CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**NorthWestern Energy-Young Family Ranch Distribution Power line Project across the Smith River.**
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2015
Proponent:	NorthWestern Energy
Location:	NW4NW4, Section 36, T18N, R2E
County:	Cascade County
Trust:	Public

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

NorthWestern Energy has requested to install a 14.4/24.9 kV distribution power line approximately 100 feet across the Smith River from an existing power line on private land in order to provide power to the existing sprinkler irrigation system on private land and state trust land. The affected area will be approximately 0.05 acres of the Smith River.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Agencies, Groups or Individuals Scoped:	Response:
DNRC, Landowner	Neutral-Landowner (Navigable River)
NorthWestern Energy	Proponent is in favor of the project, December1, 2014
Young Family Ranches	Private Landowner-September 2014

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

Mathew Young (Young Family Ranch) submitted a *JOINT APPLICATION FOR WORK IN MONTANA'S STREAMS, WETLAND,* etc. in September 2014 to address other possible permits regarding this project. NorthWestern Energy is aware of other permits that may be required; however DNRC is not aware of any other required permits for this specific project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Action Alternative: To grant NorthWestern Energy a ROW utility easement of approximately 100 feet of 14.4/24.9 kV electric cable across the Smith River from an existing power line on private land in order to provide power to the existing irrigation system on private land and state trust land.

No Action Alternative: To deny NorthWestern Energy a ROW utility easement of approximately 100 feet of 14.4/24.9 kV electric cable across the Smith River from an existing power line on private land in order to provide power to the existing irrigation system on private land and state trust land.

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: Impacts to the soils would be minimal to non-existent since the impact of facilitating power through an overhead power line from an existing pole on private land to the irrigation pump on the adjacent private and state trust land across the Smith River requires minimal disturbance to soils. No impacts to fragile, compactable, or unstable soils or any unusual geologic features are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics would occur.

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.

Impacts to the water quality, quantity and distribution would be minimal since the impact of facilitating power through an overhead power line from an existing pole to the irrigation pump on the adjacent private land and state trust land requires minimal to no disturbance to water resources.

Proposed Action Alternative: No direct or cumulative impacts to water quality are anticipated as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.

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.

In general, this area is considered to be of high quality air standards with good ventilation and would not be affected by the proposal.

Proposed Action Alternative: No direct or cumulative effects are expected to occur to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to air quality will occur.

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.

There are no known rare plants or cover types present. The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists no plant species of concern, potential species of concern, or special status species within T18N R1W.

Proposed Action Alternative: Temporary disturbances to plant communities may occur on adjacent private land. These vegetative communities would not be permanently altered. No impacts to rare plants or cover types are anticipated within the prospective easement corridor.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality will occur.

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.

This tract is used by a variety of wildlife, including large ungulates (elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn), small to large sized predators (weasels, skunks, red fox, and coyotes), numerous species of small mammals (mice, voles, ground squirrels, rabbits, etc.), various raptors (red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, bald eagles, American kestrels, prairie falcons, etc.) upland game birds (Hungarian partridge, pheasant), waterfowl, and numerous non-game bird species (a wide variety of migrant and resident bird species associated with available habitats). The proposed project would temporarily displace these wildlife species.

Proposed Action Alternative: Habitats would be temporarily disturbed during the installation of the power line. The small addition of 100 feet of power line does not significantly increase the length of the existing power line. No lasting impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and/or habitats are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.

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.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 3 animal *species of concern*, 0 *potential species of concern*, and 1 *special status species* within this township. The area wildlife would be affected by temporary displacement during installation and maintenance of the lines. Also, "Electric utilities have recognized that the interaction of birds with electrical facilities may create...avian injuries and mortalities" (Suggested Practices for Avian Protection On Power Lines, 2006).

Species of Concern
Species
Filtered by the following criteria:
Township = 18 N Range = 2 E (based on mapped Species Occurrences)

BIRDS (AVES) — 3 SPECIE

FILTERED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA: TOWNSHIP = 18 N RANGE = 2 E (based on mapped Species Occurrence

SCIENTIFIC NAME / COMMON NAME / TAXA SORT	FAMILY (SCIENTIFIC) / FAMILY (COMMON)	GLOBAL RANK	STATE RANK	USFWS	USFS	BLM	CFWCS TIER ID	% OF GLOBAL BREEDING RANGE IN MT	% OF MT THAT IS BREEDING RANGE	HABITAT
Aquila chrysaetos Golden Eagle	*Accipitridae* Hawks / Kites / Eagles	G5	S3	BGEPA; MBTA; BCC		SENSITIVE	2	3%	100%	Grasslands
		Species verified in these Counties: Beaverhead, Big Horn, Blaine, Broadwater, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Flathead, Gallatin, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Granite, Hill, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lake, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Lincoln, Madison, Mccone, Meagher, Missoula, Musselshell, Park, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Powell, Prairie, Ravalli, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sanders, Sheridan, Silver Bow, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, Yellowstone							
Ardea herodias Great Blue Heron	*Ardeidae* Bitterns / Egrets / Herons / Night-Herons	G5	S3				3	3%	100%	Riparian forest
		Species verified in these Counties: Beaverhead, Big Horn, Blaine, Broadwater, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Flathead, Gallatin, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Granite, Hill, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lake, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Lincoln, Madison, Mccone, Meagher, Mineral, Missoula, Musselshell, Park, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Powell, Prairie, Ravalli, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sanders, Sheridan, Silver Bow, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, Yellowstone **State Rank Reason:** Small breeding population size, evidence of recent declines, and declining regeneration of riparian cottonwood forests due to altered hydrology and grazing.							
Buteo regalis Ferruginous Hawk	*Accipitridae* Hawks / Kites / Eagles	G4	S3B			SENSITIVE	2	11%	95%	Sagebrush grassland
		Species verified in these Counties: Beaverhead, Blaine, Broadwater, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Gallatin, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Hill, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lake, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Madison, Mccone, Meagher, Musselshell, Park, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Prairie, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sheridan, Stillwater, Teton, Toole, Valley, Wheatland, Yellowstone							

