Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Fischer Land Use License (LUL) Authorization
Proposed Implementation Date: December 2022
Proponent: Clearwater Unit, Southwest Land Office, Montana DNRC
County: Powell

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Action:

The Clearwater Unit of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is proposing the Fischer LUL Authorization. The project area is located approximately 2 miles north of Ovando, Montana (refer to Attachments Vicinity map Attachment A-1 and Project map A-2) and includes the following sections:

Beneficiary	Legal Description	Total Acres	Utilized Acres
Common Schools	**Sections 4, 9, 16; T15N-R12W**	**1920**	**20**
Public Buildings			
MSU 2nd Grant			
MSU Morrill			
Eastern College-MSU/Western College-U of M			
Montana Tech			
University of Montana			
School for the Deaf and Blind			
Pine Hills School			
Veterans Home			
Public Land Trust			
Acquired Land			

Objectives of the project include:

- Use of the above areas for training sites and a winter base camp.

Proposed activities include:

- Winter training utilizing snowmobiles and sleds as well as Nordic skis and pulks.
- Development and utilization of a winter base camp which would involve use of Arctic tents, 3 person tents, above ground survival shelter camping, a fueling depot, helicopter landing zones, and vehicle staging areas. The base camp, helicopter landing zone, fueling depot, and vehicle staging areas will be plowed to facilitate use.

Duration of Activities:	3 months – not continuous January 2 – March 15 with possible summer reclamation
Implementation Period:	2023

The lands involved in this proposed project are held in trust by the State of Montana. (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11). The Board of Land Commissioners and the DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

The DNRC would manage lands involved in this project in accordance with:
- The State Forest Land Management Plan (DNRC 1996),
- Administrative Rules for Forest Management (ARM 36.11.401 through 471),
- The Montana DNRC Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) (DNRC 2010)
- and all other applicable state and federal laws.

Project Development

SCOPING:

- DATE:
  - Internal Scoping Occurred December 12, 2022.

- PUBLIC & AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:
  - Not formally scoped. Blackfoot Challenge through the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA) members which include local board members, landowners and agency representatives including FWP and Forest Service were read in by the project proponent because the desire is to utilize those ownerships as well.
- COMMENTS RECEIVED:
  - Concerns: Impacts to soils, recreation, and and big game security from snowmobile use.
  - Results (how were concerns addressed): All concerns shared were associated with potential impacts to adjacent Blackfoot Challenge and FWP land. Those concerns will be managed through use authorizations or permits by the respective land managers.

DNRC specialists were consulted, including *Patrick Rennie – Archeologist*, *Jordan Rice – Land Use Specialist, Andrea Stanley – Hydrologist and Soil Scientist and Garrett Schairer – Wildlife Biologist.*

Internal and external issues and concerns were incorporated into project planning and design and would be implemented in associated contracts.

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED: *(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

- **United States Fish & Wildlife Service-** DNRC is managing the habitats of threatened and endangered species on this project by implementing the Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands HCP and the associated Incidental Take Permit that was issued by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in February of 2012 under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act. The HCP identifies specific conservation strategies for managing the habitats of grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and three fish species: bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, and Columbia redband trout. The HCP can be found at http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/trust/forest-management/hcp.

- **Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)-** The use of hazardous substances is included in the activities proposed by the LUL applicant. The handling and potential spills would be required to comply with Montana laws and administrative rules, including the containment and cleanup of spills. See https://deq.mt.gov/Files/DEQAdmin/ENF/Documents/SpillPolicy_02_2016.pdf for more information.

- **Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC**) – Water Resources Division (WRD) – The DNRC WRD administers water rights and the surface water rights. The applicant does not mention divertion, impounding, or withdrawl of water in their activities. Any of these activities would require consultation and permitting with the DNRC WRD.

- **Montana/Idaho Airshed Group-** The DNRC is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group which was formed to minimize or prevent smoke impacts while using fire to accomplish land management objectives and/or fuel hazard reduction (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). The Group determines the delineation of airsheds and impact zones throughout Idaho and Montana. Airsheds describe those geographical areas that have similar atmospheric conditions, while impact zones describe any area in Montana or Idaho that the Group deems smoke sensitive and/or having an existing air quality problem (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). As a member of the Airshed Group, DNRC agrees to burn only on days approved for good smoke dispersion as determined by the Smoke Management Unit.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative: The proposed training and camping activities would not take place.

