

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Montana-Dakota Utilities Electric Line
Proposed Implementation Date:	2017
Proponent:	Montana-Dakota Utilities Co.
Location:	T8N-R57E-Sec 16
County:	Fallon County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Montana-Dakota Utilities Co. has requested a right of way easement from the DNRC Eastern Land Office. This ROW easement is for the purpose of placing an underground 7.2 kV service line across the above mentioned tract of State Trust Land to the BNSF signal house at MP #1033.50.

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-Dakota Utilities has requested that the DNRC allow the passage of the new service line mentioned above across this state owned tract. The surface lessee was contacted to inform them that the application was filed. The requested easement would be 3010.05 feet in length and 25 feet in width for a total encompassing acreage of 1.73 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 underground service 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 lasting effects should be minimal. 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*), Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Green Needlegrass (*Stipa viridula*), Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), Needle-and-thread (*Stipa comata*) 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 bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), the chestnut collared larkspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) and the long billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*). While these species may be present, no impact is expected due to this project. Additionally, the project is located within Greater Sage Grouse General Habitat. The closest active lek to the project is approximately 2.4 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. The proponent has submitted the project to the Sage Grouse Program for review and has received consultation which will be followed in the construction plan.

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 revealed no potential historical sites located 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 revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Because the Holocene age soils in the APE are relatively thin, and because the local geology is not likely to produce caves, rock shelters, or sources of tool stone, 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- Montana-Dakota Utilities would need to be able to perform maintenance on the service 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

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.

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.

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- This proposed project 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 proposed 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

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Seth Urick	Date: 03-23-2017
	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 underground service 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.

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: 3-23-17

**MONTANA SAGE GROUSE
HABITAT CONSERVATION PROGRAM**



STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

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Project No. 1465921824650
Governor's Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015
BNSF MP1033.50 Site Power

Andrew Helm
2001 North Merrill Ave.
Glendive, MT 59330

June 23, 2016

Dear Mr. Helm,

The Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program received a request for consultation and review of your project or proposed activity on June 14, 2016. 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: Underground Electric
Project Disturbance: 2.99 Acres
Time Frame: 2016

Project Location:

Legal: Township 8 North, Range 57 East, Section 16
County: Fallon
Ownership: State Trust Land



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



Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015 Consistency:

The project proposes to install underground electricity on State Trust Land in designated General Habitat for sage grouse. This project will run electric power lines to a BNSF railway site. The lines will be mostly underground with a small section of overhead line to cross Sandstone Creek.

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

