

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	NW Energy/Sieben Canyon Land Use License/Utility Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	October 2015
Proponent:	NorthWestern Energy
Location:	Section 36, T13N, R5W
County:	Lewis and Clark
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

NorthWestern Energy is proposing to remove an overhead electric distribution power line on State Trust Land in Section 16, T18N, R03E and replace it with a new underground distribution line. The existing powerline is in poor condition and needs to be replaced as failure is imminent. Project implementation is urgent. NorthWestern Energy is requesting a land use license to begin this project. Also, NorthWestern Energy is seeking a new easement as the new distribution line on state land will not remain in the existing easement corridor. The new buried distribution line will encumber approximately 2.37 acres and extends approximately 3,440 feet.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Agencies, Groups or Individuals Scoped:	Response:
DNRC, Landowner	Neutral-Landowner
NorthWestern Energy	Proponent is in favor of the project
Sieben Ranch	Lessee/Adjacent Landowner
Lewis and Clark Conservation District (Chris Evans) Called by B. Kemnitz NWEnergy on 10/1	No permits necessary-neutral
MT FWP (Erik Roberts) Called by B. Kemnitz NWEnergy on 10/1	No permits necessary-neutral

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

DNRC is not aware of other government agencies with jurisdiction. The proponent is responsible to obtain any necessary permits.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Action Alternative: Issuing the Land Use License as proposed; issuing NorthWestern Energy a new easement to account for newly encumbered state land.

No Action Alternative: Deny the applications for a Land Use License and an easement to account for newly encumbered state 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.

Soils in the project area include Holter-Castner channery loams (61E) and Fluvaquents and Fluvaquentic Haplustolls soils (501B). 89.1% of the soils in the project area are categorized 501 B and are considered well suited for mechanical site preparation (Deep) while 10.9% of the soils in the project area are categorized 61E considered poorly suited for the mechanical site preparation.

Proposed Action Alternative: Removal of the existing overhead distribution line will require minimal ground disturbing activities. More extensive disturbance will occur during the installation of the underground distribution line. An existing ranch road accesses the area and the underground line will be buried within this road prism. Standard LUL stipulations would address reclamation. No long-lasting 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.

Little Prickly Pear Creek is adjacent to the project area. However, impacts to the water quality, quantity and distribution would be minimal since the removal of the existing distribution line will require minimal ground disturbing activities. More extensive disturbance will occur during the installation of the underground distribution line, however, this activity should occur an acceptable distance away from the creek. NorthWestern Energy is responsible for obtaining any and all permits necessary to work in or around the stream. Standard LUL stipulations would address reclamation.

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: Short-duration increases in dust from construction activities associated with underground distribution powerline installation will occur. Minimal 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.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 1 plant species of concern, 0 potential species of concern, and 0 special status species within T13N R5W. The plant species of concern is Divide Bladderpod.

"Species Occurrences verified in these Counties: Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, Meagher
State Rank Reason: State endemic restricted to central-Montana with the majority of populations occurring in the Big Belt Mountains and extending north to the southern end of the Rocky Mountain Front. Many large populations exist and the species typically occurs on gravelly slopes that are not usually subject to human disturbance."

Proposed Action Alternative: Temporary disturbances to plant communities may occur. These vegetative communities would not be permanently altered. No lasting impacts to rare plants or cover types are anticipated within the project area.

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 ungulates (mule deer, whitetail deer, and elk), small to large sized predators (weasels, skunks, red fox, wolves 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, mountain grouse), 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: Temporary disturbances may occur during the proposed project duration. 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 12 animal *species of concern*, 0 *potential species of concern* and *special status species* within this township. The 12 animal species of concern are: Wolverine, Little Brown Myotis, Fringed Myotis, Fisher, Veery, Evening Grosbeak, Bobolink, Lewis's Woodpecker, Clark's Nutcracker, Sage Thrasher, Long-billed Curlew, and Brewer's Sparrow. The area wildlife would be affected by temporary displacement during proposed project.

Proposed Action Alternative: Temporary disturbances may occur during the proposed project duration. No lasting impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources habitats are anticipated.

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

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. No cultural resource concerns were identified.

Proposed Action Alternative: No impacts to 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.

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 proposed project area represents a typical rural community found in this geographic area in Lewis and Clark County, Montana. The project would have minimal impacts to the area's aesthetics. Noise and dust increases would occur during the project. 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 cumulative effects to environmental resources.

The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of 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 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
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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 removal of power poles and the installation of an underground distribution powerline.

Proposed Action Alternative: NorthWestern Energy is responsible to identify and mitigate the risks associated with the pole removal.

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.

Proposed Action Alternative: No lasting impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities/production are anticipated.

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

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.

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.

