

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Utility Easement Application, Martinsdale, MT
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring and Summer 2024
Proponent:	Triangle Communications
Location:	T8N R11E Sec. 16 & 24, T9N R11E Sec. 15 & 22
County:	Meagher

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Communications has submitted four easement applications for buried communication lines on State Trust Land located in T8N R11E Sections 16 & 24 and T9N R11E Sections 15 & 22. The routes selected for the buried lines were the shortest distance to serve the surrounding area and existing networks. See attached map in exhibits A, B, and C for proposed easement routes and locations.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Wildlife Biologists
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Ag & Grazing Surface Lessees
Montana Natural Heritage Program
Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

The proposed easements would involve Montana State Trust Land allocated to the Common Schools Trust and the School for the Deaf and Blind Trust.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easement.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The following information was derived from Web Soil Survey for this section. The proposed easements

would be located on various soil types shown on exhibits D,E, and F. All of these soil types have good to moderate reclamation suitability ratings. The communications lines would be installed with a “direct plow”. This method entails cutting a trench, placing the infrastructure underground, and closing the trench in one motion. No cumulative impacts are anticipated to soils.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

No surface water is in the path of the proposed easements in T8N R11E Sections 16 & 24 and T9N R11E Section 22. There is a seasonal drainage ditch located in T9N R11E Section 15. The proponent would be responsible for mitigating any issues with crossing this small area. Due to the small footprint of the proposed infrastructure, minimal impacts to water quality, quantity, and distribution are expected.

Minimal cumulative impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Some short-term dust from the machinery and vehicles traveling the proposed easement areas during installation is anticipated, but no long-term effects to air quality are expected.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities should not be significantly affected by this easement due to the small area disturbed for the communication line. The easement applications are for a 20' width for future maintenance and repairs, however, minimal impacts during installation are expected. Montana Natural Heritage Map view classifies the sites where the proposed lines would be installed as Rocky Mountain Lower Montane, Foothill, and Valley Grassland.

DNRC staff completed a site visit to this section in October 2023 and found the following species in the easement area locations: sagebrush, needle and thread, prairie junegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, threadleaf sedge, various introduced grasses and various forbs.

DNRC will require the applicant to reseed and maintain weed management. Applicant will need to use a pre-approved seed mix for State Trust Land and would be responsible for weed management on the easement corridors.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

No cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic life are anticipated from these proposed easements. Montana FWP was contacted for comment and their only concern was related to noxious weed control/mitigation.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS) was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located near the proposed easement area. Species that have habitat polygons occurring in the proposed communication line location include: the West slope Cutthroat Trout, the Bobolink, Long Billed Curlew, Sprague's Pipit, Thick-billed Longspur, Greater Sage-Grouse, Great Blue Heron, and the Golden Eagle.

The proposed lines would be installed below ground and construction is anticipated to be short duration.

No cumulative impacts anticipated to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, and two cultural resource inventories were conducted with regard to previous telecommunications cable installation work.

Proposed cable installation activities are expected to have *No Effect to Antiquities*. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The proposed easements are in rural parts of Meagher County. The proposed lines would be placed underground, and disturbed areas will be reseeded.

No anticipated impacts to aesthetics.

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

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project.

No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from these proposed easements.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

No other studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for these proposed easements.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain *POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS* following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No health or safety risks are posed by the proposed easements.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

If approved, these proposed easements are designed to allow access to the buried lines for maintenance and repair purposes.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed easements will not create or eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No significant increase in tax revenues is expected as a result of these proposed easements.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

No increased demand for government services is expected as a result of these proposed easements.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

No locally adopted environmental plans will be affected by these proposed easements.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

These proposed easements will not negatively alter recreational activities in the area.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No change in population will result from these proposed easements.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No change in social structures and mores are expected as a result of these proposed easements.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed easements have no anticipated affects to the unique quality of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The proposed easements on these tracts of State Trust Lands would generate approximately \$3,930 in revenue for the Common Schools trust and \$6,240 for the School of the Deaf and Blind Trust.

\$1,500 x 0.14 acres = \$210 (9N 11E 22 School for the Deaf and Blind)
\$1,500 x 2.44 acres = \$3,660 (9N 11E 15 School for the Deaf and Blind)
\$1,500 x 1.58 acres = \$2,370 (8N 11E 24 School for the Deaf and Blind)
\$1,500 x 2.62 acres = \$3,930 (8N 11E 16 Common Schools)

DNRC will require the applicant to reseed and maintain weed management. Applicant will need to use a pre-approved seed mix for State Trust Land and would be responsible for weed management on the easement corridors.

