



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: Prickly Pear Sportsmen's Association

2. Type of Proposed Action:

The Prickly Pear Sportsmen's Association (PPSA) proposes to improve and expand the PPSA Range by:

- Constructing a 500-yard range adjacent to and contiguous with the existing 200-, 300-, and 400-yard ranges;
- purchasing a back-up generator for the range solar power system;
- and purchasing a security camera system.

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:

The PPSA Range is located approximately 13 miles west of Helena, Montana, at mile marker 31 on U.S. Highway 12; Lat. 46.587357, Long. -112.263436; Section 29, Township 10 North, Range 5 West.

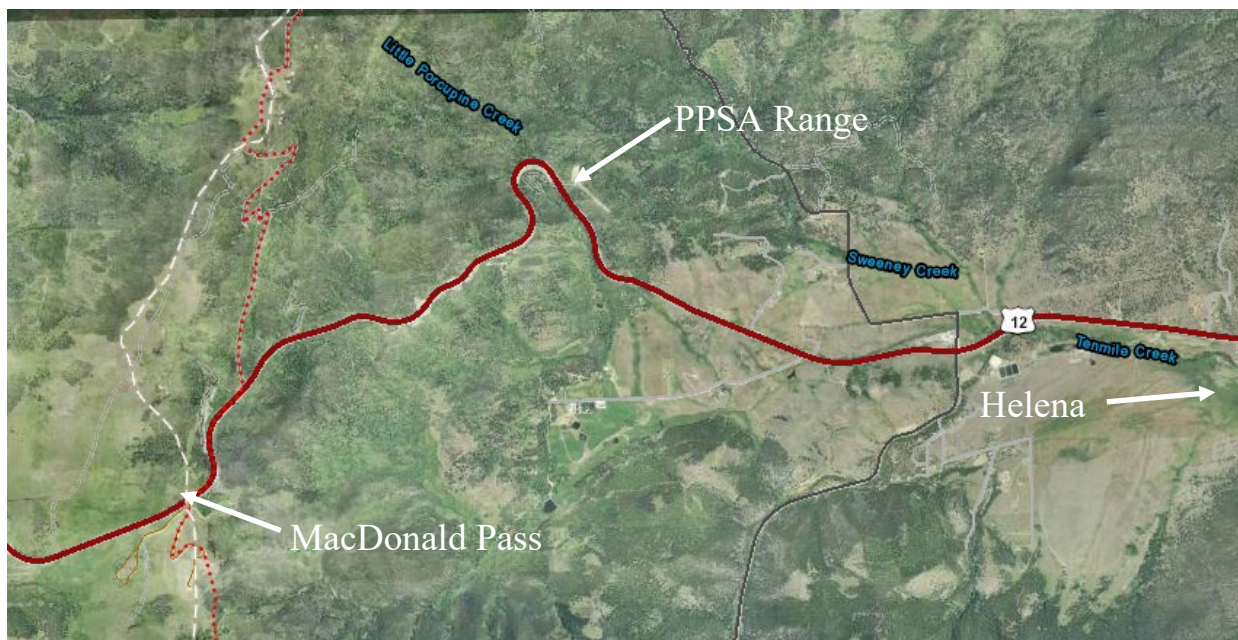


Figure 1 – Location of Prickly Pear Shooting Association Range, Helena, Montana



Figure 2 – Aerial view of Prickly Pear Shooting Association Range, Helena, Montana



