CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Easement application for the installation of a buried fiber optic cable to serve toll and distribution facilities and services in the proposed construction areas.
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2015
Proponent:	Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 190, Sunburst, MT 59482
Location:	See below list of tracts.
County:	Toole
Trust:	Common Schools (CS)

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc. has requested to install a buried fiber optic cable to serve toll and distribution facilities and services across two tracts of state land. The proposed easement route is located along the Oilmont Highway in Sections 34 & 35, T35N, R2E. The fiber optic cable will be buried 42" deep and will be installed using a static plow.

Township	Range	Section	Fiber Optic Cable Location	Acres Affected	Trust
35N	2E	34	SE4SE4	0.191	CS
35N	2E	35	SW4SW4	0.440	CS
TOTALS				0.631	CS

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
5R Land and Cattle Inc.-Surface Lessee, Lease #4800

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.

Soils at the proposed project sites are silty to clayey in texture. The topography is gently rolling and the fiber optic cable will be installed along an existing road. 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. 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 as required 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 static plow will minimize the surface disturbance caused by the construction project.

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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 documented and/or recorded water rights associated with the proposed project area. These water rights will not be impacted as the cable will be buried 42" below the surface and minimal surface disturbance will occur by the utilization of a static plow for the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

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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.

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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 0.260 miles of buried fiber optic cable will be installed by the utilization of a static plow. The vegetation consists of primarily native rangeland with a few areas of tame grass 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 Needlegrass, and 5% Lewis Blue Flax. If drilled the 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 T35N, R2E: A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted and 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.

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, these tracts provide 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 T35N, R2E: There were two species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey: Birds-Ferruginous Hawk. Fish-Northern Redbelly Dace. These particular tracts of tame/native rangeland do not contain many, if any of these species. If any are present, they will be dispersed into the surrounding permanent cover and return to the project area once it is completed.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The proposed project areas are adjacent to and follow an existing road. No cultural resources were found within the project area, and therefore cultural resources will not be impacted by this proposed project.

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

- *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.

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 Northern Telephone Cooperative, 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 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 cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This proposed project areas are next to Oilmont Highway which generally has low recreational value. The 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 2 easement applications for a total of $100.00. The easement on the Common Schools trust land will affect 0.631 acres X $200.00 per acre equals $126.20 of revenue generated from the future easements. Cumulative impacts are not likely as the area is used for grazing and the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the long-term viability of grazing on these tracts.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Tony Nickol	**Date:** June 29, 2015
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDINGS

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – – Grant Northern Telephone Cooperative, Inc. the requested easement and permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The applicant is applying for easements to cross state land with a buried fiber optic cable. This project will provide "state of the art" fiber optics connections to rural residents in the area. Easement routes are adjacent to existing roads. No archaeological features have been identified within the project area. Disturbed areas of grazing land will be reclaimed and reseeded in accordance with specifications outlined in this EA. The surface lessee's have been notified and actual damages have been settled. Significant impacts are not anticipated as a result of the selected alternative.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Erik Eneboe
	Title:	Conrad Unit Manger, CLO, DNRC
Signature: 	**Date**:	June 30, 2015