CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**Austin Road Electric Utility Installation Land Use License/Utility Easement**
Proposed Implementation Date:	October 2018
Proponent:	North Western Energy
Location:	SW4 Section 36, T11N, R5W
County:	Lewis and Clark
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

NorthWestern Energy (NWE) is proposing to install a new buried electric distribution line on State Trust Land in Section 36, T11N, R5W in conjunction with the Qwest/Century Link installation of the new fiber is to upgrade voice and data in the service area. The new electric distribution line will take advantage of the same disturbance resulting from the installation of the new fiber optic line. NWE is requesting a land use license to begin this project as soon as possible in order to take advantage of the work Century Link is completing. Also, NWE is seeking an easement to authorize the new electric distribution line. The new buried distribution line will encumber approximately the same acres, distance and width as the new fiber optic installation. The ROW corridor will be 20 feet wide and extend approximately 2,539 feet and 1.165 acres.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Agencies, Groups or Individuals Scoped:	Response:
DNRC, Landowner	Neutral-Landowner
NorthWestern Energy	Proponent is in favor of the project

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

DNRC is not aware of other government agencies with jurisdiction. The proponent is responsible to obtain any necessary permits.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Action Alternative: Issuing the Land Use License as proposed; issuing NorthWestern Energy a new easement to account for newly encumbered state land.

No Action Alternative: Deny the applications for a Land Use License and an easement to account for newly encumbered state land.

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.

Soils in the project area include: 86% is Geohrock channery loams (163 D); Hauz-Sieben-3.6% is Tolman channery loams (263 E); and 10.4 % are Fluvaquents and Fluvaquentic Haplustolls (501 B). These soils are considered very limited regarding this activity.

Proposed Action Alternative: The expected disturbance will occur during the installation of the underground electric line. A county road, Austin Road, accesses the area and the underground line will be buried adjacent to this road prism next to existing underground utilities. Standard LUL stipulations would address reclamation. No long-lasting impacts to fragile, compactable, or unstable soils or any unusual geologic features are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics would occur.

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.

Seven Mile Creek is adjacent to the project area on the other side of the railroad tracks. The disturbance will occur during the installation of the underground electric line, however, this activity should occur an acceptable distance away from the creek and resulting sediment would be contained by railroad facilities. NorthWestern Energy is responsible for obtaining all permits necessary to work in or around the stream. Standard LUL stipulations would address reclamation.

Proposed Action Alternative: No direct or cumulative impacts to water quality are anticipated as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.

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.

In general, the quality of air standards is fair in this area with fair to good ventilation and would only be temporarily impacted by the proposal.

Proposed Action Alternative: Short-duration increases in dust from construction activities associated with underground electric line installation will occur. Minimal direct or cumulative effects are expected to occur to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to air quality will occur.

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 Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 1 plant species of concern, 0 potential species of concern, and 0 special status species within T13N R5W. The plant species of concern is Lesser Rushy Milkvetch.

Species Occurrences verified in these Counties: Beaverhead, Broadwater, Jefferson, Lewis and Clark
State Rank Reason: The distribution of *A. convallarius* in Montana is limited to two localities in the state: the Helena Valley vicinity and an area in extreme southwest Montana in Beaverhead County. The species has been and continues to be negatively impacted by development in the Helena area. Past development in the Helena Valley likely eliminated extensive areas of previously occupied habitat resulting in the more fragmented distribution seen today. The grassland habitats this species occupies are also being invaded by several noxious weeds, particularly in the Helena vicinity. However, the species appears to tolerate some levels of disturbance and degradation of habitat quality. Several large occurrences are presently known and some areas of potentially suitable habitat remain without a survey.

Proposed Action Alternative: Temporary disturbances to plant communities may occur. These vegetative communities would not be permanently altered. No lasting impacts to rare plants or cover types are anticipated within the project area.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality will occur.

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.