Figure 3 - Prickly Pear Sportsmen's Association Project Area, Helena, Montana



Figure 4 – View Down Current 200-300-400 Range at PPSA, Helena, Montana

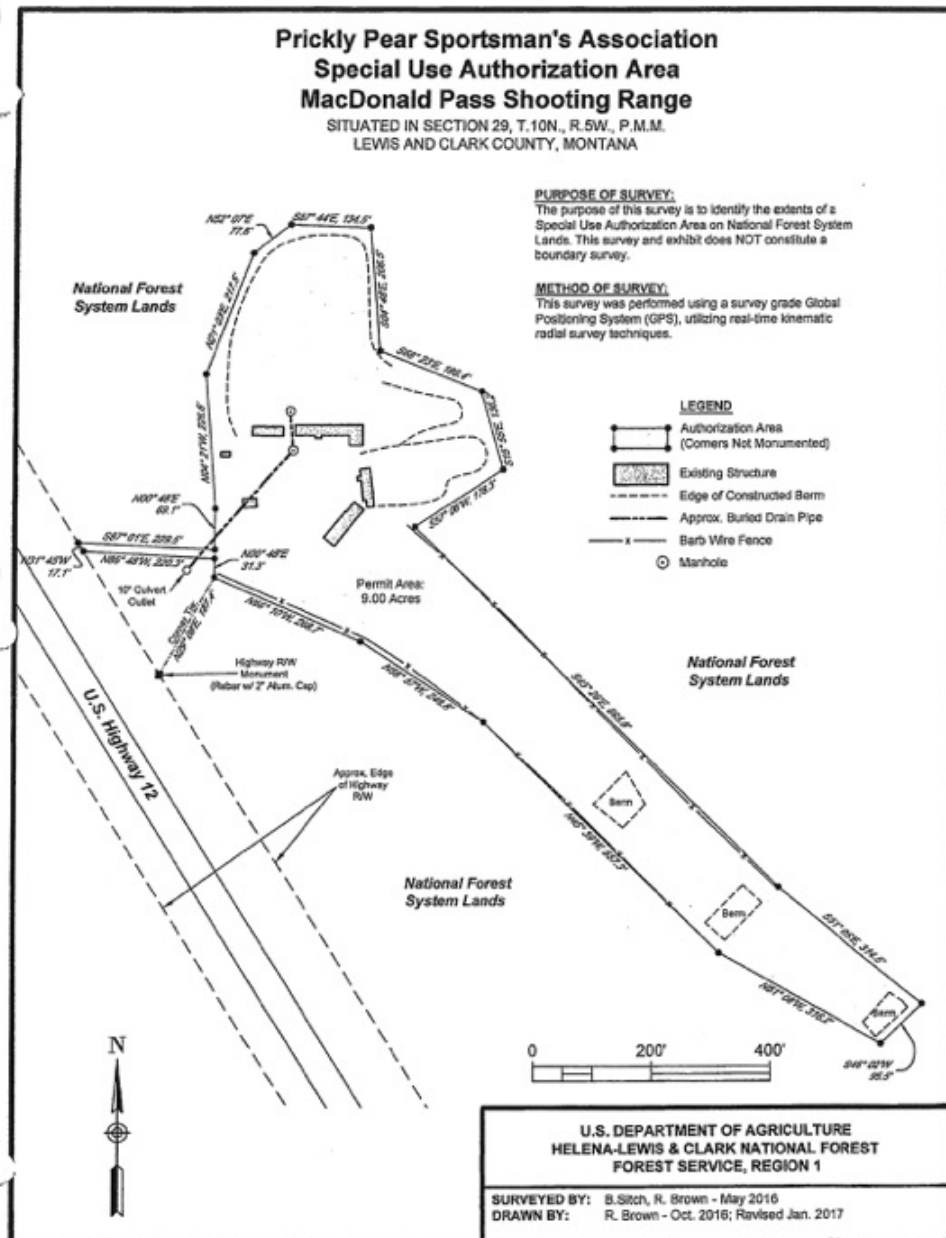


Figure 5 - Prickly Pear Sportsmen's Association Permit Area, Helena, Montana

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):

The need and perceived benefits for each of the proposed capital investments are as follows:

- a) 500-yard Range: The purpose of constructing a new 500-yard range is to provide PPSA members and visitors the ability to sight in their firearms at big game distances. Since long range trajectories vary greatly, it's vital to adjust your rifle before each hunt to hit a target at a specific range. Typically, rifles are targeted in at both 100 and 200 yards, but big game hunters can sight in at much longer distances, improving the probability of efficient, ethical, and successful harvests. In addition, with the advancement of technologies that improve long-range precision, PPSA would like to offer their members the various sport-shooting activities associated with a 500-yard range.
- b) Generator: The implementation of the solar power system in 2021 has significantly benefitted the range by providing power to all buildings. However, due to the range's unique location near MacDonald Pass, there are times when the solar array cannot dissipate the snow-load, which prevents the batteries from charging and therefore powering the entry gate and buildings. The back-up propane generator with provide enough power generation to meet the needs of the range's daily operations until the solar array has been cleared of snow and is able to once again generate solar power.
- c) Security Camera System: The security camera system will provide staff the ability to monitor and react to safety and security incidents such as improper range activities, vandalism, and other range safety considerations. The camera will have data storage for review and analysis when incidents occur, as well as other standard safety camera features.

6. Objectives for the Action(s):

The goal of the proposed project(s) is to expand and improve the safety, security, and capabilities of the PPSA Range by offering a larger range of shooting opportunities and updating the range's operational tools and facilities. Implementation of the 500-yard range will provide members and visitors with a safe environment for long-range, precision fires in a controlled, safe environment (rather than on open lands). The back-up generator for the solar power system will ensure the power, lights, security camera systems, and gate systems will all remain functional during sever weather incidents, further ensuring the safety and security of PPSA's staff, members, and guests. And the security camera system will allow staff to monitor and react appropriately to safety and security incidents.

7. Project Size: estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:

The proposed project would involve approximately 9 acres of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land.

8. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):

The PPSA obtained a 20-year Special Use Permit from the Helena National Forest on January 1, 2021 effective through December 31, 2040 on 9 acres for the purpose of establishing a Shooting Range. The property is not located within a floodplain and there are no permanent surface waters or wetlands on the property. The range offers shooting opportunities for rifle and pistol.

9. Description of Project:

PPSA plans to improve and expand the PPSA Range by executing the following projects:

- Constructing a new 500-yard range adjacent to and contiguous with the existing 200-300-400-yard ranges.
- Purchasing and installing a back-up generator for the range's existing solar power system
- Purchasing and installing a security camera system for video surveillance of the range and range activities.

