CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**Osmolak Fence**
Proposed Implementation Date:	**Fall 2022- Fall 2023**
Proponent:	**T14N R7E Section 16 Montana**
Location:	**Monarch, MT**
Trust:	**Common Schools**
County:	**Cascade**

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Lessee, Robert Osmolak, has submitted a proposal to place improvements on a section of Montana State Trust Land. DNRC grazing lease #2637 includes the E2 of Section 36, T14N R7E. The portion of the improvement located on State Trust Land would include installing a fence along the western boundary/portion of the trust land where topography allows. The proposed fence would consist of barb wire, steel t-posts, wood posts and 4" drill stem pipe. Machines including post pounders, tractors, pickup trucks, skid loaders and miscelllaneous hand tools will possibly be used to drive the posts and remove burnt trees/debris from the Balsinger Fire of 2021. Ground disturbance would be minimal with this equipment. Disturbed areas would be reseeded with a DNRC approved seed mix. The proposed fence would enable the lessee to utilize their grazing lease and keep livestock on the state trust land. Please see attached map for locations of existing and proposed infrastructure on State Trust Lands.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Jacob Doggett, Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Biologist
Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist
Montana Natural Heritage Program

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

No other agencies are known to have jurisdiction and permits on this section.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.
Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to install a boundary fence on State Trust Lands.

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 any cumulative impacts to soils.

Web Soil Survey indicates soils on the State Lands section 16 where the fence would be installed are Elve, extremely stony-Lake Creek, very stony-Comad, rubbly families, complex, 35 to 60 percent slopes. The soils in these sections were examined in "Suitabilities and Limitations for Use" tab of Web Soil Survey. These soils are classified as poorly suited for fencing with no ratings on off road erosion potential.

Construction of the proposed fence would entail driving the posts 12-30 inches deep. Impacts to the soil should be minimal due to the very small footprint of each individual post.

Please see the map at the end of this document for location of existing and proposed infrastructure of this project on State Trust Lands.

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 cumulative effects to water resources.

There is some surface water southwest of the project area in Tillinghast Creek. This water source is outside of the proposed project area. This area is too steep and rocky to bring fencing equipment. No affects to water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Air Quality would only be affected for a short duration during the installation phase of this project. Dust particulate may occur when the proponent uses equipment to transport materials and pounding posts. No long term affects are anticipated.

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 cumulative effects to vegetation.

Sites for the fence in section 16 are classified as a Rocky Mountain Lodgepole Pine Forest according to Montana Natural Heritage Program website. DNRC Land Use Specialist, Dylan Craft, completed a site visit on 07/07/22 and found the following species to include elk sedge, pinegrass, green needlegrass, various shrubs, coniferous trees and various native, perennial forbs.

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities would not be significantly, negatively affected by the construction and implementation of this project due to the low amount of disturbance. Some dead/burnt trees will be removed along the fence corridor, but minimal affects are anticipated with the relatively low footprint of this project. The fence would go through previously burned forest, and disturbed areas on State Lands would be reseeded with a seed mix approved by DNRC. The proponent is required to manage noxious weeds as part of the grazing lease and would continue to do so on fence line. This project would give the proponent the ability to manage the grazing lease with the result of increased cover, quantity and quality of the vegetative community.

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.

Construction practices used to fence the tract would be a one-time, short duration occurrence to limit disturbance and will not lead to negative cumulative effects on wildlife. This tract was previously fenced until the Balsinger fire destroyed it. Grazing and boundary fences are found throughout the surrounding area.
Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Biologist, Jacob Doggett suggested wildlife friendly fences to allow safe travel for wildlife, while avoiding jack leg fencing. He also suggested placing gates that can be left open when the tract is not in use for ease of access for wildlife.

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.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located in the vicinity of the project area. This project area is within the polygons for the wolverine and westslope cutthroat trout. The wolverine polygons represent potential areas of inhabitance with a 10 kilometer radius from where the last point observation was made. The westslope cutthroat trout polygons represent prior observations in defined watersheds with specific criteria.

Construction practices used in the placement fence would be a one-time, short duration occurrence to limit disturbance and negative cumulative effects on these species of concern are not anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Because of the low-impact nature of fence replacement projects, no additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

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 cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The project is located in a mountainous, remote part of Cascade County, approximately 1.5 miles west of Belt Park Rd. The disturbed areas would be reseeded. Fences are typical use of infrastructure in rural Montana and this project would only slightly alter aesthetics of the area.

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 cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project. No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from this project.

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.

No other studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for this project.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *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.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No health or safety risks are anticipated within the project.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

If approved, this project is designed to improve livestock utilization and allow the lessee to contain grazing on the state trust land's grazing lease.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The project will not create or eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No significant increase in tax revenues are expected as a result of this project.

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 cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

No increased demand for government services are expected as a result of this project.

