CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Widow Coulee Access Road Extended R/W
Proposed Implementation Date:	May 1, 2018
Proponent:	Northwestern Energy—Attn: Rona Sanchez, Sr. RE Rep
Location:	SE1/4NE1/4, NE1/4SE1/4 Sec. 36, T22N, R5E & Govt. Lot 2, Sec. 31, T22N, R6E
County:	Chouteau

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

To improve road condition for access to the Widow Coulee Fishing Access Site. Road widening, slope reduction and water erosion control with additional ground surface areas for construction projects to keep the access road maintained.

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 Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks—Vicki Robinson, Fishing Access Site Program Manager.
Northwestern Energy (former PP &L Montana), a Delaware Corporation of Butte, Montana—Rona Sanchez, Sr. RE Rep.
Real Estate Representative-Northwestern Energy—Zachary J. Cunningham, P.E.
Cicon and Associates, Chester, Mt.—John M. Cicon

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

Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC)—The Lewistown Unit-NELO Right-of-Way Easement for project area.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: The "No Action" alternative.
Alternative B: The Alternative to repair the Widow Coulee Fishing access road and grant an Easement.

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.

There is only one type of soil present within the project area: Sunburst-Lambeth Complex 25% to 70% slopes. (Escarpments, Back slopes and Foot slopes) Liquid limit of 30-40. Plasticity Index of 10-20. Wind Erodibility of 4. T Factor of 5. Available water capacity of 8.2 inches. Very unstable and slump prone.

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.

There is minimal ground water within the project area. The Missouri River is at the toe of this project. Degradation of the Missouri River is unlikely due to a large enough area for runoff overflow before it could get to the river.

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.

Pollutants or particulates will not be produced with this project outside of wind blow dust during construction.

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 Shallow Thin Breaks Range Site: Western wheatgrass, Green needlegrass, Needleandthread, Muly grass, Blue bunch wheatgrass, Blue grama, Kentucky bluegrass, Sandburg's bluegrass, Red three awn, Prairie sandreed, Little bluestem, Fringed sagewort, Opuntia species, Soaproot, Wild rose, Skunk bush sumac, Thermopsis, Broom snakeweed, Winterfat, Scarlet globmallow. Rated at 67% in good condition.

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.

Aquatic life will not be adversely affected by this project. The Fishing Access Site and Boat ramp are already in place and have been for years now.

As explained in #9, any terrestrial species present will be dispersed into the surrounding permanent cover types.

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.

At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the project area. A review of the Sage-Grouse Lek and Lek Area data in ArcGis showed no sage grouse leks in or near the project area. The sage grouse general and/or core areas are nowhere near this project.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified several species of birds on the Species of Special Concern report: Brewer's Sparrow, Long-Billed Curlew, Greater Sage-Grouse, Chestnut-collared Longspur Sparrow, McCown's Longspur Sparrow, Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing owl, Golden Eagle, Sprague's Pipet and the Grasshopper Sparrow. The Greater Short-Horned lizard, the Black-Tailed Prairie Dog and the Merriam's Shrew were the animals listed for Chouteau County. If any of these species are present, they will be dispersed into the surrounding permanent cover types.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

An Environmental Assessment for the Fishing Access Site and Road Easement was originally done in May of 2000. It was prepared by Lisa Bay Consulting of Helena, Montana. A MEPA/NEPA/HB495 Checklist was also completed by PP&L Montana. It was determined that an EIS was not required. A SHPO Letter of Clearance was obtained prior to the original project construction.

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.

This project is not visible from any populated areas. It is however in the very scenic river breaks.

The 3.57 acre area around the existing easemented road will be disturbed and must be re-seeded with native vegetation. Special easement conditions will be specified in #13 of this document.

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.

There are no limited resources in relation to this project. There are no other activities nearby that would affect this project.

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.

Special Conditions: Repairing the erosion on the slopes and cleaning up sediment that flows off the work area into previously undisturbed native vegetation. Ensuring that only native species of grass are growing on site, this includes seeding the steep slope below and to the south of the roadway. Ensuring that the road ditches are stabilized with rock riprap as committed to by Mt. F, W&P's. Outlets (water bars) should be put in two to three places to get water off of the road because the road is built basically into a funnel with 2 & 3-foot berms on both sides. Ensuring that the site is stabilized with either hydo-mulch or erosion control blankets. Northwestern Energy ensures that revegetation gets established for up to two years after the Right-of-Way is issued.

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.

Human health and safety will improve due to the less steep, improved roadway down to the fishing access site.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Commercial activities could be enhanced by fishermen and outfitters gaining better access to the Missouri river. Floaters and other recreationalist will take advantage of this new improved roadway.

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.

New jobs will not be created. There are no direct or cumulative effects to the employment market due to this project.

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 tax base will not be affected. There are no direct or cumulative effects upon taxes for this project.

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

Additional services will not be required. No cumulative effects are 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.

The Widow Coulee road is considered to be a County Road. The Montana F, W&P's will maintain the Fishing Access Site. Northwestern Energy is responsible for the easement and upkeep of the Right-of-Way area. Montana DNRC has issued Land Use License #3332 for road construction due to the extreme slopes of the access road prior to easement application until the exact disturbed area could be surveyed.

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.

Recreational activities were disrupted for a short time during road construction. There is valuable recreational potential in this area of the project. It leads to the Widow Coulee Fishing Access Site on the Missouri River. This is the first "Put-in after the Great Falls series of dams".

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.

Additional housing will not be a requirement of this project. No direct or cumulative effects are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Disruption is not likely. There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by this proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

There should be no shift in the area.

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.

Increased usage of the Widow Coulee Fishing Access Site should occur as a product of this project. Social effects should be enhanced. The return to the DNRC School Trusts will be the one time R/W fee for the easement.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Barny D. Smith **Signature** **Date** **2/28/18**

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: The alternative to repair the Widow Coulee Fishing Access Road and grant an easement.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

If all the requirements of LUL #3332 and special conditions of the Mt. DNRC are met, minimal negative impacts are expected.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Clive Rooney **Title:** Area Manager-DNRC
Signature **/S/**	**Date** 3/9/18