Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: RICHLAND COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
2745 W HOLLY ST.
SIDNEY, MT 59270-9201

2. Type of action: Conservation District Application to Change Water Reservation 40S 30173545

3. Water source name: Missouri River

4. Location affected by project: Point of Diversion: NWSESE, Section 20, T27N, R57E, Richland County.
NESESE Section 20 T27N, R57E, Richland County.
Place of Use: See Table 1

5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:

The Applicant proposes to add points of diversion and places of use to the Richland County Conservation District Water Reservation (40S 84500-00) that were not included in the original water reservation public notice. The authorization is for additional irrigated acreage located within the existing center pivots that have been omitted from the F&M Ranch Statement of Claim 40S 171255-00 and the Montana State Board of Land Commissioners Statement of Claim 40S 215560-00. The Applicant proposes to divert 124.45 AF water from the Missouri River, from April 1 through October 19, from a point in the NWSESE and a point in the NESESE, Section 20, T27N, R57E, Richland County, for Sprinkler Irrigation use from April 1 through October 19. No additional flow rate is proposed as a part of this change application, as the 124.45 AF of additional volume will be used in combination with Statements of Claim 40S

171255-00 and 40S 215560-00. A total of 65.5 AC of Irrigation is proposed. The proposed place of use includes three pivots located in the following legal descriptions:

Table 1: Proposed Place of Use							
Pivot Number (See Figure 1)	Acres	Quarter Section	Section	Township	Range	County	Ownership
"Pivot 3"	2.5	SWSWSW	21	27N	57E	Richland	State of MT
"Pivot 1"	32	SWSE	29	27N	57E	Richland	State of MT
"Pivot 6"	31	NWNW	33	27N	57E	Richland	F&M Ranch

