

**TARKIO SECTION 35
TRACT C**

TARKIO SECTION 35 - TRACT C

Introduction

The FS owns all of Section 35 near Tarkio, Township 15 North, Range 25 West. This section is administered by the Lolo NF. Disposal of the Tarkio property was reviewed for consistency with guidelines for land exchanges included in the Lolo National Forest's 1986 Land and Resource Management Plan, or Forest Plan. Appendix I of the Forest Plan contains general direction for evaluating land ownership adjustments for the Lolo National Forest. The Alberton Gorge Land Exchange proposal to dispose of isolated NFS lands in the Lower Tarkio and Tarkio Section 35 tracts is consistent with these guidelines. Private and state-owned lands surround these federal tracts.

As proposed, the Forest Service will transfer most of the acreage of the Tarkio Section 35 tract to River Network through the Alberton Gorge Land Exchange. The sale of this tract and the MFWP Region 5 Old Headquarters will help River Network recover costs incurred to purchase the Gorge. In the FS scoping document published in June 2000 (the FWP Alberton Gorge Land Exchange Draft EA), it was projected that River Network would receive and subsequently sell 240-400 acres of Tarkio Section 35 with the likelihood that one to four home sites would be developed. However at that time, River Network acknowledged that if such "conservation-minded" buyers were not found, it was possible that the property could be purchased by other private entities for small-lot subdivision (20-acre parcels) and timber harvest.

Appraisals completed since the scoping process in 2000 now indicate that about 530 acres of land in Tarkio Section 35 will be transferred to River Network to equalize the exchange. Again, it is projected that River Network would sell this acreage to recover the value of the Alberton Gorge property. Based on the appraisal "highest and best use" determination for the property and recent patterns of land use in Mineral County, if this land were to be sold on the open market with no restrictions, the buyer would likely be a timber harvest manager/developer, who would remove a moderate amount of timber then sell or develop tracts for sale to private entities.

Wayne Marchwick, former Mineral County Planner, indicated that the 2001 Mineral County Comprehensive Plan designates this area as a low-density residential area. As such, the county would allow potential development or subdivision into twenty-acre or larger tracts in the Tarkio Section 35 area (personal communication with Sue Dalbey, September 4, 2002).

As the recipient of the Tarkio Section 35 land, River Network has undertaken two significant measures to mitigate or avoid potential impacts from this kind of residential subdivision. First, River Network is pursuing a land exchange with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) under which the Tarkio Section 35 (and Section 34) property would transfer to that state agency to become part of DNRC's land base, which includes two adjacent sections. Through this scenario,

Tarkio Section 35 would not go into private ownership and would not be subject to private development. In return for receiving the Tarkio Section 35 acreage, DNRC would trade to River Network other DNRC Mineral County properties, which the county commission and planner have identified as desirable for private development. River Network would in turn sell these tracts to private buyers. Area residents, in commenting on the Alberton Gorge land exchange in 2000, were strongly in favor of this approach, calling for Tarkio Section 35 to be transferred to DNRC for timber management, instead of being sold to private parties for development.

River Network submitted its land exchange application to DNRC in early 2002, and in May 2003 the agency gave a preliminary go-ahead to gather public comments on the proposal through a scoping process. The overall DNRC land exchange process is expected to take another year or more, and will include numerous opportunities for public input as the proposal is fully developed, exchange parcels identified, appraisals completed, and environmental impacts determined. Ultimately, the proposed River Network-DNRC land exchange must be approved by the State Land Board.

At this early stage in the process, there is no assurance that the River Network-DNRC exchange will be successfully concluded. For this reason, this environmental assessment must analyze potential impacts to the Tarkio Section 35 tract without assuming that the land will transfer to DNRC.

River Network has agreed to apply a second mitigation measure to Tarkio Section 35 in the event that its proposed land exchange with DNRC is not successfully concluded. A June 6, 2003, letter to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Regional Supervisor Mack Long from River Network Senior Associate Ken Margolis expresses River Network's expectation that the DNRC land exchange will be successfully completed. Margolis adds, however, that River Network would have to sell the tract if the DNRC exchange fails, and he commits to the following mitigation:

“The primary purpose of this letter is to assure you that we recognize the wildlife values of the Tarkio Tract, and its unsuitability for extensive residential development. I am here promising that in the unlikely event River Network ends up selling the Tarkio Tract to a private buyer, we will insert restrictions in the deed that will restrict the use of the parcel north of the highway [Interstate 90] to timber management. For the portion of the property on the south side of the highway, we would probably need to carve out a small number of residential lots (probably between four and six) in order to get the value out of the property. We pledge to consult with your biologists to assure that the lots are situated in such a way as to minimize disturbance to wildlife. Once again, I don't believe it will come to this scenario, but I wanted to be sure that you have our pledges on these matters should the contingency situation arise.”

The FS and River Network have agreed that acreage on Tarkio Section 35 will be transferred beginning with lands in the south half of the section, proceeding into the

northeast quarter, then to the northwest quarter as necessary, until exchange values are equalized (i.e. the FS will retain certain lands in the NW¼ not needed to equalize the exchange).

