CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	MDOT Lincoln-East Highway 200 expansion
Proposed Implementation Date:	April 2013
Proponent:	Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
Location:	Section 6 T14N-R7W, Section 12 T14N-R8W
County:	Lewis & Clark

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Widening and realigning approximately 7.5 miles of US Hwy 200 east of Lincoln, MT. Project follows existing alignments and is proposed to address highway safety issues associated with limited sight distances and passing opportunities. It will to provide a 36 foot paved roadway surface, updated hydraulic features and better domestic and wild-animal accommodations. The specific activity on DNRC lands involves granting additional easement area to MDT on 2 parcels of school trust land sections 12 T14N-R8W and 6 T14N-R7W. This checklist EA only addresses proposed activities on these two parcels of school trust lands.
The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) as a part of their project proposal conducted an environmental analysis and determined and documented that the project would not have significant impacts and is categorically excluded from MEPA. (see attached)

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

MDT conducted adjacent landowners, affected special interest groups and held numerous public meetings in the local vicinity. A written public involvement plan would be completed in accordance with MDT's Public Involvement handbook.
An internal information request was made by Dana Boruch to DNRC Southwestern Land Office Area Manager Tony Liane, Trust Lands Program Manager Bob Storer, Clearwater Unit Manager Dave Poukish, Hydrologist Jeff Collins, Wildlife Biologist Garrett Schairer, Ag & Grazing Bureau Chief Kevin Chappell, Archaeologist Patrick Rennie, MEPA Planner Amy Helena, Silvaculturalist Jon Hayes, Land Use Planner Liz Mullins MDT Environmental Services Engineer Eric Thundstrom and Project Permitting Manager Bill Duede.
An external scoping letter was sent by Dana Boruch to the Lewis & Clark County Board of County Commissioners, the Helena National Forest Lincoln Ranger District, Northwestern Energy, Sieben Ranch, Newmont Exploration and the Ponderosa Snow Warriors of Lincoln.

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

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

Granite County floodplain permit (issued 4/19/2012)
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) SPA 124 authorization (issued 3/30/2012)
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 318 (issued 3/30/2012)
U.S. Army Corp of Engineer (USACOE) 404 (pending)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (SFWS) (consultation with USACOE 404)
Federal Highway Administration

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed.

List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

No Action – deny application for the additional easement area

Action – approve the easement request

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

No especially unique fragile, compactable or unstable soils are present. Proposed actions would involve ground disturbing activities. Plans include reshaping slopes to stable angles, revegetation of disturbed areas and noxious weed control activities.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

The easement within Section 12 involves a crossing of the Landers Fork of the Blackfoot river. MDT has indicated in their Catex that they would comply with all provisions of required permits. Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors act and/or Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Impacts in wetlands would be coordinated with the US Army Corps of Engineers and other resource agencies (Federal, State and Tribal) as required for permitting. A 124SPA would be obtained from Mt DFWP. A delineated floodplain exists in the project area under FEMA's floodplain management criteria. Stormwater discharge conditions including temporary erosion control features for construction would be met.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

Dust from construction operations, heavy equipment exhaust, and smoke from burning of right-of way clearing materials has the potential to affect air quality and would occur. The MDT Catex indicates the project is not within a Class 1 airshed and that the type of project is either exempted from conformity determination requirements or a conformity determination would be documented in coordination with responsible organizations such as Montana DEQ Air Quality Division.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

A very small amount of clearing of trees would likely be required. Permanent desirable vegetation with an approved seeding mixture would be established on exposed areas. Activities would include noxious weed control activities consistent with the County Noxious Weed Control Act (77-2-2152MCA).