Action Alternative : Per the applicant,

In Sections 4 and 9, winter training utilizing snowmobiles and sleds as well as Nordic skis and pulks.

In Section 16; development and utilization of a winter base camp which would involve use of Arctic tents, 3 person tents, above ground survival shelter camping, a fueling depot, helicopter landing zones, and vehicle staging areas. The base camp, helicopter landing zone, fueling depot, and vehicle staging areas will be plowed to facilitate use.

Basecamp Operations Center - 22 Arctic tents with generators.
1 x Secure weapons storage.
1 x Tactical Operations Center
1 x Medical tent with staff on-site.
2 x Dining facility tents to serve food prepared off-site.
2 x Classroom tents.
2 x Maintenance tents. One for parts storage and the other for working on snowmobiles, it will be a floored tent with HAZMAT lining to mitigate ground contamination.
10 x Sleeping tents to support up to 100 soldiers. These tents will not be occupied throughout the duration of the license but to be utilized for extreme weather condition risk mitigation.
2 x Latrine tents to be serviced under local contract.

Survival Shelter Area
This area will be utilized for the survival phase from January 10-23, 2023 with each student on-site for three nights.

Helicopter Landing Zone (HLZ)
The site will be plowed and packed to land up to two CH-47 helicopters at a time. No refueling or overnight use is anticipated. Timing of the planned use is: two helicopters during three dates in January and 2 dates in March.

Fuel Site
The site will house one tanker of 91 octane gas for snowmobiles and another tanker with diesel for trucks, tractors, a snowcat, and generators. The location will be double lined with HAZMAT lining to mitigate ground contamination and managed to a standard that supersedes minimum requirements in CFR 49 and Army regulation.

Vehicle Staging Area
This area is designated to be the primary parking area for the fleet of vehicles.

List other current or proposed state, private, or federal studies, plans, or projects in the area that may be considered as part of the cumulative effects analysis for the various resources. Proposed state actions are to be considered if under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

The training exercise will include private, BCCA, FWP, and Forest Service ground to the west, north, and east of the project area. Activities are primarily similar to what is proposed on Sections 4 and 9 of the DNRC-managed ground with the exception of firearm, munitions, and chainsaw training planned on the private ground to the west (see an ownership map).

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

VEGETATION:

Vegetation Existing Conditions: The DNRC parcels within sections 4, 9, and 16 contain western larch / Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine stands as well as open meadows.

There has been past timber management. Portions of the Section 16 parcel were treated under Jones Permit (2006), Ride the Pine (2010), Bug Out (2010), What Eagle (2010), Watch you aspen (2011), Blew It, (2012), and Between The Fences (2016). Portions of the Section 4 and 9 parcels were treated under Jumpstart Jones (2009) and Rodeo Salvage (2017).

Sections 4, 9, and 16 have grazing licenses in place. The associated forage is moderately productive and provides for approximately 364 AUMs.

There is one Species of Special Concern within the area, Howell's Gumweed (*Grindelia howelli*). This is a sensitive plant that has limited distribution across portions of western Montana (Powell and Missoula Counties) and Idaho (Benewah County). In some areas, the populations are well established however it has not been observed specifically in the project area. Per the Montana Natural Heritage Program, the plant presence varies due to it's 'short-lived nature' and propensity to establish on disturbed ground such as road prisms. It was also noted that noxious weed treatments may have a 'direct, negative impact' to the species' presence.

Noxious weeds occurring in the project parcels are mainly a combination of knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) and houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale L*).

Vegetation	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Noxious Weeds		**X**				**X**				**X**			**y**	**1**
Rare Plants	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Vegetative community	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Old Growth	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Action														
Noxious Weeds		**X**				**X**				**X**			**y**	**2**
Rare Plants	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Vegetative community		**X**				**X**				**X**				**3**
Old Growth	**X**				**X**				**X**					

Comments:

No-Action:
1. Noxious Weeds: Weeds are common in the area. The No-action alternative would have herbicide treatments conducted by the grazing licensees.

Action:
2. Noxious Weeds: Weeds are common in the area. The Action alternative would have herbicide treatments conducted by the grazing licensees.

3. Vegetative Community: The existing vegetative community may be altered through trampling of grasses and other forage in the open areas expected to be utilized for the base camp. However, that is expected to be minimized through limiting the area of use and restricting snowmobile use to snow-covered roads. There are no anticipated changes to the timber overstory. No impacts to Howell's gumweed are expected due to the proposed activity, any weed spraying would be associated with separate grazing authorizations.

