

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Elk Park Ranch Land Banking Sale
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	May 2023
<b>Proponent:</b>	Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC)
<b>Location:</b>	T5N, R20W, Section 16. Approximately 5 miles southeast of Hamilton, Montana
<b>County:</b>	Ravalli

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Elk Park Ranch has nominated 80 acres of State School Trust land for proposed sale under the DNRC Land Banking program (77-2-361 through 77-2-367 MCA). Consistent with state law (77-2-304) only the surface acreage would be sold with the State retaining ownership of the underlying mineral estate. The proposed sale would reserve easement rights for this use.

The nominated parcel is currently leased (Lease #3298) by the Elk Park Ranch for grazing use. This state-owned land is held in trust for the support of the Common Schools (K-12). The parcel is entirely surrounded by private land, and is not legally accessible to DNRC and the general public.

The purpose of the state Land Banking Program is to allow DNRC to dispose of parcels that are primarily isolated and produce low income, and to allow the Department to purchase land with legal public access that can support multiple uses and will provide a rate of return equal to or greater than the parcels that are sold. Revenue generated from the sale of this parcel would be deposited in a special account used to purchase replacement lands meeting acquisition criteria related to legal access, productivity, potential income generation and potential for multiple use.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.*

A public scoping period was provided between December 14, 2022 and January 20, 2023. Scoping letters were mailed/emailed to approximately 50 interested parties, including adjacent landowners on the Statewide scoping list for land banking proposals. A legal advertisement was also placed in the Bitterroot Star newspaper.

Two comments were received from adjacent landowners. One comment requested to be informed of the auction process and the other comment was concerned with the elk herd and informed of the appraised value and bidding process.

#### 2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

*Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.*

None

#### 3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

*Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.*

Action Alternative

The Action alternative would proceed with the nomination of the parcel for sale under Land Banking (MCA 77-2-361 through 77-2-367). The next step in this process would be to request preliminary approval from the State Board of Land Commissioners to proceed with land banking sale process.

#### No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would not proceed with the nomination of the parcel for sale under Land Banking (MCA 77-2-361 through 77-2-367).

### III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

#### 4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

*Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.*

The 80-acre parcel is located on an alluvial fan remnant south of the Skalkaho Creek floodplain. Underlying sediments are composed of upper Tertiary alluvium. Soils are cobbly sandy loams on slopes mostly less than 15% except for within Spring Gulch which bisects the parcel draining north. Approximately half of the ground is classified as farmland of local or statewide importance (NRCS). No unique or unusual geologic features are documented for the parcel.

The Bitterroot Valley Irrigation District holds an 8.13-acre easement through the section for the irrigation canal that crosses the property traversing around Spring Gulch.

Minor direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to soil quality, stability, and moisture would be anticipated should traditional management (i.e., livestock grazing) continue post-sale. No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to soils are anticipated because no appreciable changes to existing land management are expected to occur immediately, however long-term management objectives would be unknown.

Changes to site geology would not vary with action or no action. The State would retain ownership of the underlying mineral estate.

#### 5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

*Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.*

Spring Gulch passes through the middle of the 80-acre parcel. The gulch is ephemeral upslope (and south) of the Bitterroot Irrigation Canal. The canal intercepts upslope runoff from Spring Gulch. Below the canal the gulch appears to carry water intermittently to perennially and is likely mainly supplied by canal seepage.

Based on the Ravalli County Water Resources Survey (1965) ([https://dnrc.mt.gov/docs/water/Survey-Books/RavalliWRS\\_1965.pdf](https://dnrc.mt.gov/docs/water/Survey-Books/RavalliWRS_1965.pdf)), a water rights query (DNRC), and the Bitterroot Irrigation District (BRID) Operating Policies (<https://bitterrootirrigationdistrict.com/wp-content/uploads/Approved-Operating-Policies-October-13-2020-.pdf>), the water in the canal is supplied mostly by Lake Como and Rock Creek.

The canal reduces the flexibility of adjacent land use. The BRID would not be liable or obligated to mitigate issues associated with seepage or flooding (MCA-7-2212). No crossings of the canal currently exists within the 80-acre parcel. A new crossing would require approval from the Board of Commissioners of the BRID.

Cattle and wildlife use the canal for water. Associated canal-bank trampling is observable at the site. No water right or canal water allocation is held in this section or would accompany the sale of this parcel.

