

**DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
GRANT MARSH  
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA BUILDING  
REMOVAL/REPAIR/IMPROVEMENT/PARKING AREA  
INSTALLATION**



**JULY 2019**



**MONTANA FISH,  
WILDLIFE & PARKS**

# Draft Environmental Assessment

## MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

### PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

#### A. Type of proposed action

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to remove or repair the following structures from the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area (WMA):

- 1) Remove house and foundation, all internal contents, yard fixtures, corrals and debris from homesite on the north end of the property (Figure 1a,1b, 1c. House contains asbestos materials. (all fixtures except existing well that will be restored to working condition)
- 2) Remove building one and all internal contents, yard fixtures and debris from building southeast of homestead (Figure 1d)
- 3) Repair and improve building two and attached lean-to (Figure 2a, 2b)

FWP proposes development of two new gravel parking areas and replacement of two existing culverts (Figure 5) on the WMA along Highway 47. Each parking area will accommodate approximately 6 vehicles. The development and improvement of this site would enhance the functionality of the WMA while facilitating public recreational opportunities. The funding for this proposed project would be derived from the 2013 Habitat Montana spending authorization.

Figure 1. (a) House to be removed. (b) corrals surrounding house to be removed. (c) view of homestead. (d) building one to be removed.



Figure 2. (a) Building to be repaired and improved. (b) lean-to attached to building two. Also, to be repaired and improved.



**B. Agency authority for the proposed action**

FWP has the authority under state law (§ 87-1-201, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)) to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future. Funding dedicated for the acquisition and ongoing maintenance of wildlife habitat is established through MCA 87-1-242.

**C. Location affected by proposed action:**

Grant Marsh WMA is located 7 miles north of Hardin, Montana in Bighorn County; on the west bank of the Bighorn River. See vicinity map (Fig. 4) and aerial image (Fig. 5)

Figure 4. Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area project location map