Proposed expenses include:

1. 500-yard Range Construction: Mob, clear and grub, earthwork and path extension	\$51,800
2. Generator	\$7,000
3. <u>Camera Security System</u>	<u>\$4,214</u>
Total Project Budget	\$63,014.00
Total Funding Requested from FWP	\$31,507.00

10. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

None

Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
N/A		

Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$31,507.00

11. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups:

The PPSA Range is a private, non-profit range with an annual membership fee of \$50 per year for individuals and families. The range is open to visitors who are accompanied by a PPSA member for \$10 per day. Several organizations use the range each year, including Boy Scouts; Fish, Wildlife and Parks Hunters Safety; Postal Match; and Open House and Sight-In Day. In addition, two to four events and various shooting and gun safety classes are held at the range every year.

12. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement:

The PPSA Range is a private, nonprofit shooting range. The PPSA held meetings to seek member involvement in the planning process. Proposed range development proposals have been discussed with the association members, the U.S. Forest Service, and 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:

Neil Horne, 419 Mill Road, Helena, MT 59602, (406) 431-0130

15. Other Pertinent Information:

The PPSA Range is a private, non-profit shooting range. The closest shooting range providing similar shooting opportunities is located in Townsend, Montana over 35 miles from the PPSA Range.

Shooting range applications require the participating governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range-funding assistance. Resolution Date: January 22, 2022.

PART II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A, the **Proposed Alternative**, and **Alternative B**, the **No Action Alternative**, were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is as described in Part I, paragraph 9 (Description of Project): to construct a new 500-yard range adjacent to and contiguous with the existing 200-300-400-yard ranges; install a back-up generator for the range's existing solar power system; and install a security camera system for video surveillance of the range and range activities. There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative**.
- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** would result from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Range Development Grant money being denied and the area remaining as an active shooting range without the proposed improvements. The No Action Alternative would have no significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences. The range would continue on with present conditions, and land use would remain the same. The No Action Alternative could leave unresolved some key safety improvements to the range, such as a back-up power source, improved security system that is not currently safe for member use.

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:

Neither the Proposed Alternative nor the No Action Alternative would have significant negative environmental consequences; however, the No Action Alternative would leave unresolved various potential safety issues.

There are beneficial consequences that would result from accepting the **Proposed Alternative**. The proposed changes would improve the range's overall safety standards, both by enhancing the newly established solar power system by creating a back-up power source for the range's facilities during severe weather events, and by establishing a security camera system that allows staff to better monitor the premises. These changes would also increase range offerings for members, both with the addition of a 500-yard range, and by improving the range's ability to keep equipment in good condition.

The **No Action Alternative** would have no significant negative environmental consequences; the range would continue on with present conditions, and land use would remain the same. Potential negative consequences for the No Action Alternative include less-than-ideal safety standards for the range's existing facilities, especially with regards to potential power failure during severe weather conditions.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:

None. Only the **Proposed Alternative** and the **No Action Alternative** were considered. There was no other alternative that were deemed reasonably available, or prudent.

List and explain proposed mitigating measures (stipulations):

None

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

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

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		5
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		11

2. & 5. There are no delineated wetlands and no natural water sources within the area proposed for development. No critical wildlife habitat would be affected. Any resident or transient wildlife would likely temporarily leave the immediate area during construction of the proposed project.

4. The implementation of the proposed project will not change the overall abundance and diversity of plant species within the area. The proposed project occupies a small portion of the property. Due to prior land use, native vegetation has already been disturbed in the area of the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project will have a minor impact on native vegetation in the area.

7. The proposed project will cause limited displacement of soils, as the 500-yard range will be established within the existing 200-300-400-yard range. Soil disruption for this site is localized.

9. This project takes place on federally-owned and controlled property; therefore, the Federal 106 Regulations apply. No historical or archaeological cultural resources have been identified by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) on the proposed project site and the USFS approved the construction of the proposed project. Therefore, it is unlikely that cultural resources would be disturbed by the construction of the 500-yard range.

11. The property is already used as a shooting range so the proposed project will have no additional impact on the aesthetics of the property.

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			5
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities			X			7
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		

5. The proposed projects would improve the safety for members and the public using the range.

7. The proposed developments will increase shooting opportunities within the community.

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

projects reviewed were complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being implemented are already on an existing range or 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 PPSA Proposed Alternative, to improve and expand the shooting facilities of the PPSA Range, is supported by its members and the U.S. Forest Service. Therefore, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the Proposed Alternative (A) for the improvements as outlined in Part I, Paragraph 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 cumulative 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 extreme 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:

1. Neil Horne, 419 Mill Road, Helena, MT 59602, (406) 431-0130.
2. MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

EA prepared by:

Amanda Darling, Prairie Goat Enterprises, Hamilton, MT 59840

Date Completed:

May 31, 2022

Describe public involvement, if any:

This draft EA will be advertised on FWP's web site announcing the public comment period. A press release will also announce the project and comment period.