These proposed easements would enable the proponent to install, utilize, and maintain communication lines within the easement corridor for their customers.

**EA Checklist
Prepared By:**

Name: Dylan Craft
Title: Land Use Specialist- Helena
Unit

Date: 2/20/2024

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Upon review of the proposal, I find none of the impacts are severe, enduring, geographically widespread, or frequent. Further, I find the quantity and quality of the natural resources, including any that may be considered unique or fragile, will not be adversely affected to a significant degree. I find no precedent for the future actions that would cause significant impacts, and I find no conflict with local, State, or federal laws, requirements, or formal plans. In summary, I find adverse impacts would be avoided, controlled, or mitigated by granting an easement at this location.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Date:

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne
	Title: Trust Land Program Manager, Central Land Office
Signature: 	
Date: Feb. 21, 2024	

Exhibit A – VICINITY MAP

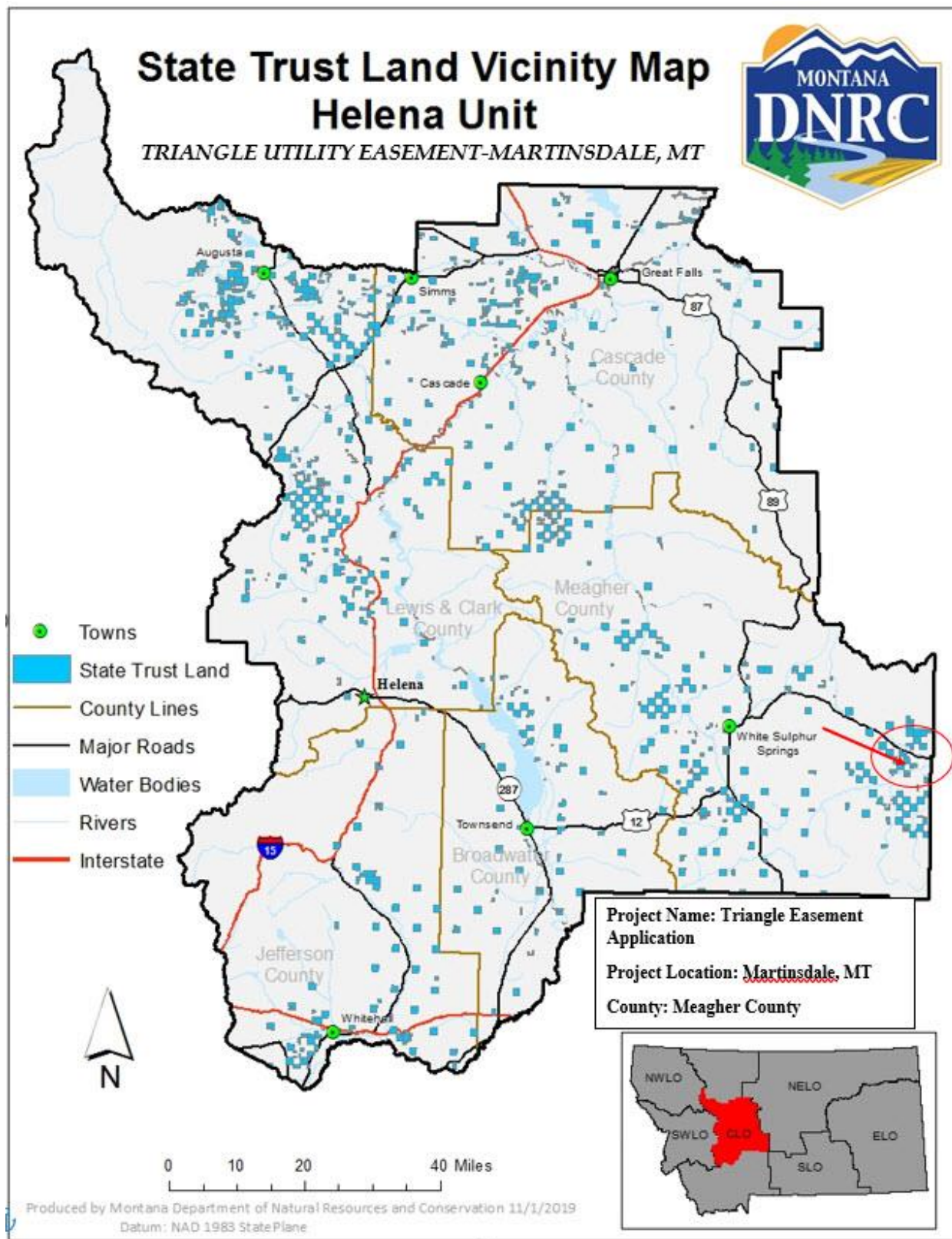


Exhibit B – 8N 11E Sec. 16 Proposed Easement indicated by the dashed Orange Line



Exhibit C – 8N 11E Sec. 24 Proposed Easement indicated by the dashed Orange Line



Exhibit D – 9N 11E Sec. 15 & 22 Proposed Easement indicated by the dashed Orange Line