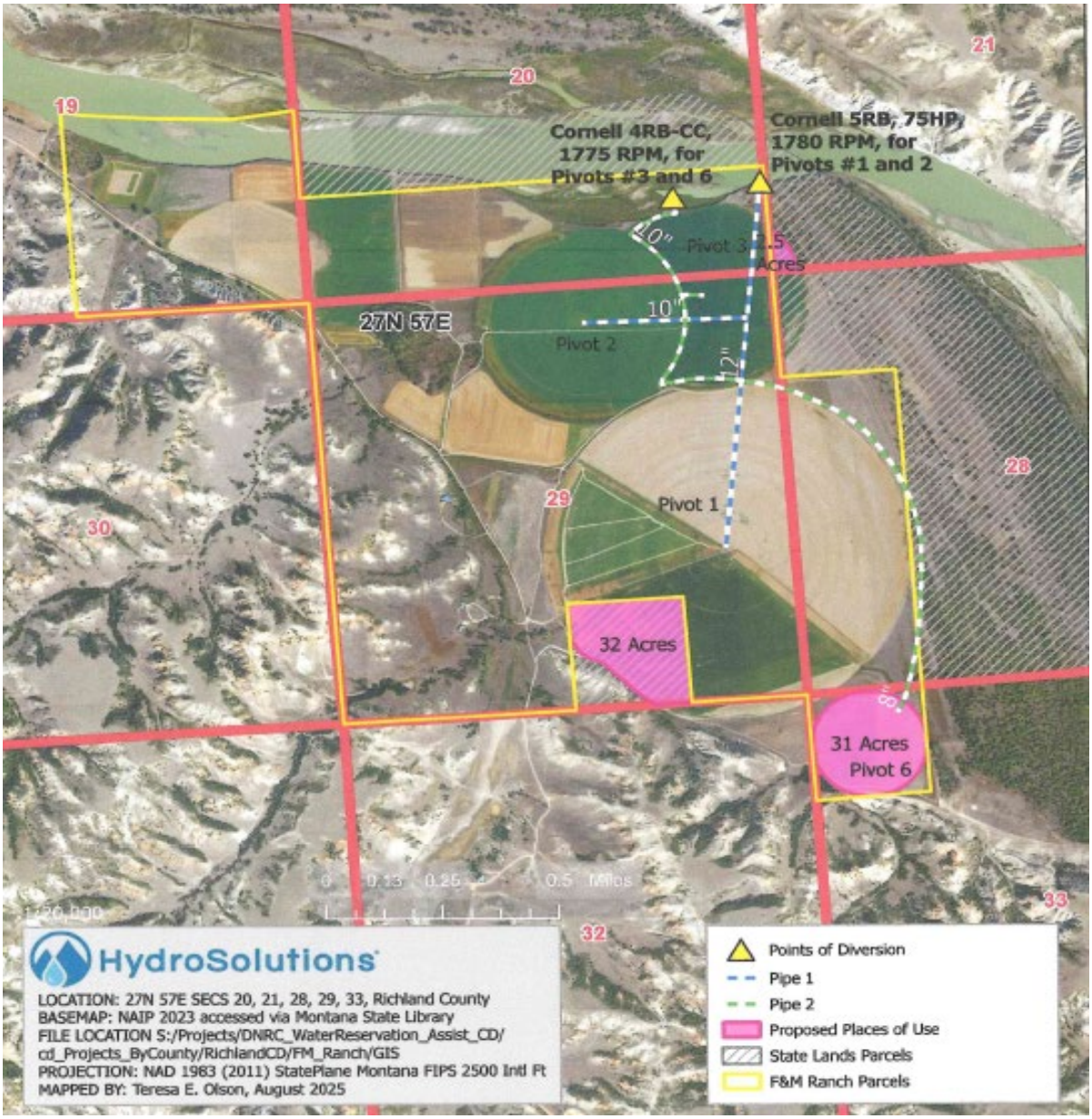

Figure 1: Map of Applicants Proposed Point of Diversion and Place of Use for CD Change Application No. 40S 30173545 created by HydroSolutions in August 2025.

The DNRC issues a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.

6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment: (include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)
   - US Fish & Wildlife Service
   - Montana Natural Heritage Program
   - Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
   - Montana Department of Environmental Quality
   - USDA Web Soil Survey
   - National Wetlands Inventory

Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY, AND DISTRIBUTION

WATER QUANTITY - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

This reach of the Missouri River has not been identified by the Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (FWP) as chronically or periodically dewatered. Also, FWP holds an instream flow right on this section of the Missouri River for 5178 CFS, effective year-round. Based on the flow requested and the DFWP instream right, the proposed diversion is unlikely to alter the current condition of the river; no significant impacts to water quantity related to this application have been identified.

Determination: No significant impact.

WATER QUALITY - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

The reach of the Missouri River where the proposed POD is located has been identified by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as fully supporting agricultural and drinking water uses and not fully supporting aquatic life. It was not assessed for primary contact recreation.

Probable sources of the impairment are the upstream Fort Peck Dam/impoundment and hydro-structure flow regulation/modification. The proposed project will not have any significant effect on water quality.

Determination: No significant impact.

GROUNDWATER - Assess if the proposed project impacts groundwater quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

The proposed surface water appropriation should have no significant impact on groundwater in the area.

Determination: No significant impact.

DIVERSION WORKS - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction, and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, or well construction.

The water will be diverted under Richland County's Water Reservation from the Missouri River at two points of diversion in combination with Statement of Claim 40S 171255-00 and further defined as POD and Means of Diversion Nos. 2 and 4 accordingly.

Determination: No significant impact is expected as this land and diversion works have already been developed for Irrigation. No new disturbance will occur.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE, OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any "species of special concern," or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or "species of special concern."