The proposed amount of land transferred from federal ownership is the acreage necessary to equalize fair market property values (FMV) in the entire land exchange. In this case, the FMV that the FS will transfer to River Network (in Tarkio Sections 34 & 35 and Hebgen Cabin) will equal the FMV the FS is receiving from FWP in Frank Lake, Natural Bridge, Park Lake, and Tizer Lakes tracts. This figure, determined by appraisal, will include about 530 acres in Tarkio Section 35, excluding 51 acres of U.S. Department of Transportation land easement to accommodate Interstate 90, and thus having no contributory value. The FS, does have the option to provide a cash equalization payment of up to 25% of the federal estate value in the exchange, which could reduce the acreage transferred. A cash equalization payment of about 1.5% of the federal estate is anticipated in combination with the proposed 530 acres.

Property Description

Interstate 90 crosses the section east and west. The southern portion of the tract is accessible from adjacent Section 34. The road that accesses section 34 can be reached from the Tarkio Interstate-90 off-ramp, west under the freeway, then south approximately one mile following the old Milwaukee Railroad bed on the Tarkio River Access Road #7736 and Tarkio Railroad (RR) Grade Road #18171. Road access could be constructed to the southern portion of Tarkio Section 35 from this area.

The northern portion of Tarkio Section 35 is accessed from the Tarkio Interstate-90 off-ramp, northeast approximately 1000 feet on gravel road, east 500 feet, then south about ½ mile on a 66-foot road right-of-way for Ronck Road #18014 to reach the northwest corner of Tarkio Section 35. This road traverses the entire section from the northwest corner to the eastern border midpoint. This is part of the old Highway 10 abandoned when Interstate 90 was constructed. The FS will issue River Network legal access on this road via a perpetual easement.

Township 15 North, Range 25 West
Portion of Section 35
Mineral County
Total acreage = 530 acres

