

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	River Junction Land Banking Parcel
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2005
Proponent:	DNRC
Location:	Sale # 117, S2SE4 Section 02-T14N-R13W
County:	Powell

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Offer for Sale at Public Auction, 80 acres of state land currently held in trust for the benefit of Public Schools. Revenue from the sale would be deposited in a special account used to purchase replacement lands meeting acquisition criteria related to legal access, productivity, potential income and proximity to existing state ownership which would then be held in trust for the benefit of Public Schools. The proposed sale is part of a program called Land Banking authorized by the 2003 Legislature. The purpose of the program is for the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to overall, diversify uses of land holdings 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.

A letter was distributed in September 2004 to all state surface lessees informing them of the Land Banking Program and requesting nominations be submitted by lessees between October 1, 2004 and January 31, 2005.

A legal notice was published in the Missoulian on March 6 and March 13, 2005, Silver State Post on March 9 and March 16, and the Seeley-Swan Pathfinder on March 3 and March 10 requesting comments be submitted on the proposal by April 1, 2005.

A letter, requesting comments be submitted by April 1 was sent to interested parties including adjacent landowners, the Powell County Commissioners, State, Federal, and Tribal agencies, Special Interest Groups and the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee who participated in writing the Administrative Rules for the Land Banking Program. A complete list of the individuals contacted is included in Attachment B of this EA.

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Offer approximately 80 acres of State Land for sale at Public Auction and subject to Statutes addressing the Sale of State Land found in Title 77, Chapter 2, Part 3 of the Montana Codes Annotated. Proceeds from the sale would be deposited in the Land Bank Fund to be used in conjunction with proceeds from other sales for the purchase of other state land, easements, or improvements for the beneficiaries of the respective trusts, in this case Common Schools.

No Action Alternative: Defer inclusion of this parcel in the Land Banking Program. Maintain state ownership of this parcel and continue to manage the trust for revenue to the assigned trust.

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 in the project area are a combination of 71F Winfall gravelly loam, moist, 25-50% slopes, 171C Winfall, moist-Rumblecreek, dry, gravelly loams, 2-8% slopes and 171E Winfall moist-Rumblecreek, dry gravelly loams 8-25% slopes. The Winfall series are > 40 inches, very deep, well drained soils located on Moraines with an Alpine till parent material. These soils have a water holding capacity of approximately 5.9 inches and can remain wet later in the spring. Because there is no activity that would affect soils under the proposed activity, there are no anticipated direct, indirect or cumulative effects to soils.

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.

The Blackfoot River is located approximately 1/4 mile north of the parcel on private land. Because there is no activity proposed for this parcel, there are no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to water quality anticipated as a result of the proposed actions.

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 parcel of land is located approximately three (3) miles southwest of Ovando, Mt. Air quality is currently good. Impacts to air quality may result from a variety of activities including road use, agricultural burning, wildfires, industrial development, and vehicle emissions or heating system emissions among others. It is unknown what land use activities may be associated with a change in ownership, however the parcel is a very small percentage of the valley airshed and we do not expect direct or cumulative effects would occur to air quality as a result of the proposal.

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 is dominated by coniferous forest stands of Ponderosas Pine and Douglas Fir. Vegetation may be affected by numerous land management activities including timber harvesting, livestock grazing, development, wildlife management or agricultural use. It is unknown what land use activities may be associated with a change in ownership; however the vegetation on this parcel is typical of a land throughout the vicinity and there are no known rare, unique cover types or vegetation on the parcel. We do not expect direct or cumulative effects would occur to vegetation as a result of the proposal.

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 parcel is considered part of the Winter Range for white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, and moose. Harlequin Ducks (State Sensitive)--This species has been observed in the nearby Blackfoot River and is sensitive to increased turbidity within the river. Currently, Flammulated Owl Habitat likely exists in the vicinity of the parcel. It is unknown what land use activities may be associated with a change in land ownership however, there are no unique or critical wildlife habitats associated with the state parcel and we do not expect direct or cumulative wildlife impacts would occur as a result of implementing the proposal.

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 Blanchard Wolf Pack is located nearby and potentially uses the parcel, hunting deer and elk on winter range. A Bald Eagle territory is located approximately 2 miles away and habitat may be located within the same section as this parcel. Development less than two (2) miles away from eagle nests is considered a threat to bald eagle recovery. Grizzly Bears likely utilize this area. The parcel is outside of the Northern Continental Divide recovery area but within occupied habitat. Montana Natural Heritage Program commented that Lynx is located in the general area. The nearest winter population is approximately 10 miles to the Southwest of the subject parcel. The parcel may be utilized by Lynx during the non-winter months.

