

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Sitz Angus Ranch Backgrounding Feedlot Land Use License Project
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer/Fall 2015
Proponent:	Sitz Angus Ranch
Location:	S½SWSW of Section 29, T5S R8W
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent, Sitz Angus Ranch, has applied for a land use license to construct and maintain a backgrounding feedlot. The total area of the feedlot is approximately 12 - 14 acres with 6 to 7 acres of private and 6 to 7 acres of state land subject to final measurement. The state portion would be located near the SW corner of section 29, T5S R8W.

The grazing lessee, Hagenbarth Livestock, and Sitz Angus Ranch have agreed to remove approximately 3 – 6 acres from lease 6772 for this proposed background feedlot. Initial measurements of the flagged area by Dillon Unit Staff showed acreage may exceed the 6 acre request by up to 1 acre. Jim Hagenbarth was approached in regard to this potential change. He did not object to the possible increase in the request to 7 acres.

A backgrounding feedlot differs from a commercial feedlot in that it is used part of the year to introduce young livestock to feedlot feeding, while commercial feedlots operate to finish cattle for slaughter. The purpose of this feedlot is to prepare the proponents cattle for their annual auction and will not be used year-round for feeding livestock.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: *Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

Vanna Boccadori, Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Wildlife Biologist
Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist
Martin Miller, Montana Natural Heritage Program
Jim Hagenbarth, Lessee

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

No other governmental agencies with jurisdiction or additional permit requirements were identified during the scoping for this proposed project. The project as proposed would involve Montana Trust Land allocated to Montana Tech.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

Alternative B: Preferred alternative. To allow construction of the backgrounding feedlot

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 on site is a sandy loam. Wind erosion potential is minimal while water erosion potential is moderate under a cropping situation. If approved, the affected acreage will include a much higher organic matter component than the current native soil which will further reduce soil erosion potential. No cumulative impacts are expected as a result of this project.

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.

No surface water resources are located in close proximity to the project area. The nearest surface water is the Beaverhead River located approximately 4 air miles East of the proposed project, and the Big Hole River located approximately 5 air miles North of the project area.

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.

Air Quality would not be affected by this project.

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.

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities would be affected on the proposed 6 to 7 acre project. Vegetative cover on site is currently dominated by needle-and-thread grass with some introduced annual kochia apparent. The 6 to 7 acre proposal, if approved, will not negatively affect the vegetative characteristics of the area.

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 used extensively by pronghorn antelope year-round. At 6 to 7 acres in size and part year use, the proposed project will not affect use by antelope.

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 Resource Information Service (NRIS) Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) website was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located in the vicinity of the project area. The query results are listed below:

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – The Great Blue Heron is currently listed as sensitive by the State of Montana. According to the MNHP site, the blue heron primarily inhabits riparian areas and wetland habitats. The nearest surface water is the Beaverhead River located approximately 4 air miles East of the proposed project, and the Big Hole River located approximately 5 air miles North of the project area. The site is dry rangeland and would not impact blue heron habitat.

Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – Greater sage-grouse use has been recorded in the general vicinity of the proposed project. The site is comprised mainly of native grasses including needle-and-thread grass, Sandberg bluegrass, and junegrass. Sagebrush is not found in proximity to the project area.

Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – Sage thrashers are listed as sensitive by the BLM and State of Montana. The proposed project will not impact sagebrush communities. The project would not cause cumulative impacts to the sage thrasher.

Spotted Bat (*Euderma maculatum*) – The spotted bat is listed as sensitive by the State of Montana, USFS, & BLM. It's general habitat is defined as cliffs with rock crevices. Topography is flat with no rock outcroppings within 1.5 miles of the project site.

Great Basin Pocket Mouse (*Perognathus parvus*) – The great basin pocket mouse primarily inhabits sandy soil types with at least some brush cover. The proposed project will not affect the Great Basin pocket mouse habitat due to the very short nature of the vegetation type on-site and lack of shrub species.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist, was consulted regarding cultural resource issues on the tract. No cultural resources are listed in the data base. No cultural resources were identified during field inspections conducted by the Dillon Unit Land Use Specialist.

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 project is not located on a prominent topographic feature and will not alter 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.

No demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project. No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from this 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.

No other studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for this project.

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 health or safety risks are posed by the project.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

If approved, this project would improve the proponents' agricultural activities and production by providing a place to feed and prepare their registered cattle prior to auction.

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 project will not create or eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

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.

No significant increase in tax revenues are expected as a result of this project.

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.

No increased demand for government services are expected as a result of this project.

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.

No locally adopted environmental plans will be affected by this project.

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.

This project will not negatively alter recreational activities in the area.