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**6. AIR QUALITY:**

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.*

No change in land use or existing conditions would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:**

*What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.*

Within the parcel is 80 acres of native rangeland. An irrigation canal also runs through the parcel. The land is classified per state law (77-1-401) as Class 1-- lands which are principally valuable for grazing purposes. The parcel is leased (Agreement 3298) for livestock grazing to the Elk Park Ranch. The lease allows the ranch to utilize (graze) up to 25 animal unit months of forage per year from the parcel.

No change in land use or existing conditions would be expected with either alternative.

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**8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

*Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.*

***Terrestrial Wildlife Resources***

The 80-acre project area is largely a native sagebrush-grassland plant community. Additionally, small amounts of riparian influenced habitats exist associated with the irrigation ditch that passes through the project area. The project area likely supports a variety of native terrestrial and avian wildlife such as golden eagles, great blue heron, red-tailed hawks, western meadowlark, sage thrasher, fringed myotis, common poorwill, bobolink, and American kestrel. The project area contains white-tailed deer and elk winter range; non-winter use by white-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk is also likely. Past activities in the project area have included livestock grazing. The project area is surrounded by private lands, which have also experienced livestock grazing and numerous forms of human development.

**No Action Alternative: Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects**

The project area would remain in DNRC ownership and the foreseeable predominant land use would be livestock grazing. Habitat-altering land uses could occur under normal DNRC management. No changes to the existing habitats would be anticipated. Wildlife use of the project area would be expected to be similar to present levels. No changes in recreational use would be anticipated; existing levels of human disturbance would not appreciably change. No appreciable changes to the existing big game winter range, summer range, or security habitats would be anticipated. No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to wildlife would be anticipated since: 1) no appreciable changes to existing habitats would occur; 2) human disturbance levels would not be anticipated to change; and 3) no changes in wildlife use would be expected to occur.

**Action Alternative: Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects**

DNRC would relinquish ownership of the project area under the Land Banking process and a private party would purchase the property. Beyond this expectation, one must speculate on further outcomes regarding future land uses that would occur outside of DNRC control following purchase by a buyer. Transferring ownership of the parcel to another party would not have any direct or indirect effects on any wildlife species or habitats, however, under the action alternative continued management, and/or future development that may erode wildlife habitat values could occur outside of the DNRC's public environmental review process.

Should traditional management (i.e., livestock grazing) continue in the project area, minor direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to wildlife would be anticipated. Should more intensive activities, such as development or subdivision, occur, this alternative could have more effects to wildlife by contributing to temporary loss of and/or more permanent habitat loss for a number of wildlife species in the future, most of which are currently relatively common in Montana. Any activities that may occur on the project area would be additive to other cumulative effects that may be associated with historic land uses on nearby properties (e.g. livestock grazing, logging, and

existing human developments etc.). Wildlife use of the project area would not immediately change, but could be subject to additional disturbance and/or displacement depending on the ultimate uses of the parcel by the new owners.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to wildlife would be anticipated since: 1) no appreciable changes to existing habitats would occur immediately, however long-term management objectives would be unknown and persistence of any given habitat condition would not be certain; 2) human disturbance levels would not be anticipated to change in the immediate future, however uncertainty associated with future use could introduce additional human disturbance and displacement; and 3) no appreciable changes in wildlife use would be expected to occur unless major changes in land use were undertaken by the new owner.

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## **9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:**

*Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

### **Terrestrial Wildlife Resources**

The 80-acre project area is largely a native sagebrush-grassland plant community. Additionally, small amounts of riparian influenced habitats exist associated with the irrigation ditch that passes through the project area. Habitats for federally listed species does not exist in the project area. The project area could support some of the following species of concern: golden eagles, great blue heron, sage thrasher, fringed myotis, and bobolink. Past activities in the project area have included livestock grazing. The project area is surrounded by private lands, which have also experienced livestock grazing and numerous forms of human development.

### **No Action Alternative: Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects**

The project area would remain in DNRC ownership and the foreseeable predominant land use would be livestock grazing. No further habitat-altering land uses would occur with this alternative, thus no changes to the existing habitats or levels of use by any of the terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated. Existing levels of human disturbance would not appreciably change. No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated since: 1) no appreciable changes to existing habitats would occur; 2) human disturbance levels would not be anticipated to change; and 3) no changes in wildlife use would be expected to occur.