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.

No locally adopted environmental plans will be affected by this project.

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 cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This project will slightly alter recreational use access. If approved, recreationists would have to travel over/through the fence to access the rest of the tract.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No change in population will result from this project.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Community and local use of this tract will be altered if approved, but not be denied.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

No affects on cultural uniqueness and diversity would be anticipated. A boundary fence will provide a barrier between federal and state lands for livestock.

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 cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The grazing lease for Section 16 (which includes a total of 320 acres) generates approximately $2,280 a year of revenue to Common Schools Trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Dylan Craft	**Date:** 11/2/2022
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to install a boundary fence on State lands.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

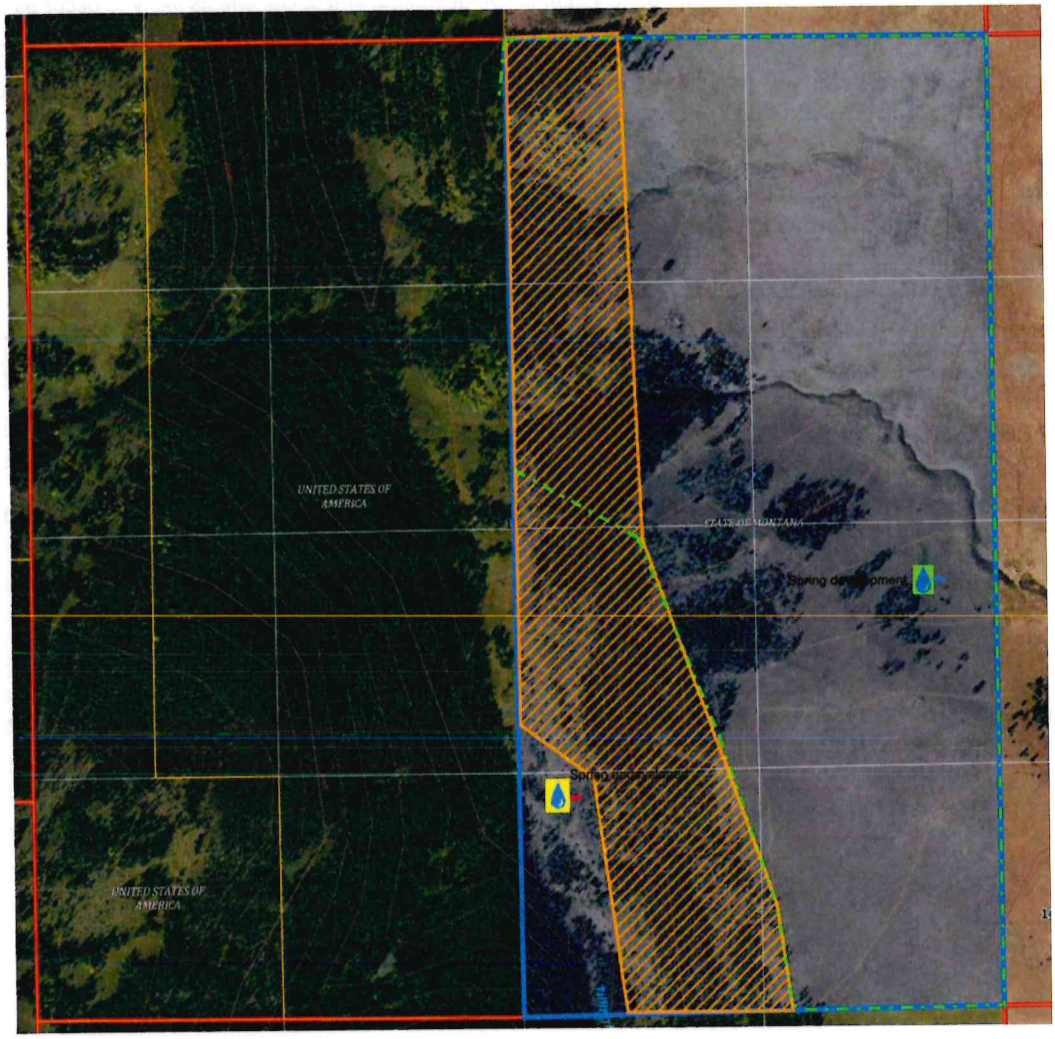
Installation of the fence to utilize livestock over the lease and help better utilize the available forage. Mitigations outlined in this analysis are appropriate and sufficient. No long term or cumulative, negative impacts are anticipated from the implementation of this proposal.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Heidi Comm	
	Title: Helena Unit Manager	
Signature: Heidi Comm		**Date:** 11/7/22

Section 16 (T14N-R7E) Green Dashed Line along North, South and West - existing fence. Orange hatched area - proposed fence location.



Site Photo of proposed fence location. Balsinger Fire of 2021 destroyed previous fence.