CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**Century Link-Bitterroot River - Navigable Water Easement**
Proposed Implementation Date:	**Fall 2016**
Proponent:	**Century Link Project LLC**
Location:	**SW 1/4 Section 12, T5N-R21W**
County:	**Ravalli**

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Century Link is planning a telecommunications upgrade between Hamilton, Montana and Darby, Montana to provide faster and higher quality internet service for surrounding residents, schools and businesses. Century Link Project LLC is proposing the construction and use of an overhead aerial fiber optic line spanning the Bitterroot River using existing Northwestern Energy Company power pole supports. The project is located in the SW 1/4 Section 12, T5N-R21W which is approximately 4 miles south of Hamilton and is adjacent to US Highway 93 as shown on the attached maps.

Montana Code (MCA 70-16-201) provides for state ownership from the low water mark to the low water mark on navigable water bodies. Based on historical evidence the Bitterroot River is commercially navigable from the mouth of Jenning's Camp Creek on the east fork (SW1/4, Sec.27, T2N, R18W) to its confluence with the Clark Fork River. Therefore, the state claims ownership of the riverbed below the low water mark between these two points. DNRC has received an application for a 10 foot wide easement spanning the Bitterroot River from Century Link Project LLC for this project involving 0.045 acres of State-owned property below the low water mark of the river.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:
Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Montana DNRC, Northwestern Energy, Montana Public Service Commission, Darby Public Schools

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

No operations would occur on the Bitterroot River and no water related permits are required for this aerial crossing using existing support poles.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A – No Action
No installation of a fiber optic cable.

Alternative B – Action
Granting an easement for the installation of a fiber optic cable spanning the Bitterroot River as proposed.

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.

None: The project would use existing support poles and there would be no impacts to soils, geology on State trust lands. No unique or unusual geologic features occur at the project site.

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.

None: No activities are proposed within the Bitterroot River 100 year floodplain, therefore, no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated from implementation of the Action Alternative.

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.

None. Some temporary emission releases are expected during construction activities; however air quality is not expected to be impacted to any measurable degree.

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.

None. Soil and vegetation disturbance would be slight if any with installation of the aerial fiber line on existing poles. Noxious weed infestations are located on upper riverbanks and outside the low water mark that is DNRC ownership. No aquatic weeds identified. Noxious weeds will continue to occur along the power line and levels of infestation will vary depending on level of control measures. No change in effects to DNRC ownership.

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.

Existing Conditions: Limited habitats for terrestrial wildlife exist in the project area. Surrounding uplands and riparian habitats likely support a variety of wildlife species.

No-Action: No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, no effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Action Alternative: Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Fisheries None: This is an aerial powerline with the supports located above the floodplain. No changes would occur to the crossing site within the riparian area, and no in stream activities would occur. No impacts to fisheries are expected.

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.

Existing Conditions: Limited habitats for terrestrial wildlife exist in the project area. The project area is roughly 2 miles from the nearest bald eagle nest; some potential bald eagle foraging habitat exists in the project area. Otherwise habitats for other threatened, endangered, or sensitive terrestrial wildlife species does not exist in the project area. Surrounding uplands and riparian habitats likely support a variety of wildlife species, including common species as well as less common species such as great blue herons, yellow-billed cuckoos, bald eagles, and pileated woodpeckers. Proximity to Highway 93 and numerous other forms of human disturbance likely limits some wildlife use of the vicinity.

No-Action: No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, no effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Action Alternative: Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. In the event a closer bald eagle nest is identified prior to the proposed activities, additional mitigations may be incorporated. Efforts to complete proposed activities prior to the commencement of the bald eagle nesting period (February 1) would reduce potential for effects to bald eagles in the vicinity. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated.

Bull Trout Existing Conditions: Bull trout is a federally threatened species and occurs in the Bitterroot River that is under the aerial crossing. **NONE:** No changes to existing fisheries would occur, as this is an aerial crossing and the support towers are above the floodplain and there are no expected impacts to sediment or fisheries habitat.

Wetlands: No wetlands are identified in the project area, therefore no impacts would be anticipated from selection of either alternative.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Because only the bed of the Bitterroot River is state-owned land in the project's area of potential effect, there are no cultural resource concerns. Issuance of an easement will have No Effect to state owned heritage properties as defined in the State Antiquities Act.

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.

None. The fiber optic cable would be attached to existing power poles. Due to the presence of other electric powerlines, minimal impacts to aesthetics would be 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 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. The proposed project would clear span the channel and would not pose an impediment to navigability or a safety hazard to boating or floating on the river.

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 cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed project would be anticipated to provide a short term employment opportunity for a small crew of people while construction activities occur.

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.

None. Minor, if any, change in tax base and tax revenues would be 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 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.

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.

