

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	InterBel Utility Line Easement, Stillwater River
<b>Proposed Implementation Date</b>	A week-long period to occur sometime between June, 2024 – November, 2025
<b>Proponent:</b>	InterBel Telephone Cooperative, Inc.
<b>Location:</b>	Section 14, T29N, R22W (Kalispell Unit)
<b>County:</b>	Flathead

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

InterBel Telephone Cooperative, Inc. (InterBel) is proposing to install new underground fiberoptic telecommunications facilities to extend their existing transport network to a new interconnect point. InterBel is locating these facilities along existing public roadways. The fiberoptic telecommunication line will cross the Stillwater River and need a Navigable River Utility Easement from DNRC to bore underneath the riverbed. The Right-of-Way would extend 20 feet in width with 10 feet on each side of centerline. The project will involve placing a buried fiber optic cable and a 1-1/4" HDPE duct in public road rights-of-way. This will be done by means of directional boring at a minimum depth of 36" to 42." Two (2) conduits will be installed, and the fiber optic cable will be placed within one (1) of the conduits. This proposed boring is likely to be completed in approximately one week. The estimated encumbered acreage totals approximately 0.029 acres.

The navigable riverbed involved in this proposed project is held by the State of Montana in trust for the benefit of the Public Land Trust/Navigable Rivers, per the Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11. The Board of Land Commissioners and DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.*

Scoping was circulated internally to DNRC Hydrologist, Josh Harris, DNRC Biologist, Justin Cooper, and DNRC archeologist, Patrick Rennie, who were consulted during the writing of this Environmental Assessment Checklist. No comments or issues were received during the scoping period of 2 weeks.

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

*Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.*

310 Permit – Flathead County Conservation District

#### 3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

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*Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.*

**No-Action Alternative A**

No-Action Alternative would deny this easement application.

**Action Alternative B**

Action Alternative would recommend Land Board approval of these easements to InterBel.

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<b>III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i></li><li>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i></li><li>• <i>Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i></li></ul>

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.*

Soils in the area range from silty clay loams to sandy terrace deposits. The largest three by percent volume are the Kalispell loam (Kg), Kalispell gravelly loam (Kd), and Tally, Blanchard, and Flathead Soils (Te). These soils are not prone to compaction, displacement, or erosion. No measurable impacts would be expected to occur, as a result of, the proposed action.

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.*

The fiberoptic cable would be installed by means of horizontal directional bore underneath the Stillwater River. The origin for point of drilling would occur 100-2000 feet beyond riverbanks. No change to bed or banks of the Stillwater River would occur. Approximately 62.18 feet, 20 feet wide (between low water marks). Due to the use of directional boring construction methodology, there will be no resulting changes to water flow, bed or banks of the Stillwater River.

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**6. AIR QUALITY:**

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.*

NONE

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.*

A minor amount of vegetation may be slightly disturbed from equipment during installation. No measurable impacts would be anticipated and any disturbance will be restored and reseeded.

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**8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

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

No terrestrial wildlife habitat would be altered, therefore no adverse impacts to wildlife are anticipated.

Aquatic habitat is not expected to be altered as the point of origin for drilling would occur 100-200 feet from the edge of the ordinary high-water mark. Sedimentation would be expected to be localized and not be delivered to the river. No measurable impacts to aquatic habitat are expected.

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

No terrestrial habitat would be altered, therefore no adverse impacts to threatened or endangered species are anticipated.

The proposed project is approximately 2.4 miles from historic bald eagle nest site, however current occupancy is unknown. There are recent observations of eagles foraging and traveling in the vicinity of the proposed project area (MNHP, 2024). Eagles that use this area are likely habituated to moderate levels of human disturbance from nearby residential & road activity. Considering the limited duration and scope of the proposed project and the existing level of disturbance, negligible adverse direct, secondary, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.

Table 2. Native and introduced fish species in the Stillwater River, Flathead County.

Species	Family	Class	Native to MT
<a href="#">Bull Trout</a>	Trout	Coldwater	Native
<a href="#">Lake Trout</a>	Trout	Coldwater	Native
<a href="#">Largescale Sucker</a>	Sucker	Warmwater	Native
<a href="#">Longnose Sucker</a>	Sucker	Warmwater	Native
<a href="#">Mountain Whitefish</a>	Trout	Coldwater	Native
<a href="#">Northern Pike Minnow</a>	Minnow		Native
<a href="#">Peamouth</a>	Minnow		Native
<a href="#">Redside Shiner</a>	Minnow	Warmwater	Native
<a href="#">Slimy Sculpin</a>	Sculpin		Native
<a href="#">Westslope Cutthroat Trout</a>	Trout	Coldwater	Native
<a href="#">Brook Trout</a>	Trout	Coldwater	Introduced

<a href="#">Lake Whitefish</a>	Trout	Coldwater	Introduced
<a href="#">Northern Pike</a>	Pike	Warmwater	Introduced
<a href="#">Rainbow Trout</a>	Trout	Coldwater	Introduced
<a href="#">Yellow Perch</a>	Perch	Warmwater	Introduced

Table 2 shows native and introduced species present in the Stillwater River. No measurable or adverse impacts are expected.

**Wildlife Mitigations:**

If a threatened or endangered species is encountered, consult a DNRC biologist immediately. Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area, contact a DNRC biologist.

**References:**

MNHP. 2024. Natural Heritage Map Viewer. Montana Natural Heritage Program. Retrieved on April 22, 2024, from <http://mtnhp.org/MapViewer>.

MTFISH. 2023. Montana Department of Fish Wildlife & Parks. Retrieved on July 28, 2023, from <https://myfwp.mt.gov/fishMT/waterbody/searchByID?waterBodyID=56884>

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

Should any historical or archeological sites be discovered during these activities, all use will cease until a DNRC Archaeologist is consulted.

**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

No measurable impacts are anticipated.

**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

NONE

**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.*

NONE

**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.*

NONE

**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

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

NONE

**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

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

NONE

**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

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

No change from existing conditions is anticipated.

**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services*

NONE

**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.*

NONE

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

NONE

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**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.*

NONE

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**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

NONE

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**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

NONE

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

Granting the easements would generate \$1,302.00 for the Public Land-Trust Navigable Rivers Trust. Valuation was determined on current market land values per acre which includes a 50% deduction for navigable waters.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Anne Shaw Moran	<b>Date:</b> 4/18/24
	<b>Title:</b> Kalispell Unit Real Estate Specialist	

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**V. FINDING**

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**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

The Action Alternative (Alternative B) – recommending Land Board approval of the easement application.

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**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:** I find that Action Alternative B would not have measurable or significant impacts on the environment. Taken individually and cumulatively, the proposed activities are common practices.

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**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

EIS       More Detailed EA       No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> David M. Poukish
	<b>Title:</b> Kalispell Unit Manager
<b>Signature:</b> /s/ David M. Poukish	<b>Date:</b> 4/23/24