April 23, 2019

RE: Availability of a Draft Environmental Assessment for an Amendment to Operating Permit 00180, Located in Golden Valley County

Dear Reader:

Lawrence Voise (Voise) has submitted an application to amend Operating Permit No. 00180. Under the operating permit, Voise produces sand stone rock for landscaping and masonry purposes. The quarry is located on private land in portions of Section 11, Township 5 North, Range 18 East in Golden Valley County, approximately 11 miles southwest of Ryegate, Montana.

The proposed amendment would increase the permitted area from 70 to 136 acres. The area of disturbance would increase from 20 to 30 acres. Voise would continue to use an excavator, skidder, loader, and dozer to expose and remove the sandstone rock down to a depth of 20 feet.

Copies of the draft environmental assessment (EA) can be reviewed at DEQ offices at 1520 E. 6th Ave., in Helena, MT. The comment period on the draft EA will end on May 24, 2019. The draft EA will also be posted on the DEQ web page: www.deq.mt.gov . For information on the project contact Herb Rolfes at 406-444-3841.

Sincerely,

Herb Rolfes
Operating Permit Section Supervisor
Hard Rock Mining Bureau
Department of Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 200901 Helena, MT 59620 -0901
(406) 444-3841 or e-mail at hrolfes@mt.gov

File 00180.8
00180_Lawrence Voise/Public Involvement/00180_2019_04_23_Dear Reader

Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Air, Energy, & Mining Division
Hard Rock Mining Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

COMPANY NAME: Lawrence Voise
OPERATING PERMIT: Operating Permit #00180 and SMES #53-011
LOCATION: North East ¼, West ½ of Section 11, Township 5 North, Range 18 East
Latitude: 46.198926 **Longitude:** -109.249553
COUNTY: Golden Valley County
PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: FEDERAL___STATE _ PRIVATE _ X _

TYPE AND PURPOSE OF PROPOSED ACTION:

Background:
Lawrence Voise (Voise) has applied for an operating permit modification to include 136 additional acres, including the current Small Miner Exclusion Statement (SMES) #53-011 acreage, into Operating Permit #00180.

Analysis Area: The Operating Permit and SMES sites are located in Golden Valley County: Section 11, Township 5 North, Range 18 East. The combined site is located approximately 10.6 miles south of Barber, MT. From Barber, head south on South Barber Road. Turn west onto Seig Road. Travel on Seig Road until coming to the intersection with Haase Road. Turn south on Haase Road. Haase Road curves to the west and the site is on the northwest side of the road beyond the curve. The location of the Voise operating permit site is shown in Figure 1.

Site Description:
The site is located at the top of a small ridge which drains to the north. Voise acquired one of the multiple quarries that was part of Operating Permit #00170 (issued on July 10, 2007) and issued to Voise as Operating Permit #00180 on April 20, 2010. Voise has mined dimension stone at least part of every year since then. The site has total area of 70 permitted acres with 19.8 acres permitted for disturbance. The location of Operating Permit #00180 is labelled the Barber Pit in Figure 2. Voise also has SMES 53-011 (issued on July 23, 2010) which is adjacent to the Barber Pit. On November 15, 2017 DEQ issued a violation letter to Voise with notification that the area mined under the SMES no longer qualified for an exclusion from an operating permit because Voise was processing SMES material at facilities located at the operating permit site. The SMES needs to be operated as a separate entity or be incorporated into Operating Permit #00180. On February 2, 2018 Voise submitted an amendment to Operating Permit #00180 (Amendment 001) to add acreage to the permit and to include the two disturbance areas that were being mined under SMES #53-011. The two disturbance areas created under SMES #53-011 are referred to as the Block Quarry and the Middle Quarry and are shown on Figure 2.

The Express Pipeline runs through the permit area. The Express Pipeline traverses the State of Montana running from Canada to Wyoming and carries crude oil from Alberta to Casper, Wyoming. No mining disturbance can occur within 100 feet of the pipeline.