Vegetation Mitigations:

1. And 2. The grazing licensees are expected to conduct herbicide treatments for noxious weed management.
3. Under the Action Alternative, the following special stipulations would be included in the proposed LUL:
    i. The licensee accepts full responsibility for all wildland fires that may result from this use and shall take all reasonable precautions to prevent and suppress wildland fires.
    ii. Licensee will not cut or remove or allow to be cut or removed any standing timber (live or dead) from the premises without written permission from the Department.
    iii. Licensee will minimize the physical footprint and vegetation or forage compaction or damage at the base camp, helicopter landing zone, fueling depot, and vehicle staging areas.
    iv. Snowmobile use on state land:
        A. Use is primarily restricted to existing road prisms. Trail creation and use of non-designated or non-approved areas is strictly prohibited unless when needed to facilitate emergency extraction. Such designated approval applies only to snowmobile use located on state land and does not grant or imply use in areas not located on state land.
        B. Use may only be carried out over snow. Use of snowmobiles on exposed road prisms is prohibited.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions:

The project is located in the southwestern foothills of the Swan and Lewis & Clark Range, mostly on unconsolidated glacial morane and alluvium. Most of the soils in Section 16 are Wildgen-Yreka gravelly loams on moderate slopes of 2 to 25 percent. Soils in Sections 4 and 9 are mostly Winfall and Windfall-Rumblecreek gravely loams on slopes 2-50 percent. No unique or sensitive geologic features or unstable slopes have been identified within the project area. High erosion risk is not present in the existing condition.

The project area is located adjacent to roads open to year-around public use. Some unauthorized motorized use (ATV and campers) occur outside the road prism and have resulted in some loss of vegetation and soil disturbance including displacement and compaction.

The DNRC completed a timber harvest in section 16 in 2010. An active grazing lease is held in Section 16. The last field assessment noted the presence of noxious weeds but not in abundence. No concerns associated with grazing were noted (June 2019).

Sections 2 and 9 were acquired around 2010 and activities/past disturbances include limited vegetation management.

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	**X**				**X**				**X**				**N/A**	**1**
Erosion	**X**				**X**				**X**				**N/A**	**1**
Nutrient Cycling	**X**				**X**				**X**				**N/A**	**1**
Slope Stability	**X**				**X**				**X**				**N/A**	**1**
Soil Productivity	**X**				**X**				**X**				**N/A**	**1**
Action														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)			**X**			**X**				**X**			**Y**	**1 & 2**
Erosion		**X**				**X**				**X**			**Y**	**1 & 2**
Nutrient Cycling		**X**				**X**				**X**			**N/A**	**none**
Slope Stability	**X**				**X**				**X**				**N/A**	**none**
Soil Productivity		**X**				**X**				**X**			**Y**	**1 & 2**

Comments:

1. Implementation of the no-action alternative would result in no new soil resource impacts in the project area. Soil resource conditions would remain similar to those currently at the site.

2. The proposed activities associated with the LUL do present a risk of soil disturbance and erosion due to the operation of vehicles and the erection of temporary structures in vegetated areas. However, the applicant has committed to limiting the operation of wheeled and tracked equipment to dry, frozen, or snow-covered conditions.

    - Soils are considered dry when soil moisture content at 4-inch depth less than 20% oven-dry weight.
    - Soils are considered frozen when frost depth is ate least 4 inches.
    - Soils are considered snow-covered when snow depths are 18 inches of loose snow or 12 inches packed snow.

3. Unstable slopes were not observed on site. The project is anticipated to have no risk to slope stability.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions:

The project is mostly located in areas draining towards Dick and McCabe Creeks. These creeks are tributary to Monture Creek and are in the Blackfoot River watershed. Dick and McCabe Creeks are not listed as impaired on the State's 303(d) list of impaired bodies of water (MTDEQ

2020). In the most recent grazing assessment of Section 16 including Dick Creek the riparian health was rated as excellent (June 2019). No impacts or alterations due to grazing were ovserved. At the time of the assessment the riparian areas appeared to be a large wetland complex, rather than a running stream.

