

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Environmental Assessment

November 2015

BLM

PREPARING OFFICE

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Worland Field Office



Introduction

Identifying Information:

Title, EA number, and type of project:

Title: Washakie County-Hazelton Road Mineral Materials testing and development & Access Road Right-of-way WYW-165341 and WYW-165341-01

EA Number: DOI-BLM-WY-R010-2015-0040-EA

Type of Project: Application for Free Use Permit of Mineral Materials and Associated Access Road Right-of-way

General Location of Proposed Action:

6th Principal Meridian, Washakie County, Wyoming,

T. 43 N., R. 86 W.,

Sec. 02, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$,

Sec. 11, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$.

Name and Location of Preparing Office:

Worland Field Office

101 S. 23rd St.

Worland, WY 82401

Lease/Serial/Case file number:

WYW-165335,

ROW Casefile: WYW-165341, WYW-165341-01

Applicant Name:

Washakie County

Background Information:

Purpose and Need for Action:

The purpose of this action is to provide Washakie County with legal access to mine disposable materials (sand and gravel) from a location approximately 23 miles South of Ten Sleep (see map, Appendix A). Under the Federal Land and Policy Management Act (FLPMA) the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is required to respond to applications for disposal of mineral materials.

The need for the right-of-way action is established by the BLM's responsibility under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) to respond to requests for rights-of-way (ROW) grants and to ensure the activity protects the natural resources of public lands and prevents unnecessary or undue degradation. The purpose of the proposed action is for the BLM to respond to the request.

Decision to be Made:

The decision to be made is whether or not to issue the free use permits and associated right-of-way and if so under what conditions. If it is decided to issue the right-of-way, the AO must decide what Terms and Conditions, would apply to the grant. Terms and Conditions could include specification of construction, operation and abandonment activities for the proposed project area.

Conformance:

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms to the land use plan as required by 43 CFR 1610.5. The proposed action conforms to the Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan for the Worland Field Office, dated September 21, 2015. The decisions in the Worland Resource Management Plan (WRMP) provide general management direction and allocation of uses and resources on the public lands in the area.

GOAL MR:1	Provide opportunities for mineral extraction and energy exploration and development to meet national and local needs, while avoiding or mitigating impacts on other resources.
Objectives:	MR:1.1 Provide opportunities to explore for, sell and/or permit, and develop leasable, salable, and locatable mineral resources. MR:1.2 Encourage sound, balanced exploration and development of mineral resources in the planning area.
Record 2030	2,468,896 acres are open to mineral materials disposal. 217,794 acres are closed to mineral materials disposal
Record 2028	Dispose of mineral materials on a case-by-case basis, subject to site-specific analysis and appropriate mitigation prior to approval, in areas open to mineral materials disposal.

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Plans or Other Environmental Analysis:

BLM's authority to dispose of sand, gravel, and other mineral and vegetative materials that are not subject to mineral leasing or location under the mining laws is the Act of July 31, 1947, as amended (30 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), commonly referred to as the Materials Act. This authority applies to sale and free use of these materials.

Section 302 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1732) provides the general authority for BLM to manage the use, occupancy, and development of the public lands under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield in accordance with the land use plans that BLM develops under FLPMA. Section 304 of FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1734) and the Independent Offices Appropriation Act of 1952 (31 U.S.C. 9701) authorize the U.S. Government to collect fees and to require reimbursement of its costs.

Sand and gravel has been removed from the application area under a prior free use permit. No reclamation has occurred. Washakie County has applied to operate in this area for a total of ten years and pursuant to 43 CFR 3604.12 there is no limitation of the production provided the material will not be used for commercial or industrial purposes.

The subjects areas are under a small mine permit administered by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality-Land Quality Division (DEQ-LQD), designated as 584. A reclamation bond is held by DEQ-LQD to ensure reclamation of all disturbances at this location and the bond amount that Washakie County is required to post is re-evaluated on an annual basis.