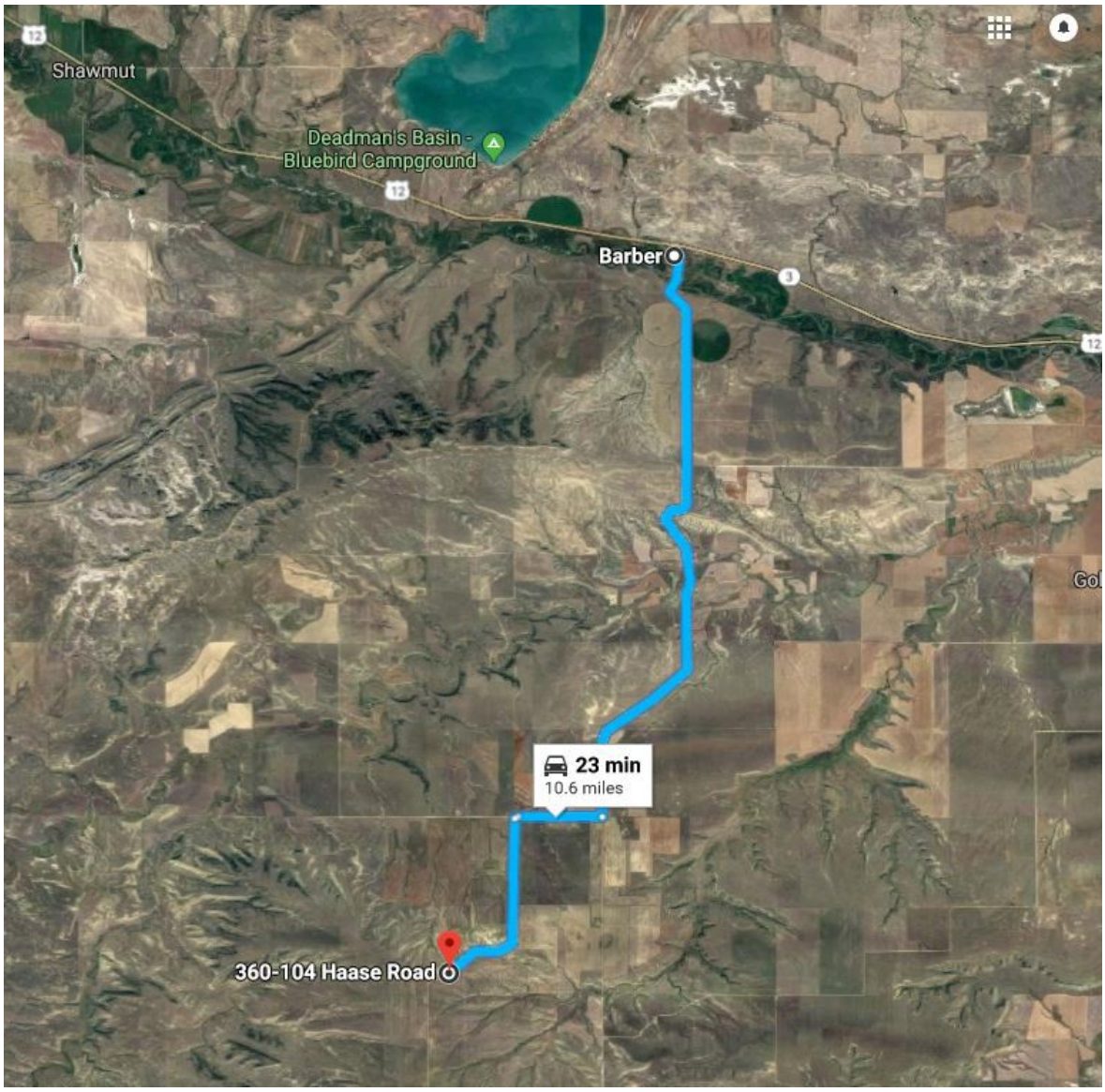

Figure 1: Voise Operating Permit Ste in Relation to the Town of Barber, MT

With Amendment# 001, Voise would add 136 acres to Operatming Permit #00180. The amendment would increase the total permit area to 206 acres. The permitted disturbance area would increase by 17.4 acres, for a total of 37.2 acres.

Table 1. Amendment# 001 Acreage Table

Permit Component	**Current**	**Amendment #001**	**TOTAL**
Permit Area	70 acres	136 acres	206 acres
Permitted Disturbance	*19.8 acres	^17.4 acres	37.2 acres

