CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Mid-Rivers Telephone Fiber Optic Easement – Dean Creek Extension
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer/Fall 2018
Proponent:	Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative, Inc.
Location:	Section 7, Township 6 North, Range 24 East - Common Schools Trust
County:	Musselshell County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative is applying for two 16' wide easements for the installation of underground fiber optic cable on a parcel of Trust land in Musselshell County described as Section 7-T6N-R24E. The two proposed easements would provide new fiber services off an existing fiber optic line that was approved in 2012 via Easement No. D-14393/App #15972 and that generally runs parallel to Dean Creek road through the section. The two new 16' wide easements that are proposed consist of: 1) a ±460.15' long easement in the N½NW¼, containing approximately 0.17 acres; and 2) a ±1,837.31' long easement in the SE¼NE¼ and NE¼NE¼, containing approximately 0.67 acres. The proposed easement locations are shown on attached Exhibits A and B.

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 not obtained from the grazing lessee. Both Mid-Rivers and the DNRC Southern Land Office attempted to contact the grazing lessee but neither received a response back.

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

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Issue two 16' wide easements to Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the underground installation of fiber optic cable on Section 7, T6N, R24E.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request by Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative to issue two 16' wide easements to Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the underground installation of fiber optic cable on Section 7, T6N, R24E.

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 route proposed in the NW¼ goes from an existing junction box to the northeast and crosses Dean Creek and Sandilly Roads. This route traverses areas that are noted in the soil report as being very limited for shallow excavation, with the main issue being depth to bedrock. This limitation is also found on portions of the easement in the NE¼. Mid-Rivers received an easement from the State on this section in 2012 and installed a buried fiber optic line in soils with similar limitations. In looking at the easement route during a site visit for the current easement, the 2012 fiber optic line appears to be working well and there were no issues noted with the routing or reclamation. 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.

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 routes do not cross a surface water body and will not be installed to a depth that would impact groundwater. No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are anticipated by 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 adverse impacts to air quality are expected by implementing 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. In 2012, Mid-Rivers was granted an easement on this section for underground fiber optic cable and during a site inspection for the current easement, it was noted that that easement area responded well to the reclamation performed and no significant issues were noted. No significant long term 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.

A variety of big game (elk and deer), small mammals, raptors, songbirds, turkeys, and grouse may traverse the subject sections. The proposed project activities could temporarily disrupt wildlife movement and patterns. Due to the relatively short project duration and nature, no significant adverse 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 three vertebrate species of concern, two of which were aquatic and were buffered due to the relative proximity of the Musselshell River to the west of the section. Neither of the two easements traverse the Musselshell River on the Trust land nor any other surface water body. The other species of concern was the Great Blue Heron and the easements are not located within areas that would be suitable habitat. Both easements are located outside of Greater Sage Grouse general or core habitat.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the installation of underground fiber optic cable, and relatively short time frame of construction activity; it is not expected that this action will have any significant effect on any of the species identified.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

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. 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. Additionally, during a site visit on 17 July 2018 by SLO Area Planner Jeff Bollman, visual inspections of the proposed easement routes were performed and no cultural resources were noted. No significant adverse impact to historic or archaeological sites is 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 underground fiber optic cable adjacent to existing roads and two-track trails, in addition to a small cross-country route in the NW¼. 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 would 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 this Trust land parcel.

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.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety would 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 land. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would 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 have no 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 have no 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 Trust land does have legal access via Dean Creek Road that runs through the N½ and E½ of the section. The installation is expected to occur in 2018 prior to the start of big game hunting season but could occur during archery season. Impacts due to installation should be minimal, especially since the easements run parallel to or near existing roads. The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to have an adverse impact on the recreational use opportunities of the 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 $675 from Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the purchase of the easement. The Common Schools Trust will be the beneficiary of this payment.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Jeff Bollman, AICP	**Date:**	6 August 2018
	Title:	Area Planner, Southern Land Office		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that two permanent 16' easements be granted to Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the purpose of installing underground fiber optic cable on a parcel of Trust land in Musselshell County described as Section 7-T6N-R24E. The two new 16' wide easements that are proposed consist of: 1) a ±460.15' long easement in the N½NW¼, containing approximately 0.17 acres; and 2) a ±1,837.31' long easement in the SE¼NE¼ and NE¼NE¼, containing approximately 0.67 acres.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust land 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	X	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Matthew Wolcott
	Title:	Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Signature: /s/Matthew Wolcott		**Date**: 8/6/18