### **Action Alternative: Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects**

DNRC would relinquish ownership of the project area under the Land Banking process and a private party would purchase the property. Beyond this expectation, one must speculate on further outcomes regarding future land uses that would occur outside of DNRC control following the disposal. Transferring ownership of the parcel to another party would not have any direct or indirect effects on any terrestrial endangered, threatened, or sensitive wildlife species or habitats, however, under the action alternative continued management, and/or future development that may erode wildlife habitat values could occur outside of the DNRC's public environmental review process. See Attachment B for a full review of anticipated to terrestrial threatened, endangered, and sensitive wildlife species.

Should traditional management (i.e., livestock grazing) continue in the project area, minor direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated. Should more intensive activities, such as development or subdivision, occur, this alternative could have slightly more effects to terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species by contributing to temporary loss of and/or more permanent habitat loss for a number of wildlife species in the future. Any activities that may occur on the project area would be additive to other cumulative effects that may be associated with historic land uses on nearby properties (e.g. livestock grazing, logging, and existing human developments etc.). Wildlife use of the project area would not immediately change, but could be subject to additional disturbance and/or displacement depending on the ultimate uses of the parcel by the new owners.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated since: 1) no appreciable changes to existing habitats would occur immediately, however long-term management objectives would be unknown and persistence of any given habitat condition would not be certain; 2) human disturbance levels would not be anticipated to change in the immediate future, however uncertainty associated with future use could introduce additional human disturbance and displacement; and 3)

no appreciable changes in wildlife use would be expected to occur unless major changes in land use were undertaken by the new owner.

**CHECKLIST FOR ENDANGERED, THREATENED AND SENSITIVE SPECIES**  
**SOUTHWESTERN LAND OFFICE**  
 Bertch Land Banking Project

<b>Threatened and Endangered Species</b>	[Y/N] Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures N = Not Present or No Impact is Likely to Occur Y = Impacts May Occur (Explain Below)
<b>THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES</b>	
Grizzly bear ( <i>Ursus arctos</i> ) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	[ N ] The project area is approximately 60 miles south of occupied grizzly bear habitat (Wittinger et al. 2002), 56 miles south of the NCDE Recovery Area (USFWS 1993), and roughly 8 miles east of the unoccupied Bitterroot Ecosystem. However, grizzly bears are increasingly being documented south of the recovery zone (J. Jonkel, MT FWP, personal communication). Transferring ownership of the parcel would not have any direct or immediate indirect effect on any wildlife species or their habitat. Should traditional uses (i.e., livestock grazing) continue, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be anticipated. However, the proposed action could allow for greater future cumulative risk of development and loss of wildlife habitat that could occur outside of the DNRC's public environmental review process.
Canada lynx ( <i>Felis lynx</i> ) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zone	[ N ] No lynx habitats occur in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated to lynx.
Yellow-Billed Cuckoo ( <i>Coccyzus americanus</i> )  Habitat: Deciduous forest stands of 25 acres or more with dense understories and in Montana these areas are generally found in large river bottoms	[ N ] No suitable deciduous riparian habitats are in the project area. Thus, no direct, secondary, or cumulative effects to yellow-billed cuckoos would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
<b>DNRC Sensitive Species</b>	
	[Y/N] Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures N = Not Present or No Impact is Likely to Occur Y = Impacts May Occur (Explain Below)
Bald eagle ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> ) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	[ N ] The project area is not within any know bald eagle territories. Incidental use during the winter could be possible while foraging on carrion. Transferring ownership of the parcel would not have any direct or immediate indirect effect on any wildlife species or their habitat. Should traditional uses (i.e., livestock grazing) continue, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated. However, the proposed action could allow for greater future cumulative risk of development and loss of wildlife habitat that could occur outside of the DNRC's public environmental review process.

