CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	East Boulder Haul Road License # 6216
Proposed Implementation Date:	June 2013
Proponent:	USDI Bureau of Land Management & RY Timber
Location:	Section 16 and 18, Township 3 South, Range 13 East (Common Schools)
County:	Sweet Grass County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Proponent has applied to the DNRC Southern Land Office (SLO) for a Land Use License to permit the use of existing dirt and two-track roads to access BLM land and private land for the purpose of removing timber. The Land Use License #6216 will allow RY Timber to haul logs from BLM and private property to East Boulder Road. RY Timber will also be allowed to relocate approximately 450 feet of road in state section 16 to move it out of the East Boulder River floodplain. The old road will be seeded and closed by RY Timber using native grass seed and waterbars. This will result in no net gain of roads on State Section 16 and reduced impact on the stream. RY Timber will also construct approximately 250 feet of new road on the south side of state section 18. Constructing the new piece will allow log trucks to exit state property and the existing two track where it currently terminates near the southern border of section 18. The location of this turn has been visited by DNRC Field Staff and deemed to be the best place to locate a turn both in feasibility and when considering environmental and water quality factors.

The roads to be used originate off East Boulder Creek Road and travel from east to west through section 16, across private land (section 17) and back on state land in section 18. RY Timber is responsible for obtaining permission to cross all private land. The location of the current road and the proposed new construction is illustrated on attached "Exhibit A". The Land Use License would be approved through 28 February 2016 with the potential for it to be renewed if required by project timelines.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

No formal public scoping was performed by the Southern Land Office (SLO) for this proposed project. The state grazing lessees, Stillwater Mining Company (Section 16) and Haas Real Property Trust (Section 18) were contacted by Dennis Davaz of RY Timber on behalf of both RY Timber and the BLM. Stillwater Mining Company and Haas real Property Trust have both signed a Settlement of Damages form.

The road was inspected February 27, 2013 by Bradley Shoemaker, SLO Forester.

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

The BLM is the only other governmental agency involved in this transaction. No other permits are known to be needed.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the issuance of a Land Use Licenses to allow road use and construction by RY Timber on State Trust land described as Section 16 and 18, Township 3 South, Range 13 East in Sweet Grass County for the removal of timber from private and BLM land.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request by RY Timber and negatively impact both the local economy and forest health by not allowing the timber harvest on BLM and private property.

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.

The majority of proposed project activities would remain on existing roads. The short section to be relocated in Sec 16 T3S R13E would move the road from its current location in a Bearmouth-Tiban-Beehive complex soil found in floodplains to a Winspect very cobbly loam. This relocation would be better suited for the logging trucks and higher use that the road will see during the project. Locating the road out of the floodplain would also minimize sedimentation and rutting. Installation and maintenance of any necessary drainage and erosion control features by the proponent would be required.

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.

East Boulder River is located along the current road in Section 16 T3S R13E. The relocation of the dirt road outside the floodplain would improve the long term water quality in East Boulder River by reducing sedimentation and motorized traffic through the floodplain. The proposed travel route also uses an existing ford across Craft Ditch. This crossing will be improved during the project by laying down pipes and or wood at the crossing site to ensure minimal ground disturbance. The short road construction in Section 18 T3S R13E is located on flat ground with slopes less than 10%. Minimal impacts are anticipated from this road construction. The location of the existing road and all construction is shown on "Attachment A"

Due to the proponent installing and maintaining any necessary drainage or erosion control features on the road, no significant impacts are anticipated.

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.

There would be some short-term airborne particulates from increased traffic on the roads. Due to the remoteness of the proposed project area and distance to any residences, no significant adverse impacts 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.

Due to the relocation and reclamation of the section of road in the East Boulder River floodplain minimal overall long term vegetative disturbance is expected. An initial disturbance will be seen with the construction of the new road sections. Proposed project activities within the current road footprint would result in minimal vegetative disturbance. The short construction of two track road in Section 18 T3S R13E would disturb approximately 250 linear feet. This disturbance will be seeded after project completion and no long term impacts are expected from it.

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, songbirds and grouse potentially use this area. Due to the short duration of use to haul logs and the low amount of disturbance to the area no significant impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

A proposed project area search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database identified three mammals that are listed as a species of concern or threatened species: Grizzly Bear, Wolverine and Lynx.

Fisheries: No Federally listed threatened and endangered fish species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered fish species as designated by the USFWS would be affected by this project.

Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*) – Grizzly Bear habitat exists in section 18 as shown on the "Montana Species of Concern East Boulder RTE" map. This area is on the edge of Grizzly Bear habitat recovery. Over the course of the project section 18 will have existing two track roads utilized and a short section of two track constructed to allow for a turn required by the log trucks to exist state property. This low amount of use is not expected to impact the grizzly bear. The low density of human population in this area and large areas of habitat available adjacent to the state sections allows the bears ample area and low chances for negative human interaction over the course of this project.

The proposed action would not result in the removal of cover habitat on state property. Residual sapling density following the proposed cutting on neighboring sections, along with topography and pole and sawtimber-sized trees, would continue to provide visual screening cover from along many of the closed roads within the project area.

Wolverine (Gulo *gulo)* —Wolverine habitat is found along the southern border of Section 18. Due to the large range individual wolverines inhabit (240 mi^2 for males and 50-100 mi^2 for females) the limited scope of the proposed action it is not expected to have adverse impacts on the wolverine population. There is minimal risk of direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to this species from the proposed action.

Lynx (*Felis lynx*): Within one mile of the project area lynx were ~~been~~ observed between 1900 and 2002 (Montana Natural Heritage Program). Although lynx have been located near the project area, the affected parcels do not contain lynx habitat. Due to the lack of existing habitat, there is minimal risk of direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to this species from the proposed action.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The DNRC staff archaeologist inspected the area of potential effect (APE) on April 30th, 2013. A remnant historic building foundation (24SW721) is located near the APE, but no other cultural resources are present within 100 m of the proposed road centerline. Realignment of the current road route will have no effect to 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 cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The proposed project area is located in a fairly remote area, it is visible briefly from the East Boulder Road but is not visible from any populated areas. No significant adverse impacts to aesthetics are expected by implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

No significant impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

No other environmental documents pertinent to the area are known to exist.

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.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

No significant impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

Allowing use of these roads will green light the harvesting on BLM and private land. During the project time this will employ approximately four individuals in private industry.

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 and the nature of the activity is not expected to have a significant positive or negative impact to the local or state tax base.

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

The implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate any additional demands on services provided by Sweet Grass County. Large trucks regularly use all county roads needed to access this area on their way to the Stillwater mine and no additional demands for services would be needed while driving on the dirt roads.

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.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans. Choosing the no action alternative would restrict the ability of the BLM to complete forest harvest activities on its land and practice good forestry.

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.

Persons possessing a valid state lands recreational use license may conduct recreational activities on Section 16 and, with permission from the surrounding private landowners Section 18. The proposed project would not affect the existing access for the general public.

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.

No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed alternative would not directly impact cultural uniqueness or diversity.

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 alternative to issue a Land Use License for road use would result in an improvement to the roads on state section 16 and generate approximately $3,400 for the common schools trust based on the estimate of volume of timber to be hauled out across state lands. The final value generated will depend on the number of board feet removed, fees will be assessed at $2/MBF.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Bradley Shoemaker	**Date:**	14 March 2013
	Title:	Southern Land Office Area Forester		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

After reviewing the Environmental Assessment, the proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that a Land Use License be issued to permit the use of the existing road to access BLM and private land for the purpose of removing timber by RY Timber. The proposed alternative can be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the long-term sustainable natural resource management of the area while also generating revenue for the common school trust.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant impacts from the proposed action is minimal based on the type of action proposed, the potential for a relatively short duration of the road use and the fact that the road to be used is an existing two-track with two short areas of improvement(construction) which will improve the road infrastructure and allow for reduced impacts in the floodplain of East Boulder River. All identified potential impacts will be avoided or minimized by utilizing the mitigations listed below and no significant impacts are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

