

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Easement application for the installation of a buried fiber optic cable to upgrade 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc.'s current facilities and services in the Fairfield West exchange serving area around Fairfield, MT.
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring/Summer 2019
Proponent:	3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc., PO Box 429, Fairfield, MT 59436
Location:	See below list of tracts.
County:	Teton
Trust:	Common Schools (CS) and Capitol Buildings (CB)

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. has requested to install buried fiber optic cables to upgrade their facilities and services in the Fairfield West exchange serving area around Fairfield, MT. The proposed easement routes are located besides existing roads and trails. The fiber optic cable will cross 5 tracts of state land. The fiber optic cable will be installed 36" to 42" deep by the utilization of a vibratory plow drawn by a crawler tractor. The easement will be 10.00' wide through the state-owned tracts.

Township	Range	Section	Fiber Optic Cable Location	Acres Affected	Trust	County
21N	6W	14	W2W2	0.2934	CS	Teton
21N	6W	21	SE4SW4	0.1452	CB	Teton
21N	6W	23	W2W2	0.5414	CS	Teton
22N	7W	27	NW4SW4	0.1700	CB	Teton
22N	7W	36	ALL	1.035	CS	Teton
TOTAL				0.3152	CB	Teton
TOTAL				1.8698	CS	Teton

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

- 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:**
Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc.-Proponent
 DNRC-Surface Owner
 J. T. and Cody Weisner-Surface Lessee, Lease #1163
 Blenton Ranch Co.-Surface Lessee #6731 and #1686
 Elizabeth and Travis Barker-Surface Lessee, Lease #5109

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

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

- 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

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 at the proposed project site are silty, sandy, and shallow to gravel in texture. The topography is gently rolling and the fiber optic cable will be installed along existing roads and trails. These soils and slopes are generally suitable for the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Equipment will cause localized areas of soil compaction and will disturb the soil where the buried fiber optic cable is being placed. Reclamation requirements are to compact and level the plow scar created in the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Then, seed the impacted area with the existing grass types and seeding rates that are listed in item 7 of this assessment. Cumulative impacts on soil resources are not expected as the use of a vibratory plow will minimize the surface disturbance caused by the construction project.

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 are numerous water rights associated with these tracts; however, none of these water rights will be impacted by the proposed easements. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by 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.

The proposed action will not impact the air quality.

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.

Vegetation will be minimally impacted as approximately 1.80 miles of buried fiber optic cable will be installed by the utilization of a vibratory plow. The vegetation consists primarily of native species and introduced species. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed construction areas are a concern, but this concern will be mitigated as the applicants are responsible for controlling weeds within the construction areas. Cumulative impacts on the vegetative resources are not expected as the proposed construction areas will be reclaimed and reseeded. The reseeding mixture will consist of a grass seed mixture of 35% Western Wheatgrass, 35% Slender Wheatgrass, 15% Bluebunch Wheatgrass, 10% Green Needle grass, and 5% Lewis blue flax. If drilled the rate will be 8#/acre, but if broadcast seeded, the rate will be doubled.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T21N, R6W: There was two species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey: Flowering Plants (Dicots)-Great Basin Downingia. Flowering Plants (Monocots)-Wood Lily. These species were not identified in the proposed project area.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T22N, R7W: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

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.

These areas are not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, these tracts provide habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, and badger), upland game birds (sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds. The proposal does not include any land use change which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or traveling corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. The proposed action will not have long-term negative effects on existing wildlife species and/or wildlife habitat.

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 parcels are located in the NCD grizzly bear recovery zone. Grizzly bears will not be impacted by the project because construction will occur along existing county roads and trails. The fiber optic cable will also be buried. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by proposal.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T21N, R6W. There were six animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and one special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds-Golden Eagle, Great Blue Heron, Bobolink, Common Loon, Long-billed Curlew, McCown's Longspur, and Bald Eagle. These tracts of agricultural and grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T22N, R7W. There were seven animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and one special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds-Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Black Tern, Bobolink, Common Loon, Long-billed Curlew, McCown's Longspur, and Bald Eagle. These tracts of agricultural and grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect (APE) on state land. During the course of inventory four irrigation ditches were formally recorded (24TT754-24TT757). The properties are recommended as ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and DNRC concurs with that assessment even though the ditches are privately owned. As such, proposed telecommunications cable installation activities will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

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.

Installation of the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the aesthetics of the land in any way as it will not be visible. It will lead to no erosion of the soil resources on the tracts as the line is located below the soil surface.

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 demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed 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.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

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.

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The results of this project will not affect the industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities or production in the area.

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.

This project will not create any new jobs, as the project will be completed in house by the proponent.

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 add to the 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

This project is of a small scale and being funded by 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. There will be no excessive stress placed of the existing infrastructure of the area.

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 proposed action is following State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

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.

This proposed project areas are located next to existing roads and trails which generally have high recreational value. These tracts are legally accessible, and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on these state tracts.

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.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

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 proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of 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.

This project will benefit the school trust in terms of the \$50.00 fee generated from each of the easement applications for a total of \$250.00. The easements on the Common Schools and Capitol Buildings Trusts will be compensated at fair market value. Cumulative impacts are not likely as the area is only used for grazing and the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the long-term viability of the tracts.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Tony Nickol	Date: April 30, 2019
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDINGS

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cables.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:


This project will provide area residents with upgraded (state of the art) telecommunications services. Significant impacts are not anticipated as a result of the selected alternative. Disturbed areas will be mitigated by reclaiming and reseeding in accordance with specifications outlined in this EAc.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Erik Eneboe
	Title: Conrad Unit Manger, CLO, DNRC
Signature: 	Date: May 1, 2019