

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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| Project Name: | Lower Confederate-Utility ROW |
| Proposed Implementation Date: | Spring 2015 |
| Proponent: | Vigilante Electric Cooperative |
| Location: | SE4NE4, NE4SE4, SE4SE4, Section 18, T9N, R2E |
| County: | Broadwater County |

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Vigilante Electric Coop. is proposing to abandon an existing underground power line ROW and obtain a new utility ROW in order to install an overhead distribution, 7200 volt power line approximately 3,959 feet across State Trust Land to provide power to a sprinkler irrigation system on private land. Approximately 11 poles will be placed on State Land to complete the project. The affected area is comprised of approximately 2.72 acres of State Trust Land used for grazing and dry crop production.

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.

| Agencies, Groups or Individuals Scoped: | Response: |
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| DNRC, Landowner | Neutral-Landowner |
| Vigilante Electric Cooperative | Proponent is in favor of the project, February 2015 |
| South Ranch LLC | Private Landowner |

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 Burning Permit.

DNRC is not aware of any other Government Agencies or required permits for this specific project.

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: To grant Vigilante Electric Cooperative a 30' ROW utility easement to cross State Trust Land encompassing approximately 3,959 feet for the purpose of providing power to an irrigation system on private land.

No Action Alternative: To deny Vigilante Electric Cooperative a 30' ROW utility easement to cross State Trust Land encompassing approximately 3,959 feet for the purpose of providing power to an irrigation system on private 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

Proposed Action Alternative: Impacts to the soils would be minimal regarding installation of 11 utility poles. A review of the USDA Web Soil Survey indicates the following soil types are present in the project area: Amesha loam (silty-limy), Brocko silt loam (silty), Sappington clay loam (silty-limy), and Musselshell-Crago channery loams (silty-limy). Slopes are gentle to moderate. 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

A dry drainage feature is present in the project area on State Land.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to the water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated from the proposed action of facilitating power through an overhead power line to an irrigation system on the adjacent private land.

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 (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.

This area in Broadwater County is rural in nature and is generally considered to be of high quality air standards with good ventilation.

Proposed Action Alternative: Construction activities may temporarily impact air quality by producing dust particulates. No cumulative impacts 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 direct, indirect, and 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 T9N R2E.

Proposed Action Alternative: Temporary disturbances to plant communities may occur on state 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 direct, indirect, and 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, 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).

Proposed Action Alternative: Habitats would be temporarily disturbed during the installation of the 3,959 feet power line. 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). Adherence by the proponent to their raptor/avian protocol should minimize these impacts through accepted avian protection standards. No lasting impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and/or habitats are anticipated due to the addition of the power line.

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

The Montana Natural Heritage Program website lists 4 animal *species of concern*, 0 *potential species of concern*, and 0 *special status species* within the project area. Wolverine, Hoary Bat, Little Brown Myotis Bat, and Westslope Cutthroat Trout are the listed species of concern. This particular tract of grazing land has few or no occurrences of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of an overhead power line.

Proposed Action Alternative: Unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources will not be impacted by the installation of the overhead power line.

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

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The DNRC has no record of cultural resources within the project's area of potential effect. This particular tract has been disturbed by farming in the past.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts are expected to occur to historical and archaeological sites as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur without the proposed utility construction activities.

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.

The landscape east of Canyon Ferry Lake and west of the Big Belt Mountains consists of irrigated and dryland cropland in addition to pasture land. It is used primarily for general farming and ranching operations. The power line would be an overhead addition of approximately 3959 feet on State Land. This project would have normal expected impacts to the area's aesthetics associated with an overhead power line for local landowners. 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.

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 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.

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 recently completed an Environmental Assessment Checklist for a CRP Break Request on nearby State Land. The DNRC is not aware of any 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.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</p> |
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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 would create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation and maintenance of the power line.

Proposed Action Alternative: Vigilante Electric Coop. 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 agricultural productivity by powering the irrigation system operation.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed project would improve the agricultural productivity on the adjacent landowner's farm.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production will occur.

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 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 direct, indirect, and 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 direct, indirect, and 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This tract of State Land is legally accessible to the public. Big game, upland bird, varmint and predator hunting are likely.

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 direct, indirect, and 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 area's 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed project would provide power for the operation of an irrigation system on the South Ranch LLC. Compensation to the trust beneficiary (Capitol Buildings) would involve the following values: the total length of the distribution line crossing state land is 3959 feet long, 30 feet wide, and contains 2.72 acres more or less. DNRC valuation of the 2.72 acres is \$800/acre for a total of \$2,176 reduced by the value of the previous easement.

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

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| EA Checklist Prepared By: | Name: Casey Kellogg | Date: 3/23/2015 |
| | Title: Land Use Specialist | |

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Proposed Alternative – Approve the project as proposed, and allow the proponent to provide power to irrigation system on private land for sprinkler irrigation purposes.