Title V of FLPMA, Sec. 501. [43 U.S.C. 1761] (a) The Secretary, with respect to the public lands (including public lands, as defined in section 103(e) of this Act, which are reserved from entry

pursuant of section 24 of the Federal Power Act (16 U.S.C. 818)) [P.L. 102-486, 1992] and, the Secretary of Agriculture, with respect to lands within the National Forest System (except in each case land designated as wilderness), are authorized to grant, issue or renew rights-of-way over, upon, under, or through such lands for-(6) roads, trails, highways, railroads, canals, tunnels, tramways, airways, livestock driveways, or other means of transportation except where such facilities are constructed and maintained in connection with commercial recreation facilities on lands in the National Forests System:

43 Code of Federal Regulations § 2800. It is BLM's objective to grant rights-of-way under the regulations in this part to any qualified individual, business, or government entity and to direct and control the use of rights-of-way on public lands in a manner that:

- (a)Protects the natural resources associated with public lands and adjacent lands, whether private or administered by a government entity;
- (b)Prevents unnecessary or undue degradation to public lands;
- (c)Promotes the use of rights-of-way in common considering engineering and technological compatibility, national security, and land use plans; and
- (d)Coordinates, to the fullest extent possible, all BLM actions under the regulations in this part with state and local governments, interested individuals, and appropriate quasi-public entities.

Scoping, Public Involvement and Issues:

Scoping

The proposed action was reviewed by an interdisciplinary team. Based on the size and routine nature of the proposed project, it was determined that external scoping was not necessary.

Issues Identified

- How would the proposed surface disturbance affect cultural resources eligible or unevaluated for the NRHP?
- How would the visual impacts from the reasonably foreseeable gravel pit affect cultural resources eligible or unevaluated for the NRHP?
- How would the Proposed Action affect the upland vegetation's ability to meet Rangeland Health Standard 3?
- How would the proposed gravel pit impact VRM Class II resources?
- Would the proposed action affect recreational opportunities in the South Bighorn ERMA?
- Will digging activities cause increased runoff and erosion?

Proposed Action and Alternatives

Description of the No Action Alternative:

This alternative would deny request of the permit and the applicant would not be allowed to mine the sand and gravel.

Description of the Proposed Action:

The Washakie County Planning Office (Washakie) has applied for a Letter of Authorization pursuant to 43 CFR 3601.3, to conduct exploratory testing for mineral materials (rock suitable for crushing) on BLM managed federal lands and continue with development under a Mineral Material Free Use Permit if the material proves adequate. Their proposal also includes a request for a Right-of-way for access to the pit site. The road would be approximately 1,300 feet in length and would not exceed a width of 20' running surface and 50' disturbance for ditches at full development (Phase 2). One 18" diameter by 60' culvert would be installed at County Road 81 and access crossing. The requested ROW is 1,300.0 foot in length, 50 foot in width, with a 40' foot 40' envelope surrounding the culvert involving 1.528 acres. The requested construction ROW is 1,300.0 foot in length, 30 foot in width, involving 0.895 acres.

The Proposed Action would consider the right-of-way application and plan of development complete, and would be approved as submitted but with special terms and conditions consistent with 43 CFR 2805.12, as well as specific mitigation and monitoring measures for the proposed project area, which may be defined through the NEPA analysis.

Phase 1 – Test pits and access

Testing would be conducted by digging 2 exploratory trenches with the use of a Case 580M rubber tire backhoe; trenches would be dug 4ft wide by 8ft long to the depth of the deposit or a maximum depth of 12ft. Topsoil would be placed to one side of the trench, and overburden and material would be placed on opposite sides. Trenches would be examined from above ground and samples would be taken from the backhoe bucket or material pile. At no time would anyone enter the trenches, nor would any open trench be left unattended.

After examining the trench and collecting samples, the trench would be immediately backfilled with material and overburden, and topsoil would be replaced and spread before moving on to the next location. The disturbed area would be raked and seeded with a BLM approved seed mix.

