

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Triangle Telephone Fiber Optic Easements
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	Summer/Fall 2019
<b>Proponent:</b>	Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc.
<b>Location:</b>	Section 16, Township 1 North, Range 20 East (Common Schools Trust) North ½ of Section 16, Township 2 North, Range 20 East (Common Schools Trust)
<b>County:</b>	Stillwater County

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Telephone Cooperative is applying for 20' wide easements on two parcels of Trust land in Stillwater County for the underground installation of fiber optic cable as described below (see Exhibits A and B):

- **Section 16-T1N-R20E:** The proposed 20' wide (0.073 acre) easement would run on the east side of State Highway 306. There is also an existing 20' wide easement for buried telephone that was granted to Triangle in 1982. The new fiber optic is proposed to roughly parallel the existing telephone line easement and the highway.
- **North ½ of Section 16-T2N-R20E:** The proposed 20' wide (1.272 acre) easement would be located on the east side of State Highway 306. There is also an existing 20' wide easement for buried telephone that was granted to Triangle in 1982. The new fiber optic is proposed to roughly parallel the existing telephone line easement and the highway.

The easements that have been applied for are a part of a larger project where Triangle is expanding fiber optic lines to their existing exchange in Rapelje. The areas impacted by this application are located south of the unincorporated town of Rapelje.

### 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. Settlement of Damages forms were obtained from the grazing lessees.

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

- Montana Department of Environmental Quality – Storm Water Discharge Permit (Issued)
- US Army Corps of Engineers (Issued)
- Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program Consultation (Issued)
- Montana Department of Transportation – Utility Occupancy & Location Agreement (Pending)
- Stillwater County Encroachment Permit (Issued)

**3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

**Proposed Alternative:** Issue 20' wide easements to Triangle Telephone Cooperative for the underground installation of fiber optic cable on the two parcels listed above in Stillwater County.

**No Action Alternative:** Deny the request by Triangle Telephone Cooperative to issue one or both of the proposed 20' wide easements for fiber optic cable in Stillwater County.

### 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 routes proposed in the easements parallel State Highway 306 and existing telephone easements. The fiber optic 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. 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 only parcel where an easement crosses a water body is in the NW¼NW¼ of 16-2N-20E where the easement proposes to cross Gurney Creek. At this location, the creek crossing is only approximately 10' with the active channel being around three feet. Triangle has received their storm water permit from DEQ and the BMPs required in that permit should protect the creek from any impact from installation of the new fiber optic cable. 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. The easement document will require Triangle Telephone to control any noxious weeds introduced by its activities and reclamation of any disturbed areas. 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 (antelope and mule deer), small mammals, raptors and songbirds may traverse the two sections. The proposed project activities could temporarily disrupt wildlife movement and patterns during construction. 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.

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**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 the following:

**Section 16-T1N-R20E:** The species of concern search result on this parcel included the Little Brown Myotis and Bobcat. The Bobcat was caught in the general area by a trapper in later 2007/early 2008.

**North ½ of Section 16-T2N-R20E:** The species of concern result located on this parcel included the Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Bobcat. During the site inspection there were no prairie dogs noted within the proposed easement route. Based on a 2017 aerial photo, there does not appear to be an active town in this immediate area. The Bobcat was caught in the general area by a trapper in later 2007/early 2008. Additionally, this parcel is located within the identified Greater Sage-Grouse general habitat.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the installation of underground fiber optic cable, it is not expected that this action will have any significant effect on any of the species identified on or around these three parcels. The surface disturbance will be temporary and generally adjacent to existing county roads or state highways.

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**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

The areas of potential effect were previously inventoried to Class III standards for cultural and paleontological resources. No such resources were identified. Cable installation work will result in *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is filed with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

Additionally, during site visits to the parcels on 15 May 2019 by Area Planner Jeff Bollman, visual inspections 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.

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**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 an existing state highway. The easement document will require Triangle Telephone to control any noxious weeds introduced by its activities and reclamation of any disturbed areas. 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.

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**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.

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**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 these two Trust land parcels.

<b>IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i></li><li>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i></li><li>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i></li></ul>

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**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.

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**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

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

The location of the easements does not traverse any crop lands. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.*

Both subject parcels have legal public access via a state highway. The installation is expected to occur in 2019 and could overlap archery and/or rifle hunting season(s). Impacts due to installation should be minimal, especially since the easements run parallel to the existing highway. The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to have a long-term adverse impact on the ability of recreational use of these Trust lands.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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 \$740 (\$100 for 1N-20E-16 and \$640 for 2N-20E-16) from Triangle Telephone Cooperative for the purchase of the easements on these two Trust parcels. The Common Schools Trust will be the beneficiary of this payment.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Jeff Bollman, AICP	<b>Date:</b> 20 May 2019
	<b>Title:</b> Area Planner, Southern Land Office	

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**V. FINDING**

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**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that permanent 20' easements be granted to Triangle Telephone Cooperative for the purpose of installing underground fiber optic cable on the following parcels in Musselshell County:

- Section 16, Township 1 North, Range 20 East
- Section 16, Township 2 North, Range 20 East

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**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

The potential for significant adverse impacts on the two Trust land parcels listed above 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.

