

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Range Telephone Cooperative Fiber Optic Line #2
Proposed Implementation Date:	2017
Proponent:	Range Telephone Cooperative, Inc.
Location:	T1S-R48E-Sec 16
County:	Powder River County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Range Telephone Cooperative, Inc. has requested a right of way easement from the DNRC Eastern Land Office. This ROW easement is for the purpose of placing an underground fiber optic communication line across the above mentioned tract of State Trust Land and will provide more effective telecommunications and internet services to rural communities.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Range Telephone Cooperative, Inc. has requested that the DNRC allow the passage of the new telecommunication line mentioned above across this state owned tract. The surface lessee was contacted to inform them that the application was filed. The line would follow a telecommunication route and parallel Little Pumpkin Road. The first requested easement (A) would be 5978 feet in length and 20 feet in width for a total encompassing acreage of 2.727 acres, while the second (B) would be 926 feet in length and 20 feet in width for a total encompassing acreage of 0.416 acres. The total encompassing acreage between the two easements is 3.143 acres.

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A- Grant the proponent a right of way easement for the construction and maintenance of the proposed fiber optic line.

Alternative B- No Action.

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.

Alternative A- Disturbance of the soil will occur through the trenching and burying of this line, but effects should be minimal. The proponent would utilize a static plow construction methodology. There should be no lasting adverse effects to the soil quality, stability or moisture. Soil structures are not fragile or unstable.

Alternative B-No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- Pollutants and Particulates may be increased during the construction of the project. After the completion of the project pollutant and particulate levels should return to normal. Increase in pollutants during construction should be almost negligible. Minimal impacts expected.

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- Where the construction and maintenance takes place there may be disturbance to the vegetation cover. Vegetation is comprised mainly of Western Wheatgrass (*Agropyron smithii*), Green Needlegrass (*Stipa viridula*), Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), Needleandthread (*Stipa comata*), Prairie Junegrass (*Koeleria pyramidata*) and various forbs and shrub species

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- There should be very minimal effect on any animal habitats within the boundaries of the project construction. Once construction is complete the site will be allowed to naturally reseed. The line would be buried and covered.

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program Database shows three sensitive species that have been observed in the general project area: The black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), Cassin's kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) and the northern leopard frog (*Lithobates pipiens*). While these species may be present, no impact is expected due to this project. This project is located within Greater Sage Grouse General and Core Habitat. Consultation with the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program has occurred (Project # 1484850773910). The program has responded with mitigation recommendations for the construction of the service line which will be implemented. The closest active lek to the project is approximately 4.5 miles from the project area. This project would be outside of the .25 mile NSO and nesting period restrictions set forth by EO-10-2014 and EO-12-2015.

Alternative B- No Impact

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Alternative A-Upon inspection of the parcels by the Eastern Land Office staff no significant findings were noted on these parcels. A search of the TLMS database shows no noted historical sites noted on this tract. 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, but it should be noted that Class III level inventory work has not been conducted there to date. 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.

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- Range Telephone Cooperative will need to be able to perform maintenance on the communication line from time to time. Any aesthetic degradation should only be temporary until the site recovers.

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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

<p style="text-align: center;">IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</p>

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| <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> |
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14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Alternative A- There may be risks to human health and safety in the construction of the project, but this should be done by qualified professionals. Safety concerns become minimal for work done in this fashion. Minimal

impacts expected. Once completed this line would increase communication reliability in areas of Powder River County.
Alternative B- No Impact

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Alternative A- It should have a positive effect on Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production. Minimal impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- This project has the potential to create jobs with further development possibilities. Minimal impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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

Alternative A- No Impact expected

Alternative B- No impact expected

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- This may provide income for the trust in the form of the purchase of a permanent easement. The easement would be set at a price of \$500.00 per acres for a total easement price of \$1571.50.

Alternative B- No Impact

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Seth Urick	Date: 03-07-2017
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative A

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The granting of the requested right of way easement upon this tract of state owned trust lands for the proposed fiber optic telecommunications line should not result in nor cause significant environmental impacts. The predicted environmental impacts have been identified and mitigation measures addressed in the EA checklist. The predicted impacts will be adequately mitigated through the construction plans. An environmental assessment checklist is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action. The proposed land use license would satisfy the trust fiduciary mandate.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Scott Aye	
	Title: Lands Program Manager	
Signature:		Date: 3-7-17

MONTANA SAGE GROUSE
HABITAT CONSERVATION PROGRAM



STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

1539 ELEVENTH AVENUE

STATE OF MONTANA

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HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601

Project No. 1484850773910
Governor's Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015
East Fork Fiber Upgrade

Scott Blackett
Mid-State Consultants
1475 North 200 West
Nephi, UT 84648

February 3, 2017

Dear Mr. Blackett,

The Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program received a request for consultation and review of your project or proposed activity on January 19, 2017, with additional project related information necessary to complete our review received on February 2, 2017. Based on the information provided, all or a portion of this project is located within General Habitat for sage grouse.

Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015 set forth Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy. Montana's goal is to maintain viable sage grouse populations and conserve habitat so that Montana maintains flexibility to manage our own lands, our wildlife, and our economy and a listing under the federal Endangered Species Act is not warranted in the future.

The program has completed its review, including:

Project Description:

Project Type: Buried Fiber Optic Telephone Line
Project Disturbance: 3.26 Acres/ 4.5 Miles
Time Frame: Immediate
Disturbance Duration: Temporary

Project Location:

Legal: Township 1 South, Range 47 East, Section 24
Township 1 South, Range 48 East, Sections 16, 17, 19, 20, 21
County: Powder River



Hosted by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Director's Office: (406) 444-2074



Ownership: State Trust Land and Private

Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015 Consistency:

The project proposes to install fiber optic line on private and State Trust Land in designated General Habitat for sage grouse.

Range Telephone Cooperative, Inc. propose to upgrade Telecommunication Facilities and Appurtenances along East Fork Otter Creek Stacy Road and Horkan Creek Road by installing two conduits to house a fiber optic cables. Once the conduit is installed the contractors will insert a fiber optic cable into one of the conduits utilizing a fiber optic cable blowing machine. The remaining conduit will be left vacant for future use.

The majority of the installation of the conduits will be completed with a track dozer utilizing the cable plow method of construction. Where the route meets sensitive areas such as paved approaches, culverts, and streams the conduit will be placed into the ground using a directional bore or trenchless drilling machine for the directional bore method of construction. Surface disturbance will be temporary and vegetation should return within the first growing season. The proposed route will stay within the existing road right-of-way in a pre-disturbed corridor.

Based on the information you provided, your project is not within two miles of an active sage-grouse lek.

Recommendations:

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*).

Your activities are consistent with the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy. Your proposed project or activity may need to obtain additional permits or authorization from other Montana state agencies or possibly federal agencies. They are very likely to request a copy of this consultation letter, so please retain it for your records.

Please be aware that if the location or boundaries of your proposed project or activity change in the future, or if new activities are proposed within one of the designated sage grouse habitat areas, please visit <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/projects/> and submit the new information.



Thanks for your interest in sage grouse and your commitment to taking the steps necessary to ensure Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy is successful.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Sime
Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program Manager

cc: Shawn Thomas
DNRC-Trust Land Management Administrator
P.O. Box 201601
Helena, MT 59620-1601

