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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

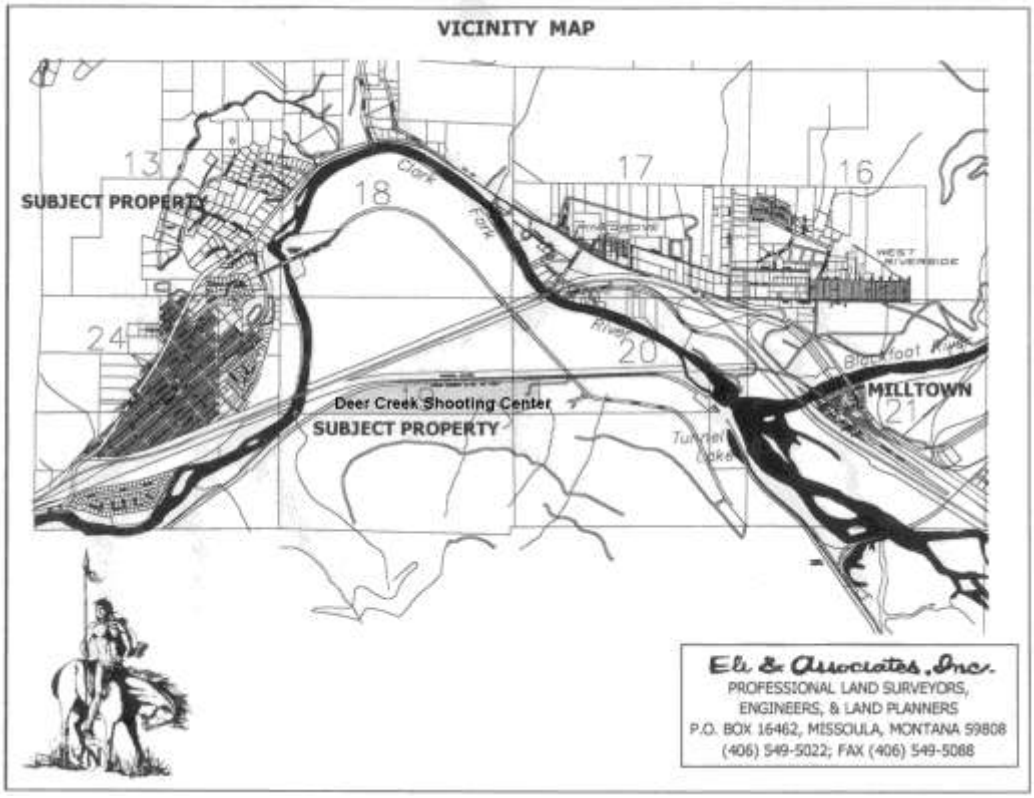
1. Project Title: Western Montana Fish & Game Association, Inc. (WMFGA), Deer Creek Shooting Center

2. Type of Proposed Action:

a) Earthwork Project
b) Road Corner Reconstruction
c) New Shooting Bays

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:
Western Montana Fish & Game Association (WMFGA) owns and operates the Deer Creek Shooting Center (DCSC), located in the Hellgate Canyon between East Missoula and Bonner on the N ½ of section 19 and the NW ¼ of section 20, T13, N, R18W, P.M.M. The property, approximately 98 acres, sits on the south side of the railroad track between the Clark Fork River and Deer Creek Road. The site rests along the north slope of Mount Sentinel, a 2,000 ft high mountain that serves as the primary impact area for the entire facility. The west end of the DCSC borders the City of Missoula's Kim Williams riverside recreational trail, which parallels the Clark Fork River and dead ends into the Montana Rail Link railroad tracks and DCSC property.

Map 1 Clark Fork Valley with Missoula and DCSC range



Map 2 – Vicinity Map for the Deer Creek Shooting Center

Map 3 - Aerial Photo of the Deer Creek Shooting Complex (DCSC lettering).

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA 87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) and MCA 87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe hunting practices). The Montana Legislature has authorized funding for the establishment of a Shooting Range Development Program providing financial assistance for the development of shooting ranges. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has responsibility for the administration of the program, including the necessary guidelines and procedures governing applications for funding assistance under the program.