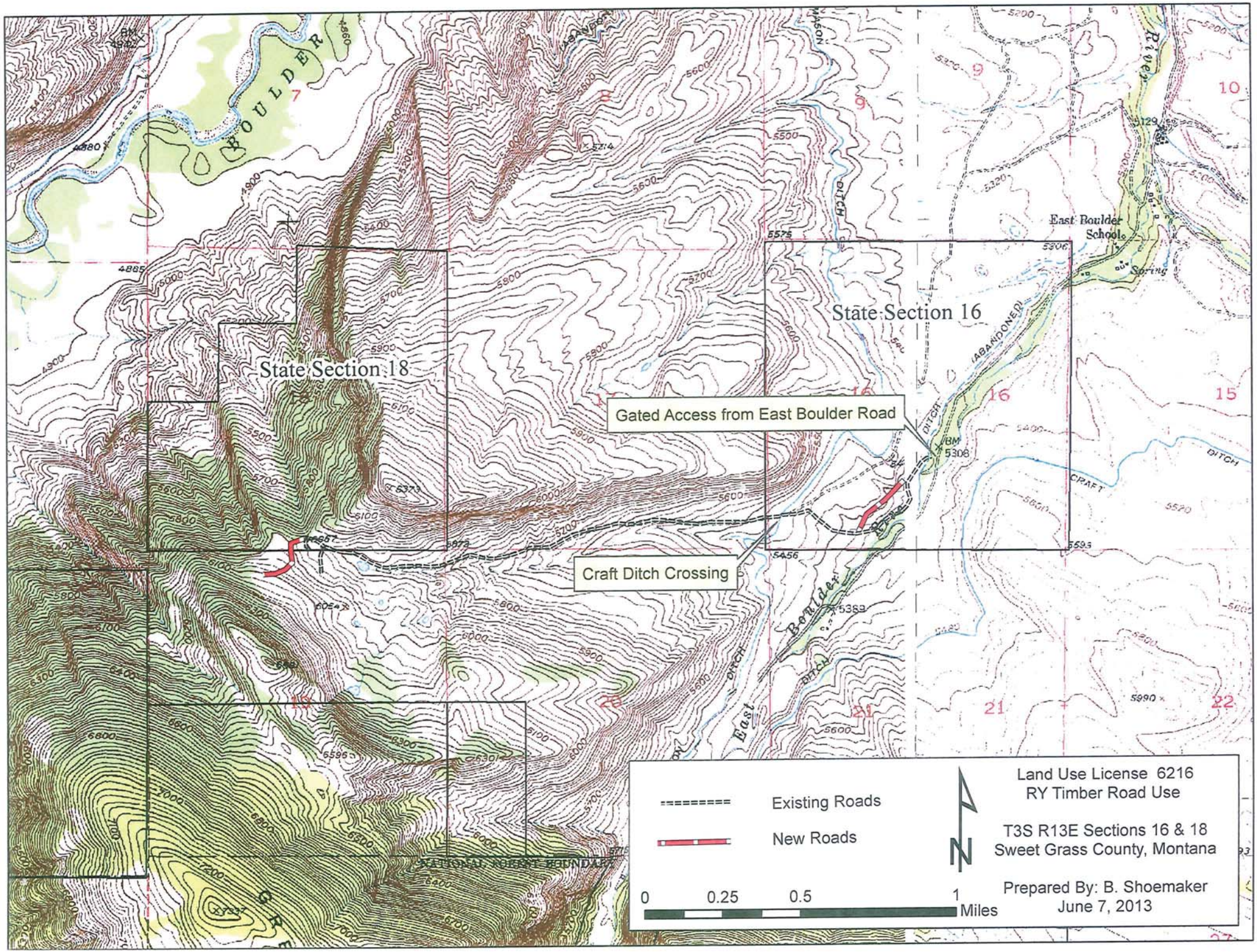
The mitigation measures that will be required by the issuance of the Land Use License include:

1. All vehicle traffic must stay on the permitted road (see Exhibit A).
2. The road will only be used in dry or frozen conditions.
3. All vehicles, particularly the undercarriage, must be washed prior to entering the tract to assure removal of dirt and plant material and weed seeds.
4. Adequate drainage and/or erosion control devices/facilities shall be installed and maintained where necessary on the existing road or areas of road improvement.
5. The Licensee shall be responsible for controlling any noxious weeds introduced by Licensee's activity on state Trust land and shall prevent or eradicate the spread of those noxious weeds onto land adjoining the subject section.
6. The road will not be widened beyond its existing footprint without prior approval of the Southern Land Office.
7. Permission must be obtained from the private landowner with controlling access.
8. All necessary BLM permits must be secured.
9. RY Timber, the contractor removing wood from BLM and private property will be required to monitor and control weeds during the License period and for two years after termination of License.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Matthew Wolcott
	Title:	Southern Land Office Area Manager
Signature:		**Date:** June 10 2013


State Section 18
State Section 16
Gated Access from East Boulder Road
Craft Ditch Crossing
East Boulder School
Existing Roads
New Roads
N
0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles
Land Use License 6216
RY Timber Road Use
T3S R13E Sections 16 & 18
Sweet Grass County, Montana
Prepared By: B. Shoemaker
June 7, 2013