

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	
Project Name: Underground Telecommunications Fiber Optic Cable	Proposed Implementation Date: Summer 2016
Proponent: Nemont Telephone Cooperative, 61 Hwy 13 South, Scobey, Montana 59263	
Type and Purpose of Action: Nemont Telephone Cooperative has submitted a Right of Way Easement to place a new buried telecommunications fiber optic cable to be located on several tracts of State of Montana land. The telecommunications fiber optic cable route will utilize a right of way consisting of 9.54 acres. The buried telecommunications fiber optic cable will enhance the telecommunications for Nemont Telephone Cooperative.	
Location: SW4SE4, SE4SW4, NE4SW4, NW4SW4, SW4NW4, Sec. 16 Twp. 31N Rge. 35E, NW4SE4, NE4SE4, Sec. 36 Twp. 31N Rge. 35E, SE4NE4, Sec.11 Twp. 32N Rge. 36E, NE4SE4, SE4NE4, NW4NE4, NE4NE4, Sec. 21 Twp. 33N Rge. 34E, SE4SE4, NE4SE4, SE4NE4, NE4NE4, Sec. 26 Twp. 33N Rge. 36E, NW4NW4, Sec. 36 Twp. 32N Rge. 36E	County: Valley and Phillips Counties

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	
1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	The applicant has completed Right of Way Easement Applications and submitted the applications to the Glasgow Unit Office. The purpose of the request is to place a buried telecommunication fiber optic cable on State land.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	The Federal Communications branch of the Federal Government may have jurisdiction for this type of project. There may also be other State of Montana and local government agencies that may have jurisdiction for this type of project.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	Action Alternative: Grant a right

of way easement to Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place a telecommunications fiber optic cable on State land.

No Action Alternative: Deny a right of way easement to Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place a telecommunications fiber optic cable on State land.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>General Discussion: There are no fragile, compactible or unstable soils present. There are no unusual geological features on the optic cable route. The various soil types will continue to produce native vegetation upon project completion.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the soils under this type of alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: This type of project will impact the soils on the telecommunications fiber optic cable route. The impacts are minimal and the area of impact will continue to produce vegetation.</p>
<p>5. 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?</p>	<p>General Discussion: There are no surface water resources or perennial streams on the project route.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.</p>

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	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the water quality, quantity and distribution of surface water on the State land. The only surface water sources are prairie potholes that would have water in the early spring of the year. The prairie potholes may contain surface water beyond spring but only on above average moisture years.</p>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>General Discussion: The project area is not located in an air quality regulation zone or air shed.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the air quality under this type of alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the air quality of the land involved with the project.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>General Discussion: No rare plants or cover types are present within the project area. The project will occur in the winter or spring and minimal vegetation will be disturbed by the installation of the buried telecommunications fiber optic cable.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the vegetation cover under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The area of impact will continue to produce native grass vegetation.</p>
<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by</p>	<p>General Discussion: This affected area is small in nature and located</p>

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important wildlife, birds or fish?

in a rural area. The area of impact has some habitat types. The Montana Natural Heritage Program list the following species of concern: Black tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) Hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Bairds sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*) Sprague's pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) Chestnut-collard longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) Brewers sparrow (*Spizella breweri*) Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*). There may also be some small areas that have small prairie potholes with habitat for some waterfowl types.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats under this alternative.

Action Alternative: This type of activity will not disturb the habitat types on the State land. The area of impact is small in scope and there will be minimal impacts to the wildlife and upland bird resources of the area.

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

General Discussion: A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program list the following species of concern: Black tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) Hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Bairds sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*) Sprague's pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) Chestnut-collard longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) Brewers sparrow (*Spizella breweri*)

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Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)  
Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*).  
There may also be some small areas  
that have small prairie potholes  
with habitat for some waterfowl  
types.

No Action Alternative: There would  
be no impacts to unique,  
endangered, fragile or limited  
environmental resources under this  
alternative.