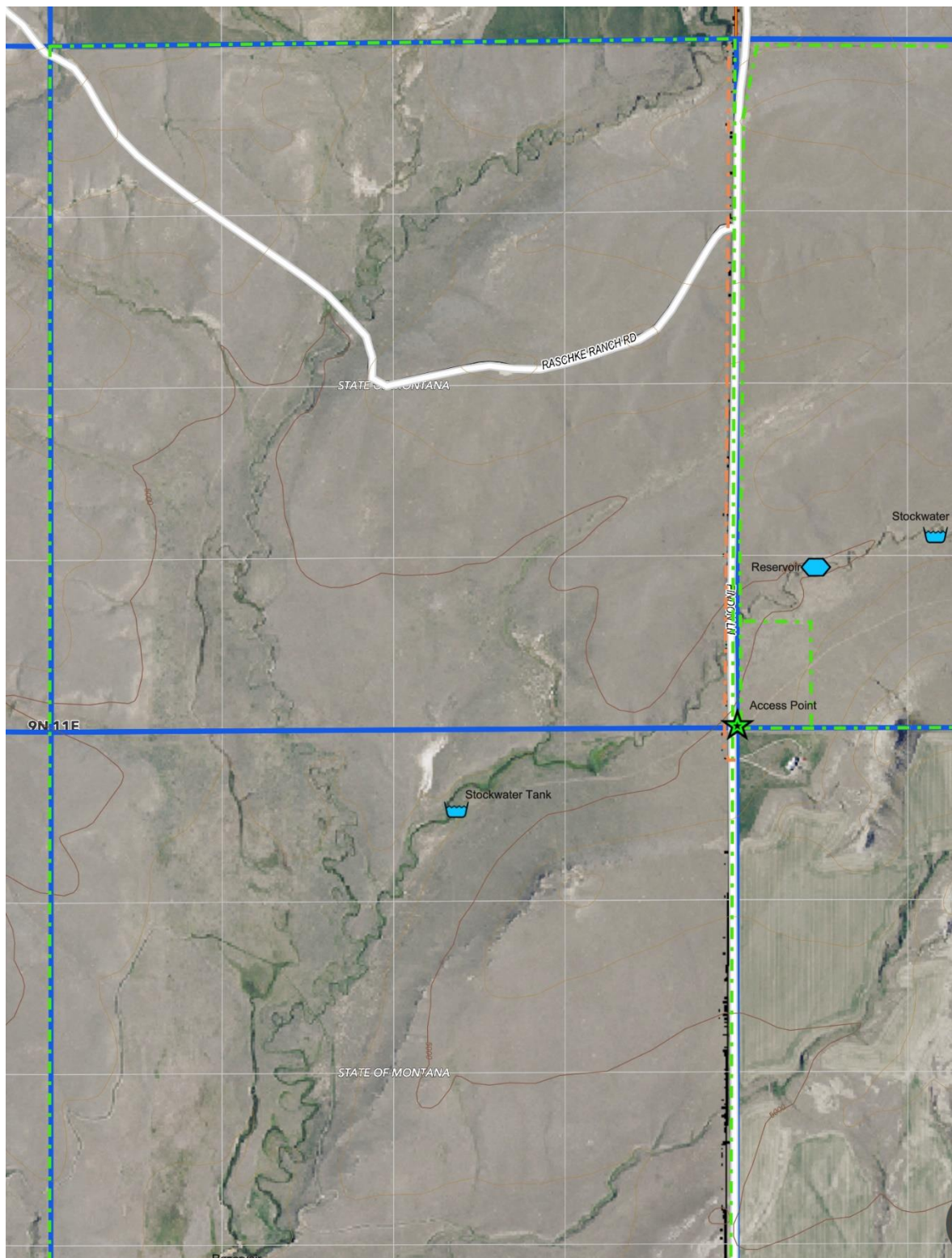
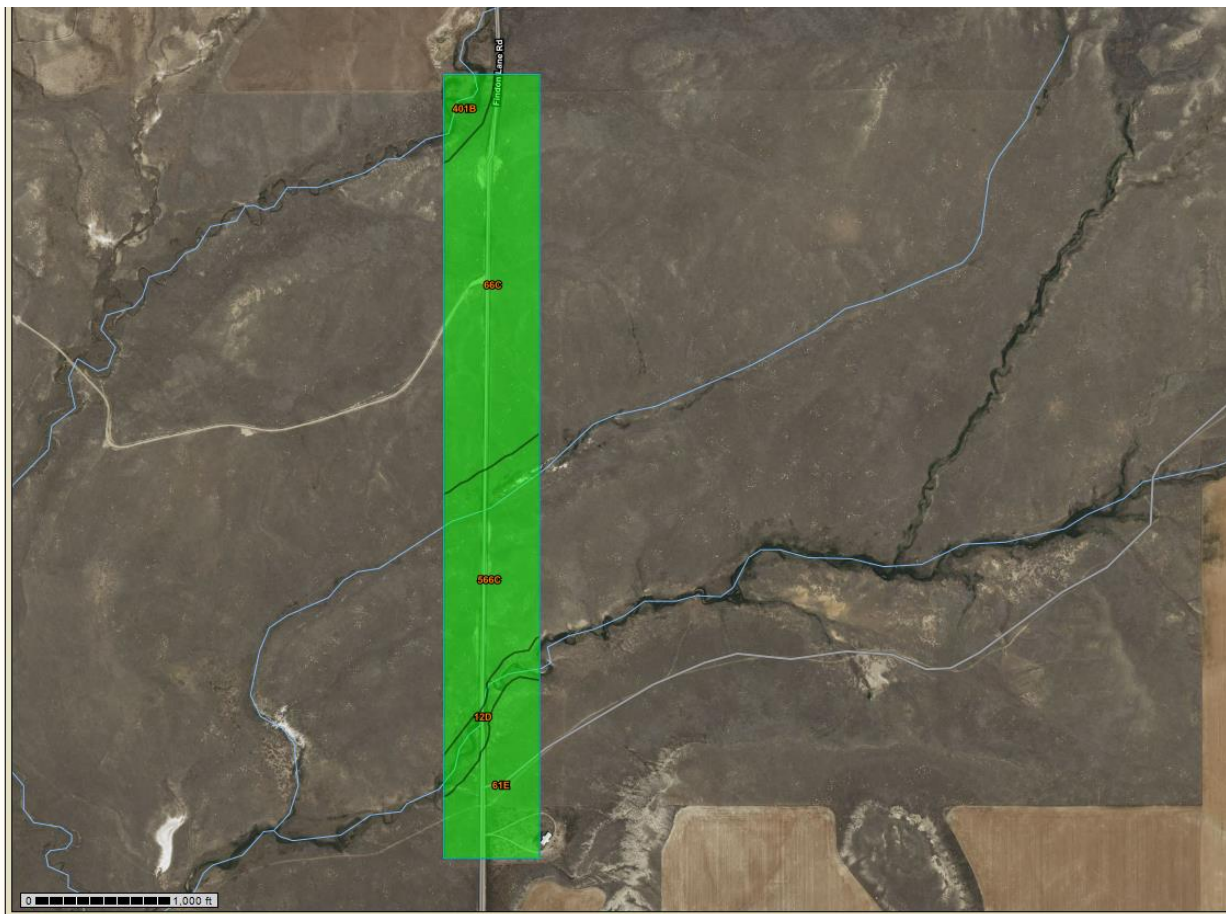


Exhibit E:

T9N R11E Sections 15 & 22 Soil Map with Reclamation Suitability Ratings



Warning: Soil Ratings Map may not be valid at this scale.
 You have zoomed in beyond the scale at which the soil map for this area is intended to be used. Mapping of soils is done at a particular scale. The soil surveys that created this map were not intended to be used at this scale. Enlargement of maps beyond the scale of mapping can cause misunderstanding of the detail of mapping and accuracy of soil line placement. The maps do not show the actual soil boundaries.