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Water Quality	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Water Quantity	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Action														
Water Quality		**X**				**X**			**X**				**Y**	**1 & 2**
Water Quantity	**X**				**X**				**X**				**N/A**	**3**

Comments:

1. No surface water features are located within 300 feet of the proposed staging or vehicle/snowmobile traffic areas and would not be included (used or crossed) as part of the activities proposed by the applicant.
2. The vehicle staging area and fueling site would be located at least 900 feet from surface water. The location will be double-lined with HAZMAT lining to prevent ground contamination and managed to a standard that superseds the minimum requirements of CFR 49 and Army regulation. Spills to soils or surface waters must be reported to the Clearwater Unit and the Montana DEQ if applicable (see: https://deq.mt.gov/Files/DEQAdmin/ENF/Documents/SpillPolicy_02_2016.pdf).
3. No foreseeable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to water quantity are anticipated with the action or no action alternatives. The applicant cannot legally take any water from adjacent surface waters and no groundwater wells exist on the site. Water needed to support the applicants operations would need to be delivered from a municipal, commercial, or military source. An alternative would be for the applicant to develop a groundwater well at the site (35 gpm or less for up to 10 acre-feet per year), however the applicant has not proposed this in their application.

Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations:
The avoidance of streams with the project activities and commitments made by the applicant in adhering to CFR 49 and Army spill and chemical release prevention reduce the risk of water quality impacts to low levels. Soil impact avoidance measures listed earlier in this analysis will reduce the risk of erosion and sediment delivery to nearby streams. No additional mitigations are necessary.

FISHERIES:

Dick and McCabe Creeks are fish bearing. However, no foreseeable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisheries resources are anticipated with an action or no action alternative due to the distance and scale of the proposed project activities. The factors considered in making this conclusion are listed below:

- Commitments made by the applicant to comly with CFR 49 and Army regulations pertaining to the spill and chemical release prevention.
- The distance of proposed activities and staging areas from fishbearing waterbodies (i.e., 300-900 feet, see further detail in the water resources analysis).

WILDLIFE:

Wildlife Existing Conditions: The project area is a mix of open forested stands, younger stands resulting from past timber management, and some non-forested areas of grass and shrubs. Existing disturbance to wildlife is likely given the proximity to open roads, human residences, agricultural operations, timber management, and various forms of summer and winter recreation. The project area includes roughly 198 acres of Canada lynx habitats, including 43 acres of other suitable habitats and 155 acres of winter foraging habitats. The project area is in the home range associated with the Dick Creek bald eagle territory. Roughly 828 acres of upland fisher habitats and 228 acres of potential fisher covertypes exist in the project area. White-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk winter range exists in the project area; summer range for big game exists in the project area.

No-Action: Continued use at existing levels by wildlife species presently found in the project area would be anticipated. No further disturbance to wildlife would be anticipated. Generally, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated.

Action Alternative (see Wildlife table below):
No appreciable changes to existing habits would occur. In general, an increase in disturbance in the vicinity would occur that could cause individuals of species using the area to alter their activities and/or use of the area. Many terrestrial wildlife species in the vicinity could be disturbed with the potential activities. Proposed activities would largely occur when most avian species are not present, limiting the potential disturbance, but some early nesting season disturbance could occur; further potential for disturbance or displacement could occur with any potential rehabilitation that would occur following proposed activities. The potential disturbance effects of proposed activities would contribute to the overall disturbance and displacement in the larger cumulative effects analysis area.

Wildlife	Effects								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Threatened and Endangered Species										
Grizzly bear *(Ursus arctos)* Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	**X**				**X**					**1**
Canada lynx (*Felix lynx)* Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types,		**X**				**X**			**Y**	**2**

Wildlife	Effects								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zone										
Yellow-Billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) Habitat: Deciduous forest stands of 25 acres or more with dense understories and in Montana these areas are generally found in large river bottoms	**X**				**X**					**3**
Sensitive Species										
Bald eagle *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)* Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water			**X**				**X**		**Y**	**4**
Black-backed woodpecker *(Picoides arcticus)* Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	**X**				**X**					**3**
Common loon *(Gavia immer)* Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	**X**				**X**					**3**
Fisher *(Martes pennanti)* Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	**X**				**X**					**5**
Flammulated owl *(Otus flammeolus)* Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	**X**				**X**					**6**

