

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Telecommunication Cable – 2026 Fiber Projects
Proposed Implementation Date: August 2026
Proponent: Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association Inc.
Location: N1/2NW1/4 Section 36 T11N R18E
County: Wheatland
Trust: Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

This action would authorize an easement for the placement and burying of fiber optic telecommunication cable through Montana State Trust Lands, including all associated construction, maintenance, and use activities. This would provide improved and expanded telephone and internet access to a rural area.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Northeastern Land Office (NELO) & Lewistown Unit Office
Proponent: Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association Inc.
Surface Lessees: Bridge Careless Creek LLC
Other:

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

The DNRC and its Northeastern Land Office (NELO) have jurisdiction over the proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for acquiring all necessary permits for the proposed project and settling all surface damage with the surface lessees.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant permission for an easement for placement and burying of fiber optic telecommunication cable.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – The Department would grant permission for an easement for the placement and burying of fiber optic telecommunication 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.

The soils in the project area are classified as having a moderate to severe risk of rutting. Rutting risk is primarily associated with the use of heavy equipment under wet conditions. To minimize impacts, all construction activities will be scheduled during dry periods when soils are least susceptible to compaction and rutting, and equipment traffic will be confined to designated work areas.

Soils show as being somewhat to very limited for shallow excavation and having slight risk of erosion. Trenchless installation will be utilized so this should not be an issue. All disturbed areas are within the existing county road right of way and were previously disturbed. These areas were previously reseeded with hardy non-natives which should easily recover. If re-seeding is necessary the proponent will acquire certified, weed free seed and refer to Appendix C for the appropriate seeding mix and rates. No significant cumulative impacts to geology or soil quality, stability, and moisture are anticipated.

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 significant impacts to local or regional water resources are anticipated.

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 significant impacts to air quality are anticipated from this project.

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 project will result in minor disturbance to approximately 0.61 acres of vegetation. These areas are within the county road right of way and have previously been disturbed and replanted to hardy non-native species such as smooth brome and crested wheatgrass. These species should easily recover post disturbance, however, if re-seeding is necessary the proponent will acquire certified, weed free seed and refer to Appendix C for the appropriate seeding mix and rates. No significant impacts to vegetation are anticipated.

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 project area supports a variety of wildlife, including resident and migratory species associated with grasslands, sagebrush, wetlands, riparian areas, and forested habitats. Key species observed or known to occur in the area include a range of migratory songbirds, raptors, and other avian species.

Potential habitat disturbance will be minimized by restricting construction to dry periods and limiting equipment to designated work areas. No significant long-term impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic habitats are anticipated.

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.

Several species of concern are present in the project area. Mitigation measures, including timing construction after July 15, minimizing soil disturbance, and restoring native vegetation, are expected to prevent significant impacts.

A complete species list, including habitat and distribution data, is provided in Appendix B. Temporary displacement of wildlife may occur during construction, but no significant long-term impacts to unique, endangered, or sensitive species are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

A Class I (literature review) level assessment was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the Area of Potential Effect (APE). This review included inspection of project maps, the DNRC sites/sites leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I assessment revealed that no antiquities have been identified within the APE. No additional archaeological investigations are planned in association with this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are discovered during project activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of the resources can be conducted.

No significant effects on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources are anticipated.

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 significant impacts on visual or aesthetic qualities are anticipated.

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.

No limited environmental resources are expected to be significantly impacted by this project. Additionally, the project will not contribute to any significant cumulative demands on environmental resources.

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 currently being considered on the tracts identified in this EA Checklist.

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.

During construction, equipment operation may pose temporary hazards. The proponent will be responsible for implementing mitigation measures. No ongoing hazards are anticipated following construction.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The project will not alter existing industrial, agricultural, or commercial activities 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.

The project will not create or eliminate jobs. No significant effects on the employment market are anticipated.

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 project will not have direct or cumulative effects on tax revenues.

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

The project will not result in significant increases in traffic or demand for government services such as schools, fire, or police protection.

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.

There are no zoning regulations or agency management plans that would affect this project.

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.

The project will not significantly affect access to, or the quality of, recreation and wilderness activities.

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 project will not affect population density or housing demand.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

The project will not significantly affect native, traditional, or community lifestyles.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The project will not significantly affect cultural uniqueness 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 easement will generate \$1525 for the trust. No significant cumulative economic or social effects are anticipated.

V. FINDING**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

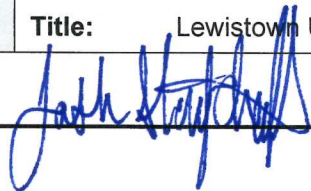
Alternative B (Proposed Action): The Department will grant permission for an easement for the placement and burying of fiber optic telecommunication cable.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After evaluating potential environmental effects, it is determined that the project will not result in significant impacts to the environment.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

**EA Checklist
Prepared By:****Name:** Seth Oetken
Title: Land Use Specialist**Signature:****Date:** 6/30/26**EA Checklist
Approved By:****Name:** Josh Stoychoff
Title: Lewistown Unit Manager**Signature:****Date:** 6/30/26

Appendix A: Soil Ratings

Table - Soil Ruffing Hazard - Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Moderate		465.9	72.6%
Severe		176.0	27.4%
Totals for Area of Interest		641.9	100.0%

Table - Shallow Excavations - Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited		487.6	76.0%
Very limited		154.3	24.0%
Totals for Area of Interest		641.9	100.0%

Table - Erosion Hazard (Off Road, Off Trail) - Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value			
Summary by Rating Value	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight		641.9	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest		641.9	100.0%

Appendix B: Species of Concern

Sort Or	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Gro	Common Name	Scientific Name
2	Field Guide	ABPBXA0010	Birds	Baird's Sparrow	Centronyx bairdii
2	Field Guide	ABPBXA9010	Birds	Bobolink	Dolichonyx oryzivorus
2	Field Guide	ABPBX94040	Birds	Brewer's Sparrow	Spizella breweri
2	Field Guide	ABPBA01010	Birds	Brown Creeper	Certhia americana
2	Field Guide	ABPBXA6040	Birds	Chestnut-collared Longsp	Calcarius ornatus
2	Field Guide	ABNKC22010	Birds	Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos
2	Field Guide	ABNNF07070	Birds	Long-billed Curlew	Numenius americanus
2	Field Guide	ABNNB03100	Birds	Mountain Plover	Anarhynchus montanus
2	Field Guide	ABPAV07010	Birds	Pinyon Jay	Gymnorhinus cyanocephalu
2	Field Guide	ABNYF04040	Birds	Red-headed Woodpecker	Melanerpes erythrocephalu
2	Field Guide	ABPBM02060	Birds	Sprague's Pipit	Anthus spragueii
2	Field Guide	ABPBXA6010	Birds	Thick-billed Longspur	Rhynchophanes mccownii
2	Field Guide	ABPBJ18080	Birds	Veery	Catharus fuscescens

Appendix C: Reclamation Seed Mix

Species	% of Seed mix	Pounds PLS/ac
Western Wheatgrass	35	2.8
Slender wheatgrass	35	2.8
Bluebunch Wheatgrass	15	1.2
Green Needlegrass	10	0.8
Lewis flax or purple prairie clover	5	0.4

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION
36, TOWNSHIP 11 NORTH, RANGE 18 EAST, P.M.M., WHEATLAND COUNTY, MONTANA

