CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Lynn Stewart-Expiring CRP to Agricultural Land Classification
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2013
Proponent:	Lynn Stewart, 99 South Danielson Road, Oilmont, MT 59466
Location:	Lease #8583 Lot 2, SW4NE4, Section 6, T33N, R1E, 67.20 Acres Lots 1, 2, E2NW4, E2SE4, Section 7, T34N, R1W, 23.70 Acres
County:	Toole
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

CRP contract #624B containing 67.20 acres in Section 6, T33N, R1E and CRP contract #623A containing 40.90 acres in Section 7, T34N, R1W expired on 9/30/2012. The lessee, Lynn Stewart, has requested to break these expiring CRP acres. The CRP acres were not offered for re-enrollment. The tracts were last farmed in 1988. The estimated acres that will be broke and returned to small grain production is 90.90 acres. The remaining 17.20 acres in Section 7, T34N, R1W of expiring CRP consists of an area of extreme salinity problems that will not be broke. Also, 12.60 acres of a grass waterway and reservoir in Section 6, T33N, R1E will not be broke. The lessee plans to spray the CRP out in the spring of 2013 and direct seed the proposed break area to winter wheat the fall of 2013.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

DNRC-Surface Owner
Lynn Stewart-Lessee
Ryan Rauscher-MFWP
Montana Salinity Control Association
Montana Audubon Society

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

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny Lynn Stewart permission to break the expiring CRP and return it to small grain production.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Lynn Stewart permission to break the expiring CRP and return it to small grain production.

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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.

This tract consists of gently rolling topography. The below table outlines the soil types that will be broke.

Slope	Class	T-Factor	WEG	Estimated WW Yield	Acres	Section
0-4%	3E	5	6	38 bu/acre	67.20	6
0-4%	3E	5	6	39 bu/acre	2.00	7
4-8%	3E	5	6	35 bu/acre	21.70	7
TOTAL	3E				90.90	
TOTAL	BREAK				90.90	

Class 3 soils have severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants and require special conservation practices. The letter "e" shows that there is an erosion hazard unless close-growing plant cover is maintained.

The class 3E soils have an expected yield of 35-39 bu/acre for winter wheat are susceptible to wind and water erosion. These erosion concerns will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. Clearly, the majority of the soils on this tract meet DNRC's land break requirements.

The last noted practice type was CP-10 which is for already established grass. The reason for initial enrollment in CRP is for increased revenue and due to farming difficulties presented by the utilization of mechanical tillage which destroyed the resided produced by small grain production.

Montana Salinity Control Association did not provide any comments regarding this proposed break.

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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.

There are two documented and/or recorded water rights associated with the proposed tracts. Water right 41N-3017000 located in the NW4NW4NE4, Section 6, T33N, R1E for irrigation using surface water from Crooked Coulee has been filed by the Montana State Board of Land Commissioners. Also, water right 41N-3011600 located in the NE4SW4NW4, Section 7, T34N, R1W for stock water for an unnamed tributary of Fifteenmile Coulee has been filed by the Montana State Board of Land Commissioners. Neither of these water rights will be affected as the areas will be left in permanent cover, so no cumulative effects to water is expected in either alternative. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

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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.

No cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

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.

The existing vegetation is introduced species consisting of primarily crested wheatgrass. The tracts were last farmed in 1988. The vegetative community will be altered by the reclassification. The conversion of CRP to small grain production will increase the overall productivity of the tract as the current grass stand has very low vigor.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T33N, R1E: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T34N, R1W: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

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.

Any concerns will be somewhat mitigated as the proposed action will remove the permanent vegetative cover, but the residue produced in small grains production will still provide limited cover and food for the area wildlife. FWP did not provide any comments regarding this proposed break.

Converting existing CRP acres to agricultural land will decrease wildlife thermal and hiding cover. This reduction of cover may adversely impact various wildlife species including songbirds, upland game birds, waterfowl, antelope, white tailed deer, and mule deer. Agricultural land may provide a limited food source for wildlife species including deer, antelope, upland game birds and migrating waterfowl. No comments were received from the Montana Audubon Society.

