



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation

2. Type of Proposed Action:

The West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation (WYSEF) proposes to improve and extend the offerings of their Biathlon Range by extending the shooting range portion by 30, which will require excavation, compaction, then construction of the extended retaining wall and target line.

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:

The WYSEF Biathlon Range is located approximately one mile southwest of West Yellowstone, Montana, off of Fs 1700; Lat. 44.650853, Long. -111.119418; Section 33.

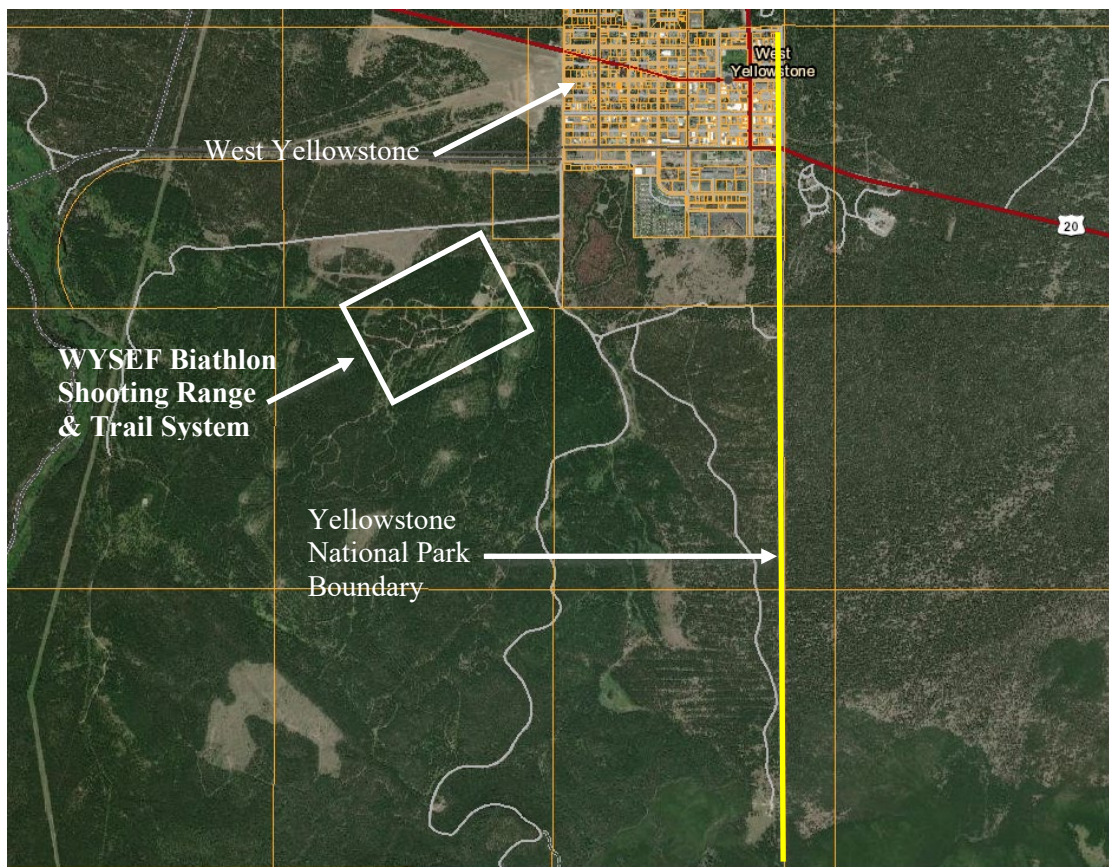


Figure 1. Aerial view of WYSEF Biathlon Range, West Yellowstone, Montana



Figure 2. Project Map of WYSEF Biathlon Range, West Yellowstone, 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):

WYSEF's goal with this project is to provide better accessibility to their Biathlon Range (part of the Rendezvous Ski Trails) for adaptive skiers. In a typical year, WYSEF's Biathlon Range hosts 4-5 biathlon events/races. The biathlon is a winter sport that combines cross country skiing and rifle shooting. A key limitation to the sport and to entry for para-biathletes is the availability of venues. Extending our biathlon range by 30 feet will increase that availability in Gallatin County and Montana overall. WYSEF's trail system is well regarded locally, nationally, and internationally as a world-class system, and this project will further enhance WYSEF's biathlon shooting range offerings.

6. Objectives for the Action(s):

The goal of the proposed project on the WYSEF Biathlon Range is to extend the range's retaining wall and target line to increase opportunities for biathletes and para-biathletes both within Montana and internationally. This project will allow better accessibility for adaptive skiers, a field of athletes that is growing rapidly, but which is typically underserved due to space constraints. Currently, the biathlon range only has 3 shooting lanes for adaptive skiers. The proposed extension would double the range's capacity, thereby increasing opportunities for a larger population of athletes.

