

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Shelhamer Land Banking Tract
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2010
Proponent:	Lloyd Shelhamer, Jr. Revocable Trust (Grazing Lessee)
Location:	Sale #628: Section 16, Township 3 North, Range 28 East (640 acres)
County:	Yellowstone County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Offer for sale at public auction, an isolated 640-acre parcel of State Land that is currently held in Trust for the benefit of Common Schools. Revenue generated from the sale of this parcel would be deposited into a special account to be used to purchase replacement lands meeting acquisition criteria related to legal access, productivity, income generation and potential for multiple use. The new parcel would then be held in Trust for the benefit of Common Schools. This proposed sale is being initiated through the Land Banking program (Montana Code Annotated 77-2-361 through 77-2-367). The purpose of this program is to allow the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to dispose primarily of parcels that are isolated and produce low income relative to similarly classified tracts and to allow the Department to purchase land with legal public access that can support multiple uses and provides a rate of return equal to or greater than the parcels that were sold. Additionally, this program allows for the Trust land portfolio to be diversified, by disposing of grazing parcels that make up a majority of the Trust land holdings and acquire other types of land, such as croplands.

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 soliciting comments and explaining the proposed sale was sent on 17 May 2010 to the lessee, property owners adjoining the state parcels, and other interested parties requesting that comments be submitted on the proposal by 18 June 2010. A complete list of individuals and interested parties contacted is included on Attachment C of this EA. In addition, on 19 July 2010 separate letters were sent to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and Crow Nation seeking their comments on the proposed sale.

A legal notice was published in the Billings Gazette on 30 July 2010 requesting that comments be submitted on the proposal by 30 August 2010.

The Southern Land Office received three comments regarding the proposed sale. A summary of the comments received is listed below:

- There was a suggestion from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) that the DNRC look at acquiring a property near the Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area to consolidate public lands in the area. FWP had no concerns with the proposed sale.
- State Representative Kenneth Peterson suggested that "...*eminent domain would be available for the State to get access. In some cases eminent domain is available to land owners who are land locked. I have brought such an action successfully. I know the State could. My thought was that the property may be more valuable if access were obtained before it is sold either by negotiation or by condemnation.*"
- Comments on the scoping letter from Jack Atcheson, Sr., requested that: more elaboration be provided in the EA on meeting the goals of the program; a copy of the completed EA be sent to him and; questioned "...when land value is down, why is DNRC selling land?"

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Offer 640 acres of State Trust Land for sale at public auction and subject to statutes addressing the sale of State Trust Land found in M.C.A. 77-2-301 et seq. Proceeds from the sale would be deposited in the Land Banking Fund to be used in conjunction with proceeds from other sales for the purchase of other Trust Land, easements, or improvements for the beneficiaries of the respective trusts, in this case Common Schools.

No Action Alternative: Defer inclusion of this tract in the Land Banking Program that will permit the State to maintain ownership of this tract and continue the grazing lease.

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 subject property mainly contains sandy and clay loam soils that provide moderate grazing production, along with some rock outcropping areas. No impact is expected since the current grazing use is expected to continue.

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.

There are two wells on this section registered to the State for stockwater use. If the parcel is sold, the water rights would be transferred to the new owner. The existing grazing use is expected to continue; therefore no adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution 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.

No Impact. The existing grazing use is expected to continue.

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 this tract is typical of land in the surrounding area and could be effected by various land management activities including livestock grazing, development, wildlife management and agricultural use. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicates there are no known rare, unique cover types or vegetation on this tract. The existing grazing use is expected to continue and therefore, no direct 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.

This parcel of Trust Land is used by a variety of wildlife species typical of undeveloped land throughout Yellowstone County. Wildlife populations can be affected by land use activities associated with livestock grazing, residential development or agricultural practices. A variety of wildlife species including mule deer, turkey, pheasant and numerous non-game birds use the tract during various times of the year.