MAP 5. Tarkio Section 35

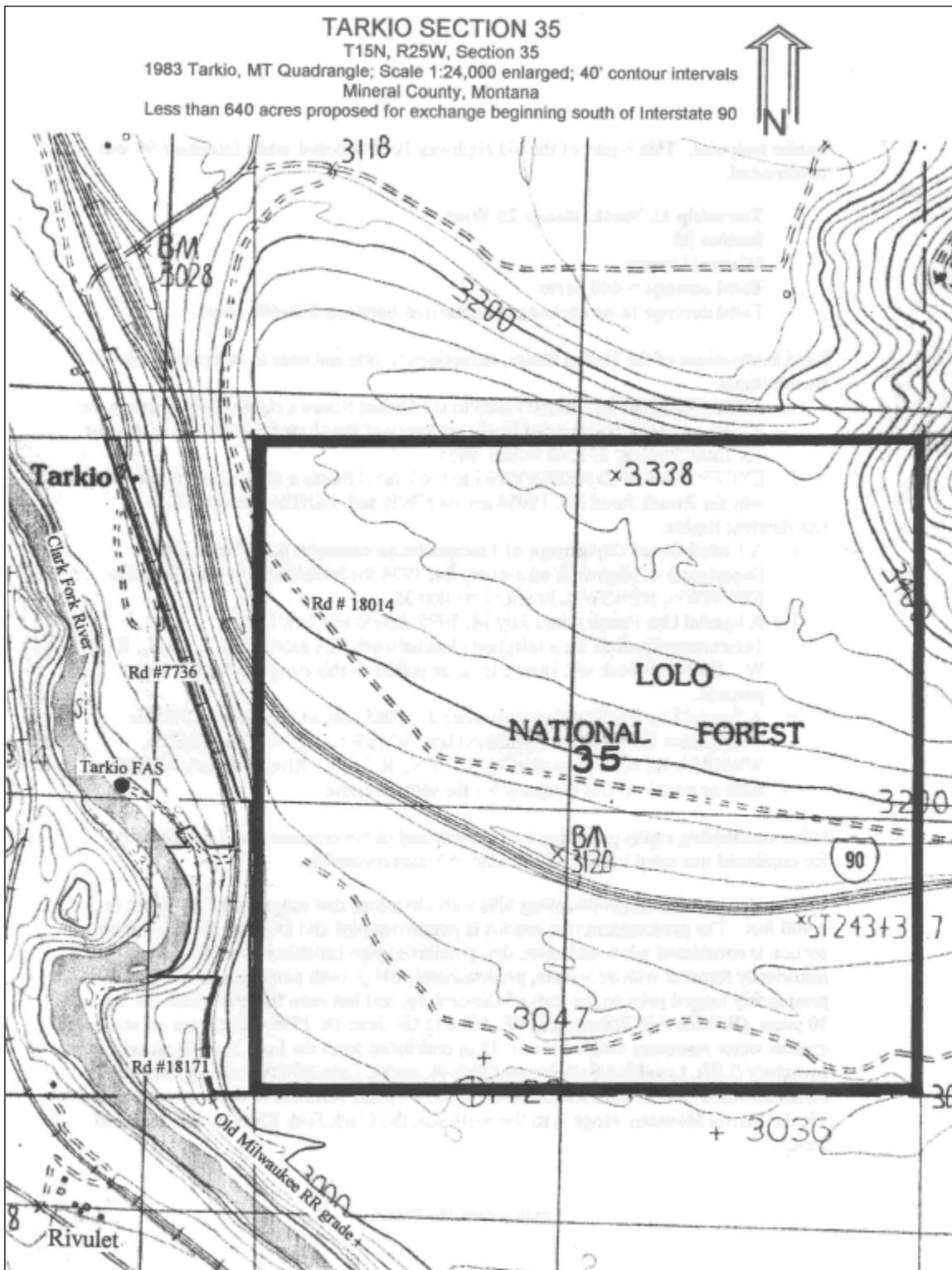
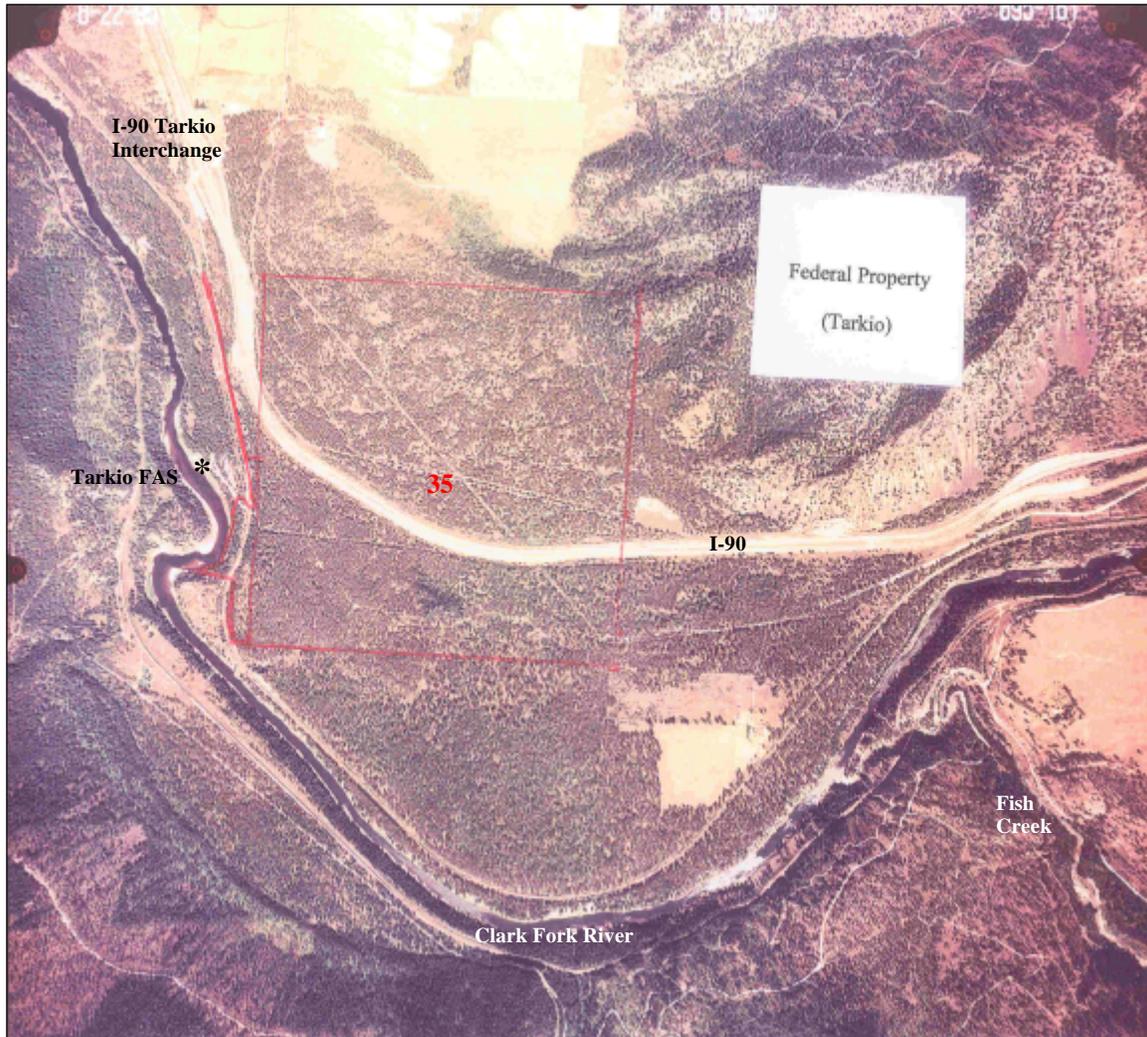


FIGURE 6. Tarkio Section 35 Aerial Photo



Tarkio Section 35 is the red square above; the Lower Tarkio tract is the irregular shape outlined in red adjacent to Section 35. Base photo provided by Appraisal Report of Federal (Tarkio) Date of Value November 7, 2000., Lee Murray Appraiser.

Land reservations of the United States, exceptions to title and uses to be recognized.

Reservations:

1. EXCEPTING AND RESERVING to the United States a right-of-way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States (Act of August 30, 1890, 26 Stat. 391; 43 U.S.C. 945).
2. EXCEPTING AND RESERVING to the United States a 66-foot road right-of-way for Ronck Road No. 18014 across NW $\frac{1}{4}$ and S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, section 35.

Outstanding Rights:

- a. A United States Department of Transportation easement issued to Montana Department of Highways on January 24, 1974 for Interstate 90 as it affects the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ section 35.
- b. A Special Use Permit dated July 14, 1995, issued to Clark Fork Telecommunications for a telephone line network, S $\frac{1}{2}$ section 35, T. 15 N., R. 25 W. River Network will issue a lease or permit to this company for the same purpose.
- c. A Special Use Permit dated November 25, 1985, issued to Missoula Electric Cooperative for a 44Kv transmission line, W $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ section 35, T. 15 N., R. 25 W. River Network will issue a lease or permit to this company for the same purpose.
- d. Touch America/AT&T has been granted permission to install a fiber optic line through the south half of Section 35 and in Section 34 along the old railroad right-of-way.

