

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	2008 Land Banking Nomination
Proposed Implementation Date:	2008-2009
Proponent:	Moore's Sunday Creek
Location:	T8N-R46E-S36
County:	Custer

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Offer for Sale at Public Auction, 63.2 acres of state trust 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.

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.
March 5, 2008 to April 7, 2008	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 our ELO routine contact list for Trust Land projects, Carter and Custer County Commissions, Negotiated Rulemaking Committee. Public "Legal Announcements" were published in the following local newspapers; Miles City Star, Sidney Herald-Leader, Glendive Ranger-Review and the Ekalaka Eagle.

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A- No action, do not sell Trust Land T8N-R46E-S36.

Alternative B- Offer Trust Land for sale at public auction via DNRC Land Banking Program.

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 on the tract consist of sandy/shallow complex. Soils are moderate to highly erosive in nature, no evidence of fragile or compactable soils on the tract. No evidence of any unusual geological features.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

Tom Hughes, Water Resources specialist for DNRC, was contacted and no water right was found for this parcel. No impact the existing use is not anticipated to change.

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.

Pollutant and particulate levels are currently normal for the area; no increases in these levels are expected. Tract does not have any air quality regulations or zones.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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, western wheatgrass (*Agropyron smithii*), Prairie Sandreed (*Calamovilfa longifolia*), Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), Needle & Thread (*Stipa comata*), Threadleaf Sedge (*Carex filifolia*), Fringed Sagewort (*Artemisia frigida*) and native forbs. Vegetation may be affected by numerous land management activities including livestock grazing, development, wildlife management or agricultural use. The vegetation on this tract is typical of a land throughout the vicinity. A species of concern as noted by the Natural Heritage Program in the area is the White-bract Stickleaf. We do not expect direct or cumulative effects would occur to vegetation as a result of the proposal.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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 of state trust land is used by a variety of wildlife species typical of use on undeveloped lands throughout the 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 sage grouse, mule deer, whitetail deer, antelope, fox, coyotes, and numerous non-game birds use the tract during various times of the year. Wildlife use on this section is not seasonal in nature. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicates there is a greater landscape for sage grouse in eastern Montana. This state trust land parcel is part of that landscape. It is not expected to have direct or cumulative wildlife impacts as a result of implementing the proposal.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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 shows the habitat and nesting/foraging area for the sensitive species Greater Sage Grouse has been noted and is centralized in the area of this section. Sage grouse leks, while present in the general area, are not present on any state trust land proposed for sale in Custer County. Other species of concern in the area of this section as noted by the Montana Natural Heritage Program database include Fringed Myotis, Greater Short-horned Lizard and the White-bract Stickleaf.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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 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.

Aesthetic value of this section should remain the same.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

Demands on environmental resources should remain the same

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

None

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<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>

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B- 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

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

There are no recreational or wilderness areas nearby or accessed through this parcel.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

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.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Alternative A-No impact expected

Alternative B-No impact expected

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Eastern Montana has a rich history of farming & ranching.

Alternative A- No impact expected

Alternative B- The sale of the state land should not directly or cumulatively impact cultural uniqueness or 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.

The tract currently has a grazing lease for 15 Animal Unit Months (.23 AUM/Acre) at a rate of \$6.18/AUM and generating an income of \$92.70 or approximately \$1.46/acre in 2007. Based on the DNRC Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2004, the average income for the 4.3 million acres of grazing land was \$1.83/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.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Tina Hirsch	Date: 3/31/2008
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Through Alternative B, the expected use of this land should stay in production agriculture. Impacts should be minimal and acceptable.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

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