No occurrence of threatened or endangered species on the state parcel has been established and no critical habitat is present. No direct or cumulative impact to Threatened, Endangered or unique wildlife is anticipated as a result of the proposal.

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.

There are no prominent topographic features on the state land. The state land does not provide any unique scenic quality not also provided by adjacent lands. No direct or cumulative impact to aesthetics is anticipated as result of the proposal.

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.

This 80 acre parcel is part of the common school trust of which there are more than 4.6 million acres within the state. The statutes limit the sale of trust land to a maximum of 20,000 acres prior to purchasing replacement lands. The potential sale of this parcel would affect an extremely small percentage of the common school trust land if replacement land was not purchased before the statute expires and even less impact if replacement land is purchased as anticipated.

The potential transfer of ownership would not have any impact or demands on environmental resources of land water, air or energy.

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.

Grazing Lease Range evaluations have been conducted on this parcel and are in the Department files. The land to the north, west, east, and northwest of the parcel is under a conservation easement that would conserve wildlife habitat.

This 80 acre parcel is part of an initial proposed sale of state land not to exceed 20,000 acres within the state and under concurrent analysis. There are no known state or federal actions in the vicinity and no known future actions proposed by the state, which would have cumulative impacts with this proposal.

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 impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of the proposal.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The parcel of land is currently licensed for grazing purposes (22 Animal Unit Months-AUM's). The current licensee, Saroc Inc & O'Conner Family Grant Trust owns acreage adjacent to the north of the parcel. There is lawful access via an easement acquired from Plum Creek to the state land, which is surrounded by private lands and Plum Creek lands. FWP acquired an easement on this access road from the Anaconda Company for recreational purposes to the Fish, Wildlife and Parks River Junction Campground restricted to non-commercial recreation traffic. The potential sale of the state land would be subject to all existing easements and would not affect the rights of easement deed holders. The state land is currently unzoned.

It is unknown if a change in use would occur if the parcel was transferred to another owner. Any future change in land use would be subject to review under state and local regulations intended to address impacts to local industrial, commercial and agricultural activities. No direct or cumulative impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposal.

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 proposal would have no affect on quantity and distribution of employment.

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.

Currently the parcel is not assessed taxes. The sale would put new land on the county tax base, thus increasing revenue to the county. The equalization payments from the state are fixed for a county at this time. The legislature may be looking at making changes in how the payments are calculated and distributed in the future. For now, the equalization payments will continue as is.

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 proposed sale would not have an impact on government services.

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 parcel is currently unzoned. The Growth Policy land use designation is 1 dwelling unit per 160 acres. Ron Hansen, Powell County Planner, commented that this designation does not apply to the parcel because it exists as an 80 acres parcel but could not be further subdivided. Any future proposal to develop the property would be subject to review and approval under state and local regulations.

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 parcel of state land does provide access to a recreational area in the vicinity. The Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) River Junction Campground is located approximately three (3) miles to the east at the confluence of the North Fork and main Fork of the Blackfoot River. An application for an historic right-of-way easement to use the access road on state land has been requested. FWP acquired an easement from Anaconda Company in 1971 on the access road, which does not include the portion of the road, which crosses the state land. The State of Montana intends to reserve the right to grant FWP an easement on this portion of road if the land is sold prior to granting an easement to FWP.

The potential transfer of ownership on this parcel may have an impact on the ability of the public to continue their use on this land for recreational purposes. It is unknown what recreational uses would be allowed under different ownership. Because of the relatively small parcel size, recreational use is limited. If proceeds are used to purchase other accessible lands, there could be a positive benefit to the public.

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 potential ownership transfer of this parcel would not require additional housing or impact population changes. It is unknown what land uses would occur under new ownership. Any future proposal to develop the property and increase housing would be subject to review under state and local regulations.

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 potential sale of the state land will not directly or cumulatively impact cultural uniqueness or diversity. It is unknown what management activities would take place on the land if ownership was transferred.