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

The proposed project would involve approximately 0.5 acres of the 8-acre WYSEF Biathlon Range.

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

WYSEF obtained a Special Use Permit from the Custer Gallatin National Forest on 8 acres for the purpose of establishing a Nordic skiing trail system and biathlon target range. The property is not located within a floodplain and there are no permanent surface waters or wetlands on the property. The property offers Nordic ski trails and a range with air-rifle shooting opportunities for biathletes and para-biathletes.

9. Description of Project:

WYSEF plans to improve their biathlon range (adjacent to their Rendezvous Trail System) by extending the retaining wall and target line by 30 feet, which will increase their capacity for hosting biathletes and para-biathletes. The proposed extension will require excavation and compaction, then construction of the extended retaining wall and target line using concrete and native backfill. The target line for para-biathletes is 10 meters from the firing line and will require pouring concrete for posts, securing and stabilizing mounting rail, and supplies for constructing the target mounts.

The requested funds will be put towards all of this work (labor and materials included). The funds requested are based on quotes received from a West Yellowstone excavation company and an Ennis concrete form and finish company for the retaining wall extension. The target line will be constructed by volunteers; estimated costs of these materials is based on pricing found through a local hardware store and online.

Proposed expenses include:

Equipment Rental	\$ 300
Concrete - Labor and Materials (Target Line)	\$ 40
Excavation and Compacting - Labor and Materials	\$ 40,181
Air-rifle Biathlon Targets	\$ 1,300
Volunteer Labor (Constructing Target Line)	\$ 2,042

Miscellaneous Materials	\$ 950
Grant Administration	\$ 1,200
Total Project Budget	\$ 46,013
Total Funding Requested from FWP	\$23,006.50

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	\$23,006.50

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

The WYSEF's Rendezvous Trail System and Biathlon Range is a non-profit private range with an annual individual membership fee of \$50. The range/trail system is open to visitors for a day-use fee of \$, and members are also welcome to bring guests for \$5 per person per day. Many organizations (40+) use the biathlon range each year, including the West Yellowstone Ski Team, Altius Biathlon Club, Bridger Ski Foundation, Crosscur Mountain Sports Center, Bogus Basin Nordic Team, Colorado Biathlon Club, West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation, and more. In addition, ~5 events are held at the range and trail system.

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

Because the WYSEF is a nonprofit private shooting club for members, there has been no public involvement in the planning process. Proposed range development proposals have been discussed with the club members 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:

Dr. Julie Wieseler, 410 Starling Dr., Bozeman, MT 59718; (406) 539-6021.

15. Other Pertinent Information:

The WYSEF Biathlon Range is a private, nonprofit shooting range. The closest shooting range providing somewhat similar shooting opportunities (though not biathlon-specific) is located in West Yellowstone, Montana (West Yellowstone Shooting Sports Association) about 2 miles from the WYSEF Biathlon 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 24, 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 expand shooting opportunities at their biathlon range by extending the retaining wall and target line

by 30 feet, which will increase their capacity for hosting biathletes and para-biathletes. 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. In this case, the area would remain as an active shooting range without the proposed improvements.

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.

There are beneficial consequences that would result from accepting the **Proposed Alternative**. The proposed changes would expand existing target shooting opportunities for biathletes of all abilities, both for recreational and competitive uses.

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.

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				X		

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
reservation						
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			7
8. Air quality or objectionable odors			X			8
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 may 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 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 but the developments will not substantially affect geological features or establish new erosion patterns. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures will be in effect and any disturbed areas will be reseeded.

8. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during construction. However, the construction time is short and human effects will be limited due to the sparse population near the property.

9. The project site is located on federally-owned and controlled property so the Federal 106 Regulations apply. Though the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has not conducted a search of historical or archaeological resources on the project site, the project site is located on the existing access road and next to the existing shooting ranges. These areas have been disturbed by range activities for years and it is unlikely that cultural resources would be disturbed by the improvement of the access road and development or a foot path. According to the terms of the USFS Special Use Permit, if cultural resources are discovered during construction of the proposed project, all work would cease until USFS has been notified.

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		
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		

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 WYSEF Proposed Alternative, to improve the accessibility of the WYSEF Biathlon Range, 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, 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:

Dr. Julie Wieseler, 410 Starling Dr., Bozeman, MT 59718; (406) 539-6021.
MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

EA prepared by:

Amanda Darling, Prairie Goat Enterprises, Hamilton, MT 59840

Date Completed:

June 7, 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.