

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:
Great Northern Golf Co
DBA Bridger Creek Golf Course
C/o Mark Holiday
2710 McIlhattan Rd
Bozeman, MT 59715
2. Type of action: Application to Change Water Right No. 41H 30163442, by Great Northern Golf Co
3. Water source name: Bridger Creek
4. Location affected by project: The proposed mitigation reach is 53.8 miles beginning with the SWNESW Section 33, T1S, R6E, and NWNWSW Section 9, T2N, R2E, all within Gallatin County.
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:
Applicant submitted Change Application No. 41H 30163442 on January 8, 2025, to the Bozeman DNRC Water Resources Office. The Applicant proposes to change the point of diversion, place of use, and purpose of Statement of Claim 41H 115640-00 to marketing for mitigation use. The Applicant proposes to retire 28.54 acres of historical irrigation following the change. No change in place of storage is proposed. A map of the proposed project is shown in Figure 1 on the following page. The DNRC shall issue 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:
 - Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (DFWP) – Dewatered Streams Page 3 of 4 https://gis-mtfdwp.hub.arcgis.com/datasets/e0849312c41b415992a075f8696164c8_0/explore?location=45.587206%2C-110.981863%2C11.41
 - Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) – Clean Water Act Information Center (CWAIC) <https://clean-water-act-information-center-mtdeq.hub.arcgis.com/>
 - Montana National Heritage Program (MTNHP) – Natural Heritage Map Viewer <https://mtnhp.org/mapviewer/?t=7>
 - U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) – National Wetlands Inventory Wetlands Mapper <https://www.fws.gov/program/national-wetlands-inventory/wetlands-mapper>
 - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) – Web Soil Survey (WSS) <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>