The test program would commence upon BLM approval, and testing and reclamation would take no more than 2 days. Washakie County personnel would notify the Worland BLM office at least 48 hours prior to beginning field work.

No construction on the access would be necessary to reach the test pit area.

Phase 2 – Development and access

If the sampling and testing program proves the area has adequate mineral material resources for future road maintenance projects in the area Washakie would implement phase two and under a Mineral Materials Free Use Permit in order to develop a pit for the material. Construction would commence on the access road and it would be maintained to a permanent road running surface of 20'. Disturbance would extend to approximately 50' to provide for runoff.

Right-of-Way:

Construction standard for all new access roads:

The new proposed access route would be approximately 1,300', constructed to a 20' running surface with a width of disturbance of 50', and an additional 30' for construction, resulting in 2.423 acres of new disturbance. The proposed new construction would be designed for the anticipated levels of use of truck traffic which would be traveling the road, which includes both light and heavy duty trucks.

The access road is designed to meet the standards of the anticipated traffic flow and seasonal requirements from May through October. The access road would not be constructed using frozen material or during periods when the soil material is saturated or when watershed damage is likely to occur. Vegetative debris would not be placed in or under till embankments.

The road would be crowned, ditched, and surfaced with gravel. One 18" by 60' culvert would be installed and placed at the intersection of the access road with CR 81. Access roads, surface disturbing activities and maintenance would conform to standards outlined in the BLM and Forest Service publication: Surface Operating Standards and Guidelines for Oil and Gas Exploration and Development, The Gold Book, Fourth Edition (2007) and BLM Manual Section 9113.

The anticipated truck traffic use during construction and mining is estimated to be 10 trucks per day for up to three weeks annually.

Washakie County would maintain the right-of-way in a way that would contain periodically monitoring the roadway that would include, but would not be limited to, graveling, blading, ditching, culvert installation, and surfacing. Work would not occur when conditions are too muddy. No excess dirt would be placed in any existing drainage.

The proposed action would involve stockpiling of topsoil; removal of sand and gravel in the near-subsurface; crushing- screening-sorting of bank-run material into stockpiles on location; hauling away the processed aggregate product by truck; with reclamation taking place concurrently or at the close of operations when the bank run material has been depleted. The area of potential disturbance would not exceed 10 acres of actual disturbance over a 10 year period.

The following design features are required by BLM for gravel pit operation and will become the stipulations of operation for the permit if issued.

General

A Reclamation and Weed Plan would be submitted and approved by the Authorized Officer within 30 days prior to development of the mining pit. The Reclamation Plan shall include measures that will be taken to minimize visual impacts to the project area.

Soil

- All surface disturbances will be restricted to the specific area needed for extraction, processing, and stockpiling of the aggregate materials. All hauling activity, from the material source to the eventual use site, will be restricted to existing roads.
- Topsoil will be removed and stockpiled prior to collection of useable aggregate materials. Topsoil stockpiles will be shaped and seeded with a BLM approved seed mix to minimize erosion and maintain soil viability for future site reclamation needs. Topsoil and overburden

will be stockpiled in as close as possible and to facilitate reclamation of the site. Stockpiles will be stabilized in a manner that will minimize loss of material.

- Overburden will be removed to the depth necessary for the production of acceptable aggregate material. Overburden will be stockpiled separate from topsoil in previously disturbed areas within the site. Care will be taken to remove only that which is necessary for production of the required quantity of aggregate material.
- Precautions will be taken in locating spoil piles or material stockpiles to assure that siltation of streams, ponds, drainages, etc., will not occur. Operations will be conducted in such a manner that standing water, which may pose a threat to health, will not accumulate at random within the project area.
- The aggregate material will be crushed to a size and gradation that is acceptable for its intended purpose. If a crusher is used, it will be set near the edge of the site and material fed into the crusher by earthmoving equipment. Material screened during the crushing operation will be stockpiled adjacent to the source area in previously disturbed locations. Rejected material will also be stockpiled in previously disturbed areas.

