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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: FY23 Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Range

2. Type of Proposed Action:

The Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Range (WRPR) proposes the following projects:

- Project 1: Construct an ADA-accessible ramp that accesses the existing office building;
- Project 2: Add fill material to safety berms on north and south sides of 300-yard rifle range to build up low spots;
- Project 3: Seed the disturbed areas of Project 2 to prevent erosion.

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:

The WRPR range is located approximately 3.5 miles northwest of Hamilton, Montana and 2.5 miles west of Highway 93 at 578 Blodgett View Drive, Hamilton, MT, 59840, Lat. 46.27415, Long. -114.198822; Section 15, Township 6 North, Range 21 West.



Figure 1 – Aerial View of the Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Range, Hamilton, Montana

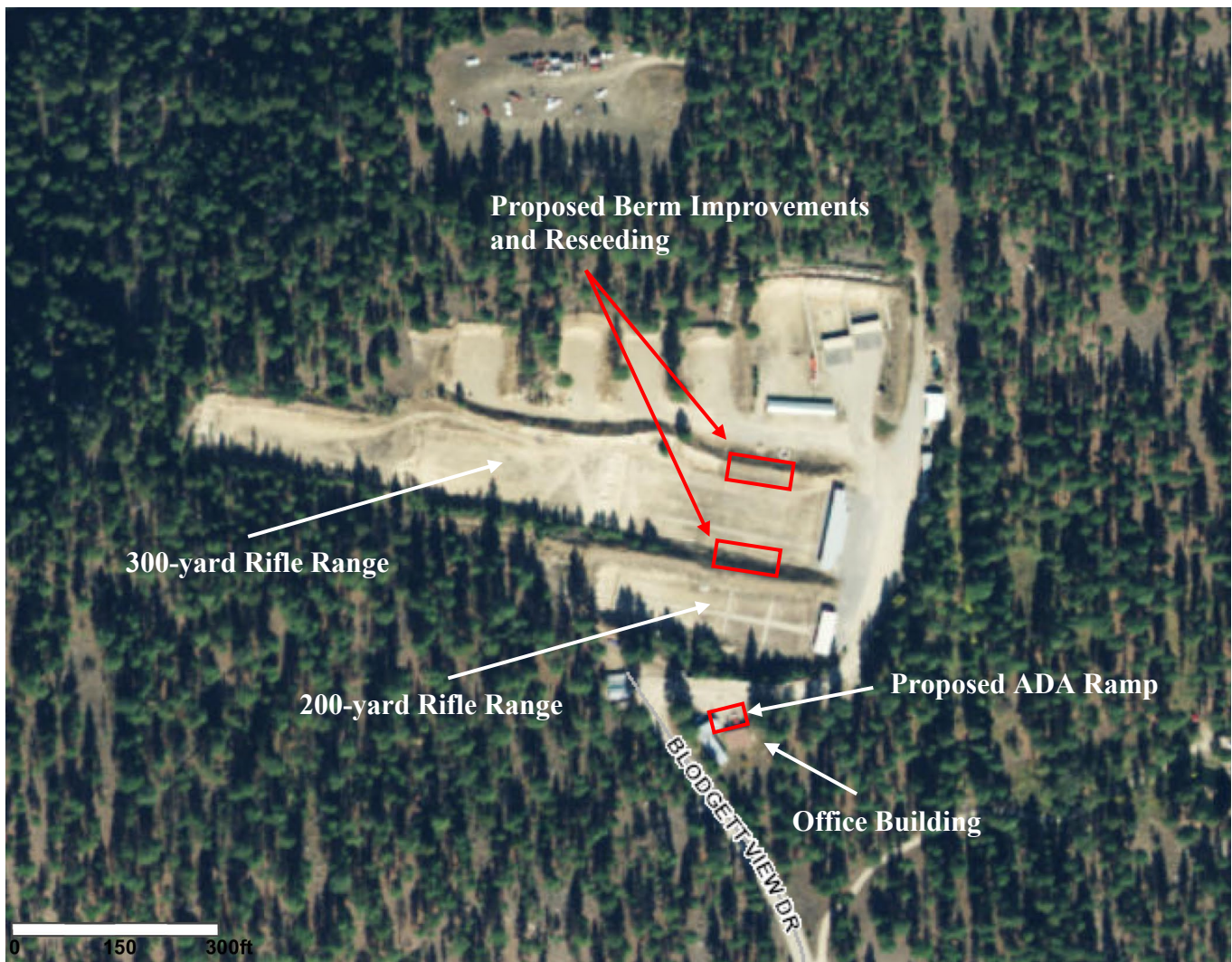


Figure 2. Location of Proposed Projects at the Whittecar Rifle & Pistol Range

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):

WRPR's office building was constructed in the 1970s and does not currently comply with American Disability Act (ADA) requirements for accessibility. Part 1 of the proposed project will upgrade the office entryway to meet these requirements through the constructions of an ADA-compliant ramp. Part 2 of the proposed project will address safety hazards resulting from the eroded berms enclosing the 300-yard rifle range. Raising the berms will help prevent projectiles from escaping the range area and falling on adjacent ranges. And finally, part 3 of the proposed project attempts to prevent future erosion of these safety berms by reseeding the newly disturbed soil with grass seed. In summary, the project would attempt to enhance the safety and accessibility of the facilities for shooters of all abilities.

