

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Pleasant Valley Road Project
Proposed Implementation Date: June – October, 2016
Proponent: Kalispell Unit, Northwestern Land Office, Montana DNRC
County: Flathead

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Action:

The Kalispell Unit of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is proposing the Pleasant Valley Road Project. The project is located on State Trust Land adjacent to Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge (refer to Attachments vicinity map Figure A-1 and project map Figure A-2) and includes the following sections:

Beneficiary	Legal Description	Total Acres	Treated Acres
Common Schools	Section 16, T28N, R26W	5.4	5.4
Public Buildings			
MSU 2 nd Grant			
MSU Morrill			
Eastern College-MSU/Western College-U of M			
Montana Tech			
University of Montana			
School for the Deaf and Blind			
Pine Hills School			
Veterans Home			
Public Land Trust			
Acquired Land			

Objectives of the project include:

- Reclamation of 0.1 miles of Pleasant Valley Road, and construction of 0.7 miles of new Pleasant Valley Road on State Trust Land, to improve public access to State Trust Land. The existing roadway consists of unsuitable road base material and currently traverses through historical wetlands and Pleasant Valley Creek floodplains, resulting in seasonal saturation of the road prism and public safety and maintenance issues. Flood water occasionally overtops the road surface, resulting in rutting, surface erosion, settling and instability of the road sub-base material and road prism. This project would include relocating Pleasant Valley Road from the valley bottom to upland locations, improving road conditions and reducing annual road maintenance needs. The intent of this project is to enhance and improve access to State Trust Land in Section 16, T28N, R26W.

Proposed activities include:

Action	Quantity
Proposed Harvest Activities	
	# Acres
Clearcut	
Seed Tree	
Shelterwood	
Selection	
Commercial Thinning	
Salvage	
Total Treatment Acres	
Proposed Forest Improvement Treatment	
	# Acres
Pre-commercial Thinning	
Planting	
Proposed Road Activities	
	# Miles
New permanent road construction	0.7
New temporary road construction	
Road maintenance	
Road reconstruction	
Road abandoned	
Road reclaimed	0.1
Other Activities	

Duration of Activities:	June – October 2016
Implementation Period:	June – October 2016

The lands involved in this proposed project are held in trust by the State of Montana. (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11). The Board of Land Commissioners and the DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

The DNRC would manage lands involved in this project in accordance with:

- The State Forest Land Management Plan (DNRC 1996),
- Administrative Rules for Forest Management (ARM 36.11.401 through 471),
- The Montana DNRC Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) (DNRC 2010), and
- all other applicable state and federal laws.

Project Development

SCOPING:

- DATE:
 - July 31, 2015 – August 14, 2015

- PUBLIC SCOPED:
 - The scoping notice was posted on the DNRC Website: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/PublicInterest/Notices/Default.asp>
 - The scoping notice was posted at the U.S. Postal Service office in Marion, Montana
 - The scoping notice was advertised in the legal section of the Daily Interlake on July 31, 2015 and August 7, 2015.

- AGENCIES SCOPED:
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
 - U.S. Forest Service
 - Tribal Governments

- COMMENTS RECEIVED:
 - How many: None
 - Concerns: None
 - Results (how were concerns addressed): N/A – No Comments Received

DNRC specialists were consulted, including:

- Dave Poukish, Kalispell Unit Manager
- Norm Kuennen, Northwestern Land Office
- Chris Forristal, Biologist, Northwestern Land Office
- Mark Vessar, Hydrologist, Northwestern Land Office

Internal and external issues and concerns were incorporated into project planning and design and will be implemented in associated contracts.

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED: *(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

- **United States Fish & Wildlife Service-** DNRC is managing the habitats of threatened and endangered species on this project by implementing the Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands HCP and the associated Incidental Take Permit that was issued by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in February of 2012 under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act. The HCP identifies specific conservation strategies for managing the habitats of grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and three fish species: bull trout,

westslope cutthroat trout, and Columbia redband trout. This project complies with the HCP. The HCP can be found at www.dnrc.mt.gov/HCP.