To be eligible for grant assistance, a private shooting club or a private organization:
(a)(i) Shall accept in its membership any person who holds or is eligible to hold a Montana hunting license and who pays club or organization membership fees;
(ii) May not limit the number of members;
(iii)may charge a membership fee not greater than the per-member share of the club's or organization's reasonable cost of provision of services, including establishment, improvement, and maintenance of shooting facilities and other membership services; and
(iv)shall offer members occasional guest privileges at no cost to the member or invited guest and shall make a reasonable effort to hold a public sight-in day each September, when the general public may use the shooting range for a day-use fee or at no cost; or
(b) Shall admit the general public for a reasonable day-use fee.

5. Need for the Action(s):

a) **Earthwork Project** –Range 300-B has an overlapping cut in the right side berm at the end of the bay, which presents a potential safety hazard. Shooters may approach the target setting area either on foot or by vehicle. There is a STOP sign indicating a cease-fire situation that is to be erected in front of the shooting benches when shooters are downrange setting targets, by utilizing the cut in the berm persons can go downrange and appear in the target setting area unseen by active shooters until they present in front of the targets.
b) To date there have been no incidents; however, the potential is high for an accident to occur. The solution is to simply close the cut in the berm, thereby forcing access to the target setting area from a constantly visible approach path.

Figure 1 Overhead showing 300-B berm break to be closed

Figure 3 Current access to the impact area of 300-B

Figure 2 Overhead showing re-angling of 300-B berm for driving access downrange

Figure 5 Looking down 300-B from the shooting position

c) **Road Corner Reconstruction –** There is a need to improve the sight distance on a semi-blind corner on the internal, single lane, range access road. Bays 300-B, 100-C, the shotgun area, the archery area, the classroom/meeting room, and all of the shooting bays at the West End of the DCSC are accessed via an internal range road. The road goes around a tight corner between bays 300-A and 300-B. Sight distance is limited at this location and there have been two instances where vehicles have driven off the road at this corner. All vehicles accessing the facilities in the west half of the DCSC must traverse this corner.

Figure 5 East-west access road to be widened at this bottleneck.

Figure 7 Looking at corner from 300-B

Figure 6 Looking at narrow corner from 300-A

d) **New Shooting Bays -** WMFGA's membership has grown at a rate of 10% per year over the last decade. Early indications are that membership will grow 15% or more this year. With these continuing membership increases have come increasing pressure and congestion of the existing facilities. To accommodate this increase, WMFGA needs to expand shooting bay 50-D and build two additional shooting bays.

Figure 8 Location of 50-D expansion, and addition of 50-E & F

Figure 9 Bay 50-D - to be made longer by digging into hillside

Figure 10 New bays 50-E and 50-F will be built beyond the visible berm for 50-D

6. Objectives for the Action(s):

a) **Earthwork Project** - To correct visibility of downrange shooters/target changers, WMFGA proposes closing the access cut at the far end of the bay, and move the berm over near the shooting benches sufficient to allow vehicular access to the full length of the bay from the shooting position, within the bay, as is currently done with all other bays. This will require establishing a roadway the full length of the 300-B bay (see figures 1 and 2). With this improvement a person taking a vehicle or even walking down range on 300-B to set targets at 300 yards will be visible from the firing line throughout the time they are down range.

b) **Road Corner Reconstruction -** WMFGA proposes to improve this narrow, semi-blind, corner by widening and straightening the road on the inside of the corner (see figures 5, 6, and 7) thus improving line of sight distance for any vehicles approaching this corner.

c) **New Shooting Bays -** To accommodate the increasing pressure and congestion, WMFGA proposes to expand shooting bay 50-D, and build an additional two bays. These additional two bays will be adjacent to the existing 50-D, and will begin expansion into the new property the WMFGA acquired in 2011(see figures 8, 9 and 10). These bays will be at least 30 yards wide and 60 yards long, long enough that if WMFGA build covered firing points in the future WMFGA will finish with at least 50 yards of useful shooting depth. Because addition of these bays will reduce congestion on existing bays to cater to growing membership, these additions will contribute to the safe operation of the facility.

