

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

|                                      |                                                     |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Project Name:</b>                 | <b>Silver City Natural Gas Pipeline Replacement</b> |
| <b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b> | <b>Summer/Fall 2026</b>                             |
| <b>Proponent:</b>                    | <b>Northwestern Energy Corp</b>                     |
| <b>Location:</b>                     | <b>T12N 5W Section 36</b>                           |
| <b>County:</b>                       | <b>Lewis and Clark</b>                              |
| <b>Trust:</b>                        | <b>Common Schools</b>                               |

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Northwestern Energy has submitted a Land Use License (LUL) application to authorize a temporary work area outside their easement corridor to install a new 16" natural gas transmission pipeline on State Trust Land located in T12N R5W Section 36 pursuant to MCA 77-2-101 & 102. The new line will replace an old 20" natural gas pipeline. The old line will remain in the ground during installation of the new pipe. After the new pipe is installed, the old pipe will be decommissioned and removed at a time designated in the LUL. The methods of installation will be a combination of directional boring and open trench. The proposed temporary work area is 85 ft outside the existing easement corridor and is 3686 feet in length. The total area is 6.4 acres in size. 3686.68. See the attached work area maps.

Exhibits:

- Exhibit A: Vicinity Map
- Exhibit B: Aerial Photo with Proposed License Location
- Exhibit C: Survey Exhibit
- Exhibit D: Construction (Typical) Footprint Drawing
- Exhibit E: Site Photos

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

- Grazing Lessee, Valley View Farms (AG-9443)-Notice of Settlement of Damages sent by the proponent, signed July 22, 2026.
- Grazing Lessee (AG-10155) Patrick Lane-Notice of Settlement of Damages sent by the proponent, signed June 3, 2026.
- Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie
- Montana Natural Heritage Program

Public outreach was limited to the list above due to the larger impacted project corridor outside of State Trust Land (the impacted Trust Land involves a smaller segment of the proposed route) resulting in the supposition that local area residents are well informed of the project and the evident need for the replacement of important energy infrastructure.

No comments in opposition were received by DNRC.

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

The proposed temporary work area would involve Montana State Trust Land allocated to the Common Schools Trust. Approval of the project is contingent on the proponent obtaining all necessary and lawful permits, licenses, and authorizations from the appropriate entities.

### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Alternative A:** No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

**Alternative B:** Action Alternative: Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure.

### 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 following information was derived from Web Soil Survey for this section. The proposed work area would be almost entirely located on "Musselshell-Crago complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes" soil type. This soil type has a "well" mechanical site preparation rating. During the installation phase, the proponent would separate the topsoil and subsoils and begin reclamation immediately. Reclamation, reseeding, and success of revegetation would be closely monitored.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to geology and soils would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Action Alternative: Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Impacts to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture are expected following installation. Reclamation requirements will be monitored.

### 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 surface water was found in the proposed work area. Due to the small footprint of the proposed infrastructure, minimal impacts to water quality, quantity, and distribution are expected.

No cumulative impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution 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.*

Minimal, short-term dust from the machinery and vehicles traveling the proposed work areas during installation and removal is anticipated, but no long-term effects to air quality are expected.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to air quality would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Minimal impacts to air quality are expected to 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.*

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities will be minimally impacted by this work area due to the relatively small area disturbed for the buried natural gas line. The proposed work area is 85'. Short-term effects to vegetation cover, quantity and quality are expected in this 85' wide corridor. The disturbed area would be reclaimed and reseeded. The Montana Natural Heritage Map view classifies the project site as mainly Sagebrush Steppe and Montane Grassland Systems.

DNRC staff completed a site visit to this section on July 28, 2026. Observations at this time report the most occurrent species in the project to sage brush, bluebunch wheatgrass, prairie junegrass, needle and thread, various introduced grasses and various forbs. Project area had been mowed at the time of the site visit; therefore, species composition was derived from the adjacent rangeland.

DNRC will require the applicant to reseed and maintain weed management. The proponent will need to use a pre-approved seed mix for State Trust Land and will be responsible for controlling any weed that may be introduced during construction activities. DNRC will require all equipment and vehicles to be washed prior to entering the project area.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to vegetation cover, quantity, and quality would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Minimal impacts to vegetation cover, quantity, and quality are expected to 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.*

A survey of the project area was conducted using the Montana Natural Heritage Program. Four species of concern were identified: Black-tailed prairie dog, Grizzly Bear, Little Brown Myotis, and the Silver-haired bat. Temporary disturbances during the installation of the new utility may have short-term impacts on terrestrial and avian mobility through the project area. None of the land within the project area is considered unique or critical habitat.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Minimal impacts to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats are expected to 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 Resource Information Service (NRIS) was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located near the proposed work area. Species having habitat polygons occurring in the proposed project location include Grizzly Bear.