- **Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)**- DNRC is classified as a major open burner by DEQ and is issued a permit from DEQ to conduct burning activities on state lands managed by DNRC. As a major open-burning permit holder, DNRC agrees to comply with the limitations and conditions of the permit.
- **Montana/Idaho Airshed Group**- The DNRC is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group which was formed to minimize or prevent smoke impacts while using fire to accomplish land management objectives and/or fuel hazard reduction (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). The Group determines the delineation of airsheds and impact zones throughout Idaho and Montana. Airsheds describe those geographical areas that have similar atmospheric conditions, while impact zones describe any area in Montana or Idaho that the Group deems smoke sensitive and/or having an existing air quality problem (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). As a member of the Airshed Group, DNRC agrees to burn only on days approved for good smoke dispersion as determined by the Smoke Management Unit. Burning is not a proposed activity under the Action Alternative.
- **Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (DFWP)**- A Stream Protection Act Permit (124 Permit) is required from DFWP for activities that may affect the natural shape and form of a stream's channel, banks, or tributaries. A 124 Permit will not be required for this project since the project area does not impact stream channels, streambanks, or tributaries.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative: No road reclamation or new road construction would occur, and Pleasant Valley Road would continue to provide a substandard driving surface for public land access.

Action Alternative: A 0.1 mile section of Pleasant Valley Road would be removed and reclaimed, and a 0.7 mile section of new road would be constructed, to improve the condition of Pleasant Valley Road. Currently, high groundwater and seasonal flooding of Pleasant Valley Creek result in seasonal saturation of the road prism. Relocation of the road from the valley bottom to upland areas would result in more reliable access to public land and lower long term road maintenance costs. Along with addressing road safety and maintenance issues, the Action Alternative would facilitate related federal actions including the restoration of stream and wetland habitat at Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The related federal action would enhance compatible public use at the Refuge and on adjacent State Trust Land, address habitat needs of fish and wildlife, and restore streams and wetlands.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

VEGETATION:

Vegetation Existing Conditions: The project area lies within the Northern Rock Mountain lower montane, foothill and valley grassland ecosystem. Native bunchgrasses are common throughout the area, including bluebunch wheatgrass, intermediate wheatgrass, and Idaho fescue. Nonnative pasture grasses are also dominant throughout the project area, such as Kentucky blue grass, common Timothy grass, quack grass, and creeping bentgrass. Shrubby cinquefoil, a shrub species, also occurs at the project site. The noxious weeds Canada thistle and spotted knapweed are present in some areas where the new road would be constructed. One rare plant, Spalding's catchfly, has been documented near the project area. The closest documented Spalding's catchfly plant to the project area is approximately 540 feet east of the new Pleasant Valley Road location on State Trust Land (Figure A-3). Wetland vegetation near the project consists mostly of a common beaked sedge community; expansion of wetland environments as a product of the Pleasant Valley Road Project and related federal restoration actions would result in approximately 16.1 additional acres of Palustrine emergent wetland dominated by sedge and rush wetland plant species on State Trust Land (Figure A-4).

Vegetation	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Noxious Weeds	x				x				x					
Rare Plants	x				x				x					
Vegetative community	x				x				x					
Old Growth	x				x				x					
Action														
Noxious Weeds			x				x				x		Yes	1
Rare Plants	x				x				x					2
Vegetative community			x		x						x		No	3
Old Growth	x				x				x					

Comments:

- 1) Moderate direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts to noxious weeds would occur as a result of the new permanent road construction. Total area affected by the road prism is 5.4 acres. While removal of noxious weeds would occur within the new road prism, the spread of noxious weed seed would be likely as both a direct impact from road construction, and as a secondary impact from continued vehicle travel and seed dispersal by vehicle tires. Impacts of the action on noxious weeds are also cumulative, as the past cattle grazing of the area has increased weed abundance throughout State Trust Land bordering the Refuge.

- 2) No direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts to rare plants are anticipated. The nearest documented occurrence of Spalding's catchfly is along a hillslope approximately 540 feet east of the new road location. If encountered during road construction, additional plant surveys would be conducted and avoidance alternatives or mitigation requirements would be analyzed.

- 3) A total of 5.4 acres of disturbance to upland grassland vegetation would occur where the new road prism is constructed. This disturbance is a permanent direct impact, resulting from the 0.7 miles of permanent road which would be constructed. Secondary impacts are not anticipated. Moderate cumulative impacts include the effects of the road on upland vegetation over time.

Vegetation Mitigations:

Noxious weed establishment is expected to occur along the new roadside, and mitigation of impacts could occur through the implementation of a noxious weed management program, including roadside herbicide spray application. Impacts to upland grassland vegetation cannot be mitigated, as the new road construction would result in a permanent loss to the grassland vegetation community on the road prism footprint.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions: The new road traverses through four mapped USDA NRCS soil units: 15B Lostprairie-Whitebear complex, 541E Finleypoint-Haskillpass-Wimper complex, 17A Whitebear-Dahlake complex, and 512D Perma-Quast-Totelake complex. Most soils have silt to loam textures, with sands and gravel common at eskers and glacial outwash plains. Depth to water table is between 12 and 48 inches on the valley bottom, and greater than 80 inches on hillsides. None of the soil is classified as prime farmland.