Legal, public access does exist to this parcel of state land in Section 36, T13N, R5W. Project implementation may occur during general hunting season. Temporary impacts may occur. Generally, hunting opportunities are limited in the project area due to the close proximity to the county road

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

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 allow access to state land to remove a failing electric distribution powerline and replace it with a buried distribution powerline. Compensation to the trust beneficiary would total \$200.00 for the land use license. This is equal to the minimum amount required by the REMB fee schedule. Additional revenue will be realized for the utility easement. This Land Use License and forthcoming utility easement should not impact future uses or income potential to this tract of state trust land.

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

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Casey Kellogg	Date: July 3, 2015
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

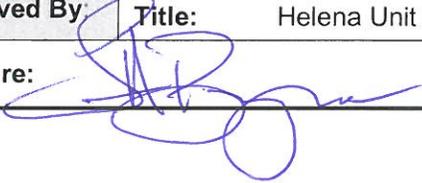
Proposed Alternative – Approve the project as proposed, issue the land use license and utility easement to allow the proponent to remove an overhead electric distribution power line on State Trust Land and replace it with a new underground distribution line.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

As proposed, the removal of the overhead, electric distribution power line on State Trust Land in Section 36, T13N, R05W and the replacement with a new underground distribution line is not expected to result in any direct, indirect or cumulative adverse effects to the project area. Standard LUL stipulations regarding reclamation and noxious weed control will appear in the license. Compliance with these stipulations will be monitored.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne	
	Title: Helena Unit Manager	
Signature:		Date: 10/2/15