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.

There are no threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern associated with the proposed project area. Montana FWP did not provide site specific comments regarding wildlife, (see item #8). At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area. The project is 90.90 acres consisting of two CRP tracts, which is only a very small portion of the total CRP acres held within Toole County.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T33N, R1E: There were zero animal species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T34N, R1W: There were two animal species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey. Birds-Ferruginous Hawk and Chestnut-collared Longspur. This particular tract of CRP does not contain many, if any of these species. If any are present, they may be dispersed into surrounding permanent cover.

With the use of the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan, minimum cumulative effects are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted and he stated that due to the tracts being previously farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.

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.

Since the fields are currently in CRP and the surrounding tracts are all farmed or CRP, reclassification as agricultural land will not affect the aesthetics of the area.

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.

The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

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.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

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.

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The reclassification to agricultural land will increase the vegetative productivity of these tracts. The estimated WW yield is 35-39 bu/acre so the average estimated yield is 37 bu/acre. In a 50-50 crop fallow system economic returns will vary between $20/acre to $30/acres. The current CRP payments are $35.59/acre and $36.54/acre at a 42.97% share, but will not be sustained due to the contract expiring. Converting this acres to cropland, the Common Schools trust would see an increase in revenue. In addition, the Common Schools trust will receive 25% of the FSA Direct Contract Payment (DCP).

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.

The proposed action will not significantly affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.

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.

The proposed action will increase the tax revenue due to the increased revenue generated in small grain production.

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

There will be no increases in traffic, no changes in traffic patterns, and no need for additional fire protection, or police services.

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on government services.

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 proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

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.

These tracts of state land are rural and generally have a low recreational value. Section 6, T33N, R1E is not legally accessible and Section 7, T34N, R1W is legally accessible. The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this state tract.

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

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

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 conversion of CRP to agricultural land will greatly improve the productivity on the tract and increase the return to the trust. The current CRP stand has lost its vigor and has very low productivity. These tracts were not offered for renewal of the CRP contract due to their relatively high productivity. Therefore, converting this acreage to small grain production will provide the Common Schools trust with an estimated return of between $20 - $30/acre, depending on grain prices. No other unique circumstances exist.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Tony Nickol	**Date:**	January 2, 2013
	Title:	Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Lynn Stewart permission to break the expired CRP and return it to small grain production.