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	x				x				x					
Erosion	x				x				x					
Nutrient Cycling	x				x				x					
Slope Stability	x				x				x					
Soil Productivity	x				x				x					
Action														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)			x		x				x				No	1
Erosion		x			x				x				No	2
Nutrient Cycling	x				x				x					

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number	
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative						
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High			
Slope Stability	x				x				x						
Soil Productivity			x		x				x					No	3

Comments:

- 1) 5.4 acres of upland soil would be permanently impacted as a direct result of new permanent road construction. Soil compaction and displacement would occur within the new road prism. No secondary or cumulative impacts to soil resources are expected.

- 2) Direct impacts on soil from erosion, due to road construction equipment use and road construction activities, are expected to occur. These impacts are minor as most of the impact is from physical disturbance, however some soil erosion is anticipated as construction equipment moves over the ground surface and exposes soil. Appropriate Best Management Practices and soil and water conservation practices (e.g. silt fences, straw wattles, straw mulching) will be implemented to minimize soil displacement and erosion. Following construction activities, all disturbed areas will be broadcast seeded with an appropriate seed mix.

- 3) Moderate direct impacts on soil productivity would occur with implementation of the Action Alternative. 5.4 acres of upland soil would become unproductive, as the new permanent roadway is built. Approximately 0.4 acres of soil would be enhanced in association with the removal of the 0.1 mile segment of Pleasant Valley Road. Following road removal, growth media would be placed on disturbed soils and reseeded. Over time, the surface is expected to convert to Palustrine emergent wetland as shown in Figure A-4.

Soil Mitigations:

Impacts to soil cannot be mitigated. The physical disturbance and loss of soil productivity of 5.4 acres is a permanent impact, resulting from the construction and maintenance of the new permanent road prism. However, removal of the 0.1 mile of Pleasant Valley Road will result in 0.4 acres of improved soil productivity.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

The newly constructed road prism would have no significant impact on the quality or quantity of water in the watershed, and potential for cumulative watershed effects as a result of Action Alternative implementation is low as there are no ephemeral, intermittent or perennial drainages in the project area. Surface water drainage along the new road would be addressed, where necessary, with new culvert installation. Groundwater would not be impacted.

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions: No ephemeral, intermittent, or perennial streams or rivers are present at the project area. Groundwater generally occurs between 12 and 80 inches below the soil surface, and would not be impacted with the action alternative implementation.

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Water Quality	x				x				x					
Water Quantity	x				x				x					
Action														
Water Quality	x				x				x					
Water Quantity	x				x				x					

Comments: The action alternative would have no direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts on water quality and quantity.

Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations: No impacts would occur.

FISHERIES:

Fisheries Existing Conditions: Fisheries resources do not exist in the project area.

No-Action: No effects on fish species or fisheries resources would occur.

Action Alternative (see Fisheries table below):

Fisheries	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Sediment	x				x				x					
Flow Regimes	x				x				x					
Woody Debris	x				x				x					
Stream Shading	x				x				x					
Stream Temperature	x				x				x					
Connectivity	x				x				x					
Populations	x				x				x					
Action														
Sediment	x				x				x					
Flow Regimes	x				x				x					
Woody Debris	x				x				x					
Stream Shading	x				x				x					
Stream Temperature	x				x				x					
Connectivity	x				x				x					
Populations	x				x				x					

Comments: No effects on fish or fisheries resources would occur.

Fisheries Mitigations: None.

WILDLIFE:

No-Action: No additional impacts to wildlife would occur.

Action Alternative (see Wildlife table below):

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Threatened and Endangered Species														
Grizzly bear <i>(Ursus arctos)</i> Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity		x				x				x			Yes	1
Canada lynx <i>(Felix lynx)</i> Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zone		x				x				x			Yes	2
Wolverine <i>(Gulo gulo)</i>	x				x				x					
Sensitive Species														
Bald eagle <i>(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional forest within 1 mile of open water		x				x				x			No	3
Black-backed woodpecker <i>(Picoides arcticus)</i> Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	x				x				x					
Coeur d'Alene salamander <i>(Plethodon idahoensis)</i> Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams	x				x				x					
Columbian sharp-tailed grouse <i>(Tympanuchus)</i>	x				x				x					