None. The proposed project would clear span the Bitterroot River channel and would not pose an impediment to navigability or a safety hazard to boating or floating on the river.

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.

None.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

None.

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.

Granting of the proposed easement would return approximately $125 to the Public Land- Navigable Rivers trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Thayer Jacques	**Date:** 10/6/2016	
	Title: Hamilton Unit Forester		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I select the action alternative; granting an easement involving 0.045 acres of State-owned property below the low water mark of the Bitterroot River, thereby accommodating the installation of a fiber optic cable onto existing power poles as proposed by Century Link.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

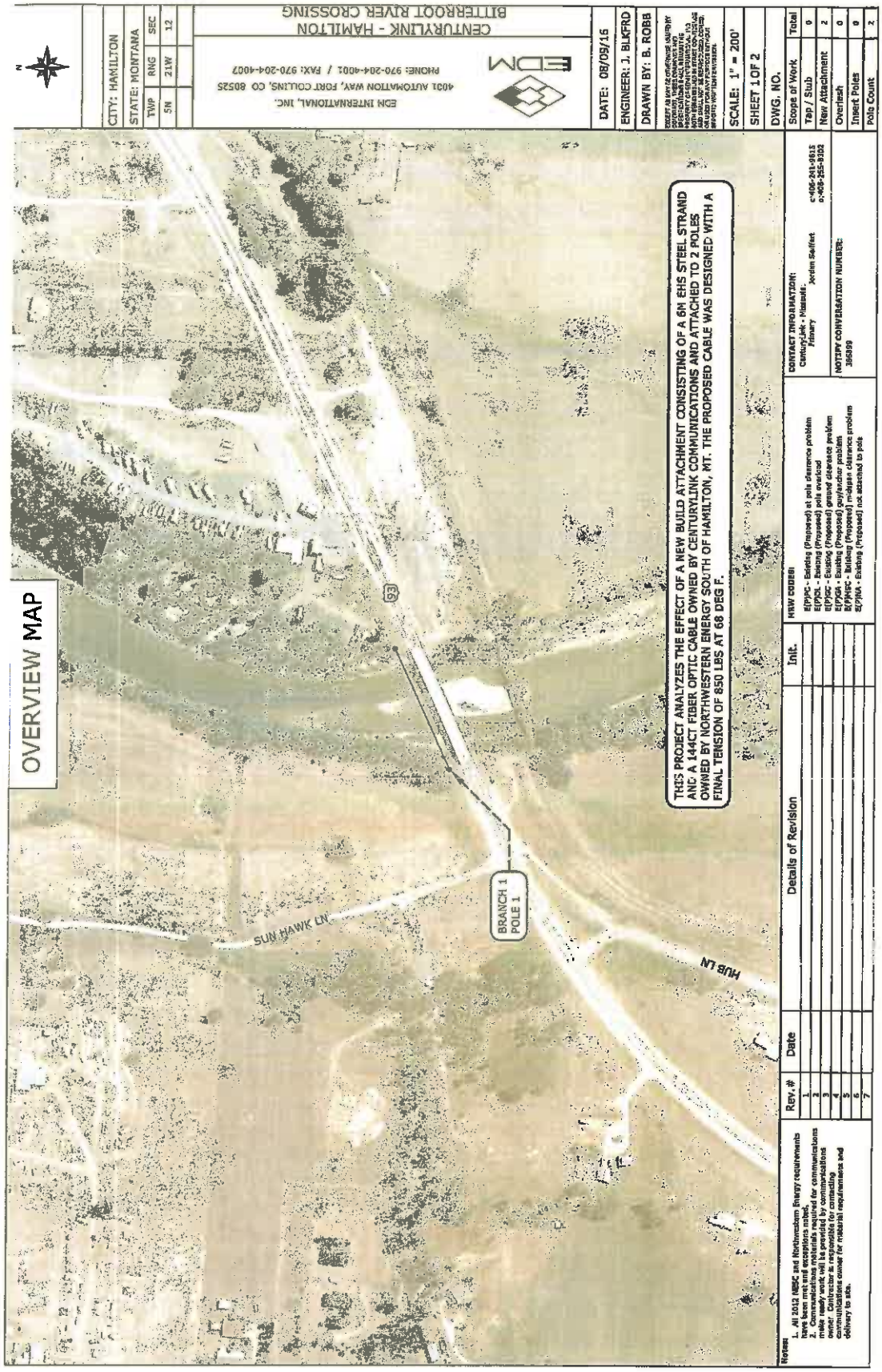
The action alternative will not result in significant environmental impacts.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Robert H. Storer	
	Title: Trust Lands Program Manager - SWLO	
Signature: Robert H Storer		**Date:** October 11, 2016

Attachment A: Overview Map



Attachment B: Fiber Optic Cable Location