Wildlife	Effects								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Fringed myotis (*Myotis thysanodes*) Habitat: low elevation ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and riparian forest with diverse roost sites including outcrops, caves, mines	**X**				**X**					**6**
Hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) Habitat: coniferous and deciduous forests and roost on foliage in trees, under bark, in snags, bridges	**X**				**X**					**6**
Peregrine falcon *(Falco peregrinus)* Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	**X**				**X**					**3**
Pileated woodpecker *(Dryocopus pileatus)* Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	**X**				**X**					**6**
Townsend's big-eared bat *(Plecotus townsendii)* Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	**X**				**X**					**3**
Wolverine *(Gulo gulo)* Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal forests that maintain deep persistent snow into late spring	**X**				**X**					**3**
Big Game Species										

Wildlife	Effects								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Elk			**X**			**X**			**N**	**7**
Whitetail			**X**			**X**			**N**	**7**
Mule Deer			**X**			**X**			**N**	**7**
Moose			**X**			**X**			**N**	**7**
Other	**X**				**X**					

Comments:

1. The project area is adjacent to the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem grizzly bear recovery area and is in `occupied' grizzly bear habitat as mapped by grizzly bear researchers and managers to address increased sightings and encounters of grizzly bears in habitats outside of recovery zones (Wittinger et al. 2002). Proposed activities would occur during the denning period, thus no potential for disturbance to grizzly bears would be anticipated. Any potential rehabilitation could occur during the non-denning period, which could disturb grizzly bears, but activities would avoid the spring period (April 1 – June 15) unless they are close to open roads (<100 feet from open roads) and/or would be completed within the Clearwater unit's allocated 10 days of potential emergency activities in spring activities. No changes to existing habitats would occur. Any unnatural bear foods or attractants (such as garbage) would be kept in a bear resistant manner. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be anticipated.

2. There are roughly 198 acres of suitable Canada lynx habitats in the project area, including 155 acres of winter foraging and 43 acres of 'other suitable' habitats. Habitats are largely in the southern portion of the project area, but are generally marginally suitable, exist in a matrix of unsuitable habitats, and are not well connected to other suitable habitats in the larger landscape. Extensive use by Canada lynx would not be anticipated. No changes to existing habitats would occur with the proposed activities. Proposed activities could occur in and adjacent to these generally marginal habitats and some potential for disturbance to Canada lynx could occur should lynx be in the vicinity during proposed activities. Thus, minor direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Canada lynx would be anticipated from the proposed activities.

3. The project area is either out of the range of the normal distribution for this species or suitable habitat is not present. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated.

4. The project area is partially within the home range associated with the Dick Creek bald eagle territory. This territory has at least 3 different nest sites, with the closest occurring in Section 16 and within 0.35 miles from the proposed activities. The second nest site is on Dick Creek and is roughly 0.69 miles from the proposed activities, and the third nest

site and most frequently used site is roughly 1.04 miles from the proposed activities. Activities would occur during the non-nesting (August 16-February 1) season or early nesting season (February 1 – March 31), with potential for any necessary rehabilitation potentially occurring in the late nesting season (June 16-August 15). No activities would be conducted between April 1 and June 15. Negligible potential disturbance to bald eagles would be anticipated with activities that would occur during the non-nesting period. Conversely, activities conducted during the nesting period could disturb nesting eagles, and activities closer to the nest are more likely to disturb nesting bald eagles than those further away. Therefore, DNRC would suspend any activities within 0.5 miles of the nest site unless it could be determined that the nesting pair would not be affected. Use of helicopters during the non-nesting period would pose limited potential for disturbing nesting bald eagles at any of the nests, but activities during the nesting season would be expected to disturb nesting bald eagles (Watson 1993). To minimize the potential for disturbing the nesting pair, no helicopter flights would occur in the quadrant to the southwest of the proposed activities using the Monture road as a north-south boundary and the Rodeo Park road extending due west from the proposed helicopter landing zone as the east-west line (see Figure 1).

5. Roughly 828 acres of potential fisher habitats exist in the project area and an additional 228 acres of preferred fisher covertypes exist in the proposed project area. No changes to existing habitats would occur. Some potential disturbance could occur, but would not be expected to appreciably alter fisher use of the project area. Thus, no appreciable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisher would be anticipated.

6. The project area contains potential habitat for this species, but no changes to existing habitats would occur. The majority of proposed activities would occur outside of the time periods when this species could be in the vicinity. Slight potential for disturbance could occur should any rehabilitation be required following proposed activities. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated.

7. 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. No changes to existing habitats would occur. No changes in potential disturbance levels would occur. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fringed myotis would be anticipated from the proposed activities.