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<i>Phasianellus columbianus</i> Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture														
Common loon (<i>Gavia immer</i>) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	x				x				x					
Fisher (<i>Martes pennanti</i>) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	x				x				x					
Flammulated owl (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	x				x				x					
Gray Wolf (<i>Canis lupus</i>) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities	x				x				x					
Harlequin duck (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	x				x				x					
Northern bog lemming (<i>Synaptomys borealis</i>) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats	x				x				x					
Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open	x				x				x					

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
foraging areas and/or wetlands														
Pileated woodpecker <i>(Dryocopus pileatus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	x				x				x					
Townsend's big-eared bat <i>(Plecotus townsendii)</i> Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	x				x				x					
Big Game Species														
Elk		x				x				x			Yes	4
Whitetail		x				x				x			Yes	4
Mule Deer		x				x				x			Yes	4
Other	x				x				x					

Comments:

- 1) The action alternative would have no permanent direct impact on grizzly bear populations or their critical habitat. The project area is not located in a grizzly bear Recovery Zone but is within a Non-Recovery Occupied Zone. While one grizzly bear has been documented at the Refuge in the past, it is unlikely that the new road construction would have a permanent effect on grizzly bear populations which travel through DNRC State Trust Land. No pullouts or picnic areas would be permitted under the Action Alternative. At the discretion of the DNRC, additional restrictions may be implemented to provide further protections to grizzly bears.

Temporary direct impacts on grizzly bear from road obliteration and construction activities would occur. Noise, construction equipment, and increased human activity at construction sites would have a temporary impact on any grizzly bears that are in the vicinity of the project area during construction. Secondary impacts to grizzly bear populations could also occur from continued vehicle use of the new road, if grizzly bears travel in the vicinity of the new road. Cumulative impacts to grizzly bear including impacts from past human activities in the vicinity of the project area would also continue to occur, and the Action Alternative would have a minor impact on cumulative effects. The related federal habitat restoration actions on the Refuge would, however, increase

the total habitat area for grizzly bear populations, as wetlands and riparian habitats are restored to historical conditions.

- 2) The action alternative would have no permanent direct impact on Canada lynx populations or their critical habitat. Canada lynx critical habitat has been designated in the mountainous region surrounding the project area. Habitat within the project area consists of bunch grass prairie and is not suitable for Canada lynx. The closest critical habitat is approximately 2 miles from the project area and 2,000 feet higher in elevation.

Temporary impacts on Canada lynx are not likely to occur as a result of road obliteration and construction activities since Canada lynx have not been documented or observed on the Refuge. Road construction activity, noise, and an increased human presence could temporarily impact Canada lynx mobility through the project area. Secondary impacts from road use could also impact Canada lynx movement if they are present in the area, and cumulative effects on Canada lynx are likely to continue to occur from previous human activities in the vicinity of the Refuge and the new road construction. The related federal actions would, however, have a net positive impact on Canada lynx populations if they utilize the Refuge, as wetlands and riparian ecosystems are restored to historical conditions.

- 3) Bald eagles have been documented nesting along the Refuge boundary. However, it is unclear whether any nests have been established on State Trust Land. The action alternative would have no permanent direct impact on bald eagle populations. Temporary direct impacts could, however, occur with road construction activity, noise, and increased human presence during construction, if bald eagles reside in the vicinity of the project area. Secondary impacts to bald eagles could occur with continued use of the new roadway, and cumulative impacts are likely to continue to occur from previous human activities and the new road construction.
- 4) Elk, whitetail deer, and mule deer utilize the State Trust Land adjacent to the Refuge as habitat. Direct temporary impacts from road construction related activities would occur to elk and deer populations. Secondary impacts from continued road use would impact the ungulates as well, and cumulative impacts arising from the history of human modifications to the environment in the vicinity of the project area would continue to impact elk, whitetail deer, and mule deer.

Wildlife Mitigations:

Temporary direct impacts from road reclamation and construction activities to grizzly bear and Canada lynx would be mitigated by implementing appropriate measures to reduce the potential for animal-human conflict during the construction period. Storage and disposal of food, refuse, construction materials, petroleum products, human waste and other animal attractants would be accomplished in an animal conscious manner, and direct impacts to grizzly bear and Canada lynx would be minimized.

Secondary impacts occurring from continued use of the new roadway, and cumulative impacts occurring from the interaction of past and current human activities, on grizzly bear, Canada lynx,

bald eagle, elk, whitetail deer and mule deer cannot be mitigated. However, implementation of the related federal stream and wetland restoration actions would result in an overall increase in habitat quantity and quality for the wildlife species.