Other outstanding rights providing for roadway and utility easements will be protected for continued use upon transfer out of FS ownership.

This section consists of gentle rolling hills with elevations that range from 3,047 feet to 3,600 feet. The predominant tree species is ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. The entire section is considered a low elevation, dry, ponderosa pine benchland, which was historically forested with very open, predominately old growth ponderosa pine. It was presumably logged prior to the turn-of-the-century, and has been thinned within the last 30 years. (Wildlife AE, Effects, and BE, Mike Hillis, June 16, 1999). There are no above ground water resources within Section 35 as concluded from the Lolo Land Systems Inventory (LSI), Level 3-4 Soil Survey (Arne Rosquist, Lolo NF Hydrologist, written communication to Lisa Subcasky, June 21, 2000). Tarkio Flats lies to the north of Section 35; the Martel Mountain range is to the northeast; the Clark Fork River to the south and west.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The following analysis is based on the guidelines put forth in the Mineral County Comprehensive Development Plan (2001) identifying Tarkio Section 35 as a low density residential area qualifying for one home on each 20-acre parcel. The assessment also relies on reasonable assumptions about how other similar lands have been developed in Mineral County with input from the Mineral County Planner.

River Network has committed to mitigating many of the impacts noted here, by restricting the use of the parcel north of Interstate 90 to timber management, and convey only four to six residential lots south of the interstate.

Physical Environment

Land Resources

(**Minerals** source: Mineral Potential Report prepared for the Alberton Gorge Land Exchange, U.S. Forest Service, Region 1, Missoula, 2000.)

Mineral resources are under federal ownership with no unpatented mining claims or federal leases.

Geology, Mineralization and Mineral Activity

The Tarkio Tracts are within the Northern Rocky Mountains physiographic province which is underlain by Precambrian sedimentary rocks of the Belt Supergroup. Recent Pleistocene glacial deposits cover most of the lowlying areas. On the subject parcels, limited outcrops of Wallace and Mount Shields argillites and quartzites occur, and landforms and alluvial deposits associated with glacial activity.

Hard rock mineralization is not evident on the parcels, nor is there evidence of hard rock mineral activity. There are no mineral leases on the federal tracts and the geology is not very favorable for occurrence. Mineral materials occur on the parcel due to the glacial deposits.

Mineral Occurrence and Development Potential

The mineral potential for occurrence and development of hard rock and leasable minerals on the Tarkio parcels is rated as low to very low (Mineral rights are outstanding). Mineral materials, sand and gravel, occur on the parcel and have been exploited in the past. For these reasons, the potential for future development of sand and gravel is rated as high.

Touch America/AT&T has been granted permission to install a fiber optic line through the south half of Tarkio Section 35 and in Section 34 along the old railroad right-of-way.

Construction of access roads to individual tracts, house foundations, infrastructure such as utilities, sanitation systems and water wells, will result in disruption, displacement,

compaction, and over-covering of soil which will reduce productivity and fertility. According to the *Cultural Resource Inventory Report*, November 29, 1999, by Jennifer Eberlien, Lolo NF Archeologist, the section has had several episodes of logging as recent as 1976, and has several logging haul roads. Dispersed skidding would disrupt or displace soil, however working in the winter could mitigate the effects due to hardened ground and snow cover.

The tract is gently rolling, with no outstanding geologic or physical features that may be destroyed during construction of residential home sites and associated development, nor is the soil stability or geologic substructure anticipated to be altered. Due to the gradual slope of the tract and interference across this slope from Interstate 90, the potential development proposed is not anticipated to alter siltation, deposition or erosion patterns of the Clark Fork River. The county would examine the tract during the subdivision plan review for possible land slides, or soil instability, and could enforce specific restrictions, if necessary, to prevent exposure to ground failure in these areas (Wayne Marchwick, former Mineral County Planner, personal communication with Sue Dalbey, June 23, 2000).

Air

Post timber harvest actions may include broadcast burning, which would temporarily impact the ambient air quality. Minor and temporary amounts of dust can be expected during the construction of new roads and residential development, since typically construction occurs during dry months of the year. As part of the subdivision review, the county would likely require some type of dust abating measures. Wood smoke may increase if residences use wood stoves for heating. Occasional air inversions may cause temporary holding of wood smoke depending on the number of wood burning stoves, but the tract is high enough above the river bottom that smoke would not be expected to significantly accumulate. The County will review sanitary system and livestock restrictions during the subdivision review process (Wayne Marchwick, former Mineral County Planner, personal communication with Sue Dalbey, June 23, 2000).

No discharges are expected that will conflict with any federal or state air quality regulations. Changes in air moisture, temperature patterns, local or regional climate are unlikely from development or logging operations.

Water and Flood Plains

Lolo NF Hydrologist, Arne Rosquist, reported the following to Lisa Subcasky, FS Region 1 Realty Officer, June 21, 2000, regarding the features of Sections 34 and 35. The Lolo Land Systems Inventory (LSI), which is a Level 3-4 Soil Survey, shows Sections 34 and 35 along the Clark Fork River mapped as 13JA, 13UA and 14XA land types. These features are dry, well drained to excessively well drained river terraces and benches. The soils range from fine sandy and silty lacustrine deposits to gravelly and cobbly alluvial deposits. These high river terraces may be 50 to 500 feet above the adjacent stream channel with steep descending slopes to the river edge. These features were formed by huge glacio-fluvial processes as the last episode of continental glaciation was ending. The present Clark Fork River is a minimal remnant of the ancient floods. These lands,

though adjacent to the current river channel (only section 34 – Lower Tarkio tract is adjacent to the river), have no **flood plain** nor **wetland** function or value.

