

**FWP REGION 5 OLD
HEADQUARTERS
TRACT E**

FWP REGION 5 OLD HEADQUARTERS - TRACT E

Introduction

This area, located at 1125 Lake Elmo Drive, in the populated Billings Heights, was acquired in 1936. This facility was originally used as a state pheasant propagation farm. It later housed the offices for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 5-Billings, until 1990, when offices were moved to a new facility. The old compound is primarily vacant, but also serves as storage for regional equipment. The majority of the grounds/buildings are not used and are becoming a liability for the agency to maintain.

It is proposed that this property be transferred to River Network as part of the Alberton Gorge Land Exchange described in this Draft Environmental Assessment. River Network will subsequently sell the tract to obtain funds to help cover its costs in purchasing the Alberton Gorge property.

It is possible that Region would like to retain Parcel 4 (described below) for storage of equipment and materials, because there is not adequate storage at the new facility. Access to this parcel of the old compound is primarily attained by driving through Parcel 1. Access would need to be considered if the other parcels are sold as proposed, as this would leave Parcel 4 “land-locked.” This is a flexible option depending on the buyer’s need for tract; replacement FWP storage facility would be considered on an individual basis to facilitate disposal of the property, if necessary.

Property Description

The following technical information is from the Appraisal Report completed by T. Moss & Associates, Billings, MT for FWP, July 16, 1998.

This tract is located in the Billings Heights, approximately 2.5 miles northeast of the Billings central business district. The property fronts Lake Elmo Road which is a two-lane paved road, considered a “collector street” in the Billings Transportation Plan, and is one block west of Highways 87 and 312 running north/south through the Heights area.

Township 1 North, Range 26 East
Section 22, NW ¼ SE ¼
Tract 1, Certificate of Survey No. 979
Yellowstone County, Montana
Total acreage = 3.17 acres

The entire acreage is developed, including two residences, the old arched corrugated steel office building, garage/shop facility, and 8600 square feet (s.f.) of asphalt paved parking, chain link fencing, and mature landscaping. For appraisal purposes of “best use” and determining value, the property is broken into four parcels as shown in the Site Plan. Parcel 1 contains the main headquarters building (3,136 s.f.) and large paved parking

