CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Access road improvement project and parking area construction to comply with Consent Decree, Cause No. DV-12-45.
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2015
Proponent:	DNRC, PO Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620
Location:	W½SW¼, Section 10, T23N, R8W NW¼NW¼, Section 15, T23N, R8W
County:	Teton
Trust:	Capitol Buildings (CB)

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The DNRC and Salmond Ranch Company, Inc. have negotiated an access agreement to state lands which includes full DNRC administrative access and a seasonally-restricted general public access from July 1 to December 31. The details of the agreement are outlined in Consent Decree, Cause No. DV-12-45, Montana Ninth Judicial District County, Teton County, Montana. The agreement includes the construction of a low standard road (14'-16' wide) with minimal improvements, the installation of three new culverts, the fencing of a 200' X 200' parking area, and the installation of a walk through gate. The proposed road will cross approximately .5 miles of state land and encompass a total of 2 acres. The road improvements, installation of the culverts, and construction of the parking area will allow walk-in public access to state and federal lands (BLM and Forest Service) located in the North Fork of Deep Creek area southwest of Choteau.

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-Proponent
DNRC-Surface Owner
Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist
Gary Frank, DNRC Forest Management Bureau
Dave Yerk. FWP, Fisheries Biologist
Salmond Ranch Co.-Surface Lessee, Lease #10002

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

A 124 permit from FWP has been obtained from for the culvert installation on Kings Creek.

Montana Ninth Judicial District Court, Teton County, Consent Decree Cause No. DV-12-45

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 the new road improvements, culvert installations, parking area construction, and walk through gate installation as outlined in Consent Decree, Cause No. DV-12-45.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Approve the new road improvements, culvert installations, parking area construction, and walk through gate installation as outlined in Consent Decree, Cause No. DV-12-45.

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.

Soils are rocky and well drained. The topography is gently rolling to flat. Soil and topography are well suited for a low standard 14'-16 wide road, installation of the culverts, and construction of the parking area. Equipment will cause localized areas of soil compaction and will disturb the soil during construction. Reclamation and reseeding of the disturbed areas will limit long term soil erosion. Cumulative impacts on soil resources are not expected.

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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 no water rights associated with these tracts in the proposed project areas. The proposed road includes 2 crossings of existing irrigation ditches and a single crossing of Kings Creek. King Creek is a Class 3 stream with intermittent flow that is entirely captured by irrigation ditches and does not have direct return flow to another stream. Properly sized culverts will be installed in these three crossings. No impacts to downstream water quality or downstream beneficial uses are anticipated resulting from the construction and use of the road. Low level, short term, and localized increases in sediment delivery are likely to occur at the stream crossing site during the installation of the CMP and after the construction of the crossing until the fill material utilized has re-vegetated. These short-term increases are expected to be minimal and localized with no delivery to any downstream water resources.

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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.

The proposed action will not impact the air quality.

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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.

Approximately 2 acres of native vegetation will be impacted in the process of road improvements and the installation of three new culverts, and the building of a parking area. The vegetation consists primarily of native species. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed construction areas are a concern, but this concern will be mitigated as the DNRC is responsible for controlling weeds within the construction areas. Cumulative impacts on the vegetative resources are not expected as the proposed construction areas will be reclaimed and reseeded. The reseeding mixture will consist of a grass seed mixture of 30% Slender Wheatgrass, 30% Rough Fescue, 15% Green Needlegrass, 10% Western Wheatgrass, 10% Bluebunch Wheatgrass, and 5% Cicer Milkvetch. If drilled the rate will be 8#/acre and if broadcast the rate will be doubled.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T23N, R8W: 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.

The area is considered excellent wildlife habitat. These tracts provide habitat for a variety of big game species (black bear, elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope), predators (wolf, coyote, fox, and badger), upland game birds (sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds. The proposal does not include any land use change or drastic surface disturbances which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or traveling corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the construction of the road improvements, installation of the culverts, and construction of the parking area. Kings Creek is currently dry and aquatic habitats, fish habitat or fish species in general will not be impacted. The proposed action will not have long-term negative effects on existing wildlife species, wildlife habitat, or aquatic habitats.

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 state land parcels are located in the NCD grizzly bear recovery zone. This action is not expected to impact grizzly bears and/or grizzly bear habitat due to the small scale and temporary nature of the proposed construction. Other threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by proposal.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T23N, R8W. There were seven animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Mammals-Woverine, Canada Lynx, Fisher, and Grizzly Bear. Birds-Sprague's Pipit and Golden Eagle. Fish-Westslope Cutthroat Trout. These particular tracts of grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern and will not be impacted by the proposed project.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

A Class III intensity level cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect on state land. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified and no additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effec*t to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

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 road location and parking area will not change to the aesthetics character of the landscape. The parking area will be fence with material similar to adjacent fences (round wood posts, 3 rail wood stringers) No direct or cumulative effects to aesthetics are anticipated.

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 tracts 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 impact human health or safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The results of this project will add to the recreational potential in the area by providing walk-in access to previously land locked state and federal owned lands. Area agricultural operations will remain unchanged.

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.

DNRC will pay Salmond Ranch Co, Inc. for reasonable construction costs up to $15,000.00. Cumulative impacts are not likely to occur as no long-term employment will be created by the project.

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.

DNRC will pay Salmond Ranch Co, Inc. for reasonable construction costs up to $15,000.00. This payment will be subject to state and federal taxes. Therefore, the proposed action will slightly add to the tax revenue.

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

Substantial traffic will be added to the new access route. Teton County will be responsible for the long term road maintenance as outlined in the Consent Decree. Increased law enforcement in the area will be needed. There will be no excessive stress placed on the existing infrastructure of the area after the construction process is completed.

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.

The newly established access route will provide the general public seasonally restricted access (July 1 to December 31) to previously inaccessible state and federal lands. Access beyond the parking area will be walk-in or horseback (non-motorized) only. This action will provide high quality recreational access into the north fork Deep Creek area. This includes access to both State and Federal lands.

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.

DNRC will pay Salmond Ranch Co, Inc. for reasonable construction costs of the access road and parking area (up to $15,000.00).

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Tony Nickol	**Date:** August 26, 2015
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDINGS

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Approve the new road improvements, culvert installations, parking area construction, and walk through gate installation as outlined in Consent Decree, Cause No. DV-12-45.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Significant impacts are not expected to occur as a result of the proposed actions on state lands. Mitigation measures which are common and effective have been incorporated in the proposal to minimize the potential for environment impact. Impacts associated with this proposal on state lands are expected to be minor and short-term.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Erik Eneboe
	Title:	Conrad Unit Manger, CLO, DNRC
Signature: 	**Date**:	August 26, 2015

Teton County, Montana