Table 2: Natural Heritage Program Species within Project Area of Impact

Common Name	Scientific Name	Global Rank	State Rank
Piping Plover	*Charadrius melodus*	G3	S2B
Whooping Crane	*Grus americana*	G3	SB2
Pallid Sturgeon	*Scaphirhynchus albus*	G2	S1
Least Tern	*Sternula antillarum*	G4	S2B
Plains Hog-nosed Snake	*Heterodon nasicus*	G5	S2B
Blue Sucker	*Cycleptus elongatus*	G3G4	S2
Northern Redbelly Dace	*Chrosomus eos*	G5	S2
Sicklefin Chub	*Macrhybopsis meeki*	G3	S2
Sturgeon Chub	*Macrhybopsis gelida*	G3	S3

Golden Eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*	G5	S3

Table 3: Natural Heritage Program Species Rank and Definition Chart		
Global Rank	**State Rank**	**Definition**
G1	**S1**	**Critically Imperiled** — At very high risk of collapse or global extinction or state extirpation due to a very restricted range, very few populations or occurrences, very steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.
G2	**S2**	**Imperiled** — At high risk of collapse or global extinction or state extirpation due to a restricted range, few populations or occurrences, steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.
G3	**S3**	**Vulnerable** — At moderate risk of collapse or global extinction or state extirpation due to a fairly restricted range, few populations or occurrences, recent and widespread declines, threats, or other factors.
G4	**S4**	**Apparently Secure** — At a fairly low risk of collapse or global extinction or state extirpation due to an extensive range and/or many populations or occurrences, but with possible cause for some concern as a result of local recent declines, threats, or other factors.
G5	**S5**	**Secure** — At very low or no risk of collapse or global extinction or state extirpation due to a very extensive range, abundant populations or occurrences, with little to no concern from declines or threats.
Quantifiers		**Definition**
B		**Breeding —** Rank refers to the breeding population of the species in Montana.
N		**Non-breeding** — Rank refers to the non-breeding population of the species in Montana.
M		**Migratory —** species occur in Montana only during migration.

Determination: One critically imperiled species utilizes the characteristic habitat as found at the proposed project point of diversion: the Pallid Sturgeon. There are also several species listed above that are listed as imperiled or vulnerable. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has an instream flow right (40S 30017671) that exists within this reach. This project will not create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife.

Pallid Sturgeon: The Pallid Sturgeon utilizes turbid rivers with fine sandy-silty substrates, such as the stretch of the Missouri River where the proposed project is found. The screened intake structure for the project is designed to lower the intake velocity, a design that the applicant has successfully used in other applications that have presumably passed USFWS & Montana FW &P standards. The pump site is already established and is not expected to have a significant impact on the species in this reach of the Missouri River.

WETLANDS - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

According to the National Wetland Inventory, the wetland identified within the project area is the Missouri River.

Determination: No significant impact.

PONDS - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

There are no established ponds in the area where the proposed project would be developed. In addition, no additional ponds are proposed. Therefore, no existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

Determination: Not applicable to the application.

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY, AND MOISTURE - Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.

The soil type at the proposed 32 AC (Pivot 1) is Cherry silty clay loam 0-2%. This soil is classified as prime farmland if irrigated and well-drained. The soil is nonsaline to very slightly saline (0.0 to 3.0 mmhos/cm). The soil type at the proposed 31 AC (Pivot 6) is Cherry silty clay loam 2-4%. This soil is classified as prime farmland if irrigated and well-drained. The soil is nonsaline to very slightly saline (0.0 to 3.0 mmhos/cm). The soil type at the proposed 2.5 AC (Pivot 3) is Havrelon Silt Loam and Lohler silty clay loam. Havrelon silt loam 0 to 1% is classified as prime farmland if irrigated and well-drained. Maximum salinity was not assessed in the USDA report. Lohler silty clay loam. It is classified as prime farmland if irrigated and well-drained. Maximum salinity was not assessed in the USDA report. Degradation to soil or development of a saline seep is not anticipated.