Rosquist's flood plain determination coincides with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Federal Insurance Administration; Flood Hazard Boundary Map: Mineral County, MT, Unincorporated Area Page 13 of 19; Community-Panel No. 300159 0013A; effective date: February 14, 1978 provided to Sue Dalbey by Karl Christians, DNRC Flood Plain Management Section Supervisor.

There are no known existing water rights or reservations attached to the property. Residential development will increase use of ground water. Marchwick related to Sue Dalbey (personal communication January 14, 2003) that the developer, the county and the state (Department of Environmental Quality) must be able to guarantee water when reviewing a subdivision proposal. The county could require use of several wells with holding tanks for use as a community water system, if water quantities for individual wells are in question. Marchwick would expect domestic water wells in the vicinity of Tarkio Section 35 would likely require drilling to depths of about 400 feet, especially in the north half of the section, which is higher elevation. Existing wells on nearby sections (23 and 26) with similar elevation and terrain are logged at 320' and 340' and range in volume from 10 to 25 gallons per minute. Wells may be more shallow on the south portion of the section and produce higher volume.

Lack of surface water resources on the tract, gently sloping topography, and distance from the Clark Fork River, limits the risk of alterations to existing surface water quality or actions on this tract that may potentially conflict with federal or state water quality regulations. Drainage patterns and rates of surface runoff will slightly increase with logging events and residential development due to increased surface compaction and reduced vegetation; however, residential lots of the size proposed by the county development plan (20-acre lots) would limit impacts. Most developers leave enough vegetation for aesthetic purposes that runoff created from increased hardened surfaces (i.e. roads, driveways, building roofs) would dissipate.

The public has voiced concern over increased effluent entering the river from development and associated septic systems. This is not probable due to the county and state sanitation laws and required review and approval of new subdivisions. Marchwick also indicated that the soils in Tarkio Section 35 are sediments from Glacial Lake Missoula, which are conducive to adequate drain fields (personal communication with Sue Dalbey, January 14, 2003).

Vegetation, Wetlands, Prime & Unique Farmlands

Field, "intuitive controlled" level surveys were conducted on May 7 and June 3, 1999 by Darlene Lavelle for the FS. A list of species located at this site can be obtained from the Lolo FS, Ninemile Ranger District (TES Plant Biological Evaluation for the Alberton Gorge Land Exchange, Darlene Lavelle, June 30, 1999). No sensitive plants were found during Lavelle's surveys. She noted that one threatened plant species is expected to occur on the Lolo NF, *Howellia aquatilis*, but it had not been found in this NF as of June 30,

1999. Spalding's Catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) is listed under the threatened status; however, this species is found in the open grasslands of the Tobacco Valley and the Upper Flathead River drainage (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Threatened and Endangered Species – Montana, web site; www.r6.fws.gov/mt4.html; May 23, 2000). This species has not been recorded on the timbered Tarkio Section 35 tract and will not be impacted by the proposed exchange. No endangered plant species are expected to occur on this tract. Lavelle concluded that the proposed land exchange [Lower Tarkio-Tract B and Tarkio Section 35-Tract C] will have no impacts on any Forest sensitive or federally listed, threatened or endangered plant species.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has also identified the slender moonwort (*Bortrychium lineare*) as a Candidate species, however, it has not been found in Mineral County. It is found in meadows in conifer forests within Glacier and Lake Counties, north of the Tarkio Section 35 tract (US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Threatened, Endangered and Candidate Species in Montana, Endangered Species Act, December 2002).

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database for Tarkio Section 35 revealed no records of vegetative species of special concern (written correspondence, Sue Dalbey, May 12, 2000).

Timber volumes are estimated at 3,210,000 board feet on the south half of the section, and 1,900,000 board feet on the north half, based on the timber cruise completed by the Lolo NF, 1999.

As noted by the Lolo NF Hydrologist above, this tract does not contain **wetlands** function or value.

This tract is considered timbered (DNRC Forester, June 23, 2000); no **prime or unique farmland** will be affected.

Logging operations will affect the abundance of various vegetative species due to dispersed log skid trails and heavy equipment operations. Post timber harvest actions, such as broadcast burning, kills small Douglas firs and rejuvenates brush, instigating new succulent growth. Residential development will decrease the abundance of various natural vegetative species due to the construction of roads, homes, supplemental buildings, and associated landscaping. Other vegetation species, such as lawn and ornamental shrubs and trees, will likely increase for residential landscaping purposes.

Weed abatement will be the responsibility of the individual land owner(s). Subdivision would increase the vehicular traffic on the tract, thus increasing the potential for introducing new plant species, and spreading weeds on this and adjacent properties. Lavelle observed the following noxious weeds present on this tract: *Centaurea maculosa*, *Euphorbia escula*, *Hypericum perforatum*, *Potentilla recta*.

Weed infestation may also increase due to logging operations and the opportunity for existing weeds to establish and spread in disturbed soil. These effects can be mitigated if logging equipment is clean and operations occur in the winter when seeds are less apt to attach to vehicles or become established.