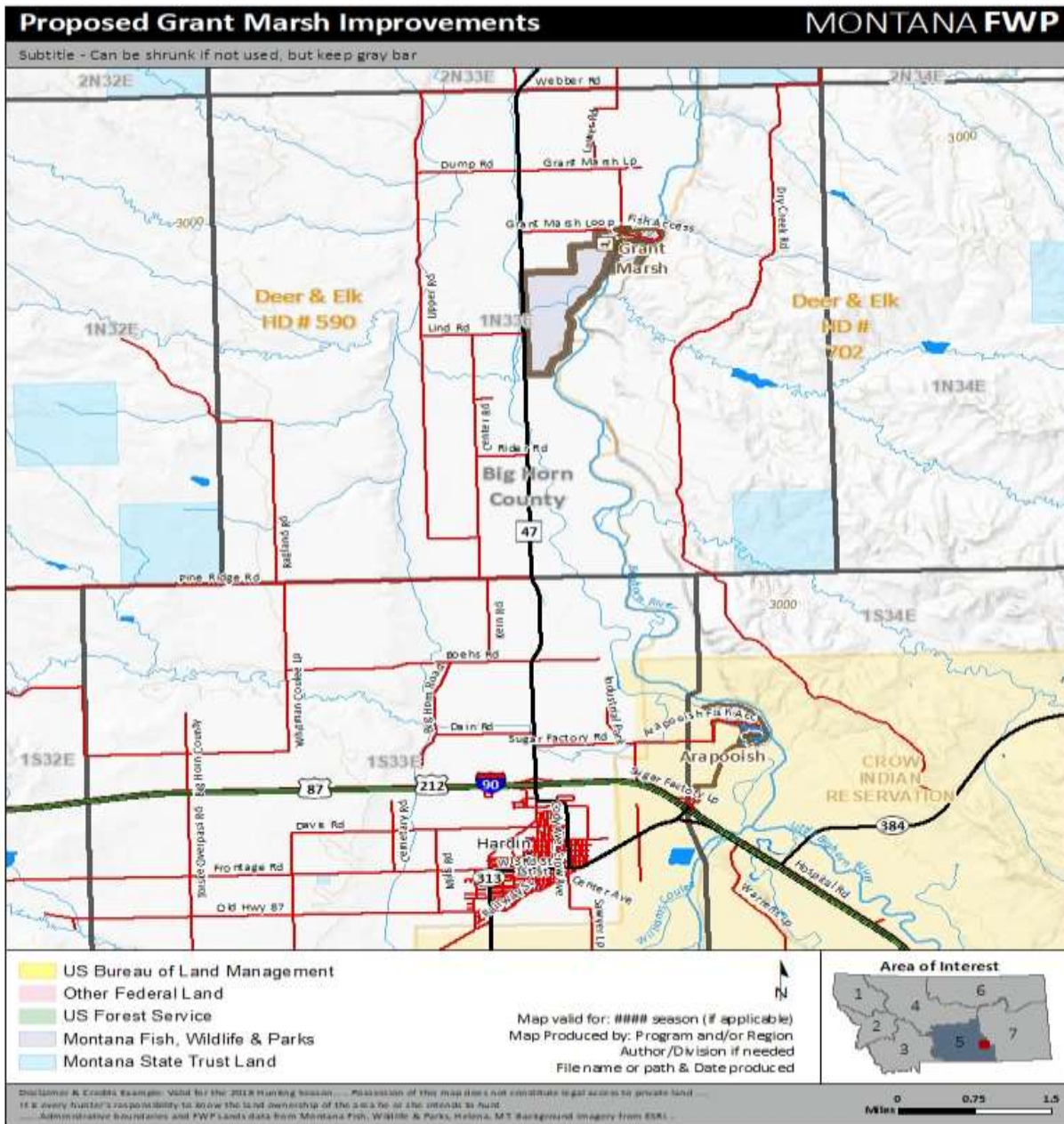
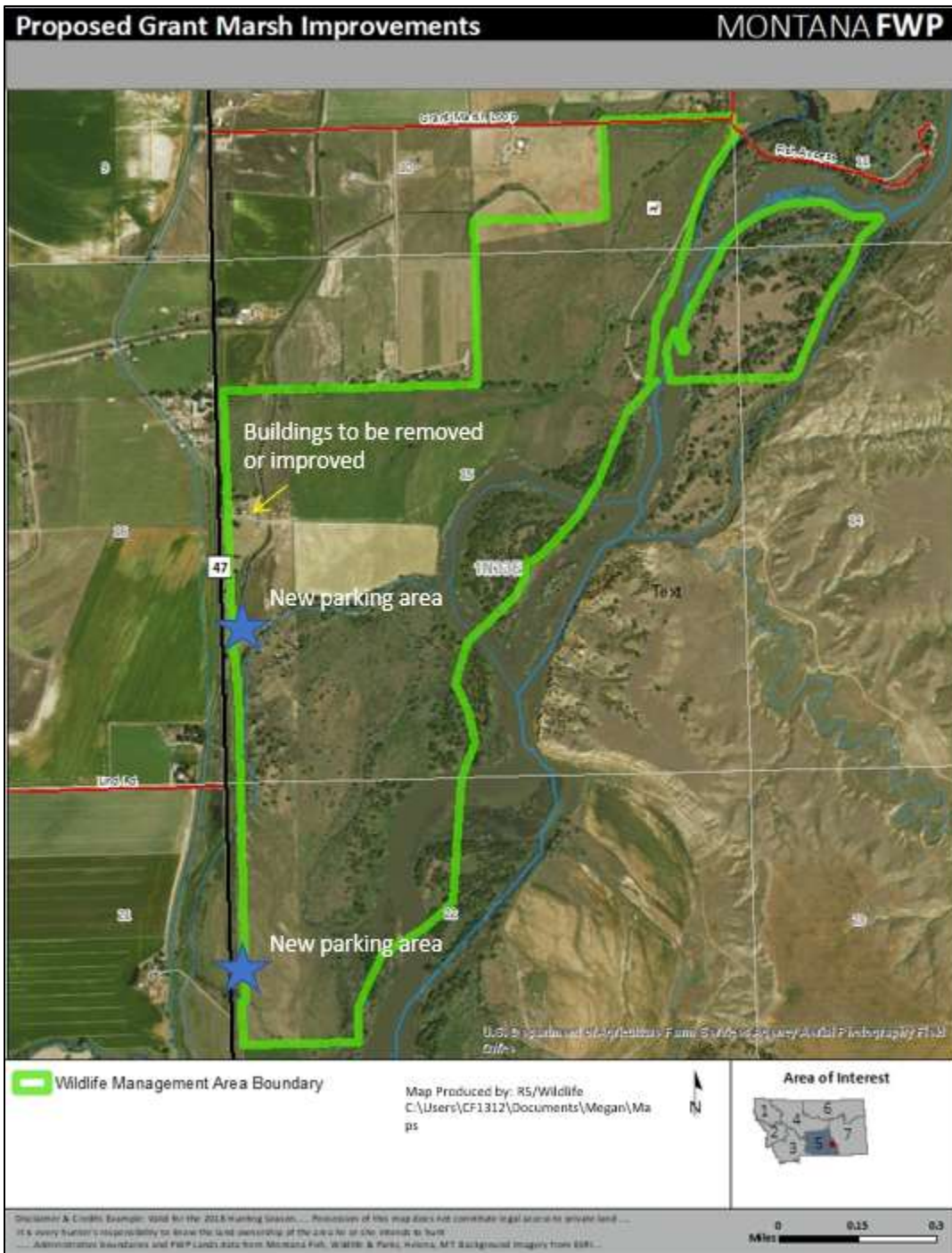


Figure 5. Aerial image of the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area and the proposed project locations.



