

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	<b>Ravalli Electric Coop–East Fk Bitterroot River/Sula - Navigable Water Easement</b>
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	<b>Fall 2020</b>
<b>Proponent:</b>	<b>Ravalli Electric Cooperative</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>NENE 1/4 Section 12, T1N-R20W</b>
<b>County:</b>	<b>Ravalli</b>

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Ravalli Electric Coop is requesting an easement across the East Fork of the Bitterroot River to install an overhead electric distribution powerline near Sula, MT. The requested route would place the crossing on the north side of a highway bridge crossing and will be inside the US Hwy 93 S ROW. The project would be in the NENE 1/4 Section 1, T1N-R20W which is approximately 2 miles northwest of Sula, MT.

The requested route was chosen because it would provide better access to the powerline and equipment. This section of US Hwy 93 S has a very wide Right of Way which would allow ample room for the powerline and equipment to be installed and maintained.

Montana Code (MCA 70-16-201) provides for state ownership from the low water mark to the low water mark on navigable water bodies. Based on historical evidence the Bitterroot River is commercially navigable from the mouth of Jennings' Camp Creek on the east fork (SW1/4, Sec.27, T2N, R18W) to its confluence with the Clark Fork River. Therefore, the state claims ownership of the riverbed below the low water mark between these two points. DNRC has received an application for a 20-foot-wide, 102-foot-long easement spanning the East Fork of the Bitterroot River from Ravalli Electric Cooperative for this project involving 0.0468 acres of State-owned property below the low water mark of the river.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Montana DNRC, MDT, Bitterroot Conservation District

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

Floodplain Permit, 310 Permit, MDT (Form 970) Encroachment Permit

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A – No Action

No installation of the overhead electric distribution line.

Alternative B – Action

Granting an easement for the installation of an overhead electric power distribution line spanning the East Fork of the Bitterroot River as proposed.

### 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.*

**No Action:** The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

**Action Alternative:** During installation of support poles and the powerline, physical ground disturbance and temporary removal of vegetation could occur. Any disturbance by equipment would be short-term. Ravalli Electric Coop would revegetate disturbed areas in accordance with a county floodplain permit. Installation would occur above the river banks. As such, there would be no physical disturbance of State trust lands (easement area) by equipment.

#### 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.*

**No Action:** The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

**Action Alternative:** Some minor sediment delivery may occur due to soil disturbance outside the easement area during installation. The bed and banks of the river would not be altered. Any disturbance would be short-term until removed vegetation reestablishes.

#### 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.*

**No Action:** The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

**Action Alternative:** Some temporary emission releases are expected during construction activities; however, air quality is not expected to be impacted to any measurable degree.

#### 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.*

**No Action:** The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

**Action Alternative:** During installation of support poles and the powerline, physical ground disturbance and temporary removal of vegetation could occur. Any disturbance by equipment would be short-term. Ravalli Electric Coop would revegetate disturbed areas in accordance with a county floodplain permit. Installation would occur above the river banks. As such, there would be no physical disturbance of State trust lands by equipment.

#### 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.*

**No-Action:** No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, no effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

**Action Alternative:** Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

**Fisheries:** This is an aerial powerline with the supports located above the river banks. No changes would occur to the crossing site within the riparian area, and no in-stream activities would occur. No impacts to fisheries are expected.

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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.*

**Existing Conditions:** Limited habitats for terrestrial wildlife exist in the project area. Surrounding uplands and riparian habitats support a variety of wildlife species, including common species as well as less common species such as bighorn sheep, great blue herons, yellow-billed cuckoos, bald eagles, and pileated woodpeckers. Proximity to Highway 93 and numerous other forms of human disturbance likely limits some wildlife use of the vicinity.

**No-Action:** No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, no effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

**Action Alternative:** Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated.

**Bull Trout Existing Conditions:** Bull trout is a federally threatened species and occurs in the Bitterroot River that is under the aerial crossing. No changes to existing fisheries would occur, as this is an aerial crossing and the support towers are above the river banks.

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**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

Because only the bed of the East Fork of the Bitterroot River is state-owned land in the project's area of potential effect, there are no cultural resource concerns. Issuance of an easement will have No Effect to state owned heritage properties as defined in the State Antiquities Act.

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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.*

**No Action:** The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

**Action Alternative:** The powerline would be attached to power poles and located near a bridge and US Hwy 93. Minimal additional impacts to aesthetics would be anticipated.

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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.*

**None.**

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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.

**None.**

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

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

**None.** The proposed project would clear span the channel and would not pose an impediment to navigability or a safety hazard to boating or floating on the river. Vertical clearance of the powerline over the river will exceed 17 feet.

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

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

**None.**

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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 project would be anticipated to provide a short-term employment opportunity for a small crew of people while construction activities occur.

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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.

**None.** Minor, if any, change in tax base and tax revenues would be anticipated.

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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

**None.**

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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.

**None.**

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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.

**None.** The proposed project would clear span the East Fork of the Bitterroot River channel with vertical clearance exceeding 17 feet and would not pose an impediment to navigability or a safety hazard to boating or floating on the river.

**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.*

**None.**

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

**None.**

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

**None.**

**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.*

Granting of the proposed easement would return approximately \$100.to the Public Land- Navigable Rivers trust.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Thayer Jacques	<b>Date:</b> 09/22/2020
	<b>Title:</b> Hamilton Unit Forester	

**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

I select the action alternative; granting an easement involving 0.0468 acres of State-owned property below the low water mark of the East Fork of the Bitterroot River, thereby accommodating the installation of an aerial powerline and power poles as proposed by Ravalli Electric Coop.

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

The action alternative will not result in significant environmental impacts.

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

EIS       More Detailed EA       No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Robert H. Storer	
	<b>Title:</b> SWLO Trust Lands Manager	
<b>Signature:</b>	<i>Robert H Storer</i>	<b>Date:</b> <i>9/23/2020</i>