Hazardous Materials

- The use of water, or a chemical palliative, may be required for dust abatement/control at the site. Water will be used in accordance with all applicable State of Wyoming and Federal regulations and approval from the appropriate water rights owner must be obtained if necessary
- Hazardous wastes and used oil will be disposed of in accordance with State of Wyoming regulation and will not be stored on location. The operator will take all necessary measures to protect soil, water, or other sensitive resources from fuels, lubricants and hazardous substances.
- No bulk fuels, lubricants or hazardous substances will be stored on site.
- Solid waste will be disposed of in accordance with State and Federal regulations.

Cultural Resources

The operator is responsible for informing all persons in the area who are associated with this project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during construction, the operator is to immediately stop work that might further disturb such materials, and contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places;
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary); and,
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800.11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction measures.

Paleontology

The operator is responsible for informing all persons in the area who are associated with this project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing paleontological localities, or for collecting vertebrate fossils. If paleontological materials are uncovered during operations, the operator is to immediately stop work that might further disturb such materials, and contact the authorized officer (AO).

Within five (5) working days the AO will evaluate the discoveries and take necessary actions to protect or remove the resource. Decisions regarding the appropriate measures to mitigate effects to such resources will be made in consultation with the operator.

Survey Monuments

The Operator shall protect all survey monuments within the permit area. In the event of obliteration of a monument, the Operator will report the incident in writing to the BLM and the respective installing authority, if known. The Operator shall be responsible for all surveys and costs of reestablishing the survey monuments.

Visual Resources

The material site will be maintained in a fashion that will blend with the surrounding topography. VRM goals will be met by shaping all sides of material sites and stockpiles to a slope of 3 horizontal to 1 vertical or flatter (3H:1V).

Fire

The Operator shall be responsible for the prevention and suppression of fires on public lands caused by its employees, contractors, or subcontractors. During conditions of extreme fire danger, surface use operations may be either limited or suspended in specific areas, or additional measures may be required by the BLM. Notification of a wildfire is to be made to: **1-800-295-9954**.

Reclamation

During reclamation the fill material will be pushed back into the cuts and up over the backslopes. The disturbed area will be graded to conform to the surrounding topography. Recontoured slopes should be less steep than 3H:1V where possible. Final grade must provide through-drainage for all disturbed areas. Depressions which trap or pond water are not allowed.

The subsoil and topsoil will be distributed evenly over the entire disturbed area and the seedbed prepared by disking/or similar activity to a depth of four to six inches following the contour. The operator will remove any unnecessary culverts from associated roads. The reclamation of drainage crossings is to match the natural gradient with similar width to depth ratios as the natural pre-disturbed drainage.

All disturbed areas shall be drill seeded. Where drilling is impractical, seed shall be broadcast and the area raked or chained to cover seed. If broadcast seeding is used, the approved seed mix shall be doubled. All disturbed areas shall be reseeded with the following mixture of all Pure Live Seed.

Common	Rate lbs/ac
Bluebunch Wheatgrass	2.2
Idaho Fescue	1.4
Columbia needlegrass	3.4

Spike fescue	1.2
Mountain big sage	0.25
American Vetch	2.6
Total	11.35

The re-vegetation shall consist of species included in the seed mix and/or occurring in the surrounding natural vegetation or as deemed desirable by the BLM or private surface owner in review and approval of the reclamation plan. Livestock palatability and wildlife habitat needs must be given consideration in seed mix formulation. Successful vegetation canopy cover production and species diversity shall approximate the surrounding undisturbed area. Interseeding, secondary seeding, or staggered seeding may be required to accomplish re-vegetation objectives. The seed mixture(s) shall be planted in the amounts specified in pounds of pure live seed (PLS)/acre. There shall be no primary or secondary noxious weed seed in the seed mixture. Since seeds are of different sizes and require different planting depths, the Operator shall use the appropriate equipment to ensure that the seed mixture is correctly and uniformly planted over the disturbed area. Seed shall be broadcast if drilling is not possible. When broadcasting the seed, the pounds per acre are to be doubled. The seeding will be repeated until a satisfactory stand is established as determined by the WYDEQ-LQD and BLM. Evaluation of growth will not be made before completion of the second growing season after seeding.