This tract is used by a variety of wildlife, including ungulates (mule deer, whitetail deer, and elk), small to large sized predators (weasels, skunks, red fox, and coyotes), numerous species of small mammals (mice, voles, ground squirrels, rabbits, etc.), various raptors (red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, bald eagles, American kestrels, prairie falcons, etc.) upland game birds (Hungarian partridge, mountain grouse), and numerous non-game bird species (a wide variety of migrant and resident bird species associated with available habitats). The proposed project would temporarily displace these wildlife species.

Proposed Action Alternative: Temporary disturbances may occur during the proposed project duration. No lasting impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and/or habitats are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.

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.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 8 animal *species of concern*, 0 *potential species of concern* and 0 *special status species* within this township. The 8 animal species of concern are: Wolverine, Canada Lynx, Veery, Evening Grosbeak, Bobolink, Clark's Nutcracker, Long-billed Curlew, Flammulated Owl, and Westslope Cutthroat Trout. The area wildlife would be affected by temporary displacement during proposed project.

Proposed Action Alternative: Temporary disturbances may occur during the proposed project duration. No lasting impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources habitats are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

A Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted in 1988 of the area of potential effect on state land. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified in the easement corridor. No additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings is on file at the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources are anticipated due to the scope and nature of this project.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.

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 project area represents a typical rural and partially subdivided community found in this geographic area in Lewis and Clark County, Montana. The project would have minimal impacts to the area's aesthetics. Noise and dust increases would occur during the project. These impacts would cease as soon as the project is completed.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to the aesthetics are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the aesthetics will occur.

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.

The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of sparse suburban residential and ranching operations.

Proposed Action Alternative No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.

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.

DNRC is not aware of other plans or projects in the area.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects pertinent to this area are anticipated to occur.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects will occur.

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.

The proposed project would create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation of an underground electric line. Traffic on Austin Road would be temporarily disrupted.

Proposed Action Alternative: NorthWestern Energy is responsible to identify and mitigate the risks associated with the installation.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.

---

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Proposed Action Alternative: No lasting impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities/production are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities/production will occur.

---

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 project would be completed in a relatively short time frame and it would not create permanent jobs.

Proposed Action Alternative: No lasting impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.

---

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: The project would not have any measurable effects to local or state tax revenues.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues will occur.

---

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

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposal would not have any impacts on traffic or government services.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to traffic, road uses, or government services will occur.

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.

DNRC is not aware of other plans or projects in the area.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated occur.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals will occur.

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.

Legal, public access does exist to this parcel of state land in Section 36, T11N, R5W. Project implementation may occur during general hunting season. Temporary impacts may occur. Generally, hunting opportunities are limited in the project area due to the close proximity to the county road

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this state tract.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.

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.

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments. No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to the areas social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities are anticipated to occur.

No Action Alternative: No impacts social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities will occur.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated to occur.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity will occur.

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed project would allow access to state land to install an underground electric line. Compensation to the trust beneficiary would total $200.00 for the land use license. This is equal to the minimum amount required by the REMB fee schedule. Additional revenue will be realized for the utility easement for the permanent encumbrance of the utility. This Land Use License and forthcoming utility easement should not impact future uses or income potential to this tract of state trust land.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances will occur.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Andy Burgoyne	**Date:** October 15, 2018
	Title: HU Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Proposed Alternative – Approve the project as proposed, issue the land use license and recommend approval of the utility easement to install an underground electric line on State Trust Land.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

As proposed, the installation of the buried electric line on State Trust Land in Section 36, T11N, R05W is not expected to result in any direct, indirect or cumulative adverse effects to the project area. Standard LUL stipulations regarding reclamation and noxious weed control will appear in the license. Compliance with these stipulations will be monitored.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Martin Balukas	
	Title: CLO Trust Land Program Manager	
Signature:		**Date:** 10/15/18