AIR QUALITY:

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Smoke	x				x				x					
Dust	x				x				x					
Action														
Smoke	x				x				x					
Dust			x			x				x			Yes	1

Comments:

- 1) Implementation of the Action Alternative would temporarily impact air quality at the project site, mainly due to increased airborne dust from road reclamation and construction activities. A temporary increase in pollution levels would also occur with road construction equipment activity, however all construction related increases in dust and pollution emissions would be localized and temporary, and levels are not expected to exceed air quality standards. Secondary impacts on air quality from new road use would be low, and would include an increase in airborne dust at the project area as vehicles continue to travel on the new road. Cumulative impacts on air quality resulting from the use of Pleasant Valley Road and other roads in the area are also likely.

Air Quality Mitigations:

Construction work would be performed during business hours to reduce air quality impacts on local residents and visitors to the area. Best Management Practices would be implemented to mitigate temporary impacts to air quality, including watering of road surfaces to decrease airborne dust. Dust abatement measures on the new road could also mitigate secondary and cumulative impacts to air quality.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	x				x				x					
Aesthetics	x				x				x					

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	x				x				x					
Action														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	x				x				x					1
Aesthetics			x			x				x				No 2
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	x				x				x					

Comments:

- 1) The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has conducted a file search of the State Historic Preservation Office's (SHPO) site and manuscript files for known cultural resources and surveys in the vicinity of the proposed action area. Resources recorded include two ranch houses (24FH0964, 24FH0965) and a log building (24FH0966) on the adjacent Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge. The buildings are not located on DNRC State Trust Land. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has initiated consultation for the proposed new road construction and segment of road to be decommissioned and reclaimed on State Trust Land in Section 16. A field inventory and cultural resource inventory is scheduled for 2016 prior to construction activities. If cultural resources are encountered, consultation with SHPO will be reinitiated.

- 2) The action alternative would result in moderate temporary impacts to visual aesthetics during the construction period, as heavy machinery and equipment is used to reclaim 0.1 miles of road, and construct 0.7 miles of new road. Low secondary and cumulative impacts to aesthetics would occur from the use of the new roadway and other roads in the area. The related federal stream and wetland restoration actions would, however, result in a major beneficial effect on aesthetics on State Trust Land and the Refuge, as stream and wetland ecosystems are restored, and wildlife use and viewing opportunities increase.

Mitigations:

Direct impacts to aesthetics would be temporary and localized. Secondary and cumulative impacts to aesthetics resulting from road use cannot be mitigated, however views of restored wetlands from the new road location would increase wildlife and natural scenery viewing opportunities.

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.*

- Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge, Pleasant Valley Road Relocation and Stream and Wetland Restoration Project Environmental Assessment.
 - Approved, Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact issued July 2, 2015 by U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (Region 6).

- Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge, Pleasant Valley road Relocation and Stream and Wetland Restoration Project Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation.
 - Concurrence June 22, 2015 by U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Ecological Services Office.
 - **Not likely to adversely impact** Grizzly Bear
 - **No effect** on Canada lynx
 - **No effect** on Bull trout
 - **Not likely to adversely impact** Spalding's catchfly

Impacts on the Human Population

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Human Population.

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Health and Human Safety	x				x				x					
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	x				x				x					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	x				x				x					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	x				x				x					
Demand for Government Services	x				x				x					
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	x				x				x					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	x				x				x					
Social Structures and Mores	x				x				x					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	x				x				x					
Action														
Health and Human Safety		x			x				x				Yes	1
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	x				x				x					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	x				x				x					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	x				x				x					
Demand for Government Services	x				x				x					
Access To and Quality of Recreational and	x				x				x					2

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Wilderness Activities														
Density and Distribution of population and housing	x				x				x					
Social Structures and Mores	x				x				x					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	x				x				x					

Comments:

- 1) Implementation of the proposed action would result in direct impacts to health and human safety, resulting from road construction related activity. All impacts would be localized and temporary, and health and human safety would not be impacted outside of the construction period.

- 2) Access to recreational and wilderness activities would be increased as a result of action alternative implementation. The new Pleasant Valley Road would provide more reliable access to recreation and wilderness than currently exists, as the quality of the road would be improved from current conditions.

Mitigations:

Impacts to health and human safety during the road construction period would be mitigated through compliance with construction safety regulations and measures, including the use of hard hats on site, posting of safety signs, and traffic control directors and flaggers where necessary.

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.*

- Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (USFWS 2005).

- DNRC. 1996. State forest land management plan: final environmental impact statement (and appendixes). Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

- DNRC. 2010. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan: Final EIS, Volume II, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances:

Costs, revenues and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives. They are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return.