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 parcel currently has a Forest Grazing Competitive Bid for 22 Animal Unit Months at a rate of \$5.91/AUM and generating an income of \$110.22 annually or approximately \$1.37/acre in 2004. 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 parcel is considered average in productivity and producing average revenue per acre. There is no indication the parcel, if remaining in state ownership, would be used for purposes other than forestry and grazing and it is likely the future income would remain relatively stable.

An appraisal of the property value has not been completed. Assuming an appraised value of \$1000/acre, the current annual return on the asset for this parcel is 0.13%.

Land Banking statute requires that land acquired as replacement property through Land Banking is "likely to produce more net revenue for the affected trust than the revenue that was produced from the land that was sold" (Section 77-2-364 MCA). Property considered for acquisition will include cropped or irrigated land, and/or land with recreational, timber, or commercial potential. All these land classifications or uses presently produce a higher rate of return on State Trust land than the average parcel of State Trust grazing land.

This would indicate a higher return on asset value could be expected under the Proposed Alternative (Sell).

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Liz Mullins	Date: 4/15/05
	Title: Land Use Planner	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the proposed alternative, recommend the parcel receive preliminary approval for sale and continue with the Land Banking process.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the comments received and potential environment affects and have determined significant environmental effects would not result from the proposed land sale. The parcel does not have any unique characteristics; critical habitat or environmental conditions indicating the parcel should necessarily remain under management by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. There are no indications the parcel would produce substantially greater revenue or have substantially greater value to the trust in the near future.

I have reviewed the comments and believe that all concerns have been adequately addressed under the appropriate headings.

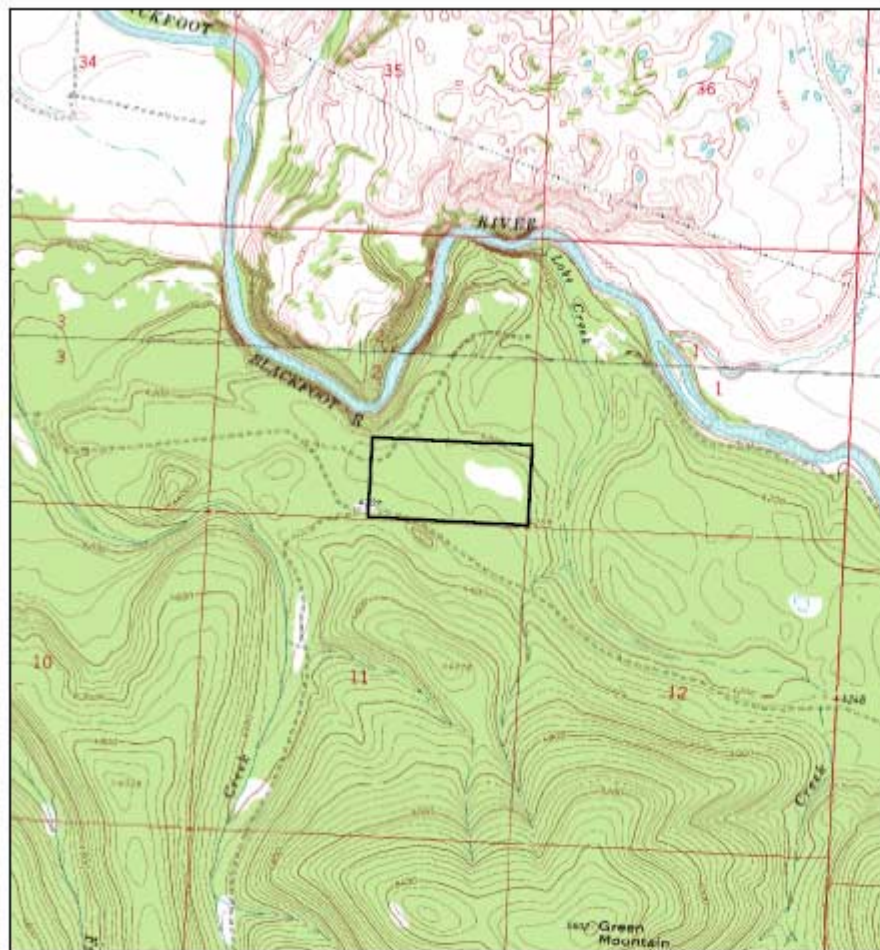
27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS

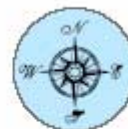
 ☐ More Detailed EA

 ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Stephen J. Wallace
	Title: Clearwater Unit Manager
Signature:	Date: 4/18/05