The County Weed Board requires disturbed soils to be reseeded within the same season, according to County Planner, Wayne Marchwick in personal communication with Sue Dalbey (June 23, 2000). This practice would also help reduce the establishment of noxious weeds.

Fish & Wildlife

Mike Hillis, former Lolo NF Wildlife Biologist, indicates in his report dated June 16, 1999, that the property consists primarily of a dry ponderosa pine benchlands habitat.

“This droughty, low elevation benchland was historically forested with very open, predominately old growth ponderosa pine.... Today it’s forested with fairly dense, century-old ponderosa pine. There has been some fairly recent thinning activity, although the stand is still denser than what occurred naturally. There are no large snags or old growth trees.”

Hillis states that Tarkio Section 35 provides a pocket of dense hiding and thermal cover immediately adjacent to northern croplands heavily used by 60-100 elk in late winter and spring. It is believed that this wintering elk resource is focused in the portion of Tarkio Section 35 that lies north of Interstate-90, due to the imposition of crossing Interstate 90 and lack of significant signs of use on the south portion. (Mike Hillis, *Wildlife Effects of Disposal* report, April 17, 2000; Bob Henderson, MFWP Region 2 Wildlife Biologist, personal correspondence with Sue Dalbey on May 3, 2000, December 10, 2002) Extensive timber harvest in the 1970’s and trends of fire exclusion on National Forest and Plum Creek (formerly Champion) lands may force a disproportionate amount of thermal and hiding cover use to Tarkio Section 35 than it would otherwise, if there were more cover on the surrounding lands. A moderate amount of hunting occurs on Tarkio Section 35 in the fall. (Mike Hillis, *Wildlife Effects of Disposal* report, April 17, 2000)

Hillis, and Henderson, indicated that the portion of the parcel south of Interstate 90 provides excellent winter range for white-tailed deer. Dense stands of ponderosa pine provide snow interception, habitat for arboreal lichens, and both hiding and thermal cover.

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).

A search for threatened and endangered species by the Montana Natural Heritage Program (Natural Resource Information System) identified no species of special concern. Hillis confirmed that Canada lynx do not inhabit the low elevation Tarkio Section 35 (written correspondence to Lisa Subcasky, May 26, 2000).

The June 16, 1999 wildlife report by Mike Hillis, indicates minimal use of Tarkio Section 35 by any federally listed species, and the proximity to Interstate-90 presents a high risk of mortality.

- Members of the Ninemile wolf pack may pass through the parcel periodically, but this is not considered essential habitat.
- Bald eagles utilize the river corridor during nesting and wintering, and though suitable habitat is limited to the zone immediately adjacent to the river, eagles do forage on road-killed deer. Based on current recovery rates, this section of the Clark Fork River will become occupied by nesting birds regardless of ownership of Tarkio Section 35, which does not border the river.

Old growth ponderosa pine is unlikely to occur on lands privately owned in a subdivision situation. Old growth is necessary to possibly recruitment habitat for the pileated woodpecker and the flammulated owl.

- Flammulated owl habitat is not currently available, but disposal of Tarkio Section 35 will probably create a loss of recruitment opportunities in 200 years. The proposed land trade “may impact individuals, but not lead to federal listing.”
- Pileated woodpecker habitat probably will not be recruited if Tarkio Section 35 is privately owned and subdivided. “Because of the minimal acreage involved, this alternative won’t place pileated woodpeckers at significant risk in the vicinity,” according to Hillis’ report.

Hillis (April 17, 2000) and Lolo National Forest Wildlife Program Manager Sandy Kratville and FWP Wildlife Biologist Bob Henderson (*Effects documented December 2, 2002 by Sandy Kratville and Bob Henderson*) concurred that with private ownership of Tarkio Section 35 and development of 20-acre parcels or less, the “net effect could include a small but measurable reduction in carrying capacity or population size at the [elk] herd unit scale. No large population declines are anticipated for elk.” Crop depredation will likely increase on neighboring lands.

White-tailed deer may continue to use Tarkio Section 35 even with subdivision development; however, the potential reduction of dense forest structure would no longer provide significant winter habitat. Large population declines in white-tailed deer would not be expected (Kratville & Henderson, December 2002).

Hillis' 2000 report states that Tarkio Section 35, in its current ownership status, helps connect the forested lands north of Interstate-90, to forested lands south of the river, in a fairly unbroken band of cover (between the Bitterroot and Ninemile Divides). It is unknown whether this serves as a significant north-south linkage zone for wide-ranging wildlife, though this larger area is identified as a possible linkage zone for grizzly bears (Servheen, Chris, J. Waller and P. Sandstrom. *Identification and Management of Linkage Zones for Grizzly Bears Between the Large Blocks of Public Land in the Northern Rocky Mountains*, 2001.). Linkage zone functions for north-south movement of wide-ranging animals could be reduced in Tarkio Section 35 if 20-acre homesites are developed; however, the surrounding public and corporate lands would mitigate these effects and continue to allow access to the river (Henderson personal communication with Sue Dalbey, December 10, 2002).

The acquisition of the Alberton Gorge will help mitigate effects of Section 35 changing to residential homesites. FWP ownership of Alberton Gorge will link some existing public lands north and south of the river, including section 36 adjacent to Tarkio Section 35, adjacent and opposite the mouth of Fish Creek.

