

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

### On an Application for an OPENCUT MINING PERMIT

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). An EA functions to identify, disclose, and analyze the impacts of a proposed action. This document may disclose impacts that have no legislatively required mitigation measures, or over which there is no regulatory authority.

The state law that regulates gravel mining operations in Montana is the Opencut Mining Act. This law and the rules adopted thereunder place operational guidance and limitations on a project during its lifetime, and provide for the reclamation of land affected by opencut mining operations.

Local governments and other state agencies may have authority over different resources and activities under their regulations. Approval or denial of this Opencut Application will be based on a determination of whether or not the proposed operation complies with the Opencut Mining Act and the rules adopted thereunder. The DEQ approval of this application would not relieve the operator from the obligation to comply with any other applicable federal, state, or county statutes, regulations, or ordinances. The operator is responsible for obtaining any other permits, licenses, approvals, etc. that are required for any part of the proposed operation.

**APPLICANT:** Fergus County Road Department

**COUNTY:** Fergus

**SITE NAME:** Peterson Pit

**DATE:** May 2016

**LOCATION:** Section 13, T12N, R15E

**PROPOSAL:** The applicant proposes to permit a new, long-term gravel pit to mine, screen, crush, stockpile and transport 600,000 cubic yards of gravel from a 49.1-acre site located 8.5 miles north of Judith Gap, Montana, and 2.5 miles east of Buffalo, Montana. A number of features are located outside of the proposed permit boundary. An intermittent stream tributary of Ross Fork Creek is located to the west. An oil pipeline, Dry Creek Road, and electric power lines are parallel to the east boundary of the site. The Buffalo Tank Farm facility with numerous above ground oil tanks is located approximately ¼ mile to the northeast.

The Fergus County Road Department would be liable to reclaim the site to rangeland/pasture by December 2040. This application contains all items required by the Opencut Mining Act and its implementing rules. Proponent commits to properly conducting opencut operations and would be legally bound by the permit.

| <b>IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>                              |  |
|---|--|
| <b>RESOURCE</b>   | <b>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES</b>   |
| <b>1. TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</b> | <p>The topography of the site is a gently sloping terrace. Geology consists of alluvium of braid plains deposited during the Quaternary and Tertiary. The broad coalescing alluvial fans have been incised by modern streams.</p> <p>The soils for most of the site consist primarily of Doughty-Judith loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes. The eastern part of the site along the terrace breaks, the soils consist of Judith-Windham gravelly clay loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes. The operator would replace 12 inches of soil and no overburden.</p> <p>The site receives approximately 15 inches of precipitation per year.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> An irreversible and irretrievable removal of gravel from the site would occur. A small impact to the quantity and quality of soils from salvaging, stockpiling, and resoiling activities also would occur, but this would not impair</p> |

| IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT                                       |  |
|---|--|
| RESOURCE  | POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES  |
|   | the capacity of the soils to support full reclamation. There are no unusual topographic, geologic, soil, or special reclamation considerations that would prevent reclamation success.   |
| <b>2. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION</b>                        | <p>An intermittent stream is located west of the site. The stream is a tributary of Ross Fork Creek. Water would be used on-site for dust control and would be obtained from a source more than 300 feet from the site.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> The proposed activities would have a minimal effect on the quantity and quality of the surface and groundwater resources.</p> <p><i>Cumulative:</i> Cumulative impacts by the proposed action on resources would be negligible.</p>   |
| <b>3. AIR QUALITY</b>   | <p>Air quality standards are based upon the Clean Air Act of Montana and pursuant rules and are administered by the DEQ Air Resources Management Bureau (ARMB). Its program is approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These rules and standards are designed to be protective of human health and the environment.</p> <p>Air quality permits would be required on the processing equipment before installment. Machinery, such as generators, crushers and asphalt plants, are individually permitted for allowable emissions. Best Available Control Technology (BACT) is the usual standard applied.</p> <p>Fugitive dust is that which blows off the pit floor, stockpiles, gravel roads, farm fields, etc. It is considered to be a nuisance but not harmful to health.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> Air quality standards as set by the federal government and enforced by the ARMB would allow minimal detrimental air impacts.</p> |
| <b>4. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY</b>                          | <p>There are no known rare or sensitive plants or cover types present in the site area. Onsite vegetation consists primarily of smooth brome, crested wheatgrass, grama grass, prairie junegrass, slender wheatgrass and fringed sagewort, and provides approximately 90% cover. The vegetation would be removed as soil is stripped and the site would be replanted with plant species compatible with the proposed reclaimed use.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> No long term detrimental impacts to the vegetation would occur.</p>   |
| <b>5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</b>               | <p>Although the area is used primarily for pasture, it also supports populations of deer, rodents, song birds, coyotes, foxes, raptors, insects and various other animal species. Population numbers for these species are not known.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> The proposed mine is expected to temporarily displace some individual species and it is likely that the site would be re-inhabited following reclamation to similar habitat.</p>  |
| <b>6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</b> | <p>The Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) lists the following single species of concern in the vicinity of the site:</p> <p><b>Little Brown Myotis</b> (<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>), also known as Little Brown Bat, has a cinnamon-buff to dark brown color above, and buffy to pale gray below. This species is resident year-round in Montana, but may be partially migratory because known winter aggregations are much smaller than the apparent size of summer populations. They are found in a variety of habitats across a large elevation gradient. They commonly forage over water and mostly feed on</p>  |