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Given the size of the easement request (<5 acres total over both parcels) and the fairly limited habitats present, no appreciable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to any terrestrial or avian species that may be in the area would be anticipated.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Some of the proposed easement would occur in the grizzly bear recover zone (1.14 acres) and the remaining easement would be in the "occupied habitat" area (3.47 acres) as mapped by grizzly bear researchers and managers to address increased sightings and encounters of grizzly bears in habitats outside of recovery zones (Wittinger 2002). In general, minimal grizzly bear habitat attributes exist in the project area due to the proximity to Highway 200. Trace amount of potential lynx habitats exist east of Landers Fork Creek, but the proximity to Highway 200 likely limits the usefulness of these habitats for lynx. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to threatened and endangered species would be anticipated.
Trace amounts of potential fisher habitats exist east of Lander's Fork Creek. Proximity to Highway 200 and the surrounding landscape likely limit the usefulness of these habitats. In general no changes to these habitats would occur with the proposed easement. Trace amounts of potential pileated woodpecker and flammulated owl habitats are also in the project area. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated with the proposed easement, thus negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to threatened Bull trout reside in the Landers Fork. The area is adjacent to the Northern Continental Divide recovery area for Grizzly bears. Activities would need to be conducted in accordance with agreements, permits and specifications from the USFWS and Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks.
The MDT Catex indicates the proposed project would not result in a jeopardy opinion from the Fish and Wildlife Service on any Federally listed T&E species.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

The area of potential effect (APE) for this project has been examined in detail with past cultural resource studies. No cultural resources are within the area of potential effect (APE) on Section 6, T14N R7W. Cultural resource sites 24LC1210 (a lithic scatter/past Native American campsite) and a segment of the route of 24LC1211 (Cokahlrishkit Trail) are within the APE in Section 12, T14N R8W. No visible evidence of 24LC1211 exists today in the APE. Further, the portion of site 24LC1210 that may be disturbed with proposed road reconstruction work has been extensively subsurface tested and determined to lack the kinds and quantities of cultural remains that can be used to address credible research questions in archaeology. Although these cultural resources have been determined previously to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NR), proposed highway reconstruction work will in no way diminish the qualities of either of these sites that make them eligible for NR listing. As such, it is the DNRC's position that proposed work will have no adverse effect to state owned, DNRC administered heritage properties.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The additional easement area is adjacent to the highway. Expansion of the right of way would not have an impact on 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 direct, indirect, and 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.

DNRC is currently analyzing timber salvage opportunities on school trust lands in the vicinity of Lincoln, Montana including activities within the two parcels involved in this project. There should not be any conflicts between these two proposed activities (road re-alignment and timber salvage).

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.

Project is expected to improve the safety of the highway.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The highway re-alignment will employ people in the highway construction business for a short period of time. While construction is ongoing traffic control measures would be in place to facilitate existing use. Some traffic delays would be expected as noted in the MDT Catex items E1-4.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

(See above)

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The project will employ people for a short term. Revenues associated with this activity are subject to taxes.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

The project is a maintenance/improvement activity associated with the state and national public transportation system. This is an ongoing function of MTD and the Federal Highway Administration. Project would improve the safety of the highway. The MDT Catex indicates the proposed project would not induce significant land use changes, nor promote unplanned growth.

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.

This is a major transportation artery traversing the area. No public controversy was revealed in the public involvement process associated with the proposal.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

No impact, to slight improvement in access to these areas. The MDT Catex indicates "No significant effects on access to adjacent property or to present traffic patterns would occur."

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

No change. The MDT Catex indicates the proposed project would not induce significant land use changes, nor promote unplanned growth.

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

No change. The MDT Catex indicates the proposed project would not induce significant land use changes, nor promote unplanned growth.

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

No change. The MDT Catex indicates the proposed project would not induce significant land use changes, nor promote unplanned growth.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

DNRC would be paid for the easement area requested. DNRC would retain the ability to access lands on either side of the highway

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name: Dana Boruch**	**Date:** March 15, 2013
	Title: Right of Way Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action Alternative

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant or potential impacts are expected due to this action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** David M. Poukish **Title:** Clearwater Unit Manager, DNRC		
Signature: /s/ David M. Poukish		**Date**:	3/15/2013