**Permitted Disturbance from 2017 Annual Report.*
^Includes SMES 53-011 and proposed 5-year expansion disturbance.

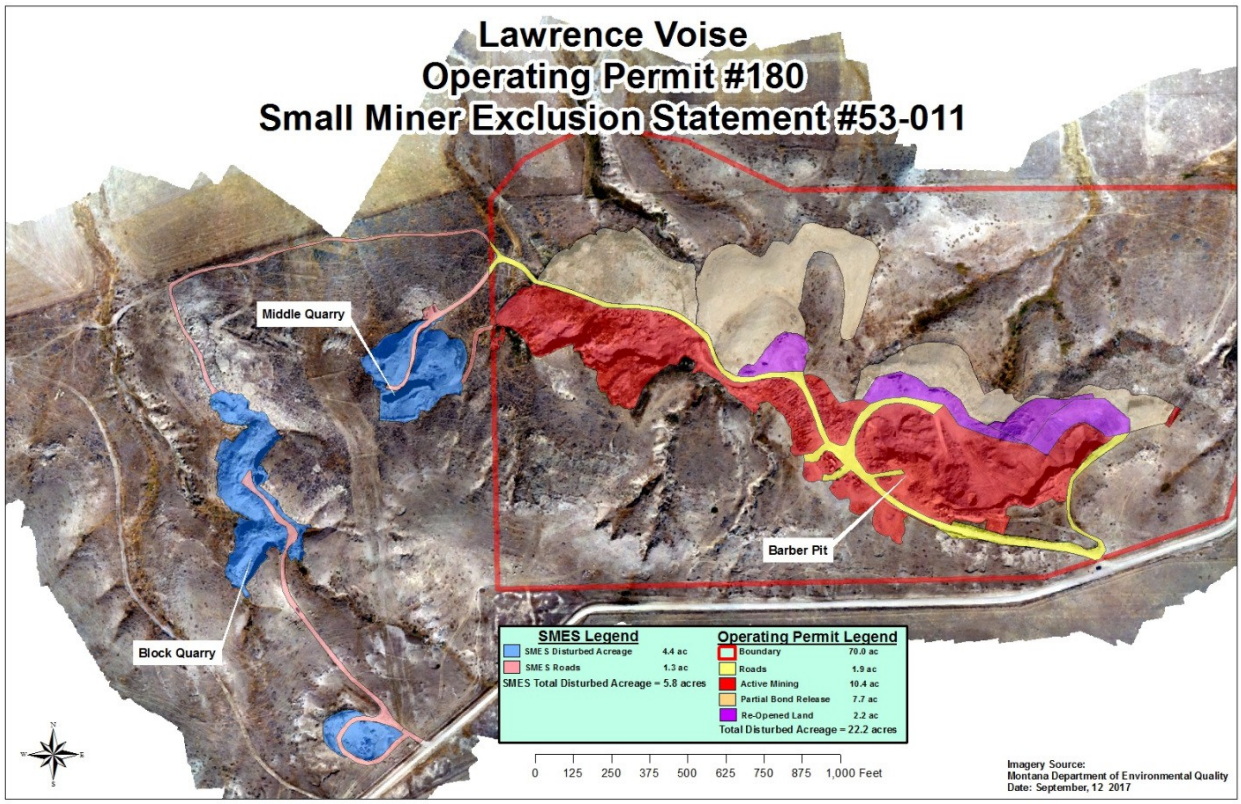

Figure 2: Existing Operating Permit #00180 and SMES #53-001.

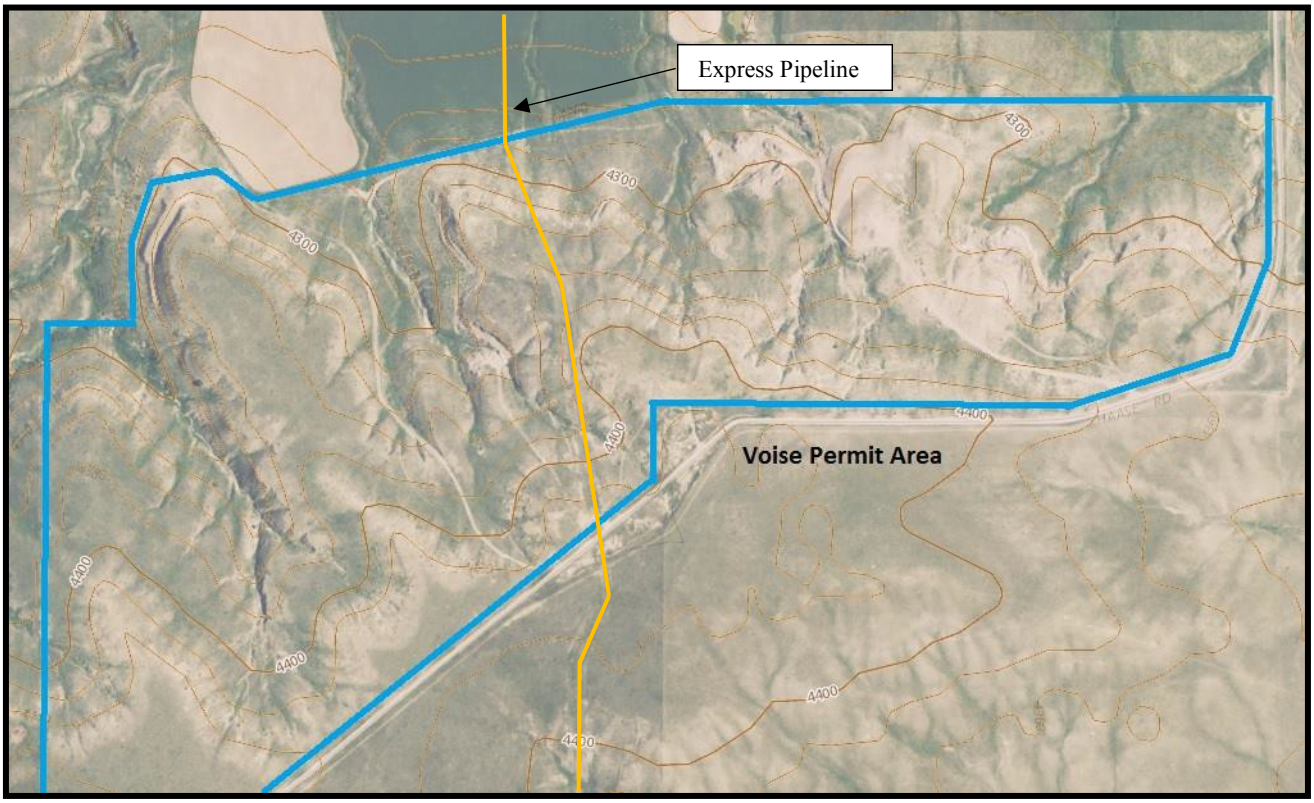

Figure 3. Topography and Location of the Express Pipeline in Relation to the Proposed

Operating Permit Boundary

Scope of Activity at the combined Operating Permit #00180 and SMES #53-011 site:
Activities at the amended operating permit site would be a continuance of current mining practices. Quarry areas would be excavated from 0 to 20 feet to access suitable rock resources. Soil and overburden would be removed to expose the rock for removal and hauling to the landing area. Soil would be stored in berms (bordering the quarry areas) or stockpiled. At the landing area, rock would be sorted and stacked on pallets for loading onto flatbed semi-trailer trucks.