6. Objectives for the Action(s):

The objective of the proposed project is to provide safe and convenient shooting opportunities for visitors and shooters of all abilities by improving accessibility to WRPR's facilities, repairing key safety mechanisms (safety berms), and making an effort to prevent/delay these safety issues in the future.

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

The proposed project would involve approximately 1 acre of the 30-acre WRPR range.

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

The WRPR range is located on 30 acres of state land leased from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). The property is not located within a floodplain and there are no permanent surface waters or wetlands on the property. The WRPR range currently offers shooting opportunities for rifle, pistol, shotgun, black powder, cowboy action, IPSC, bench rest, Schuetzen rifle, IR 50-50, Hunter Safety, CCW, law enforcement, and Teller Wildlife Youth.

9. Description of Project:

The proposed three-part project involves constructing a new ADA-accessible ramp for entry into the main office building; building up the existing safety berms along specific sections of the 300-yard rifle range; and reseeding disturbed soil from the berm reconstruction to protect against future erosion.

The ADA-accessible ramp would be constructed primarily using concrete, with railings lining the entirety of the pathway. The ramp would be 12 feet long by 4 feet wide with a slope of 1 in 12, and it will include a slightly larger deck area (5 feet by 6.5 feet) at the doorway entrance into the building.

The safety berm repairs will require heavy machinery to transport large amounts of dirt from an on-site source of fill material to designated sections of the berms. Once re-established at the desired height, the berms will then be reseeded with grass seed.

The estimated costs include:

▪ Materials/Construction for Concrete Ramp and Deck	\$ 4,950
▪ Heavy Machinery/Labor to Build Up to Safety Berms	\$ 6,800
▪ Seed Mix for Berms	\$ 225

▪ Volunteer Labor	\$ (301)
Total Project Budget	\$ 12,276
Total Funding Requested from FWP	\$ 6,138

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	\$6,138.00

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

The WRPR is located on 30 acres of state land leased from FWP. This is a private range with an annual membership fee of \$50 for individuals, \$75 for families, and is open to visitors for a \$7 day-use fee. The WRPR hosts up to 126 events each year and approximately 20 organizations and law enforcement agencies use the range each year, including Benchresters, Scheutzen, Cooper Firearms, Hunter Safety, Teller Wildlife Refuge, Barmint for Score, Darby One Shot, Marine Corps League, American Legion Post 91, Bitterroot Blasters, Bitterroot Buckaroos, Boy Scouts, Kathy Love, Goodnight, Skills Set Tactical, Western Montana Tactical, Women's Basic Handgun, Rocky Mountain Lab, and Hamilton Police Department.

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

Because the WRPR is a non-profit, 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:

James McCormack, 1005 College Street, Stevensville, MT 59870, (406) 777-5779.

15. Other Pertinent Information:

The WRPR is a non-profit, private shooting range. The closest shooting range providing similar shooting opportunities for rifle and pistol shooting is in Missoula, Montana, 60 miles from the WRPR. The nearest range providing similar shooting opportunities for shotgun only is in Hamilton, MT.

Shooting range applications require the participating governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range-funding assistance. Resolution Date: January 13, 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

provide safe and convenient shooting opportunities for visitors and shooters of all abilities by improving accessibility to WRPR's office building through the construction of an ADA-compliant ramp; repairing eroded safety berms along the 300-yard rifle range; and reseeding these disturbed berms to prevent/delay this erosion in the future. There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative**.

Alternative B (No Action Alternative) would result from the 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, however the No Action Alternative would leave unresolved the safety and accessibility issues mentioned above.

There are beneficial consequences that would result from accepting the **Proposed Alternative**. The proposed changes would improve ADA accessibility within WRPR's facilities and enhance basic safety measures for the 300-yard rifle range and all adjacent ranges.

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 existing safety berms, and a lack of full compliance with ADA requirements.

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 determines the 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				X		2

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
life and/or habitats						
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			8
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		11

Comments

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 area during construction.

4. Any elimination of vegetation for 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, some of which already contains no vegetation (i.e. the area proposed for the ramp). 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. Potential positive effects of the proposed project include the introduction of grass seed to help stabilize the newly repaired berms.

7. The proposed project will cause displacement of soils contained to limited areas, but the developments will not substantially effect geological features or establish new erosion patterns. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures will be in effect and disturbed area will be reseeded, which would benefit the existing eroded safety berms.

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. This project uses no federal, therefore the Federal 106 Regulations does not apply. WRPR does lease the property from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, thus the State Antiques Act could apply, however WRPR has indicated that there are no historical or archaeological sites near the proposed project.

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	Comment 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		4
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		

Comments

4. The site borders privately-owned forest lands on three sides and Montana State Trust Lands on the

remaining side. The site is not suitable for agricultural production.

7. The proposed developments will increase shooting opportunities for a wider range of individuals (especially those with disabilities) 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 Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Club Proposed Alternative, which aims to provide safe and accessible shooting opportunities to the community, 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. It was also 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:

- James McCormack, 1005 College Street, Stevensville, MT 59870, (406) 777-5779.
- 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.