No Action: The No Action alternative would not generate any return to the trust at this time.

Action: Road construction would have a positive impact on potential grazing of State Trust Land. Relocation of Pleasant Valley Road from historical wetland areas to upland locations, and the implementation of related federal actions including restoration of wetland habitats, would increase wetland acreage by approximately 16.1 acres on State Trust Land (Figure A-4). Marginally wetter conditions are expected on the 16.1 acres, with an increase in palatable sedge vegetation from current conditions. Implementation of the action alternative would result in a net positive impact on potential grazing, and would generate additional revenue for the Common Schools Trust if grazed.

Implementation of the action alternative would also enhance and improve motorized access to State Trust Land in Section 16 for the purpose of ongoing land management activities and public use.

References

DNRC. 1996. State forest land management plan: final environmental impact statement (and appendixes). Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

DNRC. 2010. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan: Final EIS, Volume II, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

No.

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

No.

Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:

Name: John Muhlfeld
Title: Hydrologist, River Design Group, Inc.
Date: July 31, 2015

Finding

Alternative Selected

The Action Alternative is selected.

Significance of Potential Impacts

No significant impacts are expected to occur due to this action. Section 16 does not have motorized access. The new road placement for this project will provide motorized access to Section 16. The movement of the existing road to this location will provide a more historic condition for the hydrological environment present on this site and will positively enhance the existing condition from where the road is presently located. The increase in wet land on section 16 due to this project is expected to increase the carrying capacity for cattle grazing of this section because of the type of wet land expected to be created.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

Name: Dave Poukish

Title: Montana DNRC, Northwester Land Office, Kalispell Unit Manager

Date: 9/4/15

Signature: /s/ David M. Poukish

Attachment A- Maps

Figure A-1: Pleasant Valley Road Project Vicinity Map.