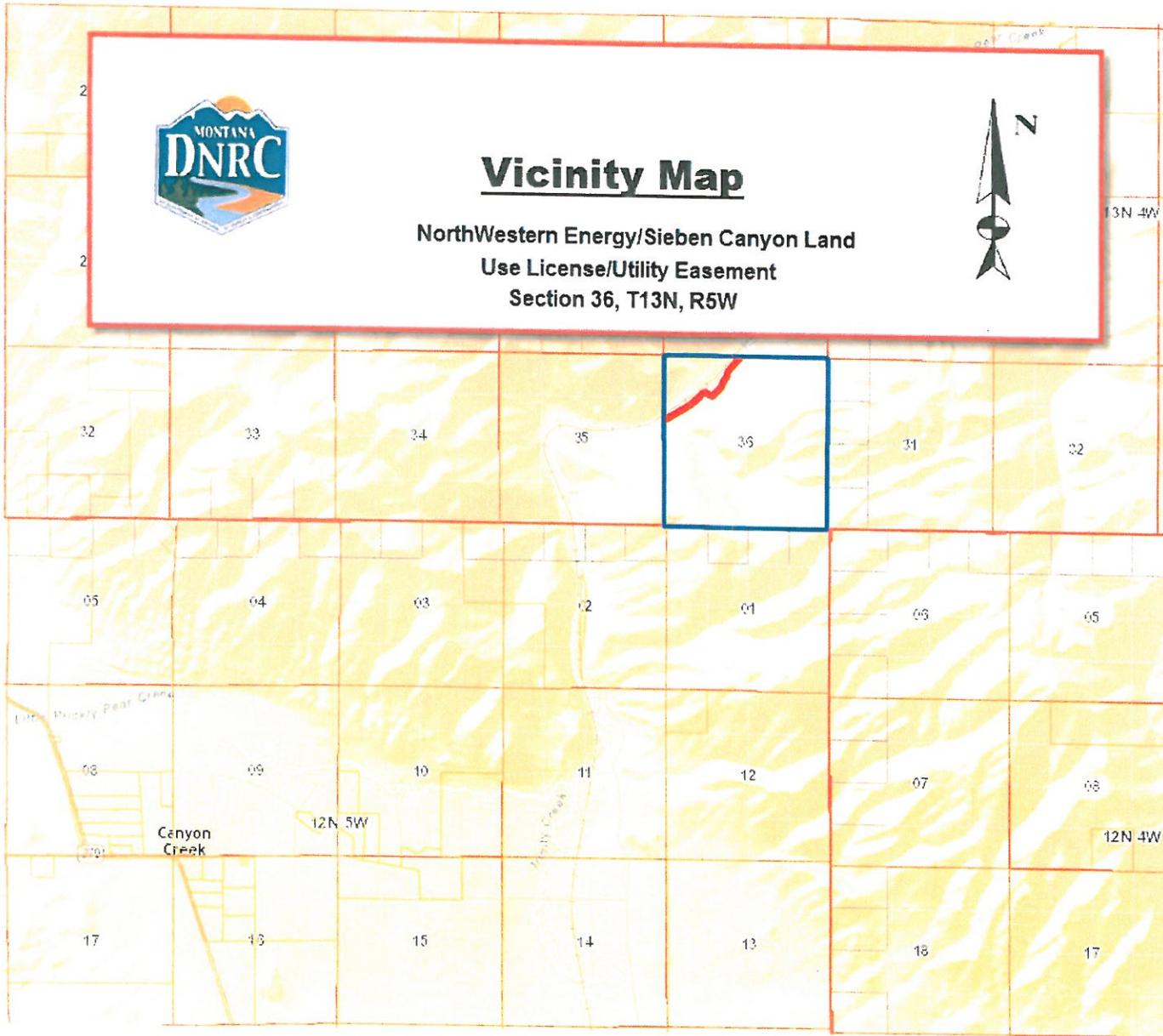


Exhibit A-Vicinity Map

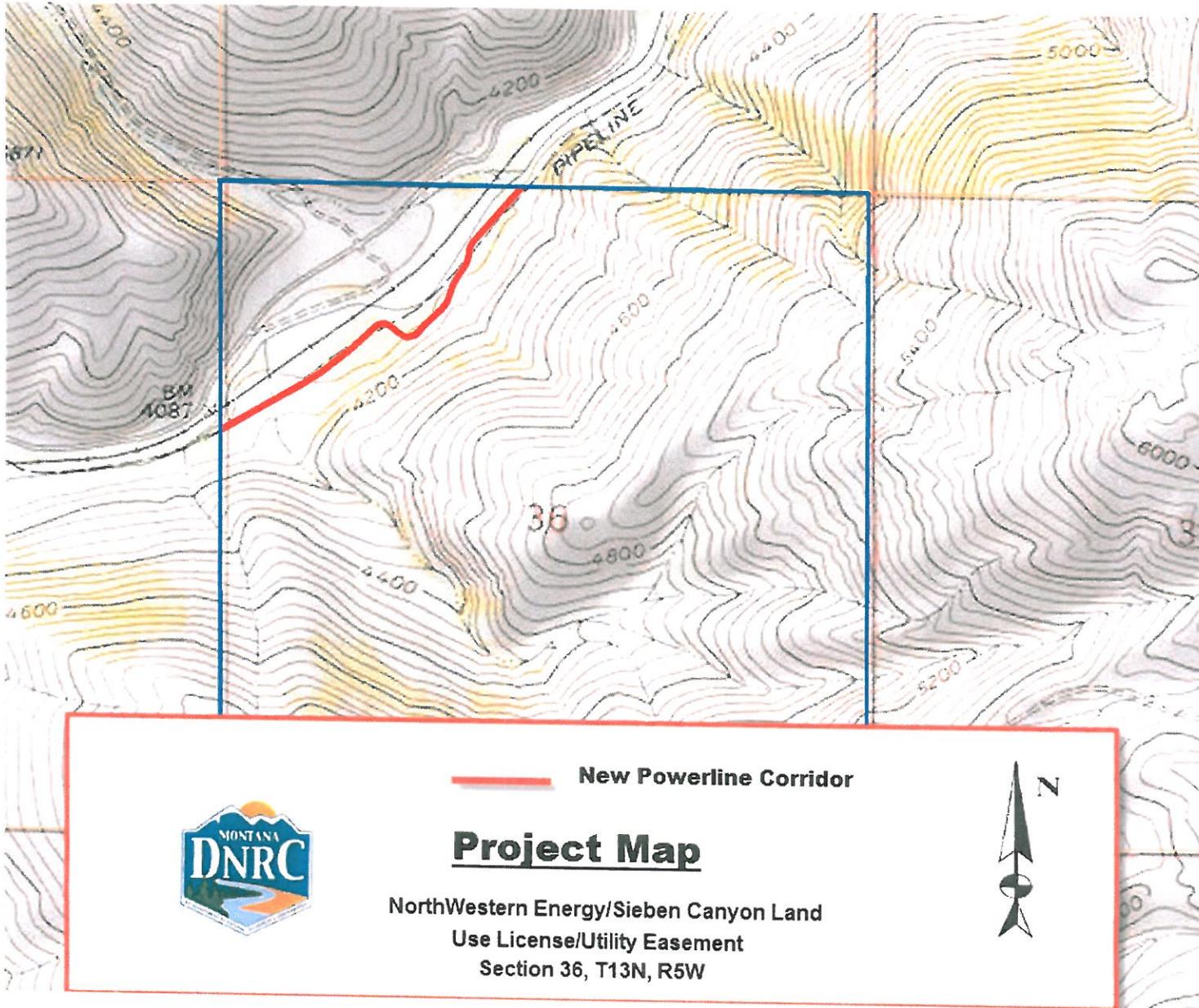


Exhibit C- Project Map- Aerial Photo