41H 30163442 - Proposed Use

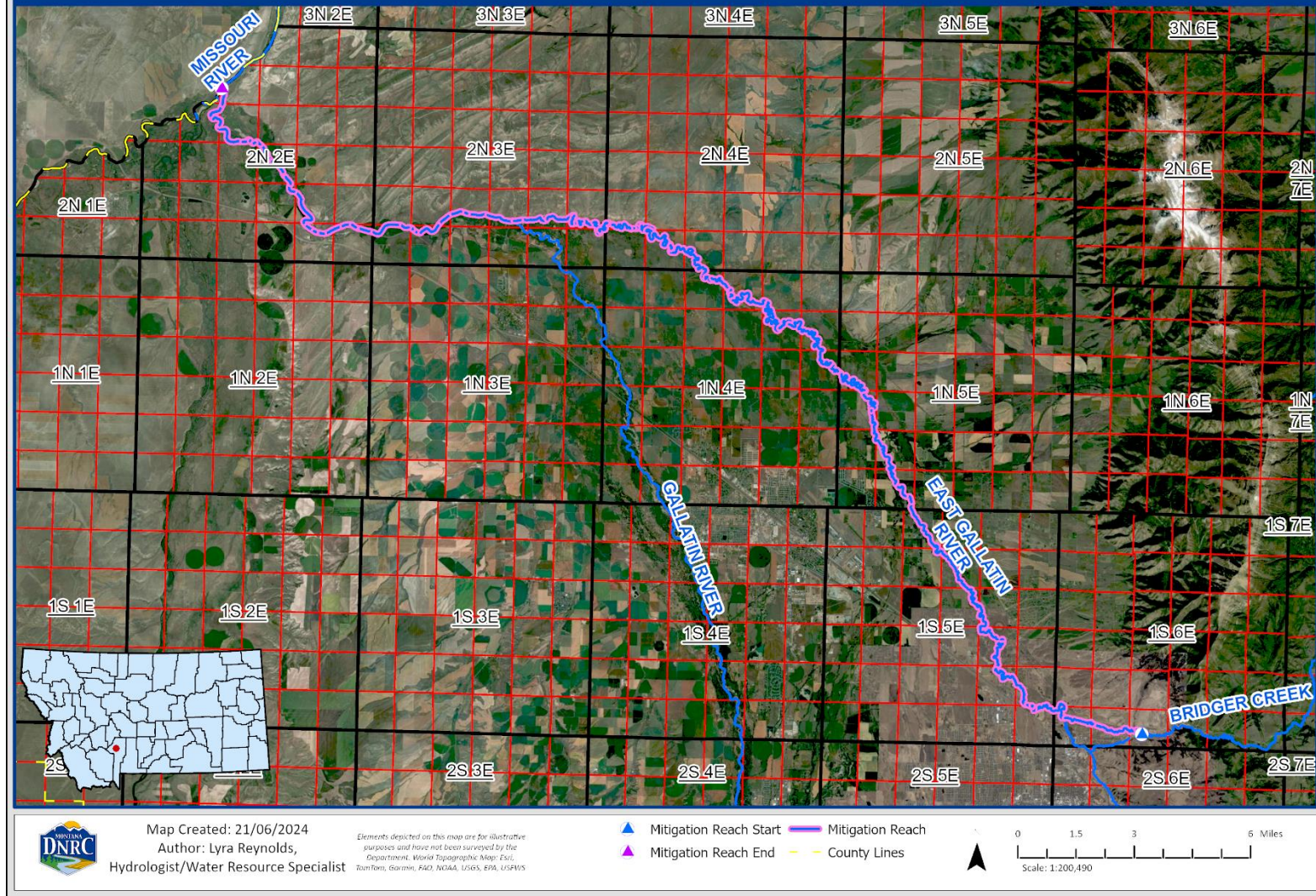


Figure 1. Map of Change Application No. 41H 30163442

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.*

Determination: No significant impact.

An April 8, 2025, search of DFWP data does list Bridger Creek as chronically dewatered. The proposed project leaves all historically diverted volume instream at the point of diversion. Historical return flows in Bridger Creek will be available in Bridger Creek following the proposed change. The water quantity in the source will not decrease as a result of the proposed change, and the dewatered condition will not worsen due to the proposed change.

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.*

Determination: No significant impact.

The source of the water right proposed for change is Bridger Creek. An April 8, 2025, search of the DEQ CWAIC website lists the stretch of Bridger Creek from the headwaters to the mouth of the East Gallatin River as not fully supporting aquatic life and primary contact recreation uses. The impairments are suspected to be caused by nitrite/nitrate level exceedances and chlorophyll levels below recommended thresholds. Agricultural and drinking water uses were not assessed. The proposed change to Claim 41H 115640-00 is not anticipated to negatively impact water quality, as all water will be left instream potentially leading to an increased dilution of pollutants.

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

Determination: No significant impact.

The proposed change does not involve a groundwater component.

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, well construction.*

Determination: No significant impact.

The proposed project involves changing the point of diversion to an instream diversion point. No new construction is required as a result of the proposed change, as all water will remain instream following the proposed change.

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.”

Determination: No significant impact.

An April 8, 2025, search of the Montana Heritage Program’s website for T1S, R6E, T1S, R5E, T1N, R5E, T1N, R4E, T2N, R4E, T2N, R3E, AND T2N, R2E, all in Gallatin County, returned the following results:

- 79 animal Species of Concern: American Bison, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Canada Lynx, Eastern Red Bat, Grizzly Bear, Little Brown Myotis, Long-eared Myotis, Long-legged Myotis, Northern Hoary Bat, Silver-haired Bat, Townsend’s Big-eared Bat, Wolverine, Alder Flycatcher, American Bittern, American Goshawk, American White Pelican, Baird’s Sparrow, Black Rosy-Finch, Black Tern, Black-backed Woodpecker, Black-billed Cuckoo, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black-necked Stilt, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Bobolink, Brewer’s Sparrow, Brown Creeper, Burrowing Owl, Caspian Tern, Cassin’s Finch, Clark’s Grebe, Clark’s Nutcracker, Common Loon, Common Tern, Evening Grosbeak, Ferruginous Hawk, Flammulated Owl, Forster’s Tern, Franklin’s Gull, Golden Eagle, Gray-crown Rosy-Finch, Great Blue Heron, Greater Sage-Grouse, Green-tailed Towhee, Harlequin Duck, Horned Grebe, Least Tern, LeConte’s Sparrow, Lewis’s Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, Long-billed Curlew, Mountain Plover, Nelson’s Sparrow, Northern Hawk Owl, Pacific Wren, Pileated Woodpecker, Pinyon Jay, Red-headed Woodpecker, Sage Thrasher, Sagebrush Sparrow, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Solitary Sandpiper, Sprague’s Pipit, Thick-billed Longspur, Trumpeter Swan, Varied Thrush, Veery, White-faced Ibis, Whooping Crane, Yellow Rail, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Northern Leopard Frog, Western Toad, Arctic Grayling, Northern Redbelly Dace, Rocky Mountain Cutthroat Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Greater Short-horned Lizard, Snapping Turtle
- 21 animal Potential Species of Concern: Barrow’s Goldeneye, Black-and-white Warbler, Boreal Owl, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Chimney Swift, Common Poorwill, Eastern Bluebird, Gray Flycatcher, Great Gray Owl, Hooded Merganser, Ovenbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Short-eared Owl, Tennessee Warbler, Western Screech-Owl, Brook Stickleback, North American Porcupine, North American Water Vole, Prairie Shrew, Uinta Ground Squirrel, Western Spotted Skunk
- 1 animal Special Status Species: Bald Eagle
- 29 plant Species of Concern: Alkali-marsh Ragwort, Annual Indian Paintbrush, Annual Muhly, Autumn Willow, Beaked Spikerush, Beautiful Fleabane, California False-hellebore, Daggett Rockcress, Dense-leaf Draba, Dwarf Purple Monkeyflower, Foxtail Muhly, Heart-leaved Buttercup, Letterman’s Needlegrass, Marsh Horsetail, Meadow Horsetail, Mealy Primrose, Oregon Bluebells, Oregon Checker-mallow, Pale-yellow Jewel-weed, Railhead Milkvetch, Rocky Mountain Twinpod, Scarlet Ammannia, Scribner’s Ragwort, Slim-pod Venus’-looking-glass, Small Dropseed, Tilesius Wormwood, Ute Ladies’-tresses, Wedge-leaf Saltbush, Whitebark Pine