Seeding should be done preferably in the fall after September 15, until the soil is frozen, or conditions prevent effective seeding operations. Seeding may also be done as early as possible the following spring (between spring thaw and April 15) to take advantage of available ground moisture. Seeding shall be repeated until a satisfactory stand is established as determined by the WYDEQ-LQD and BLM. Evaluation of growth will not be made before completion of the second growing season after seeding.

Weeds

The Operator is responsible for weed control on disturbed areas within the boundaries of the permit. The control methods must be in accordance with guidelines established by the BLM, state and local authorities. Prior approval is required on Federal surface and use of pesticides will be limited to those approved by the BLM.

The Operator shall be responsible for total control of all invasive/noxious weed species on any and all project disturbed areas and native areas infested as a direct result of the project. A yearly weed control program shall be incorporated into the reclamation program until native vegetation is well established. The control methods shall be in accordance with guidelines established by BLM, state and local authorities. Prior to the use of pesticides, the Operator shall obtain written approval from the BLM Weed Coordinator and BLM Authorized Officer.

The Operator would be responsible for controlling all noxious and undesirable invading plant species in mined and/or reclaimed areas until the revegetation activities have been determined to be successful, and the bond has been released for a given area. If noxious or invasive weeds are encountered, the Big Horn County Weed and Pest shall be contacted by the Operator for control and eradication. Written approval from the Authorized Officer for the use of herbicides must be obtained prior to usage of herbicides.

Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail:

Alternative locations have been considered in the past but were eliminated from detailed analysis due to resource concerns.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT and ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Introduction

This chapter characterizes the resources and uses that have the potential to be affected by the proposed action, followed by a comparative analysis of the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the alternatives. **Direct** effects are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place. **Indirect** effects are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable. **Cumulative** impacts result from the incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Resources Not Analyzed

Resources and features not present or not effected by the proposed action or alternatives, and not discussed in this EA, include: Environmental Justice, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Flood Plains, Native American Religious Concerns, riparian areas, Class I visual management areas, Class I Airsheds, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wetlands, Wilderness Values or Inventoried Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Threatened and Endangered, BLM Special Status Plant Species, Range Administration.

Resources Carried Forward for Analysis

Cultural Resources, Traditional Cultural Properties, Native American Religious Concerns

Issue(s) Identified

How would the proposed surface disturbance affect cultural resources eligible or unevaluated for the NRHP?

How would the visual impacts from the reasonably foreseeable gravel pit affect cultural resources eligible or unevaluated for the NRHP?

Affected Environment

The area of potential effect (APE) is defined by the Wyoming State Protocol Agreement between the BLM and the SHPO (State Protocol) as the geographic area or areas within which an undertaking may directly or indirectly cause alterations in the character or use of historic properties (cultural resources eligible or unevaluated for the National Register of Historic Places), if any such properties exist. The area of potential effect is influenced by the scale and nature of an undertaking and may be different for different kinds of effects caused by the undertaking.

The APE was defined for the current undertaking to include the proposed surface disturbance under Phase 2 (direct), approximately 12 acres, and the viewshed from the proposed phase II gravel pit and access road (indirect). A class III cultural resources inventory was completed for the direct APE which includes the proposed gravel pit, associated stock piles, and access road (BLM cultural project #010-2015-090). Approximately 26 acres were inventoried to determine effects to historic properties within the direct APE. No cultural resources were identified. Within the indirect APE one historic property, a prehistoric cairn (48WA2211) was identified. The APE includes one prehistoric site eligible for the NRHP under criterion D.

Direct and Indirect Effects

No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, the development of the proposed action would not occur. No resulting effects on cultural resources would be expected to occur beyond the current situation.