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 proposed project area search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database identified one vertebrate animal listed as a species of concern, threatened species, or endangered species: bald eagle. The bald eagle is listed as a threatened species and is being monitored after previously being listed as endangered. The property could have bald eagles occasionally going over it due to its proximity, approximately 1.5 miles, to the Yellowstone River, but it does not have prime habitat that supports its food source or nesting. Since the existing land use is expected to continue and the parcel does not have the preferred habitat for the bald eagle, no significant impacts are anticipated.

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 paleontological resources will be carried out if preliminary approval of the parcel nomination by the Board of Land 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.

No Impact. The existing use is expected to continue.

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 Impact. The existing use is expected to continue.

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.

This tract is a part of a group of four sections, 2,560 acres, in Yellowstone County that are under concurrent analysis to be sold. There are no other known state or federal actions in the vicinity and no known future actions proposed by the state that 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.

The implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant adverse impact on human health and safety.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

No Impact. The existing grazing use is expected to continue.

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.

No Impact. The existing use is expected to continue.

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.

This tract is currently tax-exempt and the sale of this tract to a non-exempt entity would add it to the county tax base, thus marginally increasing tax revenue to Yellowstone County.

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 Impact. The existing grazing use is expected to continue.

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.

Implementing the proposed action would not conflict with the 2008 Yellowstone County/City of Billings Growth Policy. In addition, the property is not presently zoned by Yellowstone County.

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 parcel does not have legal public access so the only persons who can legally access the tract are those that can get permission from an adjoining private landowner. Therefore, implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on access to and quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

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 Impact. The existing grazing use is expected to continue.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

The implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on social structures and mores.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on cultural uniqueness and diversity.

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.

This 640-acre parcel currently has a grazing lease for 81 Animal Unit Months (0.17 acres/AUM, based on 479 grazing acres) at the minimum lease rate that is currently \$6.12/AUM. The total income generated from the tract was \$995.72 or approximately \$1.56/acre in 2010. There is a 160 acre portion of the property that is charged a flat rate of \$500/year for use as feedground/calving area. The average annual net income from this tract for the past 3 years, less a \$0.25/acre management cost, has been \$880.81 or \$1.38/acre. Based on the DNRC Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2009, the average net income for the 4.3 million acres of grazing land was \$1.51/acre with an average productivity of 0.22275 acres/AUM. Therefore, this tract is below average in productivity and producing below average revenue per acre, even with the extra income from the feed ground.

An appraisal of the property value has not been completed to date. Under DNRC rules, the appraisal would be conducted after preliminary approval to proceed is granted by the Board of Land Commissioners. The revenue generated from the sale of this tract is intended to be combined with other revenue in the Land Banking Account to purchase replacement property for the benefit of the Common Schools Trust. It is anticipated the replacement property would have legal access, which would provide greater management opportunities and income. Assuming an appraised value of \$400/acre, the current annual return on the asset value for this tract is 0.41%.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jeff Bollman, AICP	Date: 31 August 2010
	Title: Area Planner, Southern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that the property receive preliminary approval for sale and continue with the Land Banking process.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The Southern Land Office has evaluated the comments received and studied the potential environmental effects as described in this document and has determined that no significant environmental effects would result from the proposed land sale of this 640-acre tract. The tract does not have any unique characteristics, critical habitat or environmental conditions indicating it should remain under management by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. There are no indications the tract would produce substantially greater revenue to the Trust in the near future.

The transfer of ownership of this 640-acre tract is not expected to have any significant effects on the human or natural environment.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:☐

