

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Communications Fiber Optic Cable Easements
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring/Summer 2017
Proponent:	Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc
Location:	Section 36, Township 4 North, Range 21 East (Stillwater County) Section 16, Township 3 North, Range 23 East (Yellowstone County) Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 23 East (Yellowstone County)
County:	Stillwater and Yellowstone Counties

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Communications is applying for 20' easements on three parcels of Trust land in Stillwater and Yellowstone Counties for the installation of underground fiber optic cable as described below:

- Section 36-T4N-R21E: The proposed 0.910 acre easement would run north to south, parallel to and along the west side of Brinkle Road.
- Section 16-T3N-R23E: The proposed 2.499 acre easement would run north to south, parallel to and along the east side of Buffalo Trail Road.
- Section 16-T4N-R23E: The proposed 0.064 acre easement would run through a very small portion of the northwest corner of the southwest quarter along Buffalo Trail Road.

The easements that have been applied for are a part of a larger project where Triangle Communications is expanding fiber optic lines in northern Stillwater and Yellowstone Counties. The areas impacted by this application are all west of US Highway 3 in Stillwater and Yellowstone Counties.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. A Settlement of Damages form was obtained from the grazing lessees.

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

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request to issue 20' easements to Triangle Communications for the underground installation of fiber optic cable on the three sections listed above in Stillwater and Yellowstone Counties.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request to issue 20' easements to Triangle Communications for the underground installation of fiber optic cable on the three sections listed above in Stillwater and Yellowstone Counties.

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 routes proposed in the easements generally parallel existing roads. Based on the proposed action and relatively short disturbance time for cable installation, no significant adverse impacts to geology and soils are expected by implementing the proposed action. The soils in the easement area are mainly comprised of clay and sandy loam soils. The NRCS Soil Survey does indicate that there are some limitations in both soils for shallow excavations and they include such potential issues as unstable excavation walls and dusty tendencies. However, these issues are not expected to significantly impact the proposed action.

No significant adverse impacts to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture are expected from implementing the proposed action.

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.

The proposed easement locations do not cross any streams or bodies of water.

No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are expected from implementing the proposed action.

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.

There may be short-term isolated impacts from the equipment exhaust that is used to install the fiber optic cable.

No significant impact to air quality is expected from implementation of the proposed action.

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.

The cable is proposed to be installed using a tractor-crawler and friction-type plow blade that will create a soil disturbance approximately 36 inches deep and 6 inches wide and then the ground will be compacted back after the cable is installed. The area disturbed by the trenching activity and from vehicle travel could have short term impacts on vegetation.

No significant adverse impacts to vegetative cover, quantity or quality are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 significant impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following:

Section 36-T4N-R21E: Three species of concern were identified through the Montana Natural Heritage Program database search. They were the Ferruginous Hawk, the Greater Sage-grouse, and the Black-tailed Prairie Dog. This parcel is within General Sage Grouse Habitat, but it is over 10 miles from any FWP identified lek so the proposed activity is not expected to cause any significant disturbance. Triangle Communications submitted their entire fiber optic project to the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team. The MSGOT recommendations regarding this project for the tracts within General Habitat are as follows:

“Weed management is required within General Habitat for sage grouse. Reclamation of disturbed areas must include control of noxious weeds and invasive plant species, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Japanese Brome (*Bromus japonicas*).”

Neither the Ferruginous Hawk nor Black-tailed Prairie Dog have been sighted on this section. The recorded sightings of both species are over half a mile outside of the section. It is possible that either species may traverse this section. Wildlife in the area will be temporarily displaced within the proposed activity area during construction.

Section 16-T3N-R23E: Three species of concern were identified through the Montana Natural Heritage Program database search. They were the Greater Sage-grouse, the Brewer’s Sparrow, and the Black-tailed Prairie Dog. This parcel is within General Sage Grouse Habitat, but it is over 4 miles from any FWP identified lek so the proposed activity is not expected to cause any significant disturbance. Triangle Communications submitted their entire fiber optic project to the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team. The MSGOT recommendations regarding this project for the tracts within General Habitat are as follows:

“Weed management is required within General Habitat for sage grouse. Reclamation of disturbed areas must include control of noxious weeds and invasive plant species, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Japanese Brome (*Bromus japonicas*).”

The Brewer’s Sparrow has not been sighted on this section. The recorded sightings of the sparrow are one mile outside of the section. It is possible that this species may traverse this section. Wildlife in the area will be temporarily displaced within the proposed activity area during construction.

The Black-tailed Prairie Dog has been sighted on this tract. The proposed route of the fiber optic cable will be along Buffalo Trail Road and outside of the recorded sighting area. This species may be temporarily displaced during construction of the proposed project.

Section 16-T4N-R23E: Eight species of concern were identified through the Montana Natural Heritage Program database search. They were the American Bittern, Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, McCown’s Longspur, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, and Black-tailed Prairie Dog. No significant adverse impacts to any of the species listed above are expected as a result of the proposed project. This is because the proposed route of the fiber optic cable is directly adjacent to Buffalo Trail Road and directly south of the town of Broadview. Because the proposed route is so near a town, it is unlikely that any of the listed species would traverse this area. If any of the species listed above were to traverse this section, they would be temporarily displaced during construction of the proposed project.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the installation of underground fiber optic cable, it is not expected that this action will have any significant adverse impacts to any of the species identified on or around these three parcels. The surface disturbance will be temporary and adjacent to existing roads.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Triangle Communications contracted Ethos Consultants to conduct an inventory of cultural resources within the right-of-way of proposed cable route segments on state land. It was found that installation of the proposed telecommunications cable on state land for this project will have no effect on state owned properties.

A copy of the cultural resources inventory completed by Ethos Consultants was sent to the DNRC's State Archeologist. The State Archeologist did not have any further comment regarding the proposed action.

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 action would result in the installation of underground fiber optic cable adjacent to existing roads and two-track trails. Once the easement areas are rehabbed from the disturbance due to the installation, the only indication that there is an underground fiber optic line would be from any above-ground warning markers. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to aesthetics is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

There are no other known studies or future government actions planned for these three Trust parcels.

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

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The location of the easements does not traverse any crop lands, with the exception of approximately 2,600' of line that may run through some dryland crop ground in the NW¼ of Section 16-3N-23E along Buffalo Trail Road. A signed Lessee Settlement form for all three Trust parcels was included in the proposed easement application

materials. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 action will not have a significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

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.

The proposed action will not have an adverse impact on tax revenue.

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

The implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate any additional demands on governmental services.

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.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans.

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.

All three parcels currently have legal public access. The installation is expected to occur in the spring/summer of 2017 prior to the start of rifle and archery hunting seasons. Impacts due to installation should be minimal considering the easements run parallel to existing roads. The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to have an adverse impact on the ability of recreational use of these Trust lands.

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 significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed alternative will not have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

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 State benefited by getting a total one-time fee of \$1805.00 from Triangle Communications for the purchase of the easements on these three Trust parcels. The Common Schools Trust will be the beneficiary of this payment.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jocee Hedrick	Date: 2/16/17
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Southern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that permanent 20' easements be granted to Triangle Communications for the purpose of installing underground fiber optic cable on the following parcels:


- Section 36, Township 4 North, Range 21 East (Stillwater County)
- Section 16, Township 3 North, Range 23 East (Yellowstone County)
- Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 23 East (Yellowstone County)

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action which would entail the issuing of the easements and installation of underground fiber optic cable. There are no natural features that could produce adverse impacts or species of concern occupying the parcels that are expected to be impacted by implementing the proposed action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Matthew Wolcott
	Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Signature: 	Date: Feb 16/17