Potential Species of Concern

Potential Species of Concern
Species
Filtered by the following criteria:
Township = 18 N Range = 2 E (based on mapped Species Occurrences)

Special Status Species

Special Status Species
Species
Filtered by the following criteria:
Township = 18 N Range = 2 E (based on mapped Species Occurrences)

BIRDS (AVES) — 1 SPECIE

FILTERED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA: TOWNSHIP = 18 N RANGE = 2 E (based on mapped Species Occurrence

SCIENTIFIC NAME / COMMON NAME / TAXA SORT	FAMILY (SCIENTIFIC) / FAMILY (COMMON)	GLOBAL RANK	STATE RANK	USFWS	USFS	BLM	CFWCS TIER ID	% OF GLOBAL BREEDING RANGE IN MT	% OF MT THAT IS BREEDING RANGE	HABITAT
Haliaeetus leucocephalus Bald Eagle	*Accipitridae* Hawks / Kites / Eagles	G5	S4	DM; BGEPA; MBTA; BCC	SENSITIVE	SENSITIVE	1	2%	100%	Riparian forest
		Species verified in these Counties: Beaverhead, Big Horn, Blaine, Broadwater, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Dawson, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Flathead, Gallatin, Glacier, Granite, Hill, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lake, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Lincoln, Madison, Mccone, Meagher, Mineral, Missoula, Musselshell, Park, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Powell, Prairie, Ravalli, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sanders, Silver Bow, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Toole, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, Yellowstone **State Rank Reason:** Populations numbers have steadily increased since the 1960s and breeding pairs now occupy a high percentage of suitable habitat across the state. However the species is still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940.							

Proposed Action Alternative: While impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are possible regarding avian interactions, adherence by the proponent to their raptor/avian protocol which includes the installation of bird flight diverters and, depending on location, makes sure there is horizontal configuration to reduce risk of collisions should minimize these impacts through accepted avian protection standards. The small addition of 100 feet of 14.4/24.9 kV power line is not anticipated to significantly increase avian interactions.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.

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10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

The Department Archaeologist was consulted in regards to this project.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources are anticipated due to the scope and nature of this project.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.

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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 landscape consists of irrigated, agricultural river bottom used primarily for general farming and ranching operations. The power line would be a small overhead addition of approximately 100 feet (14.4/24.9 kV) to an existing power line. It would have minimal impacts to the area's aesthetics. Noise increases would occur during construction; these impacts would cease as soon as the project is completed.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to the aesthetics are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the aesthetics will occur.

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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.

The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of farming and ranching operations.

Proposed Action Alternative No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.

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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.

DNRC is not aware of other plans or projects in the area.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects pertinent to this area are

anticipated to occur.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects will occur.

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 would create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation and maintenance of the 14.4/24.9 kV power line.

Proposed Action Alternative: NorthWestern Energy will identify the risks associated with the installation of the line as an occupational hazard. The risk would only be present during installation and maintenance of the proposed line.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The project would improve the energy efficiency of the irrigation system operation.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed project would improve the efficiency of the irrigation system situation on the ranch.

No Action Alternative: This alternative would not provide electricity to the irrigation pump, and the operation of a diesel powered generator would continue to power the irrigation system in less energy efficient manner.

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 project would be completed in a relatively short time frame and it would not create permanent jobs.

Proposed Action Alternative: No lasting impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: The project would not have any measurable effects to local or state tax revenues.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues will occur.

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

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposal would not have any impacts on traffic or government services.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to traffic, road uses, or government services will occur.

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.

DNRC is not aware of other plans or projects in the area.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated occur as the construction is in remote, rural areas.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals will occur.

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.

Floaters and fisherman utilize the Smith River for recreational purposes. Access to the adjacent private land for recreational activities is dependent on landowner permission.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on these state tracts.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments. No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to the areas social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities are anticipated to occur.

No Action Alternative: No impacts social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities will occur.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated to occur.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity will occur.

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed project would improve energy efficiency for the operation of the irrigation system on the Young Family Ranch and state trust land. Compensation to the trust beneficiary would involve the following values: the total length of the 14.4/24.9 kV distribution line crossing state land in the Smith Riverbed is 100.49 feet long, 20 feet wide, and contains 0.05 acres more or less. DNRC valuation of the .05 acres is $2,000/acre for a total of $100.00. This is equal to the minimum rate for this kind of easement.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances will occur.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Andy Burgoyne	**Date:**	March 8, 2015
	Title:	Helena Unit Manager		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Proposed Alternative – Approve the project as proposed, and allow the proponent to provide more energy efficient power to an irrigation pump on private land for sprinkler irrigation purposes.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This project should have no significant, detrimental impacts or cumulative effects regarding the project area. The irrigation system will continue to be a long term benefit to the agricultural production on adjacent private land and state trust land in Section 36, T18N, R2E. This alternative will increase the energy efficiency of the irrigation system and generate revenue for the trust beneficiary. Impacts to avian resources should be mitigated by the proponent's installation of bird flight diverters and, depending on location, ensure there is horizontal configuration to reduce risk of collisions. Special care should be taken to control the spread of noxious weeds.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Hoyt Richards		
	Title:	CLO Area Manager		
Signature:	Hoyt Richards		**Date:**	3-11-15

NorthWestern Energy-
Young Family Ranch Distribution Line
Navigable River/Utility Easement
T18N, R2E, NW4NW4 Section 36