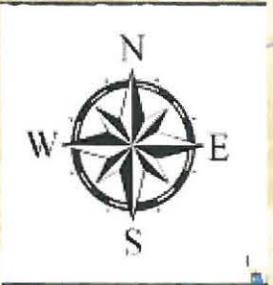
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This project should have no 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. This alternative will provide power to the irrigation system and generate revenue for the trust beneficiary. Adherence by the proponent to their raptor/avian protocol should minimize impacts to raptors and other birds through accepted avian protection standards. Special care should be taken to control the spread of noxious weeds.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

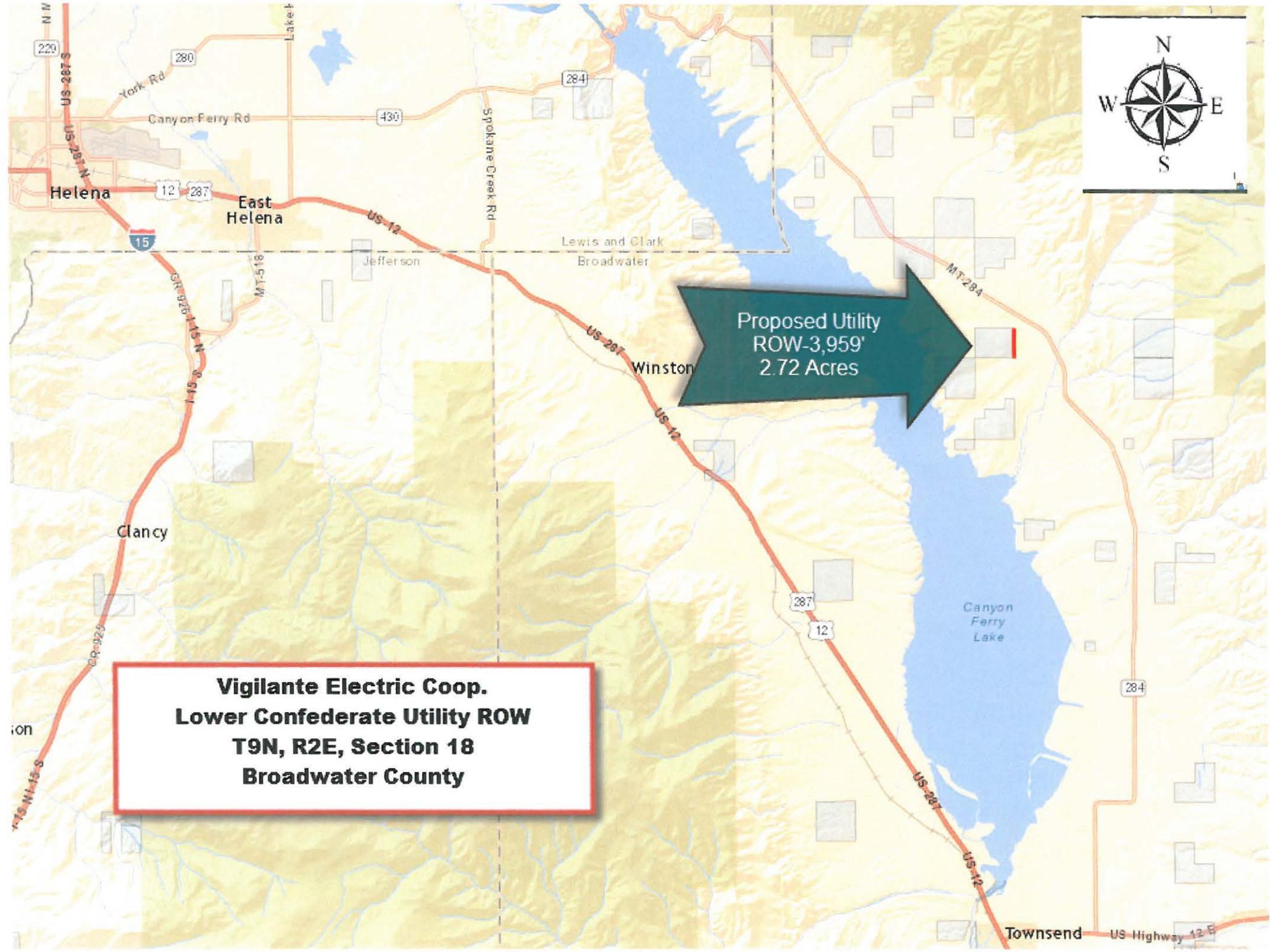
EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

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| EA Checklist Approved By: | Name: Andy Burgoyne |
| | Title: Helena Unit Manager |
| Signature:  | Date: 3/24/2015 |



**Vigilante Electric Coop.
Lower Confederate Utility ROW
T9N, R2E, Section 18
Broadwater County**

**Proposed Utility
ROW-3,959'
2.72 Acres**



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Lower Confederate Utility ROW
T9N, R2E, Section 18
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400 m
1000 ft

19

20