Trends indicate that public hunting opportunities would likely be lost if Tarkio Section 35 is privately owned and developed into residential lots. Human residences, activity and densities will increase in the area, which will add stress to wildlife populations.

Private ownership of Tarkio Section 35 may include the introduction of domestic pets, horses or untraditional livestock, such as llamas. Human and domestic animal interactions with deer, bears and mountain lions would become more common in and near Tarkio Section 35, if developed into a residential subdivision.

No fish species occur within Tarkio Section 35, due to lack of water.

Cumulative activities include the traffic from Interstate-90, disturbance from adjacent residences, and ecosystem burning and logging in the Stark Horse area. The effects of the proposed land exchange are limited to long-term effects, such as recruitment opportunities for old growth and long-term nesting options for eagles; therefore, additional impacts of a potential subdivision into small tracts in Tarkio Section 35 will be relatively minor compared to impacts of existing activities, especially Interstate-90. The potential for a functioning linkage zone across Interstate-90 in the vicinity of Tarkio Section 35, however, would be reduced with the current proposal for selling National Forest System Lands to River Network in Sections 34 and 35 (Kratville & Henderson, December 2002).

The deed restrictions proposed by River Network - to be applied in the event that the DNRC land exchange fails and Tarkio Section 35 is sold privately - should mitigate adverse wildlife impacts. River Network has pledged to prohibit residential development on the north side of Interstate 90, keeping these 210 acres accessible to commercial timber harvest, but not available for construction of buildings or other permanent human settlement. Although the character of the forest habitat will undergo periodic change through timber removal, the land will remain as part of the habitat base to support the regional wildlife population. This will include seasonal habitat use, as well as its function as a travel corridor.

South of Interstate 90, there is the potential for limited residential development in Tarkio Section 35, most likely four to six homesites. This represents a density of one house per approximately 40 to 60 acres, providing the possibility of localized wildlife disturbance by the activities of people, pets and vehicles but generally retaining the character of this open-space forested habitat.

Human Environment

Noise & Electrical Effects

No known changes to electrostatic or electromagnetic conditions are predicted. Installation of new power lines for residential use may influence radio or television reception.

Timber harvest and subdivision construction would require the use of heavy equipment and trucks for logging, road improvements and construction; therefore, noise levels are expected to temporarily increase. Future noise levels from vehicle traffic and human domestic activities will increase if the property is subdivided for residential use. Retaining some timber and vegetation in the area and limiting the tracts to 20 acres or larger could mitigate these affects.

Land Use

The construction of residential housing would allow for reasonable use of the land as required by state law, and will produce income for road and housing contractors, plumbers, electricians, painters, and other contractors, as well as increase the Mineral County tax base.

The site does include elk calving ground, which is important, but not unusual in western Montana. This use by wildlife is supported by local residents and, according to Mineral County Planner Wayne Marchwick, helped set the county guidelines for subdivision and individual tract size. Marchwick indicated that residential development on Tarkio Section 35 may ultimately result in the relocation of neighboring residents who have lived in the area for many years, as demonstrated by similar use changes in the vicinity of newer subdivisions. He said that long-time residents value the remote location and easy access to hunting and recreation opportunities, which would potentially be lost if Tarkio

Section 35 is privately owned, logged and residential subdivisions constructed (personal communication with Sue Dalbey, June 23, 2000).

Timber harvest on Tarkio Section 35 will profit the land owner/timber seller. Timber harvest and thinning can increase undergrowth for natural productivity. Residential development could increase the financial productivity and profitability of this land.

The area is now under public ownership and managed by the FS; therefore, the tract is considered a natural area to local residents who frequent the area for recreational purposes. The land, however, has no formal natural, educational, or unusual scientific designation. If this tract is developed into 20-acre residential lots, the public would lose the recreational use of this property for hiking, horseback riding, hunting, and watching wildlife.

Risk & Health Hazards

The risks for explosion or release of hazardous substances in the event of an accident are low. The use of chemical toxicants would be owner dependent, such as for weed control. Though logging and construction have certain hazards to employees, public health hazards are not typically created by either action.

The County may need to consider an emergency response or evacuation plan if the Tarkio Section 35 is developed. This area is outside of the local fire district.

Community Impact

No residences presently occur on Tarkio Section 35. Developing this tract into residential lots will slightly increase the human population density, distribution, and location. Social structure of the community may slightly change, according to Wayne Marchwick, in personal correspondence with Sue Dalbey, June 23, 2000. It is anticipated that many private lot buyers will originate from outside Mineral County, thus cultural viewpoints may differ, and the area aesthetics change.

Levels of employment, industrial and commercial activity will slightly and temporarily increase. Economic benefits of these increases, however, may not be fully realized locally. Often the larger construction projects are contracted out of Missoula rather than the local Superior/Tarkio community. Truck traffic will temporarily increase during timber harvest operations and residential construction. Standard vehicle traffic will increase on access roads and the Milwaukee Railroad bed after residences and access roads are established.

Tax Revenue Estimates in Mineral County

In Fiscal Year 1999, the FS paid approximately \$357 to Mineral County for the Tarkio Section 35 tract. This includes the PILT payment (about \$63) and the 25% Fund (about \$294 apportioned from timber sales in Mineral County). The FS collects no revenue from this site. If the property remained in FS ownership, the current management emphasis is on winter range productivity and old growth ponderosa pine restoration, which suggests that commercial thinning and underburning may occur in the future (Mike

Hillis, Wildlife Effects report, April 17, 2000). These potential actions on this relatively small parcel would not significantly change the PILT or 25% Fund payments by the FS to Mineral County, because these payments are based on timber sales on total FS lands owned in the county.