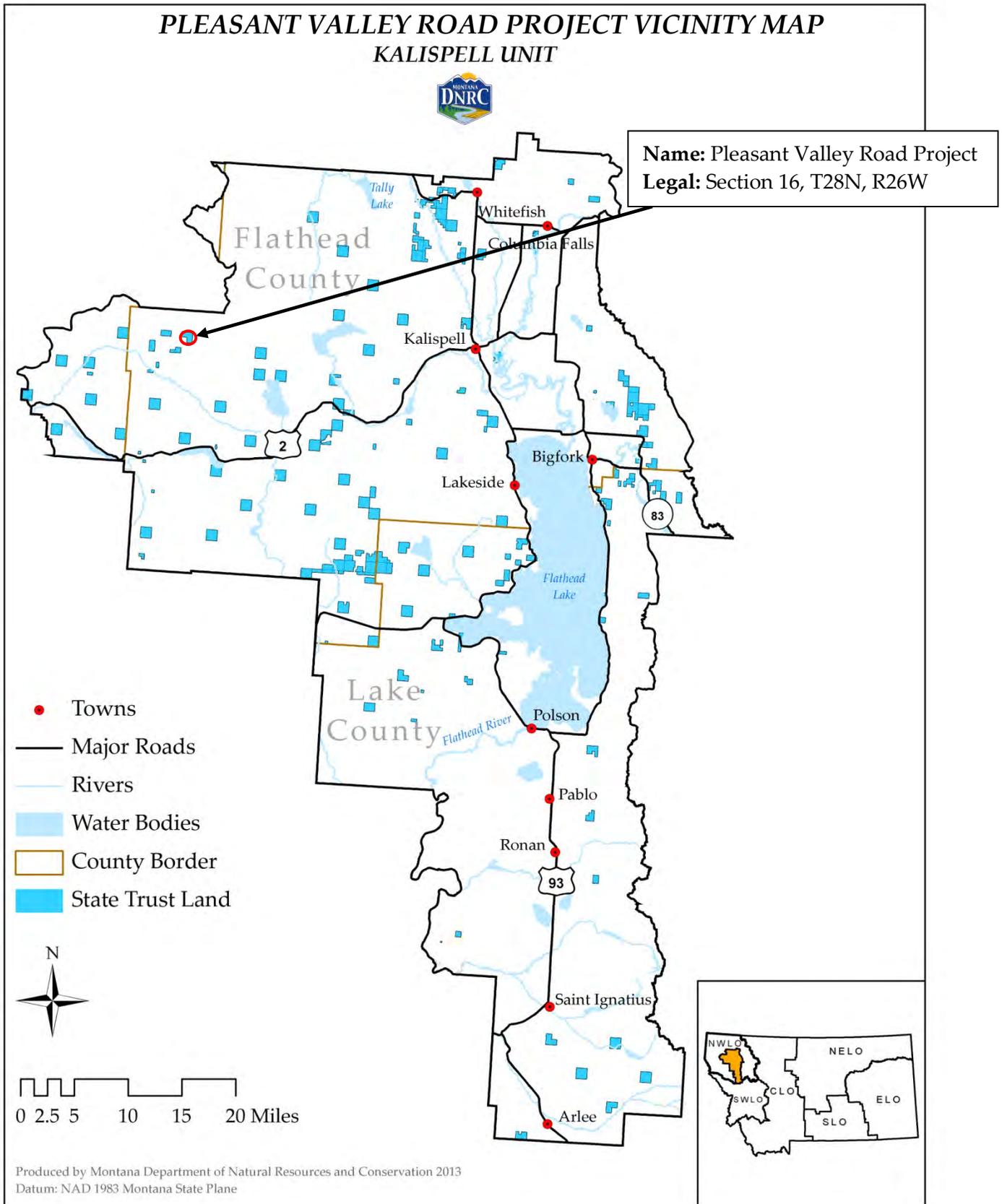


Figure A-2: Pleasant Valley Road Project Map

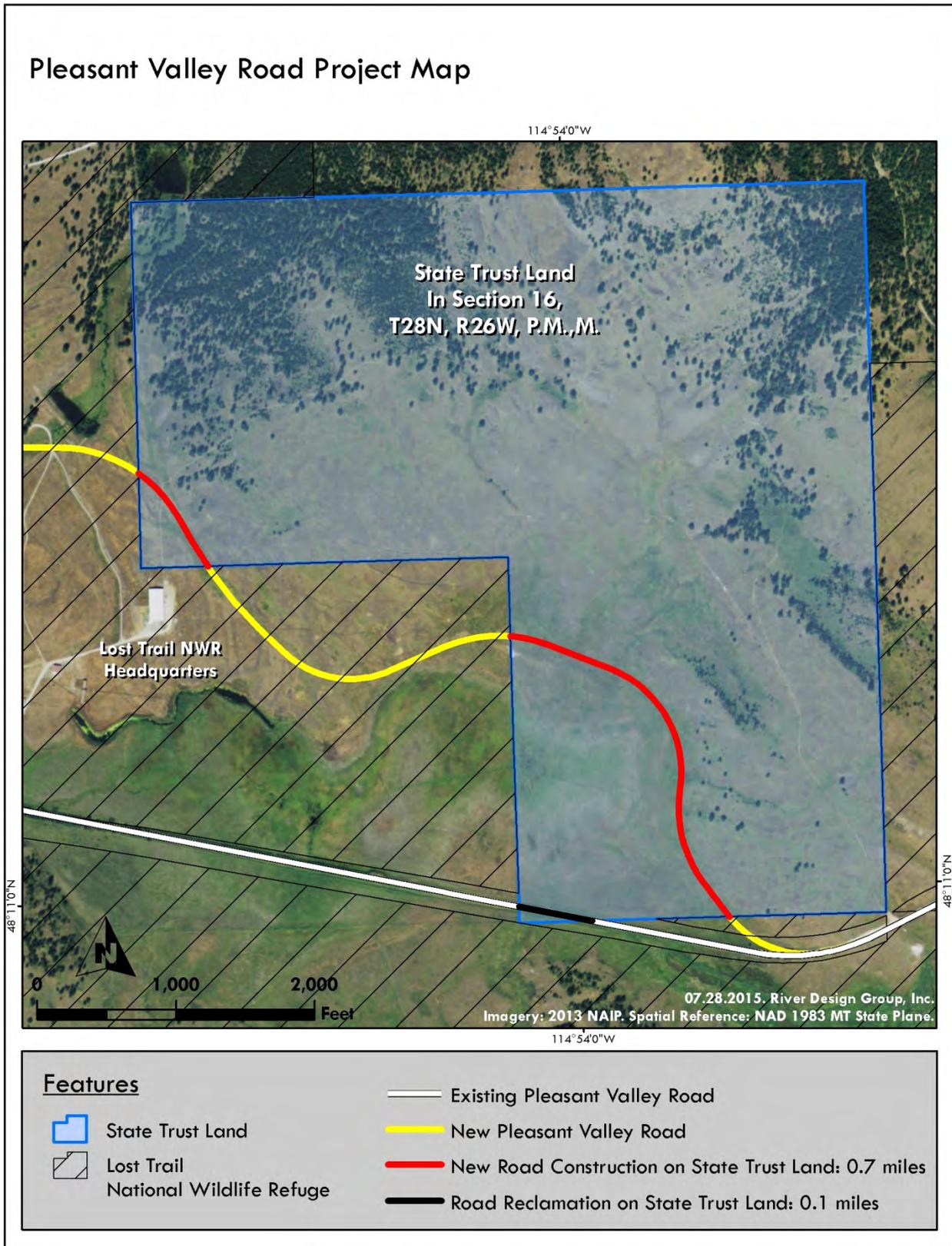


Figure A-3: Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) locations.

