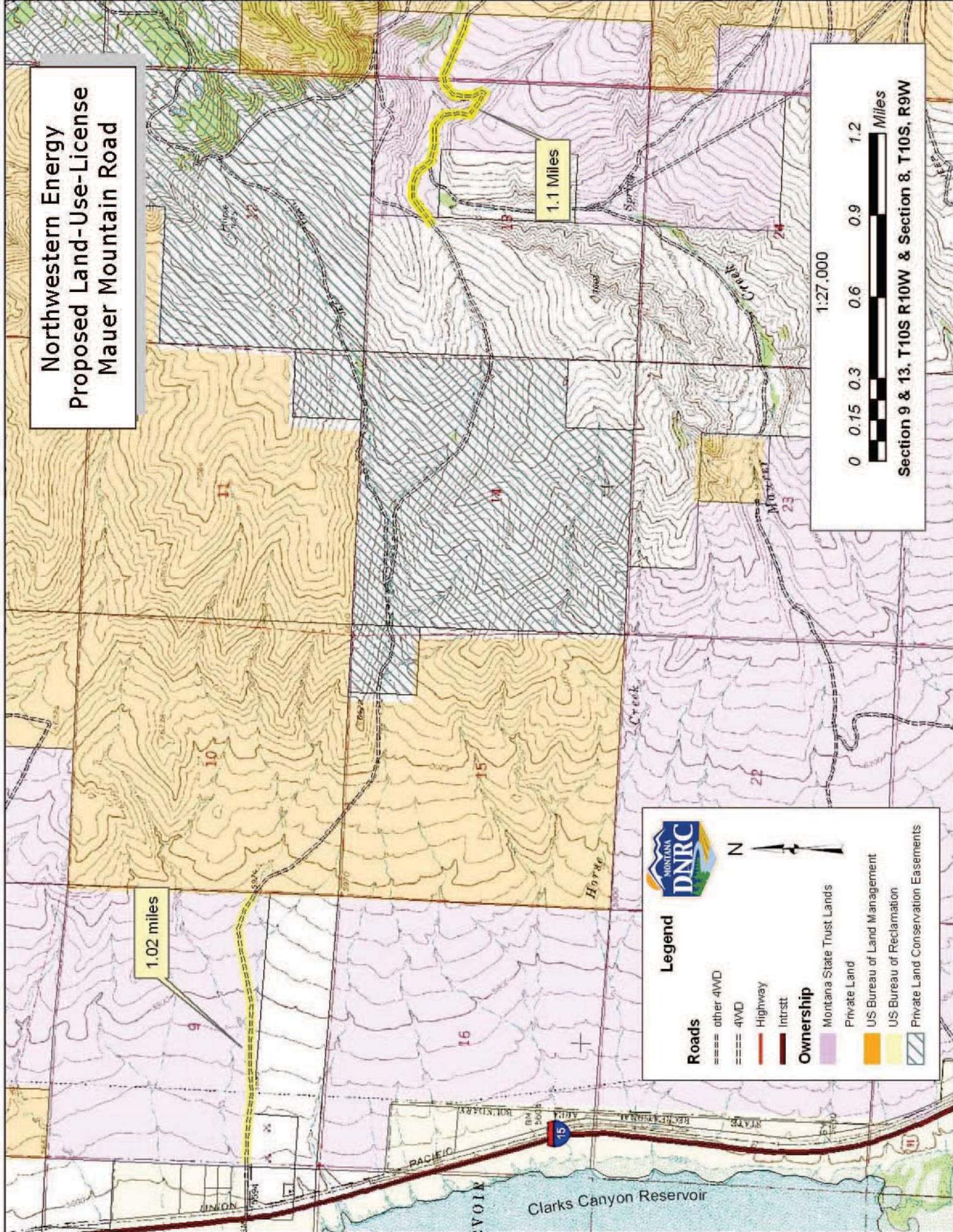
- other 4WD
- 4WD
- Highway
- Intrst

**Ownership**

- Montana State Trust Lands
- Private Land
- US Bureau of Land Management
- US Bureau of Reclamation
- Private Land Conservation Easements

Scale: 0 0.15 0.3 0.6 0.9 1.2 Miles

1:27,000



**Section 9 & 13, T10S R10W & Section 8, T10S, R9W**