4) **Project Size**

Approximately one acre of residential land and one acre of rangeland would be affected by building removal and the addition of two parking areas.

5) **Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdictions**

**Permits:** None required

**Funding:**

The proposed project would be funded by FWP Habitat Montana.

**Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name:</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
Fish and Wildlife Commission	project approval

6) **Alternatives**

**Alternative A: No Action**

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not remove house and building one, repair and improve building two or add two new parking areas to the property.

**Alternative B: Proposed Action**

FWP proposes to remove house and building one, repair and improve building 2 for equipment storage and add two new parking areas along Highway 47 at Grant Marsh WMA. Through the Proposed action unused structures would be removed, equipment storage would be provided in the remaining building and additional parking on Highway 47 would be provided.

7) **Narrative summary of the proposed action**

FWP proposes the removal of two buildings and adjacent corrals, repair and improvement of one building for equipment storage, the addition of two new parking areas and replacement of two existing culverts at Grant Marsh WMA along the Bighorn River in Big Horn County (Fig. 4, 5) using Habitat Montana funds (hunting license dollars).

## PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

### A. Physical Environment

<b>1. LAND RESOURCES</b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?			X			1a
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other		X				

No changes are anticipated that would alter soil stability.

1a. Removal of buildings may cause minor alterations to geologic substructure directly below.

<b>2. AIR</b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)				X	X	2a
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions or pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other		X				

2a. Asbestos is present in the existing residential dwelling. Materials containing asbestos would be removed by a licensed asbestos removal contractor prior to demolition.

<b>3. WATER</b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		X	
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other		X				

3b. Creation of new parking areas may create small changes in drainage patterns and surface runoff. FWP engineers will account for this when designing parking areas.

<b>4. VEGETATION</b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		X	4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X		X	4b
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		X	4e
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other		X				

Impacts to the plant community would be limited through washing of construction vehicles and reclamation using native plant species.

4a. Upon completion of building demolition, the area would be reclaimed with native species plantings.

4b. Upon completion of building demolition, the area would be reclaimed with native species plantings.



4e. In order to minimize the likelihood of establishing or spreading noxious weeds in the area construction equipment would be required to be washed prior to entering the WMA. Upon completion of building demolition, the area would be reclaimed with native species.

<b>5. FISH/WILDLIFE</b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		N/A				
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		N/A				
j. Other		X				

**B. Human Environment**

<b>6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other		X				

<b><u>7. LAND USE</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?			X		X	7b
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other		X				

7b. A cultural resource inventory was conducted by the Montana State Historic Preservation Office on the existing (Bunston) farmstead and it was determined that there was No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties for the proposed building removal/repair or parking area construction.

<b><u>8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				
e. Other		X				

<b><u>9. COMMUNITY IMPACT</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?				X	X	9e
f. Other		X				

9e. The addition of two new parking areas may have the potential to affect the local community by increasing traffic hazards as visitors slow down to turn into parking areas. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has installed two new approaches to meet their safety standards in proposed parking areas. Overall use of the Grant Marsh WMA and FAS may increase due to the additional parking areas.

<b><u>10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources		N/A				
f. Define projected maintenance costs.		N/A				
g. Other		X				

The proposed action would have no impact on public services/taxes/utilities.

<b><u>11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other		X				

<b><u>12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				

d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				
e. Other		X				

### C. SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

<b>13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		N/A				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		N/A				
h. Other		X				

## PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The (expanded) Grant Marsh WMA has been open for public use since September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. The existing structures and scattered debris could pose a hazard to the public. The addition of two new parking areas would increase the ability for the public to access this WMA.

The proposed projects would have no significant negative cumulative effects on the physical and human environments. When considered over the long-term, this action poses positive effects for conserving and restoring riparian zones, which are high value habitats for wildlife, and the public's continuing access to a scenic reach of the Bighorn River.

## PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

### A. Public involvement

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Public notice in each of these papers: *Big Horn County News* and *Billings Gazette*,
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.
- Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project including adjacent landowners and county commissioners.

**B. Duration of comment period**

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days following the publication of the legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., August 29, 2019 and can be mailed to:

Megan O'Reilly  
Wildlife Biologist  
2300 Lake Elmo Drive  
Billings, MT 59105  
[moreilly@mt.gov](mailto:moreilly@mt.gov)

**PART V. EA PREPARATION**

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in the EA, an EIS is not required. The proposed action is expected to be a benefit to the physical and human environment.

**Persons responsible for preparing the EA:**

Megan O'Reilly  
Wildlife Biologist  
2300 Lake Elmo Dr  
Billings, MT 59105