EIS

☐

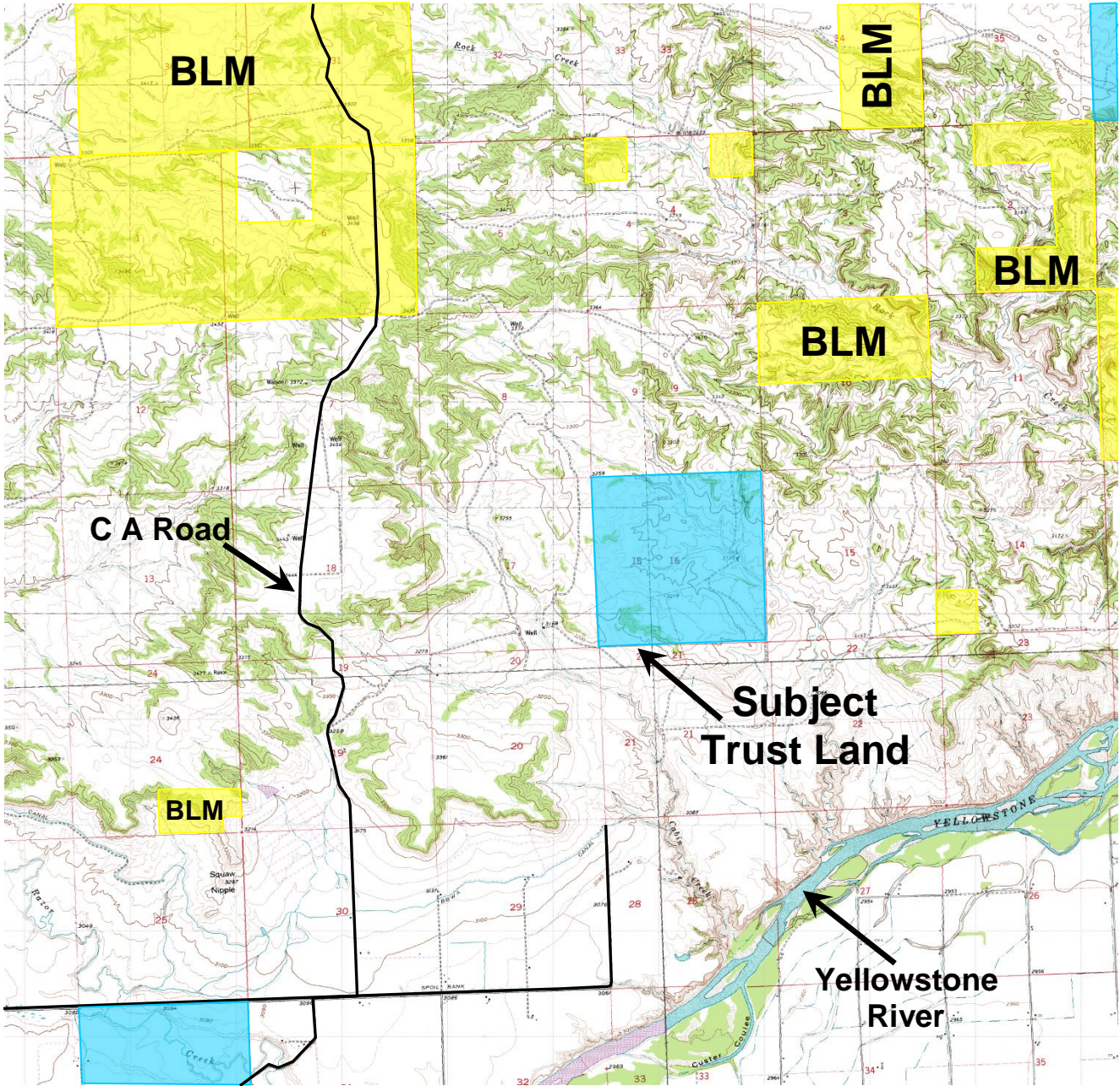
More Detailed EA

☒

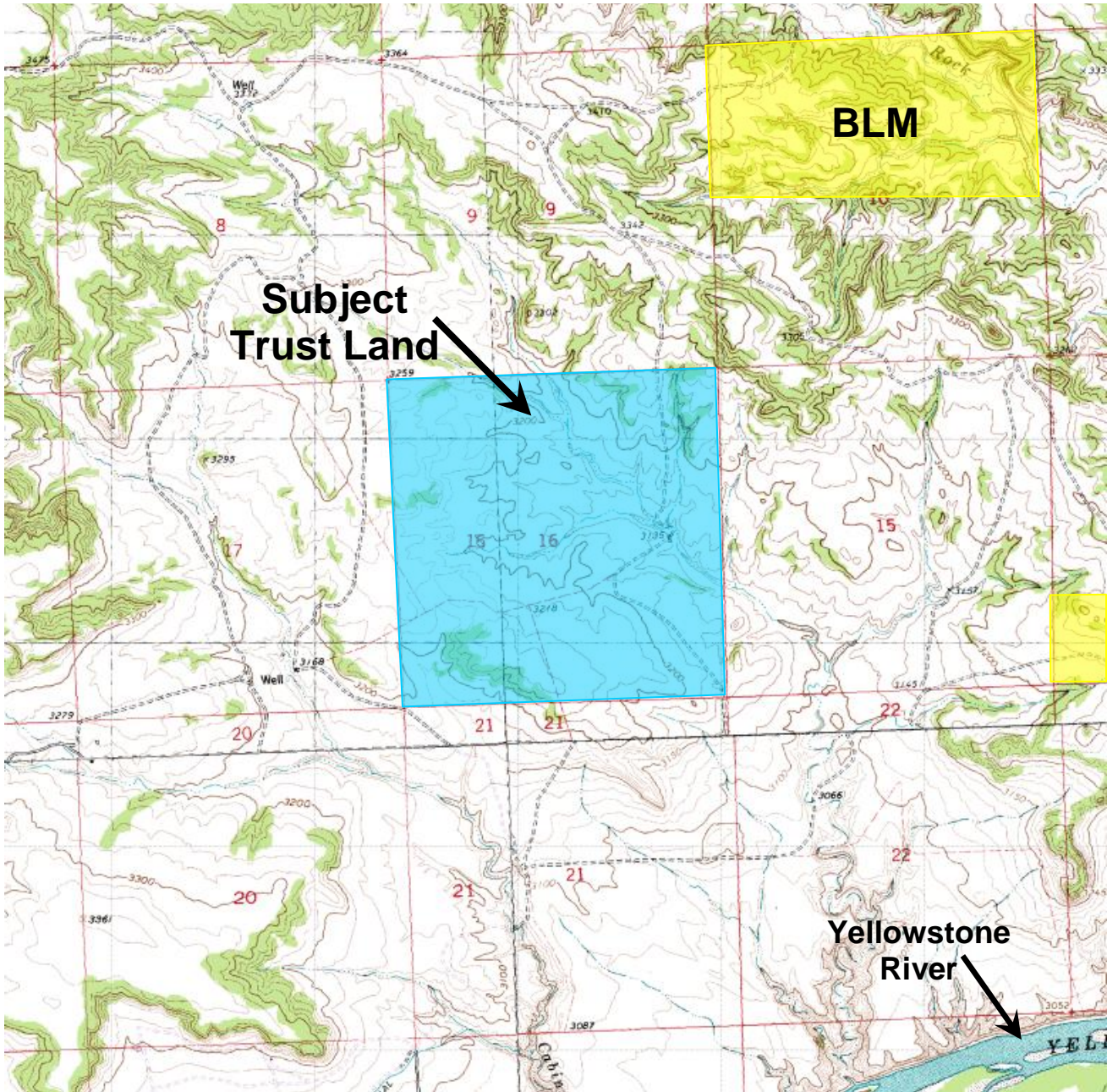
No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Richard A. Moore
	Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Signature: /s/ Richard A. Moore	
Date: 8/31/10	

Attachment A – Area Map



Attachment B – Property Map



Attachment C – List of Persons Notified in Shelhamer Land Banking Tract Scoping Process