Proposed Action

Impacts occur to historic properties when a proposed project would directly or indirectly alter any of the qualities of that property that qualify it for inclusion in the NRHP. Potential impacts from the proposed action include; physical destruction of or damage to all or part of a property (direct impact) or introduction of visual or atmospheric elements that diminish the integrity of a property's significant features (indirect impact).

No historic properties were identified within the project's direct APE. Surface disturbance resulting from the proposed action, approximately 12 acres, would have no effect on known historic properties. As with the No Action alternative, the Proposed Action will have no effect on known historic properties. Inclusion of the standard cultural stipulation in the Proposed Action mitigates any potential effects to unknown cultural resources discovered by surface disturbing activities.

One historic property was identified within the project's indirect APE. Construction of the access road and gravel pit as described under the Proposed Action would add new elements within the viewshed of that property. However, due to topography, only a portion of the proposed pit and all of the proposed access road will be visible. The visual impacts would result in a weak contrast and a no adverse effect to the property. Unlike the No Action alternative, where there would be no contrast and no effect, the Proposed Action will effect to the property. Consultation occurred with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) under the State Protocol.

Mitigation

Standard cultural stipulations and reclamation plan are included in the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Effects

Construction and development of mineral materials impact cultural resources through ground disturbance, unauthorized collection, and visual intrusion to the setting of historic properties. Design features incorporated into the Proposed Action have minimized but do not eliminate the potential impacts to historic properties in the indirect APE. The geographic scope of the cumulative impact assessment area (CIAA) is a three mile buffer around the known historic property. The timeframe of the cumulative effects analysis is from the start of the project until successful reclamation of the Proposed Action, approximately 3-5 years after reclamation has commenced. If reclamation is not successful, the potential exists for permanent visual impacts within the CIAA.

Past, Present, and Ongoing Actions affecting cultural resources in the CIAA are limited to vehicle traffic and residential buildings on private land.

There are no Foreseeable Future Actions other than phase one and two described in the Proposed Action.

Native Vegetation

Issue(s) Identified

How would phase two of the Proposed Action affect the upland vegetation's ability to meet Rangeland Health Standard 3?

Affected Environment

The proposed project area lies in the O'Brien Camp Allotment #00294. This is a small allotment with approximately 784 total acres of which approximately 363 acres are public land. Elevation is approximately 7400 to 7800 feet. The project area is a mixture of Loamy (R043BY322WY), Shallow Loamy (R043BY362WY), Course Upland (R043BY308WY), and Clayey (R043BY304WY) 15 -19 inch ecological sites. The ecological state at the proposed gravel pit is an Idaho Fescue/Big Sagebrush Plant Community. The primary vegetation on this site consists of Idaho Fescue, Bluebunch wheatgrass, Columbia Needlegrass, Spike Fescue, Big Sagebrush, and a variety of forbs.

Direct and Indirect Effects

No Action

The No Action alternative would not allow the mining of the gravel resources in the proposed project area. No vegetation would be removed from the site. This alternative would have no effect on upland vegetation or Rangeland Health Standard 3 and the current vegetative types and conditions would continue.

Proposed Action

Phase two of the Proposed Action would remove approximately 12 acres of vegetation (10 acres for the gravel pit and two acres for the access road). This would occur at approximately one acre per year over a 10 year period until reclamation is successful. Removing the vegetation would inhibit the disturbed area from meeting Standard 3 of Rangeland Health. Removal of the vegetation has a trickle-down effect to wildlife habitat, hydrology, and soil stability as described in each of those sections. To meet Standard 3 after reclamation, the vegetation would have to return to the Idaho Fescue/Big Sagebrush Plant Community. The reclamation plan, including the seed mix, proposed by the applicant would provide for a successful reclamation assuming that average amounts of precipitation occur during reclamation and that the topsoil remains viable after stockpiling.

The 12 acres of disturbance from phase two of the Proposed Action would, over a 10 year period, equate to approximately 3 percent within the 363 public land acres involving the Idaho Fescue/Big Sagebrush Plant Community. Because this is a small percentage of that larger plant community there would be little effect to the vegetation in the allotment of not meeting Rangeland Health Standard 3. In addition, the project area is to be reclaimed once mining operations have ceased and the area should vegetate with species appropriate for the ecological sites and that meets the needs and criteria of Rangeland Health Standard 3.