Various rock types would be separately stockpiled throughout the quarry and landing area. The stockpiling method would provide the operator with the ability to fill customer orders from existing stockpiles.

Soil would be stripped 10 feet ahead of any disturbance. The salvaged soil would be stockpiled separately from overburden stockpiles.

Duration of Activity:
The proposed amendment would extend the life of mine by approximately 25 years.

Personnel and Equipment:
On average two loaded trucks per week would leave the site. Hours of operation would be from 8 am to 7 pm, Monday through Thursday, during the summer months. Weekend hours (Friday through Sunday), if needed, would be from 7 am to 3 pm. A crew of three to four employees would be employed.

Access:
The quarry access roads leave Haase Road and enter the quarry site from the south. The entire permit area is located on private land owned by the Voise family. The area is fenced and gated to prevent public access.

Water Management:
Water required for dust control will be hauled in from off-site. No sustained groundwater has been encountered to date. Quarry roads and excavations are designed to drain internally. Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be employed to prevent erosion and overland flow from leaving the mine site. The BMPs would include: ditching, rip rap, berms, sediment basins, and concurrent reclamation of disturbed areas.

If significant groundwater is encountered during excavation, DEQ would be notified of its presence and the area would be backfilled to prevent ponding or erosion. Accumulation of stagnant water in the development area, to the extent that it serves as a host or breeding ground for mosquitoes or other disease-bearing or noxious insect life, would not be allowed. Sediment basins, if used, would be developed to handle a 24-hour, 10-year precipitation event and would be equipped with spillways in case of overflow. All storm water would be contained on site. No release of storm water is planned. Seeding would be done on all disturbances to reduce erosion and runoff potential. The seeding areas would include haul road slopes, diversion ditches, and berms.

Water Protection:

Voise would take appropriate measures to protect surface water from deterioration of quality and quantity that could be caused by mining and reclamation activities. Any fuel or petroleum products that reach state waters, or that total greater than 25 gallons, would be reported to DEQ. All equipment, facilities, and disturbances would be kept at least 100 feet from the typical high-water mark of drainage ways, except at approved crossings. Any accidental spills from equipment operating at the site would be contained with spill kits that would be kept onsite.

RECLAMATION PLAN:
The post mine land use would be grazing and establishment of native grassland. The access roads and landing area would be left post mine for landowner use. All other mining disturbances would be graded to match the surrounding terrain at a slope of 3:1 or less, soiled, and seeded. At least three inches of soil would be placed on graded slopes. Seeding would take place in the spring or fall with approved species, with the seed harrowed, raked, and tracked into the ground immediately after seeding.

Table 2. Disturbance Areas and Reclamation Method

Disturbance	Reclamation Method
Quarry Areas	Stockpiled overburden would be used to backfill the quarry. Soil from stockpiles or berms directly adjacent to the area being reclaimed would be placed around the quarry. Disturbed areas would be graded to match the surrounding terrain. There would be a change in post mine contours compared to pre-mine contours in some areas.
Overburden/Ore Stockpiles	The area would be ripped and seeded. There would be no soil or overburden replacement necessary. There would be no change from pre-mine contours
Quarry Roads	Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) safety berms would be constructed from soil and/or overburden. Compacted roads would be ripped prior to soil berms being pulled back over the road and seeded.
Sediment Control Structures	Sediment control structures would be graded to match existing contours, soil would be placed, and seed would be added.
Parking/Landing Area	Parking/landing areas would be left for post mine use by the landowner.
Access Roads	Access roads would be left for post mine use by the landowner.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL PHYSICAL AND BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS:

1. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE
Are soils present which are fragile, erosive, susceptible to compaction, or unstable? Are there unusual or unstable geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?

The proposed permit area is underlain by the Judith River Formation, which dates back 75-80 million years. This formation consists of mudstone, sandstone, and siltstone. There are also alluvium deposits in the area. No asbestiform or sulfide rock are expected. There are no unusual or unstable geologic features or special reclamation considerations. Soils in the area are moderately fragile with poor soil quality and low vegetative cover.