| <b>IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>                                 |  |
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| <b>RESOURCE</b>  | <b>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES</b>   |
|  | <p>insects. They roost in attics, barns, bridges, snags, loose bark, and bat houses. These bats can live more than 30 years. Females have one young per year.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> None of the listed species have been found on this site. Even if suitable habitat did exist on this site, the disturbance area would be small and large areas of similar or identical habitat surrounds the site. The possible impact to these species would be minimal.</p>  |
| <b>7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES</b>                              | <p>The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was notified of the application. It reported that no sites have been previously recorded within the designated search locale. A pedestrian survey of the area by DEQ personnel did not reveal any artifacts or signs of occupation. SHPO does not feel that a cultural resource inventory is warranted at this site at this time.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> If during operations resources were to be discovered, activities would be temporarily moved to another area or halted until SHPO was contacted and the importance of the resources was determined.</p> |
| <b>8. SAGE GROUSE EXECUTIVE ORDER</b>                                      | <p>The project would not be in core, general or connectivity sage grouse habitat, as designated by the Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (Program) at: <a href="https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/">https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/</a>.</p>   |
| <b>9. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY</b> | <p>There are no unusual demands on land, water, air or energy anticipated as a result of this project.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> Negligible impacts to land, water, air, or energy would occur.</p>   |

| <b>IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</b>                                    |   |
|---|---|
| <b>RESOURCE</b>   | <b>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES</b>  |
| <b>10. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS</b>                  | <p>Fergus County zoning clearance has been obtained.</p> <p>The site is not zoned.</p>  |
| <b>11. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING</b>             | <p>Aerial photos of the surrounding area indicate there are no nearby residences.</p> <p><i>Impact:</i> This county pit is being sited in this area because of the location of the resource, and to provide resources for Fergus County road maintenance projects in the area.</p>  |
| <b>12. AESTHETICS</b>   | <p>The site is located in a common grassland area. There would be a temporary alteration of aesthetics while mining is under way. However, reclamation would return the area to a visually acceptable landscape. This project is considered to be long-term, i.e., planned to take 24 years to complete.</p>  |
| <b>13. QUANTITY/ DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT</b>                           | <p>Existing employees would mainly be utilized for this operation. There is low potential that this project would create a significant number of new jobs.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> New employment opportunities would be limited.</p>  |
| <b>14. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION</b> | <p>The acreage listed in the proposal would be taken out of grassland use. Upon completion of mining, the land would be reclaimed to rangeland/pasture.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> Grassland production would be reduced as soil stripping and operations progress across the site. When the entire site is opened up for mining and mine-related activities, all grassland activities would cease, but would be restored as the site is reclaimed.</p> |

| IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION  |  |
|--|--|
| RESOURCE   | POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES  |
| <b>15. LOCAL, STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES, PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY INCOME</b> | Local, state and federal governments would be responsible for appraising the property, setting tax rates, collecting taxes, etc., from the companies, employees, or landowners benefitting from this operation. Following reclamation, it is assumed the tax base would revert to pre-mine levels. |
| <b>16. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES</b>  | Limited oversight by DEQ Opencut Program personnel would be conducted in concert with other area activity when in the vicinity.  |
| <b>17. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>   | Any industrial activity would increase the opportunities for accidental injury. There are agencies that require the Operator to implement specific safety measures. If followed there is no reason to believe that significant safety issues would be present.                                     |
| <b>18. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES</b>       | This activity would not inhibit the use of the identified resources.   |
| <b>19. NATIVE CULTURAL CONCERNS</b>  | <i>Impacts:</i> None identified.   |

**20. Alternatives Considered:**

- A. Denial Alternative: The Department would deny an application that does not comply with the Act and Rules. No impacts to the natural or human environment would occur.
- B. Approval Alternative: The Department would approve an application that complies with the Act and Rules. Impacts of this application are addressed in the body of the EA.

**21. Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups or Individuals contacted:** Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Fergus County Planning Department, and Fergus County Weed District.

**22. Other Governmental Agencies which May Have Overlapping or Sole Jurisdiction include, but may not be limited to:** Fergus County Commission or Fergus County Planning Department (zoning), Fergus County Weed District, MSHA and OSHA (worker safety), DEQ ARMB (air quality) and Water Protection Bureau (groundwater and surface water discharge; stormwater), DNRC (water rights), and MDT (road access).

**23. Regulatory Impact on Private Property:** The analysis done in response to the Private Property Assessment Act indicates no impact. The Department does not plan to deny the application or impose conditions that would restrict the use of private property so as to constitute a taking.

**24. Magnitude and Significance of Potential Impacts:** This proposal is not likely to create impacts of significance due to mitigation, restrictions, and oversight mandated by the Opencut Mining Act and pursuant rules and the Montana Clean Air Act.

**25. Recommendation for Further Environmental Analysis:** [ ] EIS [ X ] No Further Analysis

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Name Title

## PRIVATE PROPERTY ASSESSMENT ACT (PPAA) CHECKLIST

DOES THE PROPOSED AGENCY ACTION HAVE TAKINGS IMPLICATIONS UNDER THE PPAA?

| YES | NO |   |
|-----|----|---|
| X   |    | 1. Does the action pertain to land or water management or environmental regulation affecting private real property or water rights?   |
|     | X  | 2. Does the action result in either a permanent or indefinite physical occupation of private property?  |
|     | X  | 3. Does the action deprive the owner of all economically viable uses of the property?   |
|     | X  | 4. Does the action deny a fundamental attribute of ownership?   |
|     | X  | 5. Does the action require a property owner to dedicate a portion of property or to grant an easement? (If answer is NO, skip questions 5a and 5b and continue with question 6.)                          |
|     |    | 5a. Is there a reasonable, specific connection between the government requirement and legitimate state interests?   |
|     |    | 5b. Is the government requirement roughly proportional to the impact of the proposed use of the property?   |
|     | X  | 6. Does the action have a severe impact on the value of the property?   |
|     | X  | 7. Does the action damage the property by causing some physical disturbance with respect to the property in excess of that sustained by the public generally? (If the answer is NO, skip questions 7a-7c) |
|     |    | 7a. Is the impact of government action direct, peculiar, and significant?   |
|     |    | 7b. Has the government action resulted in the property becoming practically inaccessible, waterlogged, or flooded?  |
|     |    | 7c. Has the government action diminished property values by more than 30% and necessitated the physical taking of adjacent property or property across a public way from the property in question?        |

Taking or damaging implications exist if YES is checked in response to question 1 and also to any one or more of the following questions: 2, 3, 4, 6, 7a, 7b, 7c; or if NO is checked in response to questions 5a or 5b.

If taking or damaging implications exist, the agency must comply with § 5 of the Private Property Assessment Act, to include the preparation of a taking or damaging impact assessment. Normally, the preparation of an impact assessment will require consultation with agency legal staff.



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