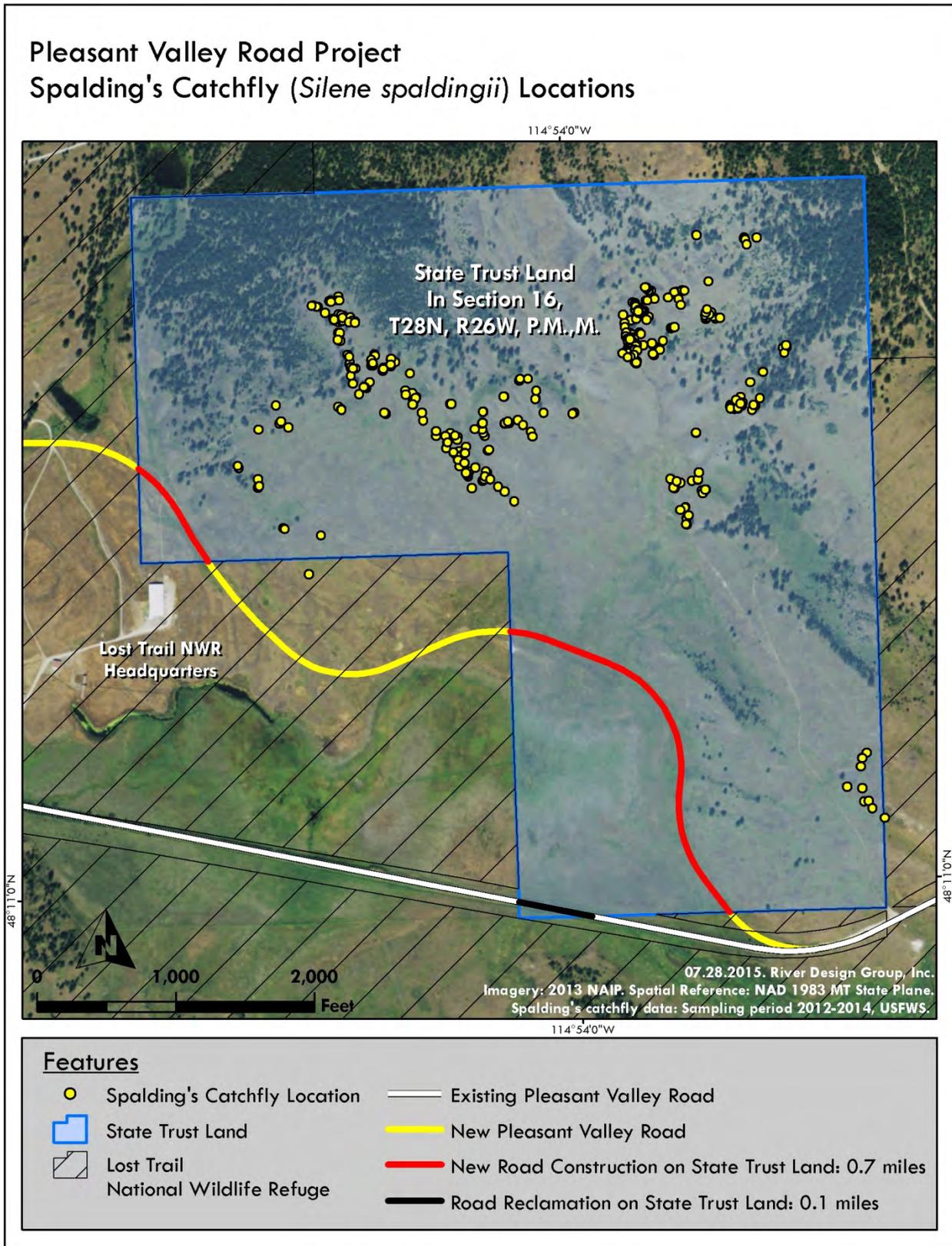


Figure A-4: Existing wetland distribution and proposed wetland expansion.