7. Project Size: estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:
The proposed improvements will cover approximately three to four acres of the 98 acre range.

8. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):
The project is on an existing shooting range in a forested area of predominantly new growth Ponderosa Pine. There are no year round flowing streams, irrigation ditches, or ponds on the site. There are no delineated wetlands; however, is a low depression on the property that sometimes collects seasonal run-off water, which dries up during the summer months. The existing range includes: 3 – 50 yard bays, 3 – 100 yard bays, 2 – 300 yard bays, one shoot gun range, an archery bay, youth bays, restrooms, and meeting facility.

A 2003 *MCS Environmental Inc*. investigation determined that, the site did not meet criteria that would qualify the area as a Jurisdictional wetland regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers. There is open pasture (portion procured in 2011) on northern portion with a forested area of predominantly new growth Ponderosa Pine to the south. The northern end of the property is bounded by the Montana Rail Link line and along the eastern border by Deer Creek Road. The current and proposed properties lie within an important ungulate and large carnivore movement corridor (see Part III, Table 1, #2), and to the east of the new Milltown State Park and their proposed acquisitions.

9. Description of Project:

a) **Earthwork Project -** (see Part I, Para. 6a) Reconfiguring of Range 300-B will require establishing a roadway the full length of the 300-B range. Additionally, closing the access cut at the far end of the bay, and moving the berm over near the shooting benches sufficient to allow vehicular access to the full length of the bay from the shooting position, within the bay, as is currently done with all other bays (see figures 1 & 2).

b) **Road Corner Reconstruction** – (see Part I, Para. 6b) Improvement of the sight distance of a narrow, semi-blind, corner on the internal range access road is proposed by widening and straightening the road on the inside of the corner (see figures 5, 6, & 7).

c) **New Shooting Bays** – (see Part I, Para. 6c) expand one existing shooting bay (50-D) and build two new bays. The two new bays will be adjacent to the existing 50-D, and will begin expansion into the new property the WMFGA acquired in 2011. These bays will be at least 30 yards wide and 60 yards long, which is sufficient to accommodate future covers for firing points and leaving 50 yards of useful shooting depth (see figures 8, 9 & 10).

10. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction: None

Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

Agency Name	Permit	Date Filed/#
N/A		

Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	$22,750

11. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups: FWP- Hunter Education Program, Missoula Police Department, Army ROTC at the University of Montana

12. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement: The Western Montana Fish and Game Association (WMFGA) has a meeting of its Board of Directors on the first Thursday of each month in the conference room of the Deer Creek Shooting Center and an Annual Meeting on the first Thursday in January of each year at the same location. All of WMFGA meetings are open to the public and all of WMFGA's +2,450 members are specifically invited. It is not unusual to have non-member visitors attend these meetings. In addition to the project being announced in newsletters to the WMFGA membership it has also been listed on the Montana Shooting Sports Foundation website at ***http://www.marbut.com/wmfga2***. On May 18, 2011, the Missoula County Board of Adjustments (MCBOA) met and approved WMFGA's application relating to the RR1 zoning of the Deer Creek Shooting Center (DCSC) and is a matter of public record with the Missoula County Board of Adjustments. Although WMFGA has not sought community publicity specifically for this proposed project (e.g., on television or in the newspapers), the Board of Directors have been open about their intentions. Proposed range improvements proposals have been discussed with the associated project vendors, and contractors.

13. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

14. Names, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

Jim McDonald, WMFGA, PO Box 4294, Missoula, MT 59806
(406) 251-3800 ext. 2222

15. Other Pertinent Information: Previous environmental assessments (EAs) were completed in 2008, 2009, and 2011. These EAs considered the building, property and range improvements in addition to acquisition of additional adjacent property in 2011. Completion of all these projects is complete. This new proposal for earthwork, road reconstruction and new shooting bays was reviewed in conjunction with all of the previous environmental assessments, which are still applicable. Although these EAs addressed the specific actions proposed then, a broader analysis of the entire range complex's environment was conducted with each new proposal, in addition to addressing the current proposal.