MAP 7. FWP Region 5 Old Headquarters - Billings Heights Neighborhood

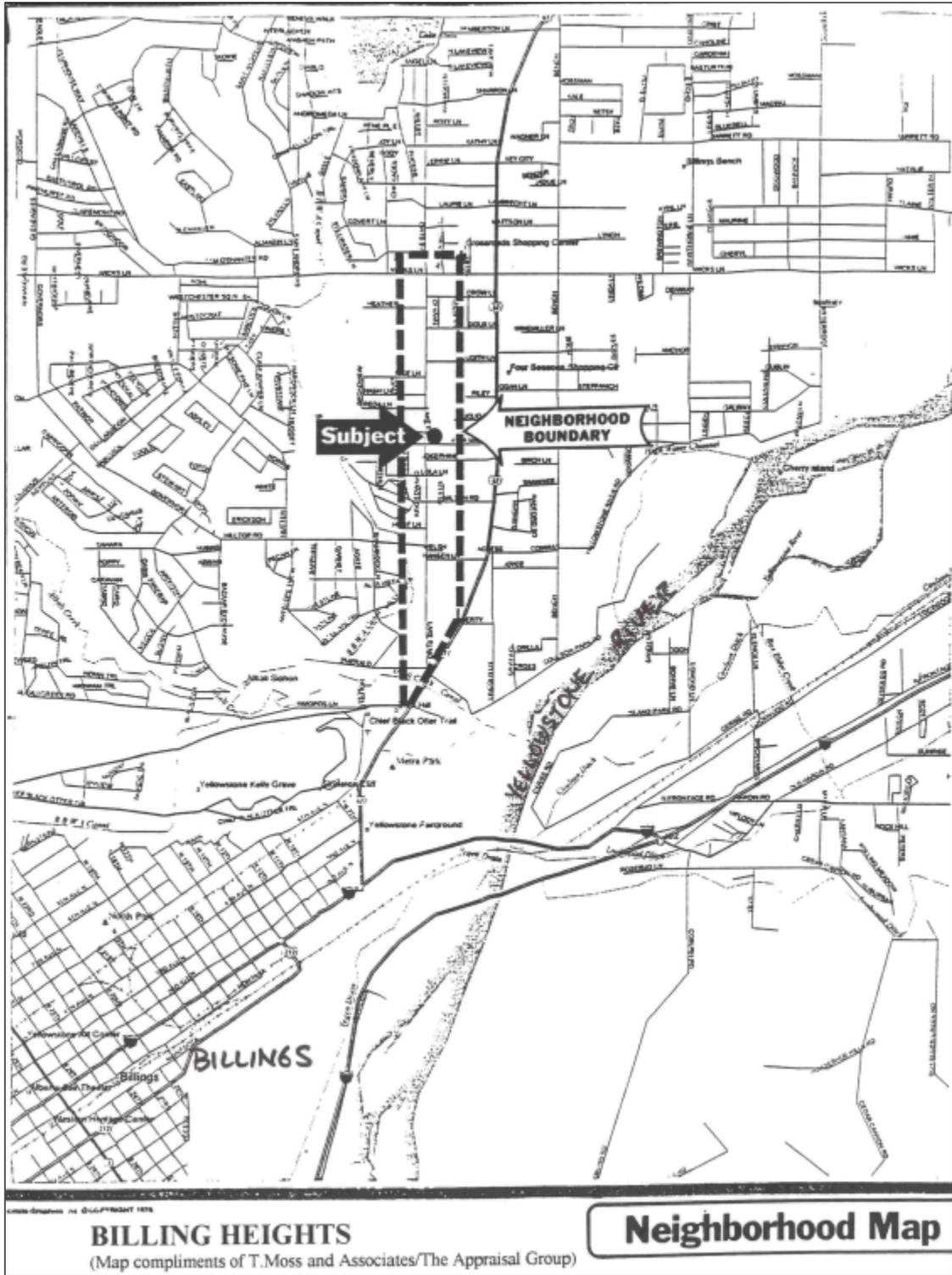
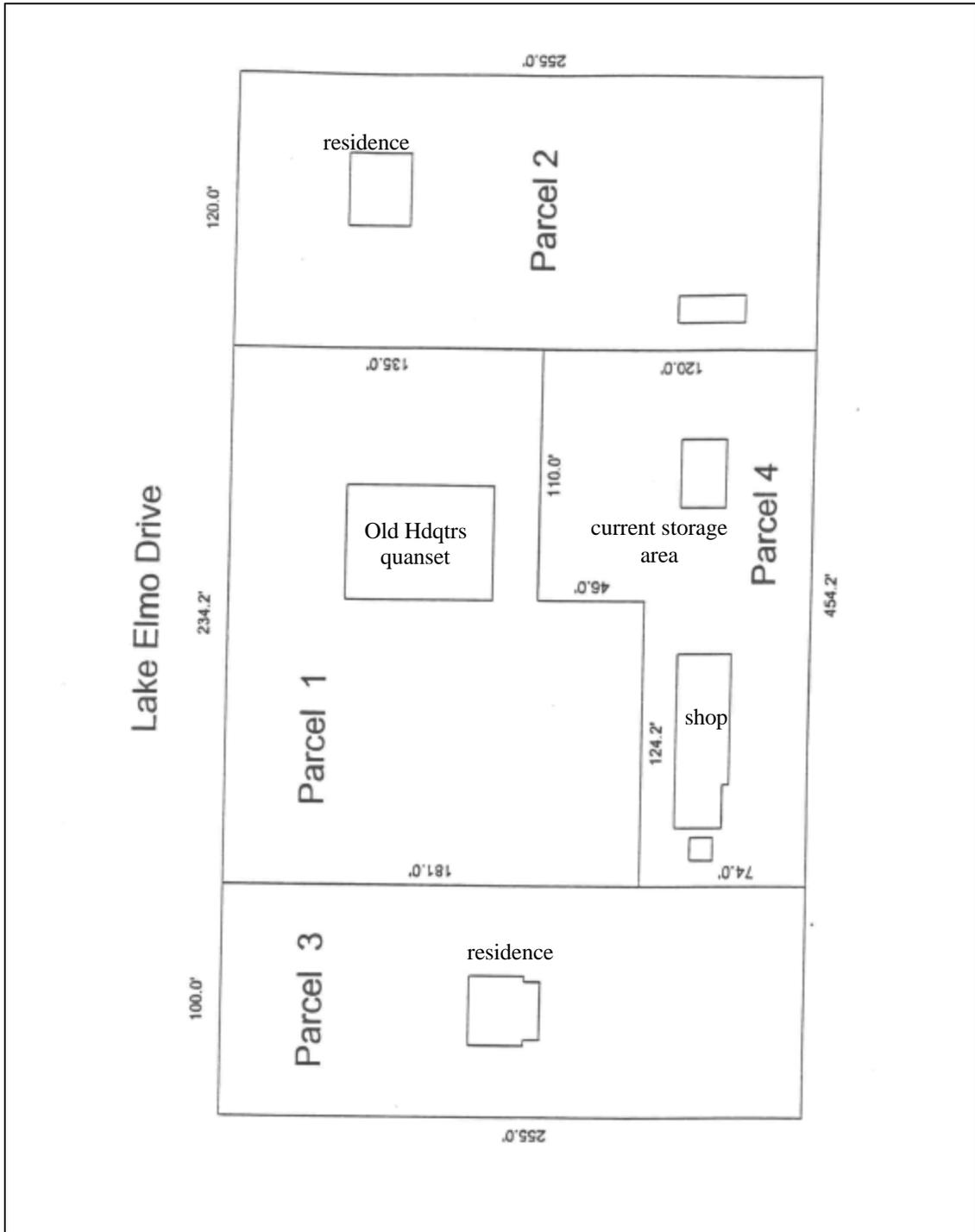