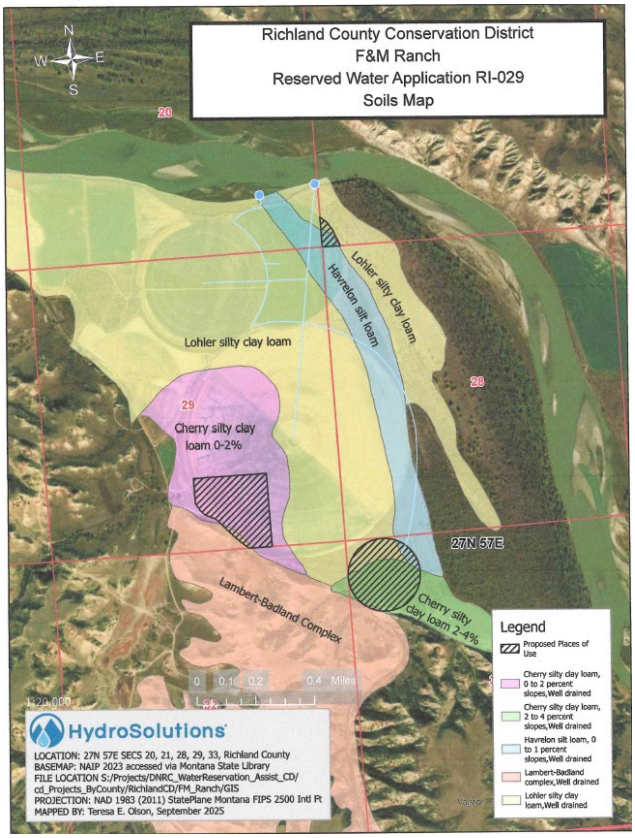

Figure 2: Map of Applicants Proposed Point of Diversion and Place of Use Soil Map for CD Change Application No. 40S 30173545, created by HydroSolutions in September 2025.

Determination: No significant impact.

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY, AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.

No vegetation was listed as endangered or threatened by the USFWS or BLM in the project area. The control of noxious weeds is the responsibility of the landowner.

Determination: No significant impact.

AIR QUALITY - Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.

The pumps have already been established and put to use by 40S 171255 00. No new impact to air quality is expected.

Determination: No significant impact.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands, simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.

Determination: NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water, and energy not already addressed.

Determination: No additional impacts on other environmental resources were identified.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

Determination: There are no known environmental plans or goals in this area.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

Determination: The project should have no significant or harmful impact on recreational or wilderness activities.

HUMAN HEALTH - Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.

Determination: The development should have no impact on human health.

PRIVATE PROPERTY - Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Yes ___ No ■ If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

Determination: There are no additional government regulatory impacts on private property rights associated with this application.

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

Impacts on:

(a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impact.

(b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impact.

(c) Existing land uses? No significant impact.

(d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impact.

(e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impact.

(f) Demands for government services? No significant impact.

(g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impact.

(h) Utilities? No significant impact.

(i) Transportation**?** No significant impact.

(j) Safety? No significant impact.

(k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impact.

2. SECONDARY AND CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN POPULATION:

Secondary Impacts: No secondary impacts have been identified.

Cumulative Impacts: No cumulative impacts have been identified.

3. **DESCRIBE ANY MITIGATION/STIPULATION MEASURES:** None

4. **DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION, INCLUDING THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE, IF AN ALTERNATIVE IS REASONABLY AVAILABLE AND PRUDENT TO CONSIDER:**

No action alternative:

The applicant would not be able to develop their water reservation and put the water to beneficial use for Irrigation, as was granted to the ultimate water user by the Richland County Conservation District. The applicant's water reservation would continue undeveloped and without the previously stated benefits.

Alternative 1:
No alternative would be reasonable for this proposed action.

PART III. CONCLUSION

1. **PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE:** Issue a water use permit if the Applicant proves the criteria in MCA are met. If the criteria in MCA are not met, then the no action alternative is preferred.

2. **COMMENTS AND RESPONSES:** No additional comments or responses to date.

3. **FINDING:**

Yes ___ No ■ Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

No significant impacts related to the proposed project have been identified.

Name of person(s) responsible for the preparation of the EA:

Name: Kailee Ingalls
Title: Water Resources Specialist
Date: June 12, 2026.