

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Land Banking Nomination – Sale # 76, 78, 97, 98
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2005
Proponent:	Danreuther Land & Cattle
Location:	T25N, R5E, Section 15, S2S2 – 80 acres T25N, R5E, Section 22, SE4,NE4,SW4NW4 – 160 acres T25N, R5E, Section 23, SW4NE4 – 40 acres T25N, R5E, Section 27, SW4SW4 – 40 acres
County:	Chouteau

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Offer for Sale at Public Auction, 320 acres of state trust land currently held in trust for the state industrial school trust beneficiary. Revenue from the sale would be deposited in a special account used to purchase replacement land meeting acquisition criteria related to legal access, productivity, and potential income which would then be held in trust for the beneficiary. The proposed sale is part of a program called Land Banking authorized by the 2003 Legislature. The purpose of the program is to diversify the land portfolio of the various trusts, improve the sustained rate of return to the trusts, improve access to state trust land, and consolidate ownership.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

MEPA Public Scoping Process:

DATE	GROUP AND / OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED
September 21,2004	Letters sent to lessees announcing the Land Banking program and presenting criteria for nominating parcels.
October 1,2004 to January 31, 2005	All DNRC administrative units accept Land Banking nominations from interested lessees.
March 17,2005 to April 15, 2005	Initiated Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), public scoping for parcels that have been identified to proceed through the Land Banking sale process. Individuals and organizations contacted were: Trust Land lessees, adjacent landowners, interested parties identified through the NELO contact list for Trust Land projects, County Commissioners, and Negotiated Rulemaking Committee members. A meeting was held with DFWP Region Six biologists to review sale applications. Notice of the sale was published in legal advertisement section of the Fort Benton River Press. A public meeting was held April 5, 2005 in Fort Benton. No written public comment was received. Comment at the public meeting was concentrated on the land sale process.

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A- No action, do not sell Trust Land.

Alternative B- Sell Trust Land

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i>

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 existing grazing use is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 water resources or water rights exist on the tracts. No impact is expected as the existing grazing use is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects 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.

The parcels are located within a class II air shed. The existing grazing use is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects 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.

The vegetation on these tracts is characterized by a mixture of western wheatgrass (*Agropyron smithii*), needle and thread (*Stipa comata*), Prairie Sandreed (*Calamovilfa longifolia*) Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), Threadleaf Sedge (*Carex filifolia*) and native forbs except for the SW4NW4 of section 22 which has been converted to crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*). The vegetation on these tracts is typical of a land throughout the vicinity. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicates there are no known rare, unique cover types or vegetation on the tract. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 parcels of state trust land are used by a variety of wildlife species typical of arid grazing lands within the area. A variety of wildlife species including mule deer, whitetail deer, antelope, fox, coyotes, and non-game

birds use these tracts during various times of the year. No seasonal concentrations of wildlife are known to exist on this tract. The existing livestock grazing use of the parcel is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicates there are no known of species of special concern on the parcels or in the immediate vicinity.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The presence or absence of antiquities is presently unknown. A class III level inventory and subsequent evaluation of cultural and paleontologic resources will be carried out if preliminary approval of the parcel nomination by the Board of Commissioners is received. Based on the results of the Class III inventory/evaluation the DNRC will, in consultation with the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer, assess direct and cumulative impacts.

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 existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects 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 existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 this area are known to exist. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

<p>IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i>
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14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 parcel would move from tax-exempt status to taxable status, which will provide income to the county. The exact amount is unknown until assessor appraisal is completed

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 existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 land is identified as agricultural. The growth policy indicates that the existing land use will continue
The existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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.

These parcels are currently enrolled in the DFWP block management program. No legal access exists to the tracts and access is gained permissively through Danreuther private property by its inclusion within the block management program. Access to these parcels after sale would continue to be contingent upon enrollment of the surrounding property in the block management program or through permissive access through deeded property. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

The existing livestock grazing use of the parcels is expected to continue. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The parcels do not exhibit any unique qualities. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 tracts currently have a grazing lease for 69 Animal Unit Months (.22AUM/Acre) at a rate of \$4.48/AUM and generating an income of \$336 or approximately \$1.05/acre. Based on the DNRC Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2004, the average income for the 4.3 million acres of grazing land was \$1.28/acre with an average productivity of .25 acres/ AUM. Therefore this tract is considered below average in productivity and producing below average revenue per acre. There is no indication the tract, if remaining in state ownership, would be used for purposes other than grazing and it is likely the future income would remain relatively stable.

The lease contains four small parcels of land and uneconomical to manage. Each parcel requires separate range evaluation and this level of management effort is an inefficient use of staff time given the carrying capacity of the land.

An appraisal of the property value has not been completed. Assuming an appraised value of \$150/acre as determined in a preliminary land value estimate, the current annual return on the asset value for this tract is 0.7 %. This would indicate a higher return on asset value could be expected under Alternative B. Alternative B presumes that proceeds from the sale of this parcel will be reinvested in property that earns a greater rate of return.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Clive Rooney	Date: 4/21/5
	Title: NELO Area Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B - Sale

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are anticipated as a result of sale.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name:
	Title:
Signature:	Date: