

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Easement Application - Buried Fiber Optic Cable.		
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2020		
Proponent:	Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 190, Sunburst, MT 59482		
Location:	35N, 3W, Sec 36	SW4SW4	
County:	Toole		
Trust:	Common Schools (CS)		

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc. has applied for an easement to install a buried fiber optic cable on state land. The proposed easement route parallels an existing Northern Telephone and is located adjacent to the Kevin – Oilmont highway. The proposed utility ROW will encumber 0.318 acres of state trust land.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc.-Proponent
DNRC-Surface Owner
Wayne Gillespie – Lease 10732

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 Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc. the requested easement and permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc. the requested easement and 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.

The fiber optic cable will be installed adjacent to the Kevin – Oilmont highway. Soils at the proposed project sites are heavy clayey in texture. The topography is flat. The 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 were the buried fiber optic cable is being placed. All disturbed areas will be reclaimed by leveling, packing and reseeding the disturbed areas. Cumulative impacts on soil resources are not expected as the use of a static 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.

Water rights, water quality and water quantity will not be impacted by the proposed project.

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.

The project area is native rangeland. Vegetation will be minimally impacted from the installation of the fiber optics cable. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed construction areas are a concern, but this concern will be mitigated by the applicants required weed control after installation. 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 25% Western Wheatgrass, 25% Slender Wheatgrass and 50% AC salt lander green wheatgrass. If drill seeded, the seeding rate will be 8#/acre, but if broadcast seeded the rate will be 16#/acre.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for the project area and no species of concern were reported.

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.

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, this tract provides habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, 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.

There are no threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern associated with the proposed project area. At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T37N, R2E: There are several species of concern. Birds-Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Chestnut-collared Longspur, McCowan's Longspur, Brewers Sparrow, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Eastern Red Bat, Hoary Bat, Little Brown Myotis.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine 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 results revealed that the current area of potential effect (APE) has been identified for two prior telecommunications cable installation proposals. No cultural resources were identified within the APE. No additional cultural resource investigative work will be conducted for the currently proposed development, but proposed cable installation work is expected to have *No Effect to Antiquities*. 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 cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Installation of the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the long-term aesthetics.

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 small scale and funded by Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc. There will be no excessive use of 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 complies 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 cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This proposed project area is adjacent to a state highway. The tract of state land is legally accessible. The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this tract.

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.

The school trust beneficiaries will receive compensation for the easement incumbancers based on fair market value. The proposed action will provide upgraded telephone and internet services to rural residents in northern Toole County.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Erik Eneboe	Date: February 20, 2020
	Title: Conrad Unit Manager, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDINGS

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:


Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Approve the decision to recommend granting an easement to install a buried fiber optic cable on state land.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

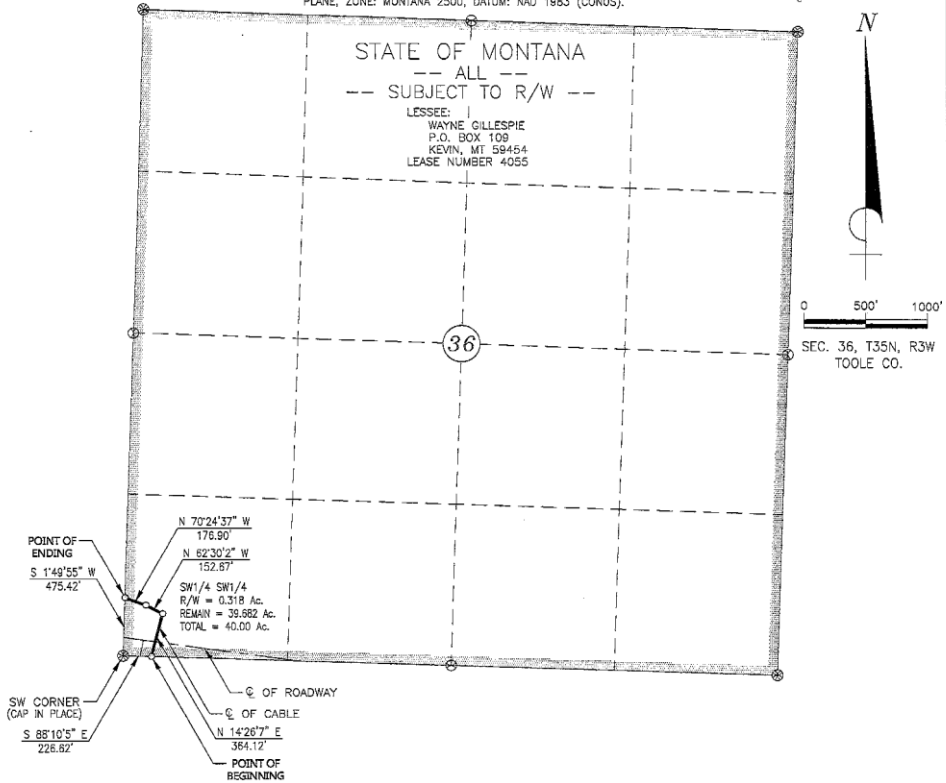
As proposed, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects from the implementation of the selected alternative to grant an easement to install a buried fiber optic cable on state land are anticipated. The proposed 0.318-acre project will provide upgraded telephone and internet services to residents in Toole County while generating revenue for the trust beneficiaries.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne
	Title: Trust Lands Program Manager, CLO, DNRC
Signature:	
	Date: February 21, 2020

NOTE: ALL BEARINGS AND DISTANCES ON SECTIONS ARE TAKEN FROM FIELD GPS DATA CORRECTED IN SYSTEM; US STATE PLANE, ZONE: MONTANA 2500, DATUM: NAD 1983 (CONUS).



DESCRIPTION

A RIGHT-OF-WAY FOR AN UNDERGROUND TELECOMMUNICATION CABLE EXTENDING TWENTY (20.0) FEET IN WIDTH WITH TEN (10.0) FEET ON EACH SIDE OF A CENTERLINE ALL WITHIN THE SW 1/4 SW 1/4 OF SECTION 36, TOWNSHIP 35 NORTH, RANGE 3 WEST OF THE PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, MONTANA, AND MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

COMMENCING AT THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF SECTION 36, TOWNSHIP 35 NORTH, RANGE 3 WEST; THENCE SOUTH 88°10'5" EAST A DISTANCE OF 226.62 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING OF THE RIGHT-OF-WAY CENTERLINE AND SOUTH BOUNDARY OF THE SW 1/4 SW 1/4 OF SAID SECTION 36; THENCE ON AND ALONG THE RIGHT-OF-WAY CENTERLINE ON A BEARING OF NORTH 14°26'7" EAST A DISTANCE OF 364.12 FEET; THENCE NORTH 62°30'2" WEST A DISTANCE OF 152.67 FEET; THENCE NORTH 70°24'37" WEST A DISTANCE OF 176.90 FEET TO THE POINT OF ENDING OF THE RIGHT-OF-WAY CENTERLINE AND WEST BOUNDARY OF THE SW 1/4 SW 1/4 OF SAID SECTION 36; THENCE SOUTH 1°49'55" WEST A DISTANCE OF 475.42 FEET TO THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF SAID SECTION 36.

CONTAINED WITHIN THE ABOVE DESCRIBED NEW CONSTRUCTION RIGHT-OF-WAY IS 0.318 ACRES MORE OR LESS.

<p>EXHIBIT of RIGHT-OF-WAY on STATE LAND Sec. 36, T 35 N, R 3 W, P.M.M. TOOLE CO.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">NTC36353.DWG</p>	<p>NORTHERN TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE, INC. SUNBURST, MONTANA</p>
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