FIGURE 8. FWP Region 5 Old Headquarters – Site Plan



(Base) Site Plan provided by T.Moss and Associates/The Appraisal Group

area. The metal building was built around 1956 and, since being vacant for 12 years, is in need of general repair.

Residences occupy parcels 2 and 3, which have Lake Elmo Rd. frontage. Both wood frame residences were built in 1936 and have less than 900 s.f. of living space on one level with nearly full, unfinished basements. The residences have asbestos shingle siding and composition shingle roofs. The northern residence is leased, and currently occupied by an FWP employee who also maintains the grounds. A single-car garage structure on Parcel 2 has depreciated highly.

Parcel 4 is a fenced storage yard consisting of approximately ½ acre, including a 1,767 s.f. garage/shop facility with concrete floor. This structure, too, was built in 1936, with an addition constructed later. A second 600 s.f. wood frame storage building with a 100 s.f. cellar is on this parcel.

Natural gas, electrical power, telephone services, and public water are available at the site. The site facilities continue to use existing septic systems, though sanitary sewer service has been extended to the area. A private well is utilized for lawn maintenance purposes.

The Region 5 Old Headquarters tract is zoned Residential Multifamily – Restricted (RMF-R). This classification allows up to 74 multifamily residential units on this site, or the development of such things as single family residents, schools, and a publicly owned community center. Special reviews by the city zoning committee could allow a hospital, church, day care center or public service installation.

The property appraisal conducted by T. Moss & Associates suggests that a zone change must occur to legally accommodate alternative types of land uses (commercial). The appraiser indicates that the highest net return would be to subdivide the property into parcels that correspond with the individual “use types” (parcels 1-4 listed above) and market those properties separately. If the property is considered vacant, the highest net return may be to develop some type of public use or alternative use, subject to special review, such as a day care center or nursing home. Another option may be to divide the parcel into smaller units to accommodate single family or smaller multifamily development.

River Network would like to sell this property quickly to return their investment in the Alberton Gorge River Corridor. If River Network is unwilling to find a buyer, however, River Network may consider requesting city approval for a different zoning classification.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The general predictions made concerning potential and likely use are based on development allowed by current zoning and the most profitable options for a future developer as underlined above from the appraiser's report. It is probable that all or some of the existing buildings will be demolished, and new residential building(s) constructed.

Physical Environment

Land Resources

In January and February, 1995, Tetra Tech, Inc. performed a Phase I and limited Phase II Environmental Site Assessment of the Region 5 Old Headquarters. The facility's drum storage area (within Parcel 4 listed above) was noted as an area of concern due to staining and odors at the surface. Soil samples collected from a test pit in the stained area detected contamination from diesel fuel and a chemical deodorant used for cleaning latrines at FWP sites. In September 1995, one monitoring well was installed to collect soil and ground water samples, which would determine the vertical extent of contamination. The results of the sampling revealed that soil contamination was limited and that soil removal was a viable remedial option.

On April 8, 1996, the contaminated soil in the drum storage area (8' x 8' x 9' deep) was removed, disposed off site, and filled with clean material. Additional soil samples were taken after excavation and analyzed for diesel range organics and semi-volatile organics. *All levels were below regulatory levels of concern and did not pose a threat to human health or the environment.*

Due to its location within the Billings city limits, however, it is possible that typical demolition of the current buildings and subsequent above-ground construction will occur. Soils will be disrupted, displaced, compacted and covered over during demolition and construction of new structures. It is unlikely that further significant changes to the geologic substructure, soil stability or modifications of major physical features will occur. The land features are generally level and will tie into city drainage plans.

It is likely that the entire site soils have been disturbed during sometime during FWP ownership. Construction on this urban tract is considered a minor impact on this urban, man-altered site.

Air

If the old headquarters tract is purchased by a developer, demolition of the existing buildings, new landscape grading, etc, may temporarily emit air pollutants (dust). Special care should be taken to contain asbestos, which may be emitted if the owner demolishes the two residences with asbestos shingle siding; this may require a permit. Residential structures will not greatly alter air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns, or emit high amounts of air pollution.

Water and Floodplains

In September 1995, one monitoring well was installed to collect soil and ground water samples, which would determine the vertical extent of contamination in the drum storage area of Parcel 4. The results revealed that *ground-water impacts were minimal and remediation of the ground water was not necessary.*

This tract is within the city limits and any new construction would be subject to city-wide regulations. Due to the small size of this tract (3.17 acres), existing drainage patterns, flooding potentials, groundwater or surface water quantities are not expected to be altered. Discharge is unexpected that will affected federal and state water quality standards. Public water and sewer services are available at the property. One private well occurs on the tract, which is currently used only for landscape irrigation.

Karl Christians, DNRC Floodplain Management Section Suupervisor, confirmed to Sue Dalbey (Federal Insurance Administration, Flood Hazard Boundary Map review on June 13, 2000) that this property is not in a designated 100 year **floodplain**.

Vegetation, Wetlands, Prime & Unique Farmlands

The existing vegetation consists of mostly mature decorative lawns, shrubs and trees around the two residences of Parcels 2 and 3. There is no agricultural land on site. Weeds are controlled under the Region 5 Weed Management Plan in cooperation with the County Weed Board. It is anticipated that the large cottonwood trees on the parcel would remain for aesthetic purposes if they are healthy.

Lawns could be replanted if disturbed during construction or demolition. Weed control will be the responsibility of the individual landowner.

A search by the Montana Natural Heritage Program did not reveal any vegetative species of special concern in the vicinity. Water Howellia (*Howellia aquatilis*) is specifically found west of the Continental Divide. Ute Ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*) is in river meander wetlands primarily found in Jefferson County. Spalding's Catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) is under the threatened status, however, this species is found in western Montana (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Threatened and Endangered Species – Montana, web site; www.r6.fws.gov/mt4.html; May 23, 2000). The US Fish and Wildlife Service also identified the slender moonwort (*Bortrychium lineare*) as a Candidate species; however, it is found in meadows in conifer forests within Glacier and Lake Counties, far northeast of Yellowstone County (US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Threatened, Endangered and Candidate Species in Montana, Endangered Species Act. December 2002). These species have not been recorded on the Region 5 Old Headquarters tract and will not be impacted by the proposed exchange.

The site has been entirely altered in the past, and FWP determined that this urban tract does not contains **wetlands**.

The site is a small urban tract with residences surrounding it; no **prime or unique farmland** will be impacted by the sale of this land.

Fish & Wildlife

Fish do not inhabit this tract, as no body of water exists on the property. Adverse effects to the wildlife in the area are not expected because the site is within an urban area and it is not prime habitat for wildlife. White-tailed deer may travel through the area temporarily from nearby fields. Some small, non-game species and birds may be displaced if the fringe vegetation is diminished due to further development.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program identified four species of special concern, all of which were last recorded at least one mile from the property discussed. Three of the species are documented over 3 miles from the site. The peregrine falcon has been seen along the rims of Billings and may re-occupy a historic eyrie. The western hognose snake (*heterodon nasicus*) was last observed in 1909 in the Billings area, as well as the milk snake (*lampropeltis triangulum*) in 1971. The spiny softshell (*trionyx spiniferus*) is known to inhabit the Yellowstone River between Billings and Intake. The Old Region 5 Headquarters is about 1 mile from the Yellowstone River, and it is highly unlikely that future development at this site would impact these species.

The following animals are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act (US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Threatened, Endangered and Candidate Species in Montana, Endangered Species Act. December 2002.) and were considered in this environmental assessment. The tract may not hold habitat for some species, and therefore will not be specifically discussed.

Endangered - black-footed ferret, gray wolf, whooping crane, least tern, pallid sturgeon, white sturgeon (Kootenai River population);

Threatened - grizzly bear, bald eagle, piping plover, bull trout (Columbia River basin and St. Mary-Belly River populations), Canada lynx (contiguous U.S. population);

Proposed Threatened - mountain plover;

Candidates for listing as threatened or endangered - Arctic grayling (fluvial population), warm spring zaitzevian riffle beetle, black-tailed prairie dog, yellow-billed cuckoo (western population);

Proposed Critical Habitat – bull trout (Columbia River basin and St. Mary-Belly River populations: streams, lakes and reservoirs in the Clark Fork, Flathead and Kootenai river basins).