Shooting range applications require the participating governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range-funding assistance. Resolution Date: April 27, 2012

PART II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

The proposed alternative A, alternative B and the no action alternative were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is as described in Part I, paragraph 9 (Description of Project). Safety improvements with earthwork on Range 300b, road corner reconstruction and new **s**hooting bays.

- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Range Development Grant money would be denied and the area will remain as an active shooting range without the proposed safety improvements, which will result in a continued situation where users are exposed to the possibility of personal injury or death.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented: Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent. Neither the proposed alternative nor the no action alternative would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative (A)** for safety improvements with earthwork on Range 300b, road corner reconstruction and new **s**hooting bays

The **No Action Alternative** (B) would be to not fund the safety improvements and the range will continue with present conditions. Land use would remain the same.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:
NONE

List and explain proposed mitigating measures (stipulations): None

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmental sensitive areas.

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	**Unknown**	**Potentially Significant**	**Minor**	**None**	**Can Be Mitigated**	**Comments Below**
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				**X**		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				**X**		**#2**
3. Introduction of new species into an area				**X**		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			**#4**
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				**X**		
6. Existing water right or reservation				**X**		
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			**#7**
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				**X**		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				**X**		**#9**
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				**X**		
11. Aesthetics				**X**		

2. "Even with the relatively high level of human presence and being bisected by I-90 and a Montana Rail Link railroad line [which runs along the north boundary of the WMFGA], the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers confluence area is within an important ungulate and large carnivore movement corridor between the Salmon-Selway ecosystem southwest of Missoula and the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem northeast of Missoula" The WMFGA is aware of the necessity for maintaining critical wildlife corridors and plans to manage their properties to minimize any potential impediments to wildlife movements and to ensure connectivity between wildlife habitats. The proposals will not significantly change land usage.

4. With projects that include the disruption of the earth, there is an increased potential for noxious weeds to present in those areas. In order to mitigate those impacts, WMFGA has a weed mitigation plan. The plan

includes reseeding disturbed ground, hand-pulling weeds and other low-intensity weed control methods will be ongoing, and where appropriate, the application of herbicides such as 2-4D and Tordon by licensed applicators.

7. There may be some minor erosion from the new berms into the new shooting bays until the reseeded grasses begin to stabilize the soil. Because the bays are graded to move any water to the south (towards the downrange end of the bays), there should be no runoff or eroded material leaving the site of the bays.

9. This project uses no federal funds nor does it take place on state owned or controlled property; therefore, the Federal 106 Regulations and the State Antiques Act do not apply.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	**Unknown**	**Potentially Significant**	**Minor**	**None**	**Can Be Mitigated**	**Comments Below**
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				**X**		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				**X**		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				**X**		
4.Agricultural production				**X**		
5. Human health				**X**		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				**X**		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				**X**		
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				**X**		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				**X**		
10. Demands for government services				**X**		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				**X**		

PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. None of the project reviewed were complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being implemented are already on an existing range/altered areas that together with the insignificant environmental effects of the proposed action, indicates that this should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative. The Western Montana Fish and Game Association's proposed alternative, to provide a safe regulated shooting opportunity is supported by its members and the public. Therefore, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the proposed alternative (**A**) for the improvements as outlined in Part I, Para. 9.

PART V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? NO

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? Individually, the proposed actions have minor impacts. However, it was determined that there are no significant or potentially significant cumulatively impacts. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no new hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:
There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative; therefore, an EIS is not required.

PART VI. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:

Western MT Fish & Game Assoc.
MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

EA prepared by:

GENE R. HICKMAN
MS Wildlife Management
Ecological Assessments
Helena, MT 59602

Date Completed: June 28, 2012

Describe public involvement, if any:
This draft EA will be advertised on FWP's web site and through a legal ad in the *Missoulian* announcing a public comment period. A press release will also announce the project and comment period.