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**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

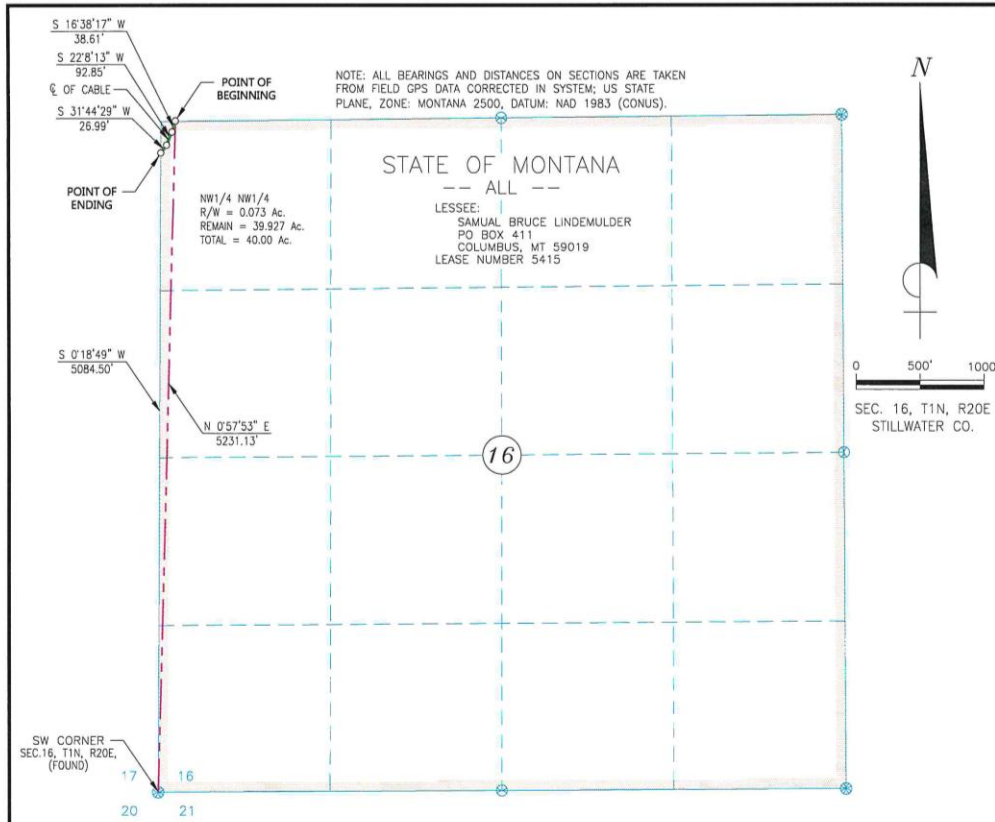
EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Jeff Hermanns
	<b>Title:</b> Area Forester, Southern Land Office
<b>Signature:</b> /s/ Jeffrey Hermanns	<b>Date:</b> 5/20/19

**Exhibit A – Proposed Easement location on Section 16-1N-20E**



DESCRIPTION

A RIGHT-OF-WAY FOR AN UNDERGROUND TELECOMMUNICATIONS CABLE EXTENDING TWENTY (20.0) FEET IN WIDTH WITH TEN (10.0) FEET ON EACH SIDE OF A CENTERLINE ALL WITHIN THE NW1/4 NW1/4 OF SECTION 16, TOWNSHIP 1 NORTH, RANGE 20 EAST OF THE PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, MONTANA, AND MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

COMMENCING AT THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF SAID SECTION 16, TOWNSHIP 1 NORTH, RANGE 20 EAST; THENCE NORTH 0°57'53" EAST A DISTANCE OF 5231.13 FEET TO THE **POINT OF BEGINNING** OF THE RIGHT-OF-WAY CENTERLINE AND NORTH BOUNDARY OF THE NW1/4 NW1/4 OF SAID SECTION 16; THENCE ON AND ALONG THE RIGHT-OF-WAY CENTERLINE ON A BEARING OF SOUTH 16°38'17" WEST A DISTANCE OF 38.61 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 22°8'13" WEST A DISTANCE OF 92.85 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 31°44'29" WEST A DISTANCE OF 26.99 FEET TO THE **POINT OF ENDING** OF THE RIGHT-OF-WAY CENTERLINE AND WEST BOUNDARY OF THE NW1/4 NW1/4 OF SAID SECTION 16; THENCE SOUTH 0°18'49" WEST A DISTANCE OF 5084.50 FEET TO THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF SAID SECTION 16, TOWNSHIP 1 NORTH, RANGE 20 EAST.

CONTAINED WITHIN THE ABOVE DESCRIBED NEW CONSTRUCTION RIGHT-OF-WAY IS 0.073 ACRES MORE OR LESS.

<p>EXHIBIT of RIGHT-OF-WAY on STATE LAND                  Sec. 16, T 1 N, R 20 E, P.M.M.                  STILLWATER CO.</p>	<p>TRIANGLE TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE ASSN., INC.                  HAVRE, MONTANA</p>
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**Exhibit B – Proposed Easement location on Section 16-2N-20E**