Anne Hedges Montana Environmental Information Center PO BOX 1184 HELENA, MT 59624	NANCY SCHLEPP MT FARM BUREAU FEDERATION 502 SOUTH 19 th , SUITE 4 BOZEMAN, MT 59715	Ray Marxer Matador Cattle Co. 9500 Blacktail Road Dillon, MT 59725
Bill Orsello or Stan Frasier MONTANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION PO BOX 1175 HELENA, MT 59624	Jeanne Holmgren, Chief Real Estate Management Bureau MT DNRC TLMD P.O. Box 201601 Helena, MT 59620-1601	Rosi Keller University of Montana 32 Campus Drive Missoula, MT 59812-0001
Bob Vogel Montana School Boards Association 863 Great Northern Blvd Helena, MT 59601	Leslie Taylor MSU Bozeman P.O. Box 172440 Bozeman, MT 59717	Denise Juneau, Superintendent Montana Office of Public Instruction PO Box 202501 Helena, Montana 59620-2501
ELLEN SIMPSON MONTANA WOOD PRODUCTS PO BOX 1149 HELENA, MT 59624	JANET ELLIS MONTANA AUDUBON PO BOX 595 HELENA, MT 59624	US Fish and Wildlife Service 2900 - 4TH AVENUE NORTH, ROOM 301 Billings, MT 59101-1266
Harold Blattie Montana Association of Counties 2715 Skyway Drive Helena, MT 59601	JACK ATCHESON, SR. 3210 OTTAWA BUTTE, MT 59701	Gary Hammond Regional Supervisor Fish Wildlife and Parks 2300 Lake Elmo Drive Billings, MT 59105
Daniel Berube 27 Cedar Lake Drive Butte, MT 59701	Tom Madden RE/MAX of Billings 1250 – 15 th Street West Billings, MT 59102	John Gibson 3028 Avenue E Billings, MT 59102
Monte Mason, Chief Minerals Management Bureau MT DNRC TLMD P.O. Box 201601 Helena, MT 59620-1601	Hugh Zackheim MT Fish Wildlife and Parks PO Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701	Ray Mulé Wildlife Program Manager Fish Wildlife and Parks 2300 Lake Elmo Drive Billings, MT 59105
Sonya Germann MEPA Coordinator MT DNRC TLMD 2705 Spurgin Road Missoula, MT 59804	Will Wood Assessment Program Manager MT DNRC FAMB 2705 Spurgin Road Missoula, MT 59804	Yellowstone County Board of County Commissioners PO Box 35000 Billings, MT 59107
Mike O'Herron Planning Section Supervisor MT DNRC TLMD 2705 Spurgin Road Missoula, MT 59804	Tom Ellerhoff MT Dept of Environmental Quality PO Box 200901 Helena, MT 59620-0901	Shane Mintz MT Dept of Transportation PO Box 200101 Helena, MT 59620-0101

Leroy Spang, President
Northern Cheyenne Tribe
PO Box 128
Lame Deer, MT 59043

Cedric Black Eagle, Chairman
Crow Nation
PO Box 159
Crow Agency, MT 59022

Glenn Marx, Executive Director
Montana Assoc of Land Trusts
PO Box 675
Whitehall, MT 59759

Bureau of Land Management
Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101

Craig Sharpe, Executive
Director
Montana Wildlife Federation
PO Box 1175
Helena, MT 59624

Larry Copenhaver, Local Issues
Conservation Director
Montana Wildlife Federation
PO Box 1175
Helena, MT 59624

Representative William Glaser
1402 Indian Creek Road
Huntley, MT 59037

Representative Ken Peterson
424 – 48th Street West
Billings, MT 59106

Senator Taylor Brown
775 Squaw Creek Road
Huntley, MT 59037

A.J. Micheletti
Yellowstone Co.
Superintendent of Schools
P.O. Box 35022
Billings, MT 59107

Patrick & Florence Goggins
PO Box 30758
Billings, MT 59107

Senator Kelly Gebhardt
PO Box 724
Roundup, MT 59072-0724

Lloyd Shelhamer Jr.
Revocable Trust
2453 North Road 13
Worden, MT 59088

Walter & Margaretha Siewart
204 Hogan Road
Huntley, MT 59037