

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Lincoln Electric Cooperative Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	2020
Proponent:	Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Location:	Section 24, T29N, R28W
County:	Lincoln

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Lincoln Electric Cooperative Inc. (LEC) has requested to secure an easement. This easement would provide for installation and maintenance of an underground power line along USFS Road #2346 (Tamarack Creek), through State land located in Section 24, T29N, R28W. Where it crosses state land, the power line easement would be 5,042 Feet long, 20 feet wide, and would total 2.3 acres in size. The power line would eventually supply electricity to a site on US Forest Service land on the top of Calx Mountain (Sec.10, T28N, R27.5W). This site is currently used as a fire lookout and radio communications site for DNRC, Lincoln County and various other agencies. The site is presently supplied with propane fueled generation, however the installation of electrical facilities would provide a more consistent, reliable power source for these essential communication sites.

The primary power cable will be installed in a conduit system, parallel to the existing road prism at a minimum depth of 36 inches, with seven access locations (vaults or junction cabinets) on DNRC land along the proposed route. When exiting DNRC land, the proposed cable route will continue along the Tamarack Creek Road on National Forest Service land up to the top of Calx Mountain. The project will terminate at a transformer/service site near a communications building. LEC is tentatively proposing construction during the 2020 season.

This proposal would affect the Capital Buildings Trust.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

A Public Notice was published in the Western News on August 9, 16, 23, and 30, 2019 as well as September 6, 2019. Additionally, scoping letters were mailed and emailed to a comprehensive list of interested parties including individuals, adjacent landowners, private organizations, and agency representatives. The scoping list for this project was made up of the Libby Unit and Forest Management Bureau scoping lists and is available upon request.

There was a concern that noxious weeds may spread because of soil disturbance associated with construction operations if grass seeding is not performed as a weed control measure.

There was a concern that negative impacts to wildlife could occur if noxious weeds are not controlled.

There was a concern that improper storage of food during construction operations could lead to negative impacts to wildlife.

There was a concern that potential sites with religious and/or cultural significance could be disturbed during construction operations.

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

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open

The DNRC has jurisdiction over this proposed project upon State Trust Land. The proponent is responsible for acquiring any and all required permits for the proposed project from other state or federal agencies. DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project as it relates to State Trust land.

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny the requested easement that would provide for installation and maintenance of an underground power line along USFS Road #2346 (Tamarack Creek), through State land located in Section 24, T29N, R28W.

Alternative B (Proposed Action) – Approve the requested easement that would provide for installation and maintenance of an underground power line along USFS Road #2346 (Tamarack Creek), through State land located in Section 24, T29N, R28W.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects of No-Action Alternative

No measurable direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to soil erosion are expected, and no additional ground would be removed from timber production.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects of Action Alternative

Soil Erosion

Risk of measurable direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to soil erosion from proposed trail construction is expected to be low. Risk would be increased over the existing condition for approximately 2-3 years until bare soil is re-vegetated. In addition, disturbed soil along 5,042 Feet long by 20-foot width of the easement request, which is located within the existing road right-of-way, would be re-vegetated with certified weed free grass seed to reduce bare soil erosion.

Forest Land Removed from Timber Production

Direct, indirect and cumulative impacts to forest land removed from timber production are expected to be low. Since this requested easement would occur within an existing road right-of-way easement, much of this area is currently out of timber production. However, under the proposed Action Alternative, some un-measured portion of the 2.3 acres of forest land within the gross project area could be removed from timber production. The direct and indirect impacts of this reduction would likely not be measurable within the gross project area. Cumulative impacts to forest land removed from timber production are also not expected to be measurable.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects of No-Action Alternative A

No measurable direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to water quality from sediment delivery are expected.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects of Action Alternative B

No measurable direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to water quality from sediment delivery are expected, provided that existing road surface drainage features are maintained. No streams have been identified within the requested easement area.

Easement language should ensure that all existing improvements, including the existing road and associated drainage features are protected.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

The construction, and to a lesser extent, the maintenance of the requested easement corridor could generate dust during the activity. Slash piles could be burned because of vegetation clearing for the trails.

The project area is located in Montana Airshed 1. If slash piles are created and burned, smoke would be generated from the burning of slash; however, adherence to the Montana/Idaho State Airshed Group regulations requires that burning occur during periods with adequate airshed ventilation. This would reduce the potential for detrimental contributions of associated air pollutants.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

Impacts associated with vegetation, and weeds would be expected to be minimal as a result of clearing existing forest vegetation (mostly roadside vegetation) within the requested easement area (5,042 Feet long, 20 feet wide, and would total 2.3 acres in size). The disturbed soil surface would be grass seeded, to reduce the potential for noxious weeds to become established. Cumulative impacts on the vegetative resources would be also be minimal.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats from the action alternative are expected to occur, as the requested easement area is adjacent to an open, public road.

Mitigations include having easement language addresses the following:

Manage noxious weeds by grass seeding disturbed soil following construction with certified weed free grass seed.

Food, carcasses, and attractants must be stored in a bear-resistant container or stored in a bear-resistant manner if they are unattended.)

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to unique, endangered, or limited environmental resources from the action alternative are expected to occur, as the requested easement area is adjacent to an open, public road.

Mitigations include having easement language addresses the following:

Food, carcasses, and attractants must be stored in a bear-resistant container or stored in a bear-resistant manner if they are unattended.)

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative 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. Because the area of potential effect on state land has been variously disturbed with past road construction, 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.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to aesthetics are expected to occur as a result of the action 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

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

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.

Within the state land parcel (State land located in Section 24, T29N, R28W) reviewed in this analysis, the DNRC is not aware of any future state actions under MEPA review, or permitting review by any state agency.

It is DNRC's understanding that the US Forest Service (USFS) has been in communication with LEC to connect the proposed powerline easement (action alternative) across USFS land to the point of use.

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.

Normal human health risks associated with construction, maintenance of an underground power line would be expected.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The action alternative would not be expected to add to, or alter industrial, commercial, and agriculture activities and production.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed action would not significantly affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue would be expected to occur as a result of the action alternative

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

There would be negligible direct, or indirect or cumulative effects on government 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.

The proposed action alternative is in compliance with 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

There are no wilderness, or recreation areas within the project area, and the proposed action alternative would not be expected to alter other recreation or wilderness activities.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

The action alternative would 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 would 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The proponent would bear the costs for the action alternative. The management of a Montana DNRC wildland fire lookout, and communication systems for certain government services would be expected to improve because of the action alternative.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Dave Marsh	Date: 11-13-2019
	Title: Forest Management Supervisor	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

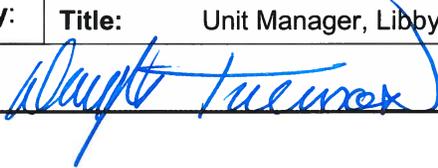
Alternative B (Proposed Action) – Approve the requested easement that would provide for installation and maintenance of an underground power line along USFS Road #2346 (Tamarack Creek), through State land located in Section 24, T29N, R28W.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The proposed easement that would provide for installation and maintenance of an underground power line along USFS Road #2346 (Tamarack Creek), through State land located in Section 24, T29N, R28W, would be expected to improve the management of a Montana DNRC wildland fire lookout, and communication systems for certain government services.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

- EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Doug Turman	
	Title: Unit Manager, Libby Unit	
Signature:		Date: 11/25/19