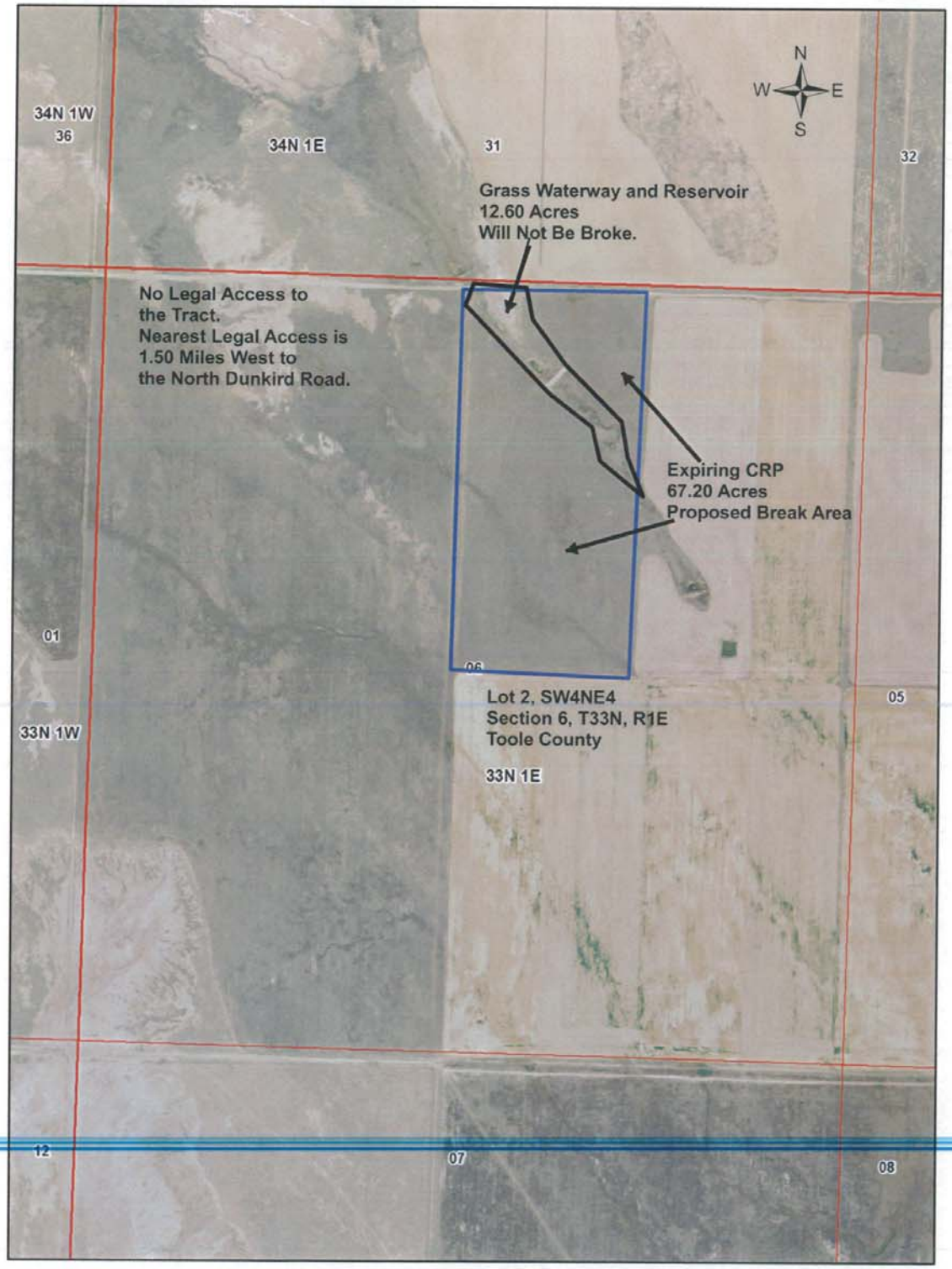
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Acres of state land proposed to be broke are adjacent to productive crop land. All acres proposed to be broke meet current Departmental breaking policy, which indicate that soils are suitable for small grain production under no till farming practices. Marginal soils due to saline conditions and grassed water way will not be broke. The lessees must work with FSA and NRCS and obtain a Conservation Plan and comply with all sod busting regulations. Breaking these acres will help meet TLMD objectives by increasing revenue to the school trust. An average of 37 bu/acre winter wheat or between $20 and $30 per acre annual return is expected for this acreage. Significant negative impacts are not expected with this 90.9 acre land break.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Erik Eneboe