Mitigation - Reclamation Plan

Recreation and Visual Resource Management; Special Designations (Including ACECs, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics)

Issue(s) Identified

How would the proposed gravel pit impact VRM Class II resources?

Would the proposed action affect recreational opportunities in the South Bighorn ERMA?

Affected Environment

The proposed action lies within a scenic mountain valley with adjacent cattle and sheep ranching operations and recreational opportunities for hunters, hikers, rockhounds, photographers. The terrain is mixed open grassland, rolling hills, rocky ridges, shrubby creek bottoms, and timbered slopes.

The area can be described as sloped hillside with viewshed of nearby mountains. The proposed project location is sloped topographic relief and is covered by grasses and shrubs. The color of the area changes with the season due to the vegetation coverage of the area.

The proposed project area is located in the South Bighorn ERMA. Management is characterized as:

- Develop facilities necessary to maximize recreational opportunities at areas such as, but not limited to the Cherry Creek stock driveway crossing of Deep Creek, Otter Creek, and Split Rock. Develop trailheads for Mahogany Butte, Deep Creek, Upper Nowood areas, and in other areas on a case-by-case basis so as to sustain recreational opportunities, as well as to address use and user conflicts, public health and safety, and to address resource protection.

This area is managed as Front Country Setting.

- Front Country Settings: on or near 4-wheel drive roads, but at least 0.5 mile from all improved roads, though they may be in sight. Front Country settings along Rome Hill Road, Dry Farm Road, and Hazelton Road. On or near improved country roads, but at least 0.5 mile from any highway.

The Visual Management Class is Class II.

- Allow surface-disturbing activities in areas managed as VRM Class II only if the level of change to the landscape from the activities are low, and will not attract the attention of the casual observer, or the project can be mitigated to meet these objectives. VRM consistent with other resource management objectives.

Direct and Indirect Effects

No Action

The No Action alternative would not allow the mining of the gravel resources in the proposed project area. No vegetation would be removed from the site. This alternative would have no effect on VRM but may alter recreational settings, as the existing road use would likely continue to deteriorate the road.

Proposed Action

Class II Objective. The objective to this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Key Observation Points (KOP's) are usually selected along commonly traveled routes or at other likely observation points. Factors that should be considered in selecting KOP's are; angle of observation, number of viewers, length of time the project is in view, relative project size, season of use, and light conditions.

VRM

The proposed gravel pit and access road would alter the form, line, color, and texture of the existing landscape and vegetation for up to 10 acres for the gravel pit and approximately 1.5 acres for the road. In the short term, the proposed 10-year operation of the gravel pit will impact the surrounding VRM Class II landscape (approximately XXXX acres). The proposed action will alter the landform and line of the hillside identified for the gravel pit site and associated access road. The removal of soil and vegetation along with the excavation activities can create a visual contrast. However, with appropriate timing of construction activities and project design requirements this project will not have a direct effect on the recreating public. Impacts will be compatible with the current management objectives for the VRM II management class, nor will it create a permanent long-term cumulative impact. There will be a lack of vegetation and somewhat of a depression at the proposed site. The soil will be moderately noticeable from the road. The aspect will provide some screening when approaching the oncoming site. This will be a moderate contrast, but will be more visual once there is a direct line of site.

In the long term, reclamation after gravel pit operations have ceased may reduce impacts to the Visual Resources of the VRM Class II landscape by returning the physical form, line, color, and texture of the site as close to its original condition as possible.

KOPs

As identified this project will only be visible from certain portions of the road. The impression of the general public will be short in duration and will not cause a long visual influence. The arrangement of the relative size between the landscape, project design, and limits to the view due to aspect will not lead the viewer to this project as the focal point on the landscape.