8. White-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk winter range exists in the project area. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Potential activities would be expected to disturb wintering big game and likely displace them from these chunks of winter range onto other portions of the winter range in the vicinity. This disturbance would be additive to disturbance effects elsewhere in the cumulative effects analysis area, including the disturbance with the associated activities on other ownerships. Collectively, a sizable

swath of the winter ranges could experience elevated disturbance levels that could alter big game survival in the vicinity. Thus, moderate direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to big game would be anticipated from the proposed activities.

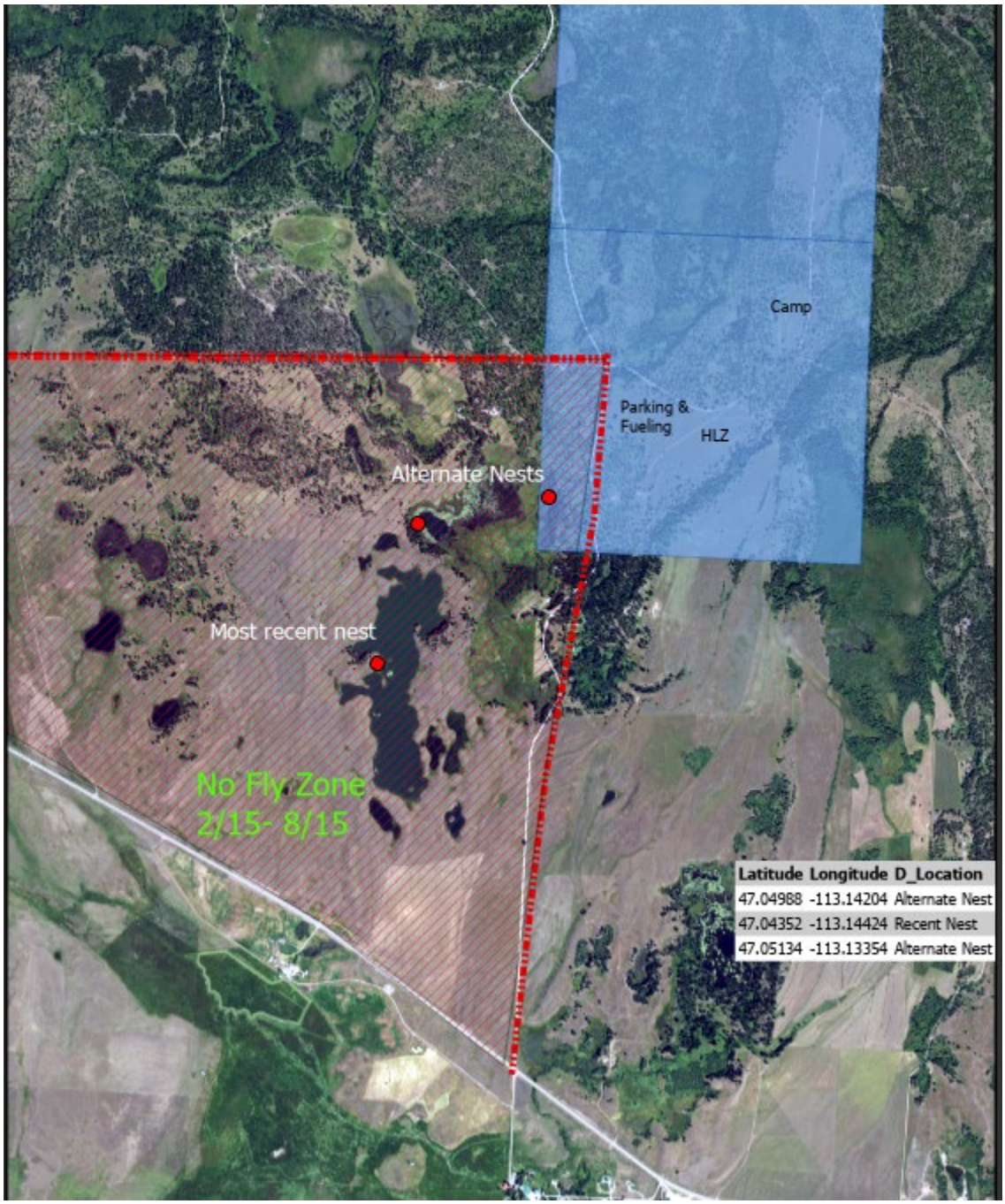


Figure 1- Locations of past bald eagle nests and no fly zone in relation to project area and proposed activities.