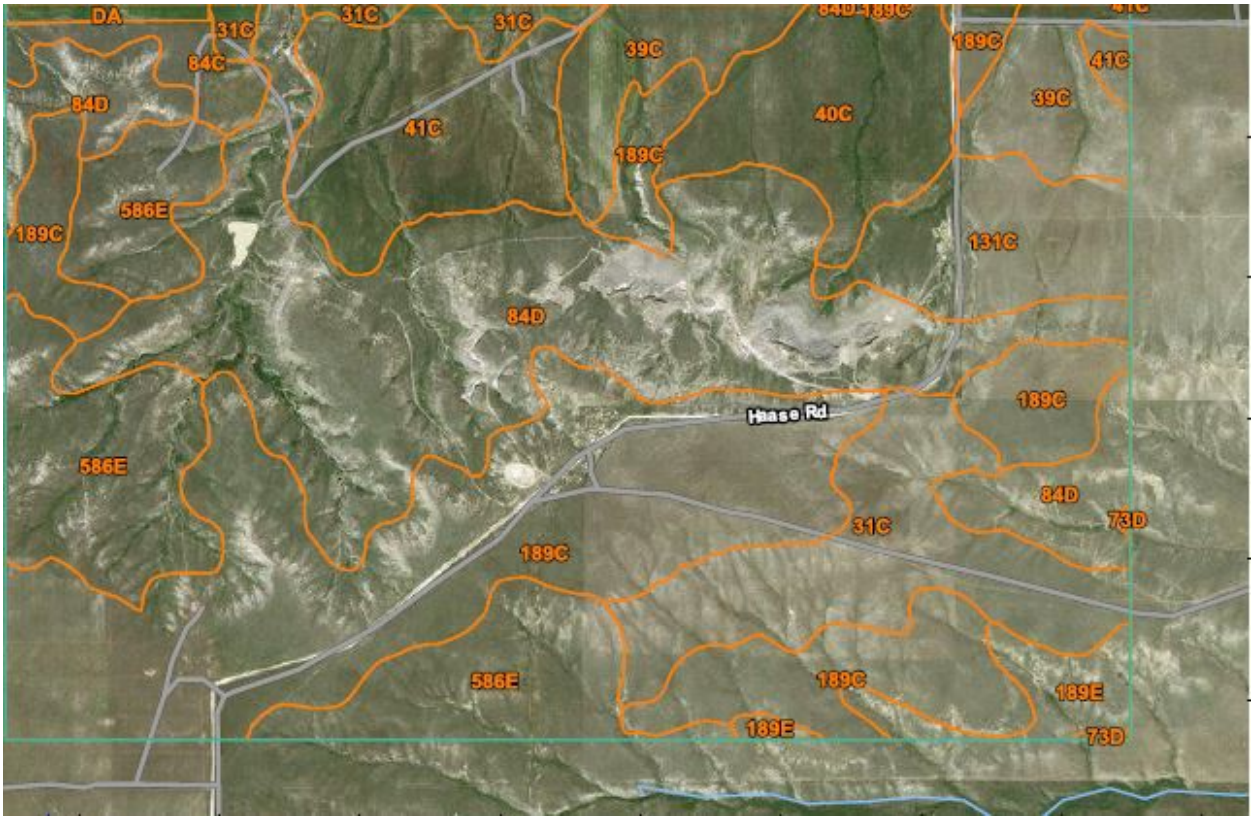

Figure 4: Soils Map for for the Voise Permit and Amendment Area

84D—Cabbart-Yawdim-
Badland complex, 4 to 35 percent slopes.
Typical Profile:
A - 0 to 3 inches: loam
B - 3 to 12 inches: loam
C - 12 to 60 inches: bedrock

189C—Rentsac-Cabbart complex, 2 to 15 percent slopes
Typical Profile
A - 0 to 2 inches: fine sandy loam
B - 2 to 12 inches: very channery fine sandy loam

R - 12 to 60 inches: bedrock

Direct Impacts:
Soil horizons would be disrupted. The impacts would be minor, as salvaged overburden and/or soil would be replaced, contoured to match surrounding topography as much as possible, and then seeded.

Secondary Impacts:
Secondary impacts consisting of erosion would be minimal given the limited precipitation for the area and the rocky conditions that are prevalent at the site.

2. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY, AND DISTRIBUTION

Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?

There are no important surface or groundwater resources present in the proposed permit area.

The closest well is located approximately 600 feet west of the proposed amended permit boundary. The well has a static water level measuring 248 feet below ground surface. Mining in the current disturbance area has encountered seeps that are expressed along the highwall. The seeps have resulted in ponding in the quarry pits. As of 2018, the pits have been filled in and there is positive drainage to areas where storm water is retained by man-made features.

Water required for dust control will be hauled in from off-site.

Direct Impacts:
To date, no groundwater, other than very small perched water bearing units, have been encountered and no other grwoundwater is expected. The use of BMPs to control storm water runoff and spill kits would prevent sediments and/or spilled petroleum products from leaving the site. There would be no direct impacts to water quality, quantity, and distribution to surface or groundwater as neither would water resource would be encountered.

Secondary Impacts:
Secondary impacts would be minimal due to the lack of surface and groundwater in the area and use of BMPs to control storm water that occurs.

Runoff from precipitation events would flow to nearby grassed coulees along natural pathways.

3. AIR QUALITY:

Would pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the operation influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?

Minimal particulates would be produced or become airborne during operations. Fugitive dust would be controlled by spraying water on working surfaces. The operator would be expected to maintain compliance with Montana's law regarding the need to take reasonable precautions to control airborne particulate matter according to the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 17.8.308. Gaseous products of combustion (oxides of nitrogen and carbon monoxide) would result from this operation, specifically from gas and diesel fuel-fired equipment.

The quantity of water needed to be used for dust control is dependent on environmental conditions such as rainfall, wind, and overall surface conditions.

Direct Impacts:
Some exhaust fumes and dust would be produced by on-site equipment. Dust control would be employed, as necessary, to meet particulate emission requirements. Blowing dust would be minimal as roads would be sprayed with water, as necessary, to meet the reasonable precautions requirements. The level of gaseous emissions from the equipment being operated at the site would be minimal due to the small number of fuel-fired equipment in operation at the site. Overall air quality impacts would be minimal.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts due to the scope of the proposed project.

4. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
Would vegetative communities be significantly impacted? Are any rare plants or cover types present?

The surrounding area consists of dryland grazing. The Montana Natural Heritage Program Land Cover Summary (MNHP 2017) identified the following types of land cover near the permit area;

- Human Land Use Agriculture-Cultivated Crops,
- Grassland Systems Lowland/Prairie Grassland-Great Plains Mixed Grass Prairie
- Recently Disturbed or Modified Introduced Vegetation-Introduced Upland Vegetation (Annual and Biennial Forb land),
- Shrubland, Steppe and Savanna Systems Sagebrush Steppe-Big Sagebrush Steppe.

No rare or endangered vegetation has been found at the site according to the natural heritage review.

The Golden Valley County Weed Control District, Noxious Weed Management Form and Agreement was signed on July 2, 2018, and applies to the proposed amended operating permit.

Direct Impacts:
Due to the nature of the proposed operation and sparseness of vegetation, impacts to vegetative cover, quantity, and quality would be minor because the disturbed areas would be reclaimed concurrently as an area is quarried out and because the amount of disturbance would be relatively minor. No threatened or endangered vegetation species have been noted in the area. If any threatened or endangered vegetation were to be encountered, work would stop immediately, the area marked off and secured, and the appropriate agencies notified.

Secondary Impacts:
Minor secondary impacts would result from the propagation of noxious weeds. The Golden Valley County Weed Control District, Noxious Weed Management Form and Agreement dated July 2, 2018, would be applicable to this operation. In addition, concurrent reclamation would be completed. The secondary impacts would be minor.

5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?

No threatened or endangered species were identified in the search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP 2017). The only species of special concern with suitable habitat, identified in the proposed amendment area is the Greater Sage-Grouse. However, the permit area is not within the core or general habitat areas as mapped (Sage Grouse Core Area and General Habitat Map) by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program and therefore does not fall within their purview. Therefore, no special precautions or needs are required.

Direct Impacts:
With the sparse vegetation and rocky terrain, little to no impacts to wildlife are expected. To date, no impacts have been noted from the ongoing operations at the site. If any threatened or endangered species were to be encountered, work would stop immediately and the appropriate agencies notified. No impacts to species of special concern are expected.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts due to the limited scope of the proposed activities and the fact that concurrent reclamation would take place.

6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Species of special concern?

The surrounding areas have been dryland grazed and quarried under Operating Permit #00180 and SMES #53-011.

Direct Impacts:
No unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources have been identified. The proposed activity at the site would be a continuation of mining that has been occurring under an operating permit since July 10, 2007 (then listed as Operating Permit #00170 and now under Operating Permit #00180) and an exclusion statement (SMES #53-011) since July 23, 2010. As there are no threatened or endangered species, wetlands, or species of special concern with suitable habitat, aside from the greater sage-grouse, in the project area, direct impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources would not occur.

Regarding sage-grouse, the permit area is not within the core or general habitat areas as mapped (Sage Grouse Core Area and General Habitat Map) by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program and therefore does not fall within their purview. Therefore, no special precautions or needs are required.

Secondary Impacts:
There are no wetlands, threatened or endangered species, or species of special concern in the project area. No other unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are present in the area. There would be no secondary impacts from the propose action.

7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?

There are no signs of historical or archaeological activities at this site. The State Historic and Preservation Office (SHPO) was contacted and no sites were identified. No further action was recommended at this time by the SHPO.

Direct Impacts:
No historical, archaeological, or other cultural sites have been identified. There would be no impacts to historical or archaeological sites. If cultural resources were encountered during quarrying, mining activities would stop and the discovery reported to the SHPO immediately.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts as no historical or archaeological sites exist at the site.

8. AESTHETICS:

Is the proposed operation on a prominent topographic feature? Would it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Would there be excessive noise or light?

Direct Impacts:
The nearest resident to the site belongs to Lawrence Voise, the operating permit amendment applicant. The next closest neighbor is about one mile to the east.

Noise and lights would remain the same as under current operations. The direct impacts to aesthetics would be minimal due to the location in a rural area and the site being partially shielded by rock ridges.

Secondary Impacts:
Secondary impacts would be minimal as there are few residences in the area. No impacts to passing traffic are anticipated.

9. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Would the proposed operation use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that would affect the expansion?

The operation uses its own power sources from on-board equipment engines. There is no commercial electrical power to the site. There are no sources of water at the site.

Direct Impacts:
This site is not connected to the power grid, nor is there on-site generation of power. The demands on environmental resources of land, water, air, or energy would be minor because the proposed operations would be similar to those demands that are currently taking place. Water required for dust control will be hauled in from off-site.

Secondary Impacts:
Secondary impacts would be minimal due to the relatively small scale of the operations and the relatively remote location of the permit area.

10. IMPACTS ON OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Are there other activities nearby that would affect the proposed operation?

There are no other activities in the area that would affect the operation or that would be affected by the operation. Aside from the current quarry operation, the surrounding land use is livestock grazing.