Exhibit A-Vicinity Map

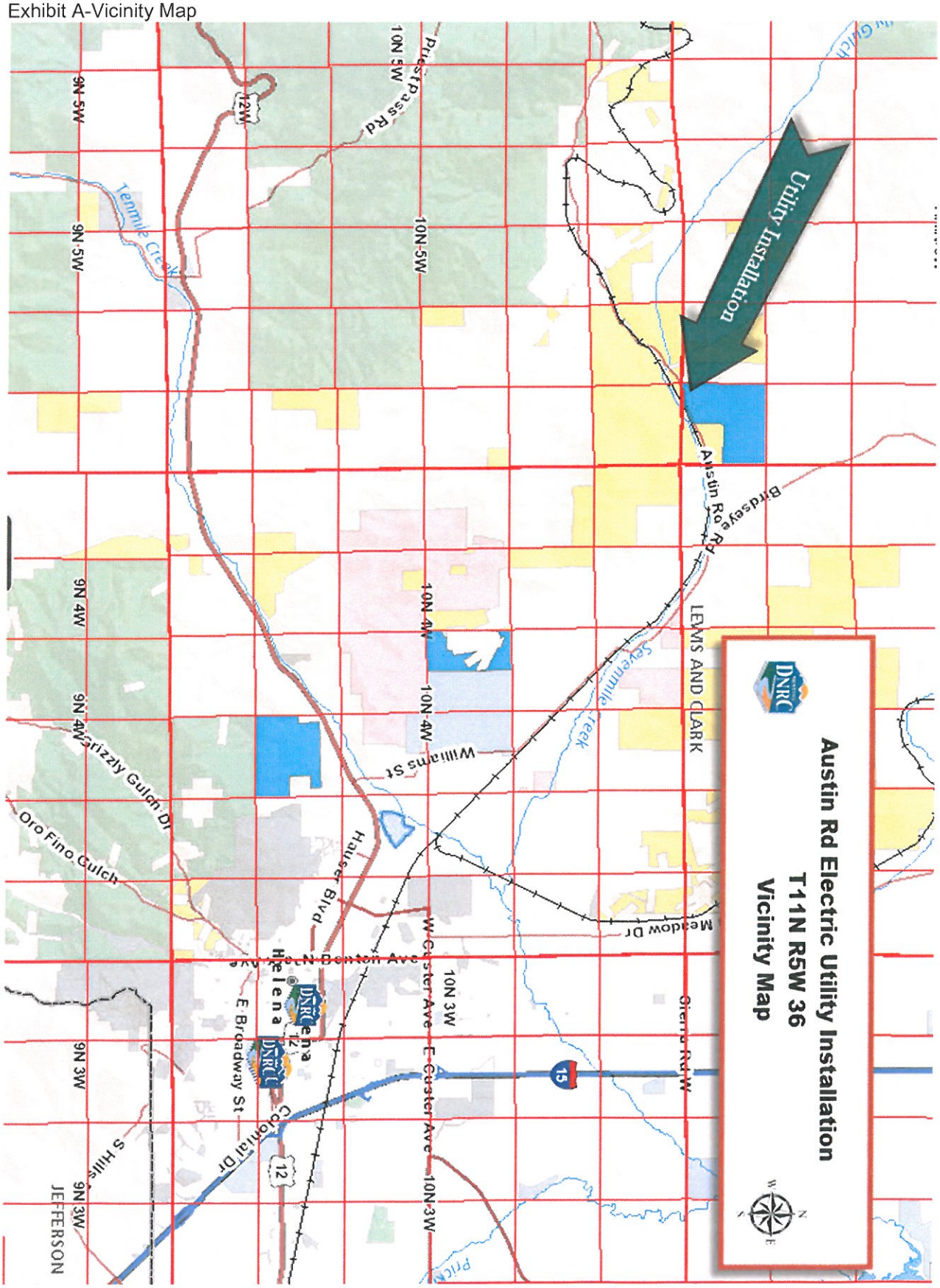
