

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Project Telephone Fiber Optic Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	May 2017
Proponent:	Project Telephone Company
Location:	W½W½ of Section 36, Township 4 South, Range 24 East (Common Schools Trust)
County:	Carbon County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Project Telephone Company is applying for a 20' wide easement on the W½W½ of Section 36, T4S, R24E in Carbon County in order to install an underground fiber optic cable parallel to and 25' south of the centerline of the adjacent county road, East Pryor Road. As described by the proponent, the project proposes "... to plow a new 72 fiber [cable] from our existing facilities in Pryor, MT to Bridger, MT. This new fiber optic cable will provide an upgraded capability to our Belfry, MT and Clark, WY exchanges enabling our customers to receive a higher speed internet." The proposed easement would encompass 0.638± acres of Trust land and is shown on attached Exhibit A.

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 lessee. The SLO Land Use Planner performed a site inspection on 22 March 2017.

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

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request to issue a 20' wide easement to Project Telephone Company to permit the installation of an underground fiber optic cable adjacent to East Pryor Road.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request to issue a 20' wide easement to Project Telephone Company to permit the installation of an underground fiber optic cable adjacent to East Pryor Road.

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 underground fiber optic cable is proposed to be installed parallel to the existing county road, which generally runs diagonally from northwest to southeast through the NW¼NW¼ of the subject section. The

topography of the area where the fiber optic cable will be installed is fairly flat. The soils in the easement area generally consist of clay loams and silty clay. The NRCS Soil Survey does indicate that there may be some limitations with shallow excavations with the main limitation being depth to bedrock. 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 underground fiber optic line is proposed to be installed along the south side of the existing county road (East Pryor Road) and there are no streams, creeks or other waterways nearby. 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.

No significant adverse 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 installation of the underground fiber optic cable would have a minimal disturbance to existing vegetative cover along the county road as it will be plowed in and immediately covered. The proponent would be required to re-seed any disturbed areas and monitor for weeds. 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 proposed project area search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database identified two vertebrate animals that are listed as a species of concern or threatened species: Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Greater-Sage Grouse. The closest prairie dog town is over 2 miles east of the proposed easement area.

This parcel is located in Greater-Sage Grouse General Habitat. Project Telephone consulted with the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program and received a letter back on 2 February 2017. The Program approved the installation of the fiber optic cable with timing restrictions (no work between 4-8am and 7-10pm) on portions of the route not on Trust land that are within 2 miles of an active lek. The closest lek to the Trust land is located approximately 3.5 miles to the northwest. In addition, the Program recommended a seed mix and measures to control weeds.

The area immediately around the proposed easement is less likely to be preferred habitat for any of the species listed above due to its proximity to East Pryor Road and the disturbance that typically occurs near an existing road. The route on the Trust land is approximately 1,400' in length. No significant adverse impacts to unique,

endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The proposed easement is located adjacent to a county road in a previously disturbed area. The SLO Area Planner conducted a site visit on 22 March 2017 and walked the easement route and did not find any cultural resources. No significant adverse impacts to historic or archaeological sites are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 an underground fiber optic cable adjacent to a county road. Once the easement area is rehabbed from any installation disturbance, 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.

The Southern Land Office is not aware of any other MEPA review or permitting that is proposed or occurring in the immediate area.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
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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.

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 easement does not traverse any crop lands. 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.

The location of the proposed easement is adjacent to a county road, East Pryor Road that does provide public access to the parcel. Construction is proposed to occur on the parcel in May, which is not a high recreational use time. Additionally, the construction on the Trust land should last less than a day if the weather is favorable. The implementation of the proposed alternative will not have a significant adverse impact on the recreational use of this Trust land.

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 will benefit by getting a one-time fee of \$350 from Project Telephone Company for the purchase of the easement on this Trust parcel. The Common Schools Trust will be the beneficiary of this payment.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jeff Bollman, AICP	Date: 22 March 2017
	Title: Area Planner, Southern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that a 20' easement be granted to Project Telephone Company for the purpose of installing an underground fiber optic cable on the south side of East Pryor Road in the NW¼NW¼ of Section 36, Township 4 South, Range 24 East in Carbon County. The proposed easement would encompass 0.638± acres.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal based on the above analysis and the nature of the proposed action. There are no natural features that are expected to be impacted and produce adverse impacts if the proposed action is implemented.

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: /s/ Matthew Wolcott	Date: 3-23-17

Exhibit A: Easement Survey