Due to the urban nature of the tract, none of the above species inhabit the tract, nor provide critical habitat. It is unknown, however, whether future development on the property would affect habitat in the vicinity.

Human Environment

Noise & Electrical Effects

It is very probable that a new owner will need to renovate the existing buildings, or demolish them and build new facilities, regardless of future use of the site. This construction will temporarily increase noise levels. Long-term noise would increase due to increased vehicular and human traffic at an active site, whether it is residential or commercial. Electrostatic or electromagnetic impacts are unlikely, as is the potential for radio or television reception interference.

Land Use

Sale of this property to a private entity will probably increase the productivity and worth of the area by increasing property values. It is not a designated natural area, and is slowly depreciating because FWP is not actively using these facilities (except for a small storage area and lease of one residence). Current zoning restrictions are intended to correspond with the character of the area and control future development patterns. This area tends to be an older residential area consisting primarily of a mixture of single family, mobile home and multi-family residential improvements. The proposed Billings Master Plan designates this as a medium to high-density residential area, with few opportunities to accommodate commercial activity. If land use remains similar to the surrounding area, it is unlikely that that would cause neighbors to relocate.

Risk & Health Hazards

Future risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances are not anticipated if proper precautions are implemented during construction or demolition. Asbestos siding is the only presence of chemical toxicants on the site. As discussed above, the Environmental Site Assessment did find contaminated soils, but levels were not considered hazardous. The soils most contaminated were removed and all areas sampled were below regulatory levels.

Slight changes, additions to, or a new internal emergency evacuation plan may need to be developed if multi-family residential units are built on the property, or if approval is received to develop a day care, church, or nursing home facility.

Community Impact

Development according to the current zoning of this property as Residential Multifamily – Restricted would raise the human population density in the immediate area, compared to its current vacant state. Social structure of the community may slightly change, and the community income may change, due to the property being inhabited, rather than vacant. Industrial activity is likely to temporarily increase due to the remodeling of existing improvements or demolition and new facility construction. More residential units will increase the traffic flow in the immediate area, but would not be significant in the overall Billings Heights.

Taxes

FWP paid \$6,269 in property taxes in 1999, similar to private party taxation. The Region 5 Old Headquarters buildings are old and in poor condition. New facilities, if built by the new owner, may provide higher tax income to Yellowstone County, but would be dependent on the structures placed on the property.

Public Services, Utilities

Assuming the new owners will develop the property with single or multi-family residential units, there will be an increased need for governmental services such as: fire & police protection, water supply, sewer and solid waste disposal. The property does have all major utilities available including city sewer, however the existing septic lines are still used. A large facility may use a significant amount of energy, particularly natural gas or electricity used for heating during winter months.

The FWP Region 5 Old Headquarters tract contains no **roads**. The property includes short driveways to residential parking areas and the main paved parking lot for the vacant office building and storage buildings.

River Network will be selling this tract on the open market. Based on the current zoning, revenue for the sale by fee title, may come from a private individual, private group or a public entity. This revenue will be used by River Network to recover funds used to purchase the Alberton Gorge River Corridor from NorthWestern Energy.

Future maintenance costs will be incurred by the new owners; costs would be dependent upon the facilities retained, repaired or newly constructed on the property.

FWP does not collect revenue from the parcel.

Aesthetics & Recreation

Minor changes to the area can be expected by simply having the entire parcel actively used and inhabited. Many residential developers would leave the larger landscaping, such as trees and large bushes to provide some privacy, aesthetic and scenic character to the property. Development of the property in a manner that coincides with current area development could add to the aesthetic value of the area, in that after twelve years of vacancy, the facilities are becoming tattered and dilapidated. This site no longer provides the recreational or tourism opportunities that it did as a Fish, Wildlife & Parks Headquarters - the hub for regional hunting, fishing, and parks information. The sale of this tract will not affect a wild and scenic river, trail or wilderness area. The site does not offer any formal public recreation purpose; an occasional skateboarder or young bicyclist may use the parking area. It is unlikely that recreational opportunities will increase after purchase by a private party.

Cultural & Historical Resources

This property has some nostalgia as an old pheasant farm, though few remnants remain to indicate its past use. This site does not contain any religious or sacred uses. FWP has contacted the SHPO regarding the transfer of the site and documented (photos, etc) any

historic remnants on the site. This is not considered an undertaking for FWP due to the lack of historical significant remains of the old pheasant farm.

Evaluation of Mitigation or other Control Measures

River Network has agreed to re-convey this land to recover funds invested for the Alberton Gorge recreation corridor.

The City of Billings will oversee and approve/disapprove of plans, rezoning, or subdivision proposed by the future owner.