Tables — Reclamation Suitability (MT) — Summary By Map Unit			Summary by Map Unit — Meagher County Area, Montana (MT637)
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	
12D	Bowery-Lolo complex, 2 to 12 percent slopes	Well suited	
61E	Holter-Castner complex, 8 to 35 percent slopes	Well suited	
66C	Kiev-Fairfield complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes, foothills	Well suited	
401B	Fluvaquentic Haplaquolls-Typic Fluvaquents, 0 to 4 percent slopes, foothills	Well suited	
566C	Kiev-Martinsdale complex, 4 to 8 percent slopes, foothills	Well suited	

Exhibit F:
T8N R11E Sections 16 Soil Map with Reclamation Suitability Ratings

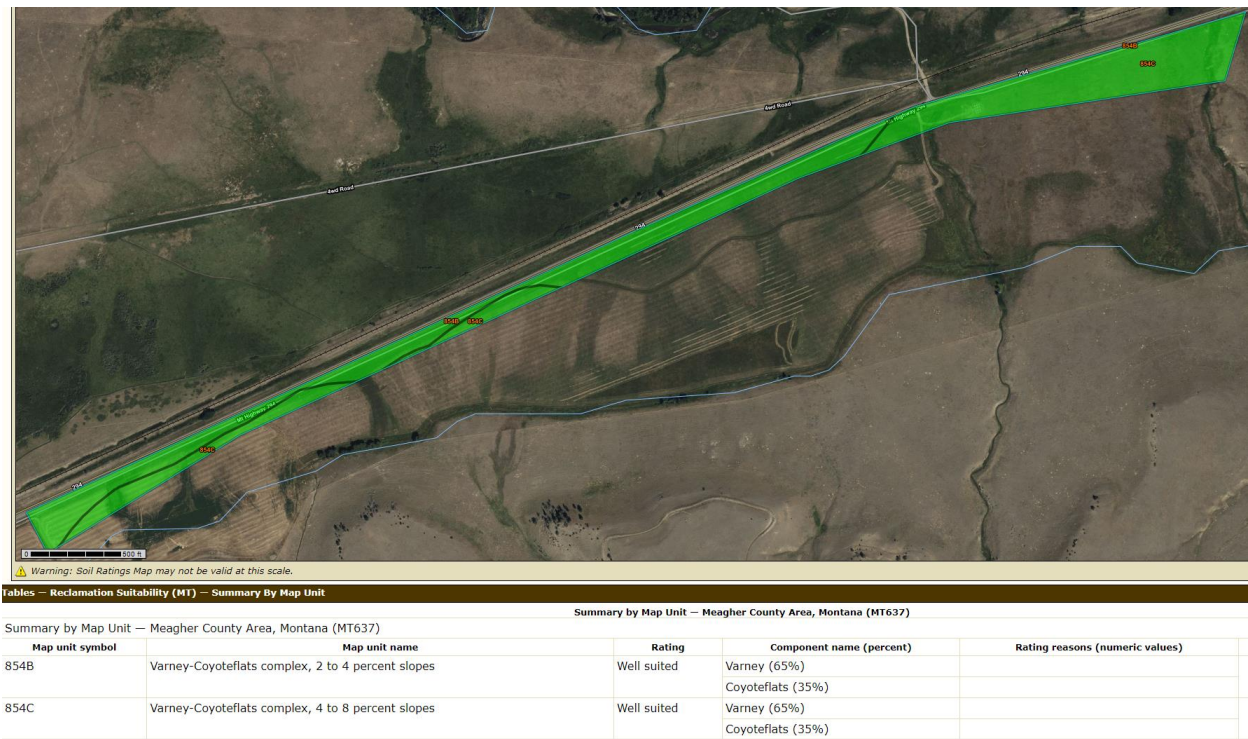


Exhibit G:
T8N R11E Sections 24 Soil Map with Reclamation Suitability Ratings



Tables – Reclamation Suitability (MT) – Summary By Map Unit

Summary by Map Unit – Meagher County Area, Montana (MT637)				
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)
86C	Delpoint-Marmarth-Cabbart complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Moderately suited	Delpoint (55%)	Wind Erosion (0.50)
			Cabbart (15%)	Droughtiness (0.63)
				Wind Erosion (0.50)
				Rooting Depth (0.05)