- 6 plant Potential Species of Concern: Jones' Columbine, Limestone Larkspur, Rydberg's Parsley, Slender Wedgegrass, Small Yellow Lady's-slipper, Spurless Touch-me-not
- 0 plant Special Status Species

All water will be left instream following the proposed change. No diversion structure will be required, as the proposed point of diversion is instream, so no barrier to the migration or movement of aquatic species will occur. The proposed change is not anticipated to have a significant impact on endangered or threatened species.

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

Determination: No significant impact.

An April 9, 2025, search of the National Wetlands Inventory Mapper shows riverine habitat in the project area. As all water will be left instream, no wetlands or deepwater habitats in the proposed place of use will be negatively impacted. Wetlands surrounding the project area will not be negatively impacted by the proposed change to marketing for mitigation use.

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

Determination: No significant impact.

No ponds are involved with the project.

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.*

Determination: No significant impact.

An April 9, 2025, search of the NRCS Web Soil Survey identified some surface salinization risks, from high to low range, and areas that are already saline. The proposed project will leave all water instream. Retirement of historically irrigated acres will not further increase salinization of soils. The proposed change to marketing for mitigation use is not anticipated to cause saline seeps.

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.*

Determination: No significant impact.

The retirement of acres and adding new acres should not promote establishment of noxious weeds. Under Montana law, private landowners are responsible for noxious weed control on their property.

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

Determination: No significant impact.

The proposed project will not impact air quality.

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: No significant impact.

The proposed project is not located on State or Federal Lands. The Applicant did not mention significant historical or archeological sites on the property.

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 significant impact.

No impacts on environmental resources of land, water, or energy not already addressed.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

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

Determination: No significant impact.

The proposed project is to change the point of diversion, place of use, and purpose of Claim 41H 115640-00 to marketing for mitigation use. Marketing for mitigation use is a recognized beneficial use of water within the state of Montana (§85-2-102(5), MCA). Protecting water for marketing for mitigation use, for future mitigation needs, is a locally accepted practice.

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: No significant impact.

The proposed project will be instream in Bridger Creek, the East Gallatin River, and the Gallatin River. Water will be left instream for marketing for mitigation use following the proposed change and will not impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.

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

Determination: No significant impact.

The project will not impact human health.

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

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

Determination: No significant impact.

This project does not impact government regulations on private property rights.

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 impacts identified.
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impacts identified.
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impacts identified.
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impacts identified.
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impacts identified.
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impacts identified.
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impacts identified.
- (h) Utilities? No significant impacts identified.
- (i) Transportation? No significant impacts identified.
- (j) Safety? No significant impacts identified.
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impacts identified.

2. Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:

Secondary Impacts: No significant secondary impacts identified.

Cumulative Impacts: No significant secondary impacts identified.

- 3. Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:** All historically irrigated acres will be retired and no longer irrigated as a result of the proposed change. All water will be left instream. The Applicant will only be able to protect the historical consumed volume in the proposed reach. The Applicant will be required to measure water use and be required to find a purchaser/lessee for the water to be put to beneficial use. For the change authorization to be granted by the DNRC, the Applicant must prove the criteria in §85-2-402 MCA are met.

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:*** The “no action” alternative would be for the Applicant to continue to use the water for irrigation, as done historically.

Part III. Conclusion

1. ***Preferred Alternative:*** The preferred alternative is to grant the Change Application if the Applicant has proven the criteria of §85-2-402, MCA.
2. ***Comments and Responses:*** None at this time.
3. ***Finding:*** Yes___ No_**X**___ *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: The EA is the appropriate level of analysis because the proposed project is to change the point of diversion, place of use, and purpose of an existing irrigation water right. The Applicant proposes to use the water right for marketing for mitigation use and will use a maximum diverted volume of 98.2 AF up to a maximum 1.38 CFS flow rate. No change in place of storage is proposed. Marketing for mitigation is consistent with state and local plans.

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

Name: Lyra Reynolds

Title: Hydrologist/Water Resources Specialist

Date: April 21, 2025