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 change in population will result by this project.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No change in social structures and mores are expected as a result of this project.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The action would not affect any unique quality 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 current income for 2015 on the approximate 6.5 acres under grazing lease No. 6772 is \$2.66 per acre or \$17.29 total based on 0.18 AUM's/acre and \$14.41 per AUM annual rental rate. A negotiated return of \$50.00 per acre per year to the Montana Tech Trust for this project would increase the income on the affected acreage up to \$350.00 per year, an increase of \$332.71

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Chuck Maddox	Date: 9/15/2015
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Preferred alternative. To allow construction of the backgrounding feedlot

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The change in use from open grazing, to a feedlot, will have some minor impacts to the current land use and could increase the amount of weeds that are present at the site. There currently is kochia present near and around the location of the feedlot. The amount of Kochia present at the feedlot location will probably increase due to the amount of disturbed ground and increase in organic matter from the feedlot.

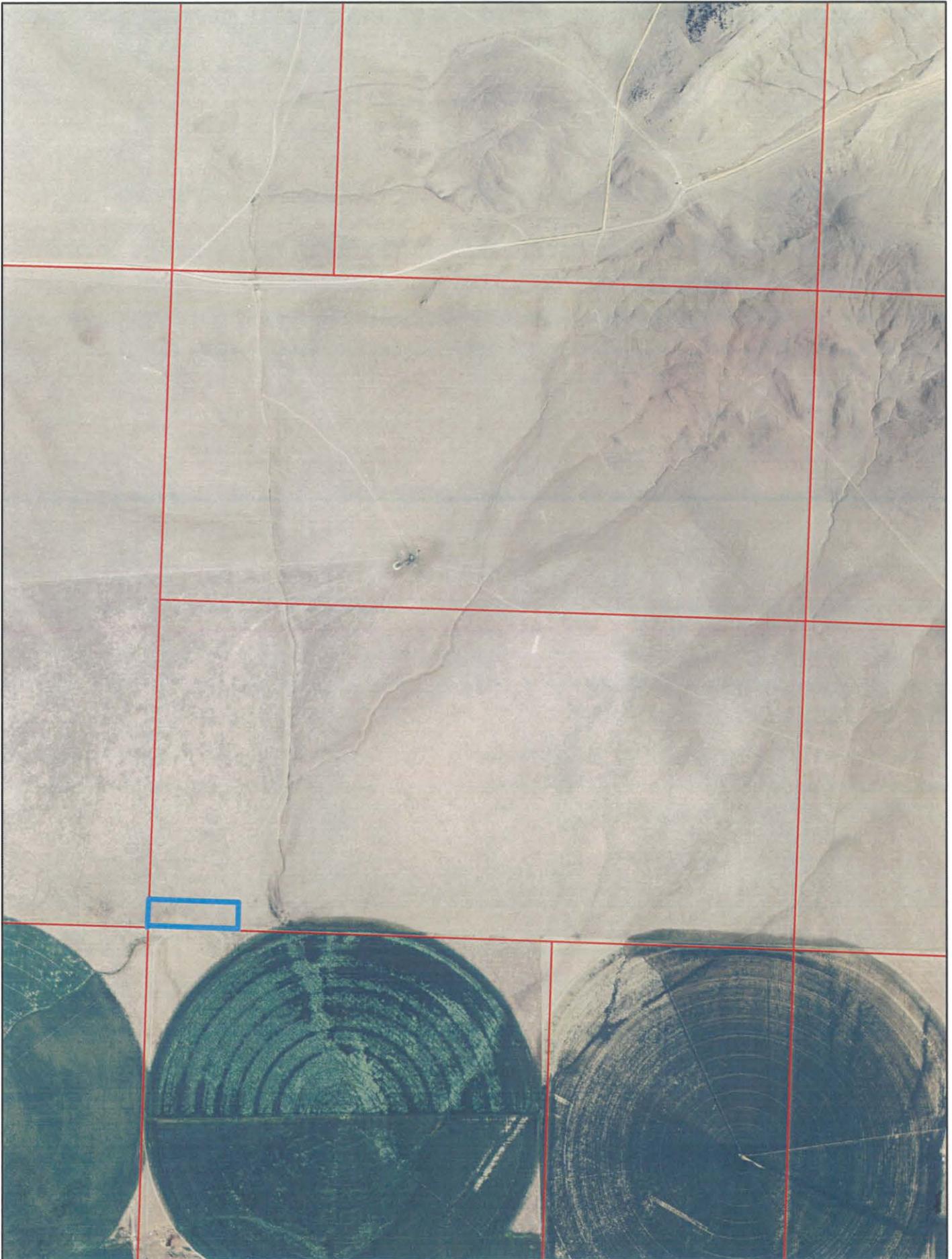
Sitz Livestock will be required to control the Kochia and work to keep it from spreading outside of the feedlot location. A yearly herbicide application will be required.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

- EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Timothy Egan
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan	
Date: September 16, 2015	

T5S R8W Sec. 29 2013



1 inch = 1,056 feet