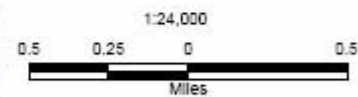
River Junction State Trust Land-Parcel Request



Township: 14 North
Range: 13 West
Section 2

Legend

 State Trust Land



MT DNRC
Forest Management Bureau
Technical Services Section
15 April 2005

Attachment B—List of Contacts

Licensee

Saroc Inc & O'Conner Family
Grantor Trust
125 Bank St #300
Missoula, MT 598024413

Adjacent Land Owners

Thomas J & Lynn M Meredith
PO Box 163597
Austin, TX 78716-3597

Plum Creek Timber Company LP
999 3rd Ave Ste 4300
Seattle, WA 98104-4096

State Agencies

Debra Dills
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
PO 200701
Helena 59620.

Stimson Timber Company
Bruce Rowland
9360 Highway 200 East
Bonner, MT

County Commissioners:

Gail Jones
409 Missouri Avenue
Deer Lodge, MT 59722-1084

Dwight O'Hara
409 Missouri Avenue
Deer Lodge, MT 59722-1084

Ralph Mannix
409 Missouri Avenue
Deer Lodge, MT 59722-1084

Powell County Planner

Ron Hansen
409 Missouri Avenue
Deer Lodge, MT 59722-1084

House District 17

Rick Ripley
8920 Montana Highway 200
Wolf Creek, MT 59648-8639

Senate District 9
John Cobb
PO BOX 388
Augusta, MT 59410-0388

State Agencies
Mack Long/Sharon Rose
REGION 2 OFFICE
MONTANA FISH WILDLIFE &
PARKS
3201 SPURGIN ROAD
MISSOULA MT 59804-3099

State Historic Preservation Office
PO Box 201202
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Federal Agencies
Debbie Austin
Lolo National Forest
Fort Missoula Road, Building 24
Missoula, MT 59804

Nancy Anderson
Bureau of Land Management
Missoula Resource Area
3255 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Greg Neudecker
US Fish & Wildlife Service
Benton Lake Wetland
Management District
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, MT 59404

Tribal Historic Preservation Office
Confederated Salish and Kootenai
Tribes
P. O. Box 278
Pablo, MT 59855

Jerry Sorenson,
Plum Creek Timber Company LP
PO Box 1990
Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Special Interest Groups

Trout Unlimited
PO Box 7186
Missoula, MT 59807

Bernie Hall
The Nature Conservancy
32 South Ewing, Suite 215
Helena, MT 59601

MonTRUST
P O. BOX 457
Helena Mt 59624

Five Valley's Land Trust
Attn Wendy Nineteman
P.O. Box 8953
Missoula, Mt 59807

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
PO Box 8249
Missoula, Mt 59807-8249

Pyramid Mtn Lumber Company
Attn Doug Mood
PO Box 42
Seeley Lake, MT 59868

Friends of the Wild Swan
PO Box 1630
Swan Lake, MT 59911

Ecology Center
801 Sherwood, Suite B
Missoula, MT 59802

Alliance for the Wild Rockies
P. O. Box 8731
Missoula, MT 59807

Blackfoot Challenge
Attn Tina Bernd-Cohen
PO Box 563
Helena, MT 59624

NEGOTIATED RULEMAKING COMMITTEE

Anne Hedges
Montana Environmental Information Center
PO BOX 1184
HELENA MT 59624

Bill Orsello/Stan Frasier
MONTANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION
PO BOX 1175
HELENA MT 59624

Bob Vogel
Montana School Boards Association
One South Montana Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Daniel Berube
27 Cedar Lake Dr.
Butte, MT 59701

Ellen Engstedt
MONTANA WOOD PRODUCTS
PO BOX 1149
HELENA MT 59624

Harold Blattie
Montana Association of Counties
2715 Skyway Dr.
Helena, MT 59601

Jack Atcheson, SR.
3210 OTTAWA
BUTTE MT 59701

Janet Ellis
MONTANA AUDUBON
PO BOX 595
HELENA MT 59624

Leslie Taylor
MSU Bozeman
P.O. Box 172440
Bozeman, MT 59717-0001

Nancy Schlepp
MT FARM BUREAU FEDERATION
502 S 19th, SUITE 4
BOZEMAN MT 59715

Ray Marxer
Matador Cattle Co.
9500 Blacktail Rd.
Dillon, MT 59725