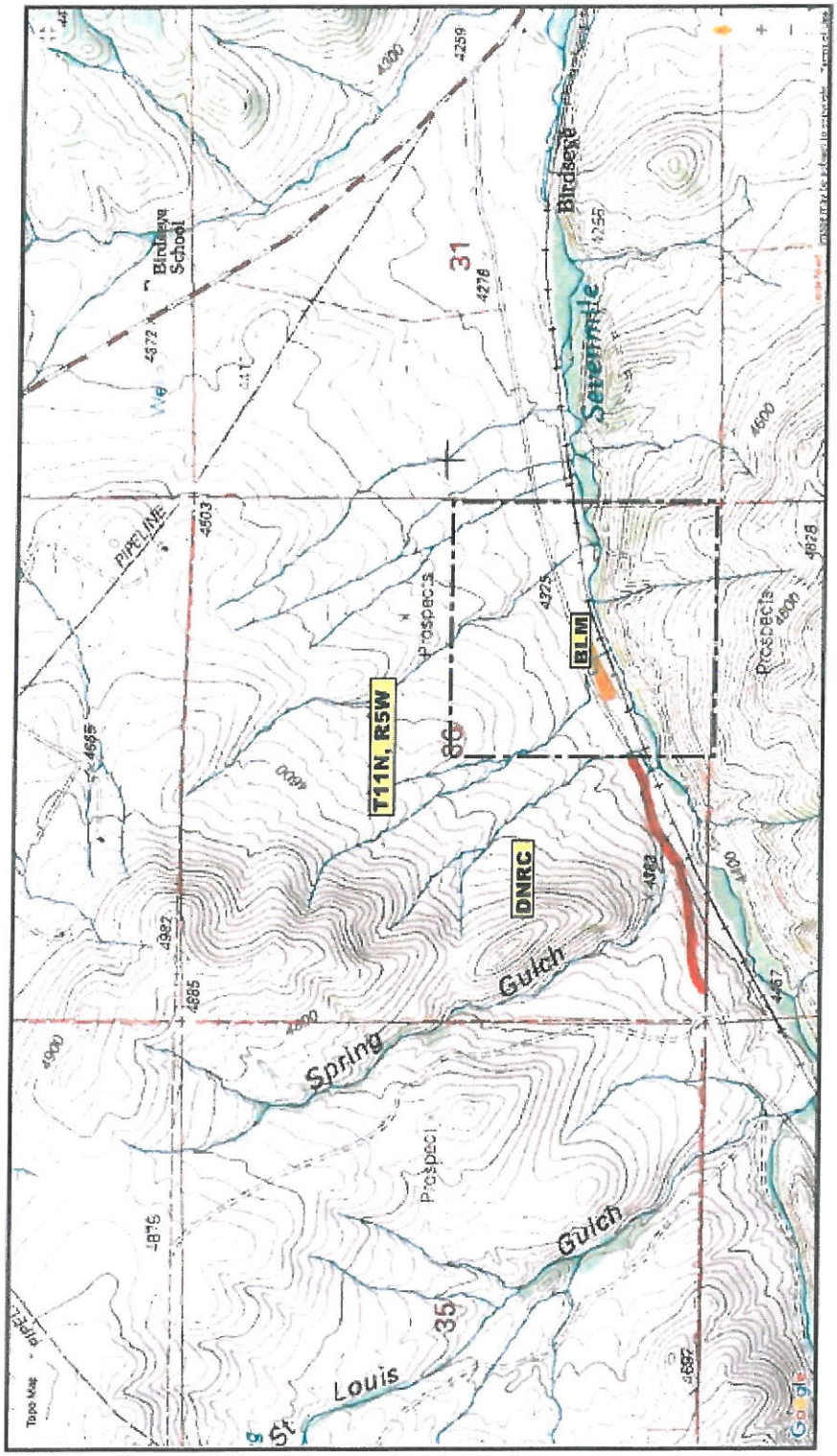
Exhibit B-Project Map-Topographical