<p>Black-backed woodpecker (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest</p>	<p>[ N ] No recently (less than 5 years) burned areas are in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.</p>
<p>Fisher (<i>Martes pennanti</i>) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian</p>	<p>[ N ] No suitable fisher covertypes exist in the project area. Given the lack of habitat, the limited area, the proximity to human developments, and the surrounding landscape, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisher would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Flammulated owl (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest</p>	<p>[ N ] No suitable flammulated owl habitats occur in the project area. Thus no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be expected under either alternative.</p>
<p>Fringed myotis (<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>) Habitat: low elevation ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and riparian forest with diverse roost sites including outcrops, caves, mines</p>	<p>[ N ] Fringed myotis are year-round residents of Montana that use a variety of habitats, including deserts, shrublands, sagebrush-grasslands, and forested habitats. They overwinter in caves, mines, crevices, or human structures. Fringed myotis forage near the ground or near vegetation. No known caves, mines, crevices, or other structures used for roosting occur in the project area or immediate vicinity. Fringed myotis have been documented along the Blackfoot River. Proposed activities could disturb fringed myotis should they be in the area. Changes in vegetation structural attributes could change overall prey availability, but considerable foraging habitats would persist in the project and cumulative effects analysis areas. Overall, no appreciable changes to fringed myotis use of the project area or cumulative effects analysis areas would be anticipated. Thus, negligible direct, secondary, or cumulative effects to fringed myotis would be anticipated as a result of either alternative.</p>
<p>Hoary bat (<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>) Habitat: coniferous and deciduous forests and roost on foliage in trees, under bark, in snags, bridges</p>	<p>[ N ] Hoary bats are summer residents (June-September) across a variety of forested habitats in Montana. Hoary bats frequently forage over water sources near forested habitats. Hoary bats are generally thought to roost alone in, primarily in trees, but will use also use caves, other nests, and human structures. Some use by hoary bats would be possible, but water sources in the project area that could be suitable foraging habitats are somewhat limited. Individual trees and snags in the existing forested habitats could be used for roosting. No known caves or other structures used for roosting occur in the project area or immediate vicinity. Hoary bats have been documented in the vicinity along the Blackfoot River. Proposed activities could disturb hoary bats should they be in the area. Loss of potential roosting habitats could occur, but considerable amounts of trees would persist in the project and cumulative effects analysis areas. No changes in foraging habitats would be anticipated. Overall, no appreciable changes to hoary bat use of the project area or cumulative effects analysis areas would be anticipated. Thus, negligible direct, secondary, or cumulative effects to Hoary bats would be anticipated as a result of either alternative.</p>
<p>Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands</p>	<p>[ N ] No preferred cliff features suitable for use by peregrine falcons occur in the project area, but peregrine falcons have nested a couple of miles upstream from the project area on the Clark Fork River. Transferring ownership of the parcel would not have any direct or immediate indirect effect on any wildlife species or their habitat. Should traditional uses (i.e., livestock grazing) continue, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated. However, the proposed action could allow for greater future cumulative risk of development and loss of wildlife habitat that could occur outside of the DNRC's public environmental review process.</p>

Pileated woodpecker ( <i>Dryocopus pileatus</i> ) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	[ N ] No suitable pileated woodpecker habitat exists in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to pileated woodpeckers would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
Townsend's big-eared bat ( <i>Plecotus townsendii</i> ) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	[ N ] DNRC is unaware of any mines or caves within the project area or close vicinity that would be suitable for use by Townsend's big-eared bats. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Townsend's big-eared bats would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
Wolverine ( <i>Gulo gulo</i> ) Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal forests, areas with persistent spring snow.	[ N ] Generally wolverines are found in sparsely inhabited remote areas near tree line characterized by cool to cold temperatures year-round and rather deep and persistent snow well into the spring (Copeland et al. 2010). The availability and distribution of food is likely the primary factor in the large home range sizes of wolverines (Banci 1994). The project area is generally below the elevations where wolverines tend to be located. No areas of deep persistent spring snow occur in the project area. Individual animals could occasionally use lands in the project area while dispersing or possibly foraging, and they could be displaced by project-related disturbance if they are in the area during proposed activities. However, given their large home range sizes (~150 sq. mi. -- Hornocker and Hash 1981), and way they use a broad range of forested and non-forested habitats, the proposed activities and alterations of forest vegetation on the project area would have negligible influence on wolverines. Thus, minimal direct, secondary, or cumulative effects to wolverines would be anticipated.

#### Literature Cited:

- Banci, V. 1994. Wolverine. Pp 99-127 in L. F. Ruggiero, K. B. Aubry, S. W. Buskirk, L. J. Lyon, and W. J. Zielinski, editors. The scientific basis for conserving forest carnivores: American marten, fisher, lynx, and wolverine in the western United States. USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, General Tech. Report RM-254, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA.
- Copeland, J. P., K.S. McKelvey, K.B. Aubry, A. Landa, J. Persson, R.M. Inman, J. Krebs, E. Lofroth, H. Golden, J.R. Squires, A. Magoun, M.K. Schwartz, J. Wilmot, C.L. Copeland, R.E. Yates, I. Kojola, and R. May. 2010. The bioclimatic envelope of the wolverine (*Gulo gulo*): do climatic constraints limit its geographic distribution? Can. J. Zool. 88: 233-246.
- Hornocker, M. and H. Hash. 1981. Ecology of the wolverine in northwestern Montana. Journal of Wildlife Management 44(3):1286-1301.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1993. Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, revised. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Montana, Missoula MT. 181pp.
- Wittinger, W.T. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum on file at USDA Forest Service, Region 1. Missoula, Montana.2pp.