The Hazelton Road itself will be impacted by increased traffic from heavy equipment and semi-trucks for three to four weeks annually. Damage to the road such as potholes and mud bogs may occur until the graveling operations are completed. With the increased traffic, it is expected that the surface material of the road would become powdery, creating dust that could impact the visual aesthetics and recreational opportunities.

Recreation and Visitor Services

Proposed permitted activities are planned for XXX time of year. The general use of the area is touring and driving (passing through) to access the recreation opportunities in the late summer and fall. There are ## recreation facilities located south of the project area.

As identified in the Worland RMP; Front Country has no defined user management controls. Allow for developments to assist in sustainable recreation opportunities and accessibility. The

proposed permitted use will assist in front country access to the South Bighorn ERMA. Activities proposed are for excavating the subsurface material to be used for road base on the Hazelton Road. The lack of surfacing material has created more damage to the ancillary road system making the activities less productive and lowering the safety standard of the road system. Using the material source closer to the road system will create less conflict with hauling routes and lower risk of trucking encounters by the public.

Mitigation

The view of the project will be from passing by the permit area. To assist with the visual impact the proponent would need to minimize material piles and to leave the area looking in its natural form during periods of non-construction. The excavation activities will be designed to contour to the landscape of the project area.

The proponent would need to utilize dust abatement as necessary.

Soils

Issue(s) Identified

Will digging activities cause increased runoff and erosion?

Affected Environment

The area of the proposed disturbance falls under the following Ecological Sites:

R043XY304WY — Clayey (15-19)

R043XY308WY — Coarse Upland (15-19)

R043XY322WY — Loamy (15-19)

R043XY362WY — Shallow loamy (15-19)

The site is situated on a Mountain slope consisting of residuum weathered from shale and siltstone and/or alluvium derived from shale and siltstone. The soils are deep to moderately deep. The depth to paralithic bedrock is 20 to 40 inches. The surface soil varies from 3” to 6” thickness depending on the texture and permeability of the subsoil.

Map Unit Summary

Map Unit Symbol	Map Unit Name	Component Name	Acres within disturbance	Percent composition of disturbance
12	Clayburn-Bachus-Inchau association	Clayburn (35%)	0.9	9.3%
49	Nathrop-Starley-Rock outcrop association	Nathrop (35%)	1.6	16.8%
65	Stubbs-Turk association	Stubbs (40%) Turk (30%)	6.9	73.8%

Soils within map unit 49 are rated by NRCS as poorly suited for deep mechanical site preparation. The reason for this rating is the slope. The rating is .5 on a scale from 0 (no limitation) to 1.0 (greatest negative impact). On the same scale, the soils within this map unit are rated as .5 for erosion hazard. Soils within both map unit 12 and 65 are rated as well suited for deep mechanical site preparation and are rated 0 on the same scale for erosion hazard.

Direct and Indirect Effects:

No Action

The project would not be approved and there would be no disturbance. Runoff and erosion rates would remain at current levels without any further reclamation.

No changes to the soil resources would occur in the proposed disturbance area.

Proposed Action

All topsoil and overburden would be excavated, and as a result the entire soil profile would be stockpiled for reclamation. In the process, soil horizons would be obliterated and blended together with the loss of all soil structure. Topsoil and overburden would be stockpiled separately and seeded. During the time that this reclamation material would be stored, there would be a continued loss of soil organic matter, a decrease in soil fertility and a loss of soil structure. Little overall erosion is depicted for the proposed disturbance area. Moderate soil erosion would occur within the 1.6 acres that fall within map unit 49. The remaining 7.8 acres are low risk for soil erosion.

Successful reclamation is possible on this site providing topsoil is stockpiled. The regulatory requirement for Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans and Reclamation Plans would enhance overall reclamation success by clearly defining reclamation objectives and by laying the framework for conducting reclamation. To the extent the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan is adhered to, runoff and erosion would be greatly reduced.

Tribes, Individuals, Organizations, or Agencies Consulted:

List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination
SHPO Section 106 Consultation

List of Preparers

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