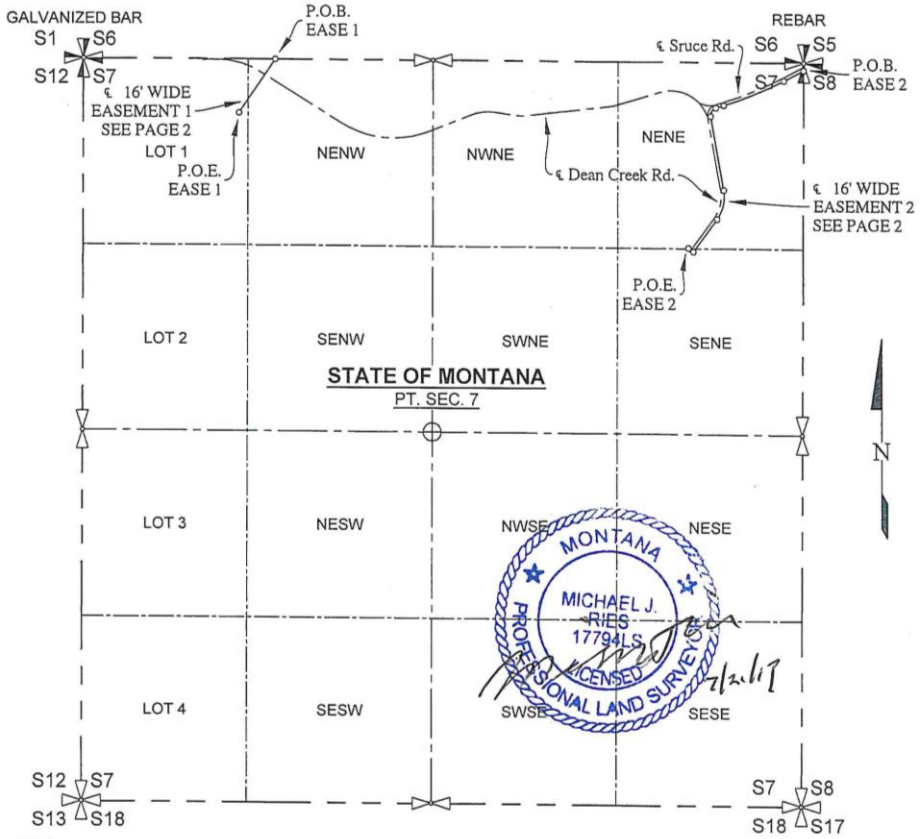
Exhibit A – Mid-Rivers Fiber Optic Easement Location

EXHIBIT A
FIBER OPTIC CABLE EASEMENT DESCRIPTION
FOR: MID-RIVERS TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE, INC.
LAND OWNER: STATE OF MONTANA

Two (2) strips of land 16 feet in width for the construction and maintenance of a fiber optic cable over, across and through the property situated in Section 7, Township 6 North, Range 24 East, Musselshell County, P.M.M., the centerlines of which are more particularly described as follows:

EASEMENT 1: COMMENCING from the Section Corner common to Sections 1, 6, 7 & 12; Thence, along the Section Line common to Sections 6 & 7, S89°45'03"E, 1363.15 feet to the POINT OF BEGINNING, which is the centerline of a 16 foot wide easement having 8 feet on each side; Thence S34°19'58"W, 460.15 feet to the POINT OF ENDING, which bears S70°43'36"E, 1169.14 feet from said Section Corner; The sidelines of said easement shall be elongated or shortened to conform to the grantor's property lines. The easement contains 0.17 acres more or less and is subject to all existing easements and documents of record.

EASEMENT 2: COMMENCING from the Section Corner common to Sections 5, 6, 7 & 8; Thence, along the Section Line common to Sections 7 & 8, S00°14'57"W, 51.67 feet to the POINT OF BEGINNING, which is the centerline of a 16 foot wide easement having 8 feet on each side; Thence S62°26'28"W, 159.94 feet to a point of a curve; Thence along a curve to the right having a radius of 2522.00 feet with a central angle of 10°30'17", an arc length of 462.39 feet; said curve having a chord bearing and distance of S67°41'37"E, 461.74 feet; Thence S72°56'45"W, 59.02 feet to a point of a curve; Thence along said curve to the left having a radius of 53.00 feet with a central angle of 83°02'12", an arc length of 76.81 feet; said curve having a chord bearing and distance of S31°25'39"W, 70.26 feet; Thence S10°05'27"E, 529.24 feet to a point of a curve; Thence along a curve to the right having a radius of 272.00 feet with a central angle of 46°10'22", an arc length of 219.20 feet; said curve having a chord bearing and distance of S12°59'44"W, 213.31 feet; Thence S36°04'55"W, 286.68 feet; Thence N53°55'05"W, 44.03 feet to the POINT OF ENDING, which bears S72°46'48"E, 4510.05 feet from the Section Corner common to Sections 1, 6, 7 & 12; The sidelines of said easement shall be elongated or shortened to conform to the grantor's property lines. The easement contains 0.67 acres more or less and is subject to all existing easements and documents of record.



Note:
All distances are ground, international feet.
All bearings are Geodetic North.
Basis of bearings = Geodetic North based on GPS observation.