Wildlife Mitigations:

- Food, garbage, and other attractants will be stored in a bear-resistant manner.
- Minimize potential for disturbance to grizzly bears and numerous avian species by restricting any necessary rehabilitation activities between April 1 and June 15, except where activities are within 100 feet of an open road and/or are part of Clearwater unit's allocated 10 days for emergency activities in spring habitats.
- Monitor Dick Creek bald eagle nest sites in February to determine if additional mitigations are necessary. Additional mitigations would be necessary should bald eagles initiate nesting activities in one of the closer nest sites.
- Should there be an active bald eagle nest within ½ mile of any camp activities, suspend operations in the vicinity of the nest.
- If eagles use the furthest nest site on the west side of Jones Lake, minimize potential for disturbance to nesting bald eagles by implementing a no-fly zone in the quadrant to the west (west of Monture Creek Road) and south (south of Rodeo Park road and the proposed helicopter landing zone; see Figure 1) during the nesting season (February 15-August 15).

Wildlife References:

Watson, J. W. 1993. Responses of nesting bald eagles to helicopter surveys. Wildlife Scoiety Bulletin 21:171-178.

Wittinger, W.T. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum on file at USDA Forest Service, Region 1. Missoula, Montana.2pp.

AIR QUALITY:

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Smoke	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Dust	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Action														
Smoke	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Dust	**X**				**X**				**X**					

Comments:

No Direct, Secondary, or Cumulative impacts to smoke and dust are anticipated under the No-Action or Action alternatives.

Mitigations: N/A

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	**X**				**X**				**X**					**1**
Aesthetics	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Action														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	**X**				**X**				**X**					**1**
Aesthetics	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	**X**				**X**				**X**					

Comments:
No-Action and Action:

1. 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 results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Considering the low-impact nature of proposed activities, training exercises are expected to have *No Effect* to *Antiquities*. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted.

No Direct, Secondary, or Cumulative impacts to Aesthetics or Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy are anticipated under the No-Action or Action alternatives.

Mitigations: N/A

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.*

Impacts on the Human Population

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Human Population.

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Health and Human Safety	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Demand for Government Services	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Social Structures and Mores	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Action														
Health and Human Safety	**X**				**X**					**X**				**1**
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Demand for Government Services	**X**				**X**				**X**					

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities		**X**				**X**			**X**					**2**
Density and Distribution of population and housing	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Social Structures and Mores	**X**				**X**				**X**					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	**X**				**X**				**X**					

Comment:
Action:

1. Gunfire and munitions training on adjacent private property may have a low cumulative impact on human health due to the potential noise generated.

2. The proposed authorization may disrupt snowmobile, cross-country skiing, and other winter recreation in the project area and vicinity. However, the use is currently anticipated to occur over one, 3-month timeframe and as such, isn't expected to have long-term effects.

No Direct, Secondary, or Cumulative impacts to the Human Population are anticipated under the No-Action or Action alternatives.

Mitigations: N/A

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 Blackfoot Community Conservation Area Agreement and Management Plan. The Agreement and Management Plan is not expected to affect the proposed project.

Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances:

Costs, revenues and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives. They are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return. The estimated stumpage is based on comparable sales analysis. This method compares recent sales to find a market value for stumpage. These sales have similar species, quality, average diameter, product mix, terrain, date of sale, distance from mills, road building and logging systems, terms of sale, or anything that could affect a buyer's willingness to pay.

No Action: The No Action alternative would not generate any return to the trust at this time.

Action: The LUL would generate revenue for the Common School Trust. The estimated return to the trust for the proposed harvest is $4,500.00 based on the proposed LUL fee. Costs, revenues, and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives, they are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return.

References

DNRC 1996. State forest land management plan: final environmental impact statement (and appendixes). Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

DNRC. 2010. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan: Final EIS, Volume II, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that 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?
NO

Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:

Name: Kristen Baker-Dickinson
Title: Clearwater Unit Manager
Date: December 16, 2022

Finding

Alternative Selected

Following a review of the document as well as the corresponding Department policies and rules, the **Action Alternative** has been selected. Issuing this Land Use License would generate revenue for the Common Schools trust and would not have significant impacts to the Trust Lands parcels.