Development of this property would increase the tax base generated from this tract. Parcels will be 20 acres or greater; therefore, taxes will be assessed as timber or agricultural land, which are less than urban tract land, according to Marchwick. Additional taxes would be dependent upon the structures placed on the property and values placed on views. Marchwick projected that county service expenses to administer subdivision permits, road maintenance, sanitation permits, solid waste disposal, health services, and police protection may be higher than the tax revenue collected, as shown in studies done in another Montana county (personal communication with Sue Dalbey, June 23, 2000).

Government (FWP) expenditures associated with wildlife damage will increase if Tarkio Section 35 is developed into residential tracts, due to displacing wintering elk and deer to neighboring agricultural land and the resulting crop damage claims.

Public Services, Utilities

The only service currently provided on the tract is in the form of FS road maintenance.

The Tarkio Section 35 tract includes 1.1 miles of 66-foot **road** right-of-way for Ronck Road #18014 across the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ and E $\frac{1}{2}$ of the section. In compliance with the Forest Land Management Planning Act of 1976, the U.S. will issue a perpetual easement to River Network for this road use. The U.S. will retain the right to review the easement terms and conditions every 30 years and the U.S. will retain the right to use this road to access portions of Tarkio Section 35 that remain in U.S. ownership. The southeast portion of this road is deteriorating asphalt - remains of the old Highway 10 (Jennifer Eberlien, Lolo NF Archeologist, personal communication with Sue Dalbey, June 2, 2000).

Road access to the southern portion of Tarkio Section 35 could be developed from the Milwaukee Railroad bed (FS road #7736 and #18171), which would be transferred to River Network through the exchange of the Lower Tarkio tract (34 acres in Section 34). FWP would retain their existing easement to access the Tarkio Fishing Access Site using this route.

Logging activities and constructing residential homesites would require improving the existing roads listed above and creating auxiliary roads. Increased traffic may require more signing at intersections, specifically where new subdivision traffic meets existing FAS traffic. If the proposed exchange is implemented, an use agreement would be negotiated between FWP and the new property owner(s) to supply access to Tarkio Section 35 via road # 7736 and #18171.

Timber harvest could be conducted using roads from past logging events. New gravel roads and driveways will be necessary to develop residential access. The subdivision design will determine the quantity of roads needed. Landowners will be responsible for road improvements and maintenance, according to Wayne Marchwick, County Planner (personal communication with Sue Dalbey, June 23, 2000).

Subdivision of the tract will increase the level of government services necessary at the Tarkio Section 35 tract in the form of subdivision review, water well, septic and drainage review. Fire protection, solid waste disposal, health services, and police protection services would increase according to Marchwick. New utilities will be needed and an increase in energy use will occur to operate typical homes, wells, and household activities.

Aesthetics & Recreation

Elizabeth Casselli, Lolo NF Landscape Architect, evaluated the Visual Quality Objective (VQO, report dated July 7, 1999) for Tarkio Section 35 and made the following comments. The section is primarily timbered with the dominant tree species of ponderosa pine. Some limited harvesting has occurred, however it is not noticeable from the Interstate, which is the primary viewpoint in the area. The section has been given the highest visual quality objective of Retention along the Interstate, and Partial Retention, in portions of the section not directly adjacent to the Interstate.

Casselli noted that if River Network acquires the property, subdivides and sells the property for residential development, it is anticipated that most of the home sites planned for development in Tarkio Section 35 will be out of view of Interstate 90. The visual integrity of the area, as viewed from Interstate 90, will not be significantly impacted by this development.

This tract is not part of a designated or proposed wild or scenic river, trail or wilderness area.

Tree removal and developing 20-acre residential lots north and south of the interstate will alter the aesthetics of this heavily timbered area. The existing natural area will change to a residential area with associated homes, outbuildings, vehicles, and livestock. Private ownership of portions of Tarkio Section 35 will exclude public access to most of the section for recreating and hunting activities.

Cultural & Historical Resources

A cultural resource inventory survey (99.LL.4.1) was completed November 29, 1999, by Jennifer Eberlien, Lolo Forest Archeologist. The FS has consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office to mitigate potential impacts as a result of the old Highway 10 transferring to private ownership.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Tribal Historic Preservation Office, were notified of this exchange in November 1999, and no objections were received.

Evaluation of Mitigation or other Control Measures

Mineral County Planning Board, County Planner and the Commissioners would examine the tract during the subdivision planning review process for possible land slides, soil instability, water, septic and drainage conditions, and could enforce specific restrictions, if necessary to prevent impacts in these areas. The county review will also identify a minimum individual tract size of 20 acres or larger as outlined in the Mineral County comprehensive plan which took into consideration wildlife habitat, agricultural uses, public health and safety, public comments, and “finding of fact” regarding tract conditions (Wayne Marchwick, personal communication with Sue Dalbey, June 23, 2000 and September 4, 2002).

River Network, Mineral County Commissioners and DNRC are currently negotiating a future exchange, which would place Tarkio Section 35 in DNRC ownership. This transfer to another public agency with no resulting residential development would mitigate most of the impacts discussed above.