Action Alternative: The project  
area contains no known unique,  
endangered, fragile or limited  
environmental resources. The  
burying of the telecommunications  
fiber optic cable will have minimal  
impacts to the habitat for song  
birds and upland game birds.

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

General Discussion: Montana  
Department of Natural Resources and  
Conservation has inspected the  
State land to be impacted through  
the Field Evaluation process.  
Montana Department of Natural  
Resources and Conservation, Glasgow  
Unit Office personnel found no  
historical or archaeological sites  
on the State land along the right  
of way easement application route.  
Finley Engineering, on behalf of  
Nemont, hired Ethnoscience, Inc. to  
perform a Cultural Resource  
Inventory of the project area. The  
findings of the inventory work were  
provided to Patrick Rennie,  
Montana Department of Natural  
Resources Archeologist. Mr. Rennie  
reviewed the document and  
determined the following:

A Class III intensity level cultural and  
paleontological resources inventory was conducted  
of the area of potential effect on state land. Despite a

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detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified and no additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the historical or archeological sites under this alternative.

Action Alternative: There are no known historical or archaeological sites on the areas to be impacted by this project. The area of impact was reviewed by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation personnel. The on site inspection showed no historical or archaeological sites present on the area of impact.

11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?

General Discussion: The project areas are located in a rural area. The landscape consists of rolling to hilly terrain. Portions of the project are located next to highway No. 2 and a county road and will be visible to the local population.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to aesthetic values under this alternative.

Action Alternative: The project site is located next to a county road and Highway No. 2 and is visible to the general public. The project will have no impacts to the aesthetic values associated with the land involved with this project.

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<p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?</p>	<p>General Discussion: The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of general ranching and farming operations.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the environmental resources of land, water air or energy under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will place no demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p>General Discussion: The writer of this document is not aware of other environmental documents pertinent to the project area, other than those listed in this document.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to studies, plans or projects under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The telecommunications fiber optic cable installation will not impact other projects or plans that may be occurring on the State land.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>General Discussion: The proposed project will create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation and maintenance of the telecommunications fiber optic cable. The area is sparsely</p>

	<p>populated and risks from working in a rural area are minimal to the local populace.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to human health and safety under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The installation of a telecommunications fiber optic cable has various human health and safety risks. The employer and employee identify the health and safety risks as occupational hazards. These hazards are mitigated by the employment of trained professional employees with experience installing buried communications lines.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>General Discussion: The surface lessees will have no decreased revenues due to surface disturbance caused by the installation of the telecommunications fiber optic cable.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will enhance the telecommunications capabilities of the applicant. The project will enhance telephone communication for Nemont Telephone Cooperative.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the quantity and distribution of employment.</p>

<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to local and state tax base under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project may or may not have impacts on the local or state tax base.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?</p>	<p>General Discussion: The area receives some traffic during most of the year from the rural population and traffic on Highway No. 2. Slight increases in traffic occur during various time periods with increased farming and ranching activities, and various types of recreational use.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts for demand for government services under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will place no demands for government services.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>General Discussion: There are no known zoning or management plans in affect in the construction areas.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the locally adopted environmental plans and goals under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact locally adopted environmental plans and goals.</p>
<p>20. 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?</p>	<p>General Discussion: Some of these tracts of State land are legally accessible from Highway No.2 and county roads and provide some recreational opportunities. No wilderness areas, wilderness study areas or areas of critical environmental concern are located</p>

	<p>within a close proximity to the proposed project area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to recreational values under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the recreational values associated with the state land.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to density and distribution of population and housing.</p> <p>Action Alternative. The project will not impact the density and distribution of the population and housing on this rural area.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to social structures and mores under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the social structures of the local communities.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the land.</p>
<p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</p>	<p>General Discussion: The project will provide the opportunity for local businesses to supply the applicant with materials needed for installation of the telecommunications fiber optic cable. This opportunity may or may not benefit local businesses.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to social and</p>