Significance of Potential Impacts

I find that the Action Alternative will not have significant impacts for the following reasons:

- The Action Alternative is in compliance with the existing laws, rules, policies, and standards applicable to this type of proposed action.
- Appropriate mitigations have been proposed to minimize potential impacts to resources such as vegetation, soil, and wildlife.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

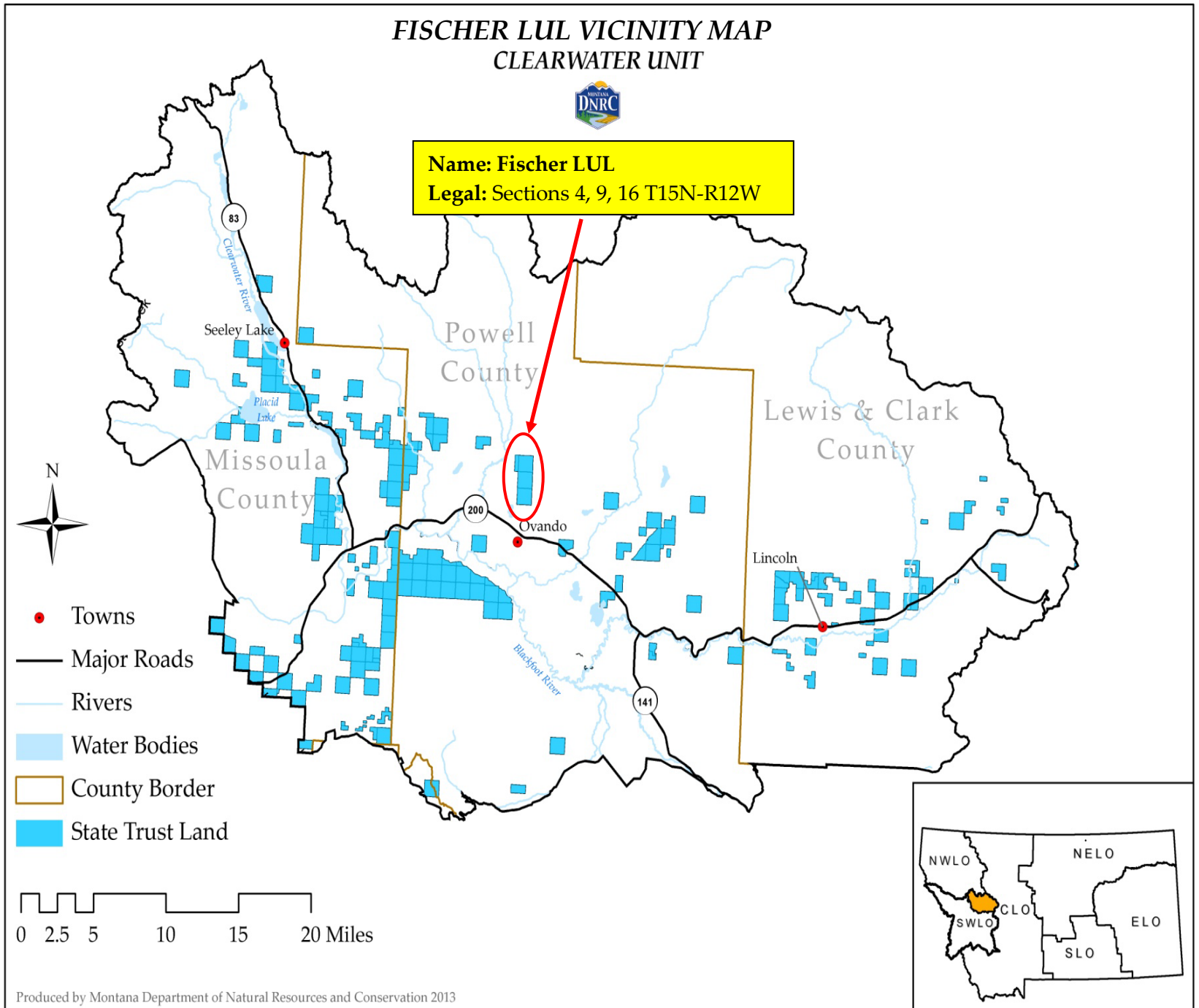
[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

Name: Sierra Farmer
Title: Trust Lands Program Manager
Date: 12/21/2022
Signature: /s/

Attachment A- Maps

A-1: Vicinity map



A-2: Section 16 Base camp map

DNRC SECTION 16

10th Special Forces Winter base Camp Overview 02JAN-02APPR23