LEGEND

FOUND PLSS COR. AS NOTED
CALC'D PLSS COR.
CALC'D CENTER ¼ COR.
P.O.B. POINT OF BEGINNING
P.O.E. POINT OF ENDING

OWNERSHIP DESCRIPTION: A PORTION OF
S. 7 TWP. 6N R. 24E
COUNTY: MUSSELSHELL
STATE: MONTANA
TYPE: 16' WIDE FIBER OPTIC CABLE EASEMENT
TOTAL L.F: 2,297.46 ±
TOTAL AREA: 0.84 AC ±

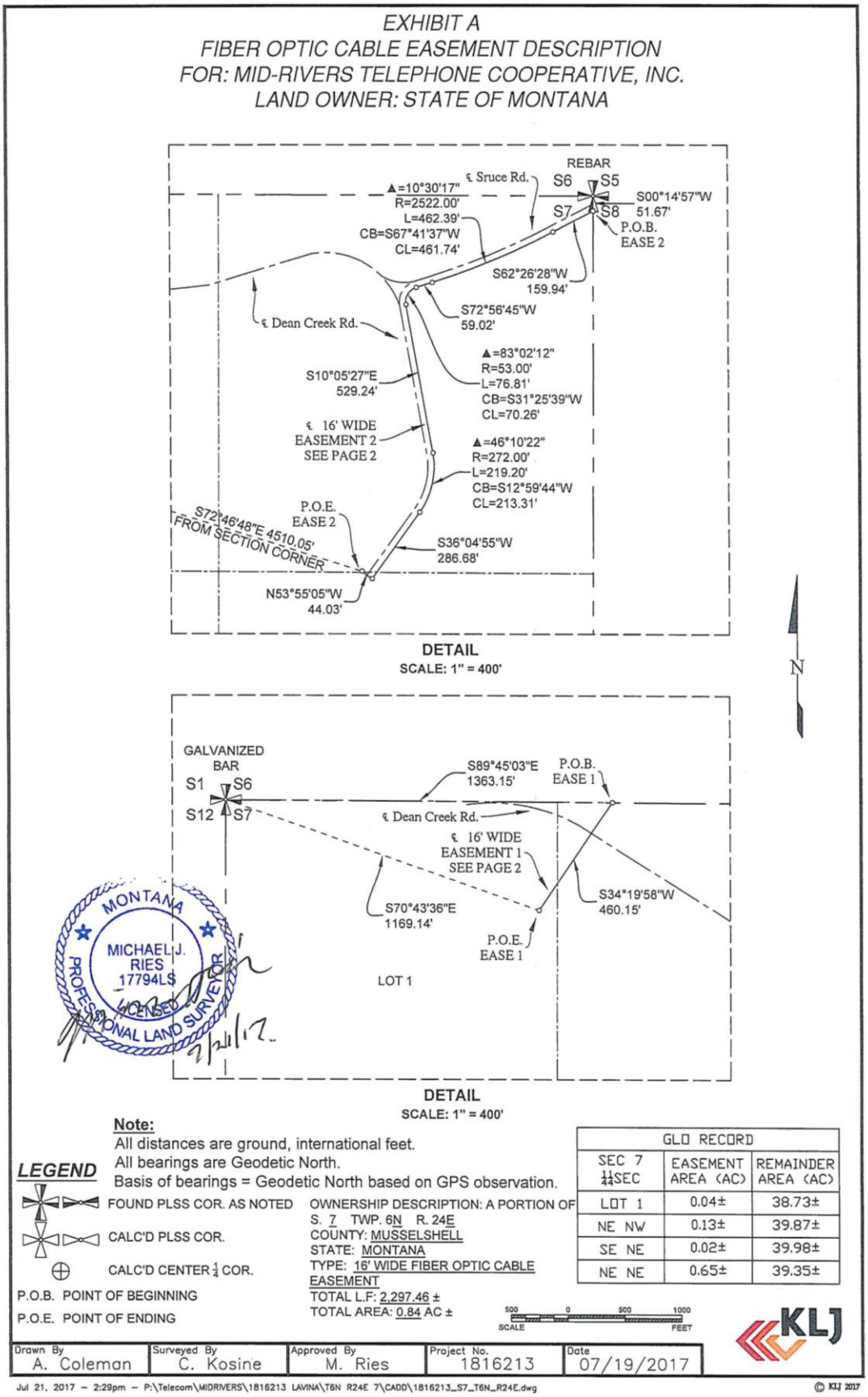
GLO RECORD		
SEC 7 11 SEC 44	EASEMENT AREA (AC)	REMAINDER AREA (AC)
LOT 1	0.04±	38.73±
NE NW	0.13±	39.87±
SE NE	0.02±	39.98±
NE NE	0.65±	39.35±

SCALE 500 0 500 1000 FEET

Drawn By	Surveyed By	Approved By	Project No.	Date
A. Coleman	C. Kosine	M. Ries	1816213	07/19/2017

Jul 21, 2017 – 2:16pm – P:\Telecom\MIDRIVERS\1816213 LAVINA\T6N R24E 7\CADD\1816213_S7_T6N_R24E.dwg

Exhibit B – Mid-Rivers Fiber Optic Easement Detail



GLO RECORD

SEC 7 ¼¼SEC	EASEMENT AREA (AC)	REMAINDER AREA (AC)
LOT 1	0.04±	38.73±
NE NW	0.13±	39.87±
SE NE	0.02±	39.98±
NE NE	0.65±	39.35±