Direct Impacts:
There are no known other industrial land uses in the area. Recreational activities would remain the same as in the surrounding area. The impacted land is privately owned, so no recreational activities would change from this action. No impacts to other environmental resources are expected. Additional impacts on other environmental resources are not expected to occur.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts due to the relatively small scale of the operation and the relatively remote location of the permit area. The current action would result in continued mining.

11. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Would this proposed operation add to health and safety risks in the area?

This proposed amendment would not add to health and safety risks in the area.

Direct Impacts:
Currently, some safety risks exist at the active mining site, as does the potential for health risks. No additional impacts to human health and safety are expected from the proposed action. The number of employees is expected to remain the same as as current operations, as are traffic density and patterns. The proposed quarry is on private land with fencing and signage restricting access. The overall impacts to human health and safety are minor.

Secondary Impacts:
Secondary impacts would be minor due to the relatively small scale of the operations and the relatively remote location of the site.

12. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Would the proposed operation add to or alter these activities?

Adverse impacts would not be expected on any industrial, commercial, agricultural, and/or production in the area. DEQ searched for other projects occurring, or under concurrent consideration near the proposed operation, and none were found.

Direct Impacts:
There are no other activities, including industrial, commercial, or agriculture operations in the area. No direct impacts to industrial, commercial, or agriculturalactivities would result from this action.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts due to the relatively small scale and the relatively remote location of the site.

13. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Would the proposed operation create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, what is the estimated number?

The workforce is not expected to either increase or decrease as a resultof the proposed amendment.

Direct Impacts:
All activities would be conducted by current employees. No additional work force is anticipated. If market conditions fluctuate, the work force may be marginally increased or decreased. No direct impacts to the quantity and distribution of employment would result from this action.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts from the proposed action, as the current workforce would be maintained.

14. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Would the proposed operation create or eliminate tax revenue?

The mining of rock products provides tax revenue to local government and state government. As a business in Montana, some income generated from the operation will be subject to corresponding taxes.

Direct Impacts:
The production and work force is not anticipated to increase from this project, therefore, no change in tax revenues would be anticipated. The overall impact of the operation on tax revenues is minor.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts due to the relatively small scale of the operation and the relatively remote nature of the proposed site.

15. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Would substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Would other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc.) be needed?

The proposed amendment is on private land and operations would be a continuance of current mining activities. No overall increase in traffic or demands for other governmental services are anticipated.

Direct Impacts:
Base demands for government services currently exist at the site. Mining activities are ongoing at the site with no increase in employment or production anticipated from this project. As such, no increase in traffic or other demands for government services would be anticipated.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts due to the relatively small scale and nature of this proposed action.

16. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?

The land is privately owned and is being used for dryland grazing. There are no known zoning or other restrictions in place.

Direct Impacts:
No environmental or zoning plans are in effect; therefore, no impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals would result from this action.The proposed action is a relatively minor change in mining operations and would not create a need for a new environmental plan and goal.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals due to the relatively small scale of the operation and the relatively remote location of the site.

17. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?

The surrounding land use is dryland grazing. No wilderness or recreational activities are within or near the proposed operations.

Direct Impacts:
The area is located on private property with active mining taking place. The area is not near, nor does it access, recreational or wilderness areas. As a result, no impacts to access or quality of recreational and wilderness activities would result from this proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts due to the relatively small scale and relatively remote location of the proposed project.

18. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Would the proposed operation add to the population and require additional housing?

All activities would be a continuance of current practices using the existing workforce. No additional housing would be needed.

Direct Impacts:
The project area is currently in operation with no change in workforce anticipated. No direct impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would result from this action.

Secondary Impacts:
No secondary impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur because no new jobs would be created and no new housing would be required under this action.

19. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?

All operations are on private land which has been dryland grazed for many years. To date, no disruption of native or community lifestyles have been noted.

Direct Impacts:
Due to the location of these operations, and the fact that no additional employment is anticipated, no disruption of native or traditional lifestyles would be expected.

Secondary Impacts:
No secondary impacts to social structures and mores would occur due to the relatively small scale of the operation and the relatively remote location of the project.

20. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
Would the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?

The surrounding areas are being used for dryland grazing. There would be no shift in unique qualities of the area due to the proposed action.

Direct Impacts:
There are no unique qualities that would be affected by the proposed operation. The quarry sites are used for dryland farming and have limited use. No impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity would result from the project.

Secondary Impacts:
There would be no secondary impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity due to the relatively small scale of the operation, the relatively remote location of the site, and the nature of the proposed project.

21. PRIVATE PROPERTY IMPACTS:
Are we regulating the use of private property under a regulatory statute adopted pursuant to the police power of the state? (Property management, grants of financial assistance, and the exercise of the power of eminent domain are not within this category.) If not, no further analysis is required. Does the proposed regulatory action restrict the use of the regulated person's private property? If not, no further analysis is required. Does the agency have legal discretion to impose or not impose the proposed restriction or discretion as to how the restriction would be imposed? If not, no further analysis is required. If so, the agency must determine if there are alternatives that would reduce, minimize or eliminate the restriction on the use of private property, and analyze such alternatives.

The operation is on private land. Other than the requirements of the Metal Mine Reclamation Act with regards to quarry operations and reclamation, no impacts or restrictions would be placed on said land.

22. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Due to the nature of the proposed activities, and the limited operation, no further direct or secondary impacts would be anticipated from this proposed operation.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:
In addition to the proposed action, DEQ also considered the "no action" alternative. The "no action" alternative would deny the issuance of the amendment to Operating Permit #00180. Voise would lack the authority to continue to quarry rock beyond what is allowed under the previously approved operating permit. Any potential impacts that would be authorized under the amendment application would not occur. In addition, Voise would be required to reclaim a portion of the operations pertaining to SMES #53-011 and discontinue any use of the operating permit site for SMES operations. However, DEQ does not consider the "no action" alternative to be appropriate because Voise has demonstrated a willingness to comply with all applicable rules and regulations in the submitted proposal and revisions, as required for amendment approval. The no action

alternative forms the baseline from which impacts of the proposed action can be measured.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:
Scoping for this proposed action consisted of internal and external efforts to identify substantive issues and/or concerns related to the proposed operation. Internal scoping consisted of internal review of the environmental assessment document by DEQ staff. A legal notice concerning the proposed action was published on September 10, 2018. Additional external efforts included queries to the following websites/databases/personnel:

- Montana Cadastral Mapping Program
- USDA NRCS Soil Survey
- Montana Natural Heritage Program

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURSIDICTION:
None.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS:
This environmental review is considering the proposed amended operation as submitted by Voise. The proposed amendment area would be located on private land. Impacts from this amendment would be minimal and the site would be fully reclaimed as soon as possible after the conclusion of operations in quarried out areas. The proposed operation would not contribute to any negative effects in the area. DEQ searched, but did not find information regarding any other federal, state, or private operations within the recent past or proposed for the near future that would add to the cumulative effects of impacts related to this operation.

NEED FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS
When determining whether the preparation of an environmental impact statement is needed, DEQ is required to consider the significance criteria set forth in the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 17.4.608, which are as follows:

1. The severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the occurrence of the impact;
2. The probability that the impact would occur if the proposed action occurs; or conversely, reasonable assurance in keeping with the potential severity of an impact that the impact would not occur;
3. Growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting aspects of the impact, including the relationship or contribution of the impact to cumulative impacts;
4. The quantity and quality of each environmental resource or value that would be affected, including the uniqueness and fragility of those resources and values;
5. The importance to the state and to society of each environmental resource or value that would be affected;
6. Any precedent that would be set because of an impact of the proposed action that would commit the department to future actions with significant impacts or a decision in principle about such future actions; and
7. Potential conflict with local, state, or federal laws, requirements, or formal plans.

Due to the level of disturbance and operational dependence of the SMES quarry sites on the operating permit facilities, the applicant proposed that the amendment include the SMES sites into Operating Permit #00180. The severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the occurrence of the impacts associated with the proposed activities would be limited. Voise is proposing to disturb up to 37.2 total acres, with a life of mine of about 25 years. The quarry

activities would result in removal of rock product material. The proposed permitted area is 206 acres with 37.2 acres permitted for disturbance.

While the area is rocky with little soil, all salvageable overburden and soils would be used for reclamation. The area would be seeded after soil is replaced.

Approval of the project would mean continuation of mining at the site. The activities would include removing and stockpiling any available soils/overburden for reclamation, then exposing the underlying layer of marketable rock. The exposed rock would then be mined, moved, prepared for sale, and stored for prospective customers to view. After an area has been mined out, any salvaged soils and/or overburden would be replaced and contoured to match the surrounding lands, and then seeded with the approved seed mix.

The land proposed to be disturbed does not contain unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources. The surface disturbance would be concurrently reclaimed to the extent possible. DEQ does not believe that the proposed activities by Voise would have any growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting aspects.

Due to the nature of the sites, soils are limited. Salvaged and stockpiled soil would be laid back at closure. The proposed activities may temporarily displace individual animals. Displacement of individual animals would likely have already occurred due to current mining at the site. This impact, however, would only occur during actual operations. There are no federally listed threatened or endangered species, or species of special concern, with the exception of the greater sage-grouse. The permit area is outside of sage grouse core and general habitat areas, as mapped by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.

As discussed in this Environmental Assessment, DEQ has not identified any long-term or significant impacts associated with the proposed activities on any environmental resource.

Issuance of an approval to Voise does not set any precedent that commits DEQ to future actions with significant impacts or a decision in principle about such future actions. If Voise submits another application to conduct additional mining, or another operating permit application, DEQ is not committed to issuing those authorizations. DEQ would conduct an environmental review for any subsequent authorizations sought by Voise that would require such a review. DEQ would make a permitting decision based on the criteria set forth in the Metal Mine Reclamation Act. Issuance of an approval to Voise does not set a precedent for DEQ's review of other applications, including the level of environmental review. The decision of the level of environmental review is made based on case-specific considerations of the criteria set forth in ARM 17.4.608.

Finally, DEQ does not believe the proposed activities by Voise would conflict with any local, state, or federal laws, requirements, or formal plans.Based on a consideration of the criteria set forth in ARM 17.4.608, the proposed operation is not predicted to significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of environmental review under the Montana Environmental Protection Act.

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Signature Date

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