#### 10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

*Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

The DNRC archaeologist conducted a Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory of the S1/2SW1/4 Section 16, T5N R20W. During the course of inventory, the historic Bitterroot Irrigation District Canal (24RA236) was identified and a site form update was prepared. The canal passes through the subject state parcel. Although site 24RA236 has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, it is privately owned so the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) has no

jurisdiction over it. Disposition of the subject state tract will have No Effect to Heritage Properties because site 24RA236 will continue to be owned, operated and maintained by the Bitterroot Irrigation District. No additional archaeological investigative work is recommended in order for disposition of the state tract to occur. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

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**11. AESTHETICS:**

*Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

No change in land use or existing aesthetic conditions would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:**

*Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

None

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**13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:**

*List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

None

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i></li><li>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i></li><li>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i></li></ul>



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**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

No change in land use or existing human health and safety conditions would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

The parcel is currently leased for livestock grazing by Elk Park Ranch at an annual carrying capacity of 25 AUM's. If the land was sold it would likely continue to be grazed similarly. Therefore, no change in land use or existing industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities and production would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

*Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.*

No change in land use or the quantity and distribution of employment would be expected with selection of either alternative.



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**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

*Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.*

State trust land is exempt from taxation. A minor increase in private property value would occur to the Ravalli County tax base with selection of the action alternative.

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**18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

*Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services*

No change in the demand for government services would be expected with the selection of either alternative.

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**19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:**

*List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*

The state-owned parcel is surrounded by lands owned by the Elk Park Ranch and approximately 5 other private landowners. None of these surrounding lands are under conservation easement. No change in land use, existing conditions or locally adopted environmental plans and goals would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:**

*Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

The State parcel is isolated and surrounded by private land and has no legal public access. The adjacent Elk Park Ranch deeded lands are not enrolled in a Conservation Easement. Lack of public access for hunting is expected to continue. No change to existing conditions would be anticipated with selection of the no action alternative.

Under the action alternative, this legally inaccessible trust land would be sold. The money received would be used to purchase replacement land for the trust beneficiaries. When purchasing replacement land the Department would look for parcels that; provide a higher rate of return for the trust beneficiaries; have legal public access; and have the potential for multiple uses. A minor increase in the acreage of legally accessible state trust lands would be expected with selection of the action alternative.

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**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.*

No change in land use or existing conditions, including the density and distribution of population and housing would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

No changes in social structures and mores would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

No change in land use or existing conditions, including cultural uniqueness and diversity would be expected with selection of either alternative.

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**24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:**

*Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

The primary source of income (for the common school trust) from this parcel is from domestic livestock grazing. The current grazing lease annual carrying capacity is 25 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). The current grazing rate is at the minimum rate of \$13.16 per AUM. Total grazing revenue is \$329 for calendar year 2023.

At a base land value of \$2600 per acre, the parcel (80 acres) has an estimated total value of approximately \$208,000. Annual revenue (\$329) divided by the total land value (\$208,000) equals an average annual rate of return of approximately 0.16%.

The historic average rate of return from parcels acquired through land banking to date exceeds 2% (more than seven times) the rate of return from the parcel proposed for sale.

At a base value of \$2600/acre, sale of the parcel could generate an estimated \$208,000. Under Land Banking Rules, the Department would look for parcels that; provide a higher rate of return for the trust beneficiaries; have legal public access; and have the potential for multiple uses.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Elizabeth Mullins	<b>Date:</b> 5/30/2023
	<b>Title:</b> Land Use Planner, Southwestern Land Office	

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**V. FINDING**

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**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

I select the action alternative; to proceed with the nomination of the parcel noted above for sale under Land Banking (MCA 77-2-361 through 77-2-367). This alternative best meets the fiduciary responsibility for management of trust lands by disposing of low revenue producing lands, disposes of land that is not legally accessible, and disposes of isolated parcels of land that are difficult to manage.

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**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

I find there are no significant impacts with selection of the action alternative.

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**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**☐


EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Thayer Jacques	
	<b>Title:</b> Hamilton Unit Forester	
<b>Signature:</b>		<b>Date:</b> 5/31/2023