	Title:	Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC
Signature:		**Date**: Jan. 3, 2013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34N 1W
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Grass Waterway and Reservoir
12.60 Acres
Will Not Be Broke.
No Legal Access to
the Tract.
Nearest Legal Access is
1.50 Miles West to
the North Dunkird Road.
Expiring CRP
67.20 Acres
Proposed Break Area
01
06
05
Lot 2, SW4NE4
Section 6, T33N, R1E
Toole County
33N 1W
33N 1E
12
07
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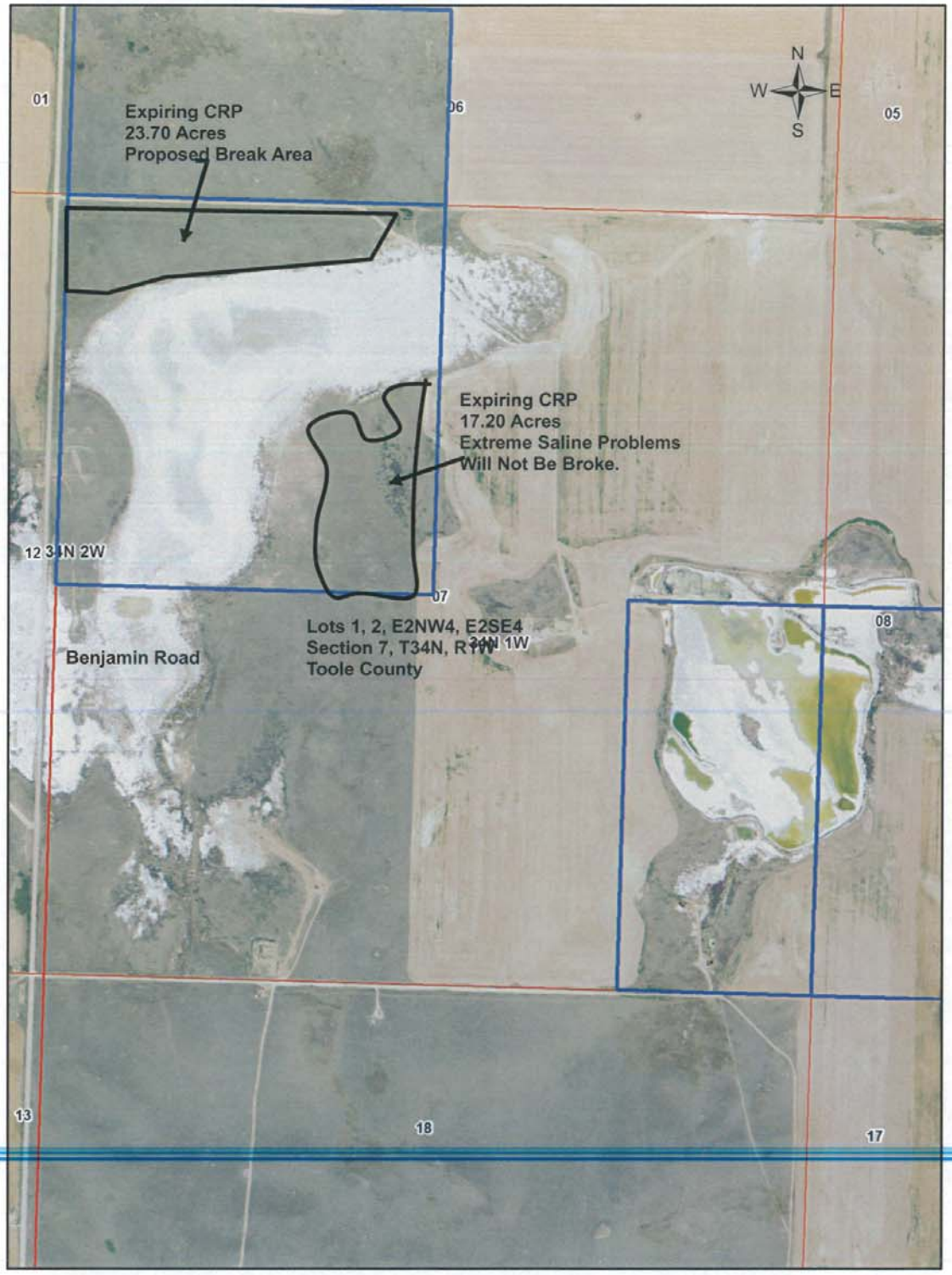
Expiring CRP
23.70 Acres
Proposed Break Area
Expiring CRP
17.20 Acres
Extreme Saline Problems
Will Not Be Broke.
Lots 1, 2, E2NW4, E2SE4
Section 7, T34N, R1W
Toole County
Benjamin Road
N
W
E
S
01
06
05
12
34N 2W
07
08
34N 1W
13
18
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