The proposed work area will be utilized to replace an existing, necessary utility, and it would be installed below ground. Construction is anticipated to persist for a short duration. The area is semi-residential with very limited or unlikely occurrences as the area is not considered critical habitat.

No cumulative impacts are anticipated to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Minimal impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are expected to occur.

#### **10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

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

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the area of potential effect (APE). Because the project entails replacement of an existing pipeline within the easement corridor, DNRC is not recommending cultural resource investigative work prior to pipeline replacement work. (ref. electronic correspondence from May 11, 2026 from Patrick Rennie, DNRC Trust Land Archeologist.

Considering the low-impact nature of the proposed project, project related activities are expected to have *No Effect to Antiquities*. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

#### **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 work area is in a semi-rural/residential area of Lewis and Clark County northwest of Helena, MT. The new line would be placed underground, and areas of disturbance would be reseeded.

During the construction phase and until the area is revegetated, minor impacts to aesthetics are expected. There would be an 85' wide corridor of reclaimed area following installation.

No anticipated long-term impacts to aesthetics.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to aesthetics would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Short-term impacts during installation and reclamation are expected, but no long-term impacts to aesthetics 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 demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project.

No cumulative effects to environmental resources will result from this proposed work area.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are anticipated.

## **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.*

No other studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for this proposed work area.

# **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.*

No health or safety risks are posed by the proposed work area. Expected utility, work-related risk associated with the utility replacement would occur during the installation phase. Locating any other underground utilities would be the responsibility of the contractor to avoid these utilities during installation.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to human health and safety would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Potential impacts to human health and safety are not expected to occur.

#### **15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

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

As proposed, this project is designed to replace existing infrastructure. The new line will allow for an increase in natural gas delivery to NorthWestern Energy customers.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Minimal impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production are anticipated.

#### **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.*

Quantity and distribution of employment is not expected to change as a result of this proposed project.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to quantity and distribution of employment would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment 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.*

No significant increase in tax revenues is anticipated as a result of this proposed project.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to local and state tax base and tax revenues would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. Minimal impacts to local and state tax base and tax revenues are expected to 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.*

No increased demand for government services is expected as a result of this proposed project.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to demand for government services would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to demand for government services are expected to 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.*

No locally adopted environmental plans will be impacted by this proposed project.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals are anticipated.

**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 work area will not negatively alter recreational activities in the area.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to access to and quality of recreational and wilderness activities would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to access to and quality of recreational and wilderness activities are expected to 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.*

No impacts to density and distribution of population and housing are anticipated.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to density and distribution of population and housing are anticipated.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

No changes in social structures and mores are expected as a result of this proposed project.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to social structures and mores would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to social structures and mores are anticipated.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

The proposed project has no anticipated impacts to the unique quality of the area.

**Alternative A (No Action):** No work would occur. No direct impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity would occur.

**Alternative B (Proposed Action):** Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure. No impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity are anticipated to 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.*

The proposed project on these tracts of State Trust Lands would generate **\$3203.00** in revenue for the Common Schools Trust.

**6.4 acres temporary work area x \$300/acre = \$1965.00**

**1 year of natural gas pipeline operation. = \$1238.00**

**(12N 5W 36 Common Schools)**

This proposed project would enable the proponent to replace an outdated, existing gas line by installing, utilizing, and maintaining the proposed natural gas line.

|                                      |                                                                  |                            |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>EA Checklist<br/>Prepared By:</b> | <b>Name:</b> Andy Burgoyne                                       | <b>Date:</b> July 20, 2027 |
|                                      | <b>Title:</b> Trust Land Program Manager-<br>Central Land Office |                            |

**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

Two Alternatives presented and fully analyzed in the EAC.

**Alternative A:** No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

**Alternative B:** Action Alternative: Issue a temporary Land Use License to the proponent for the purpose of a temporary work area for the replacement of existing natural gas transmission infrastructure.

On behalf of the DNRC I have selected Alternative B: Action Alternative.

- The Action Alternative will benefit the surrounding community with new infrastructure and provide reliable utilities to the public.
- The land involved in the project are held by the State of Montana in trust for the support of specific beneficiary institutions. This project is consistent with MCA 77-1-601 and MCA 77-1-202.

## 26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After Reviewing the two Alternatives, I find that the Action Alternative will have no minimal impacts on the Physical Environment or the Human Population.

Direct Impacts identified in this environmental assessment checklist are of short duration or temporary. Mitigations have been developed to reduce any adverse impacts to a level of non-significance.

No secondary or cumulative impacts have been identified

## 27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EI

☐

More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

**EA Checklist  
Approved By:**

**Name:** Adam Blythe

**Title:** Helena Unit Manager

**Signature:**

*Adam Blythe*

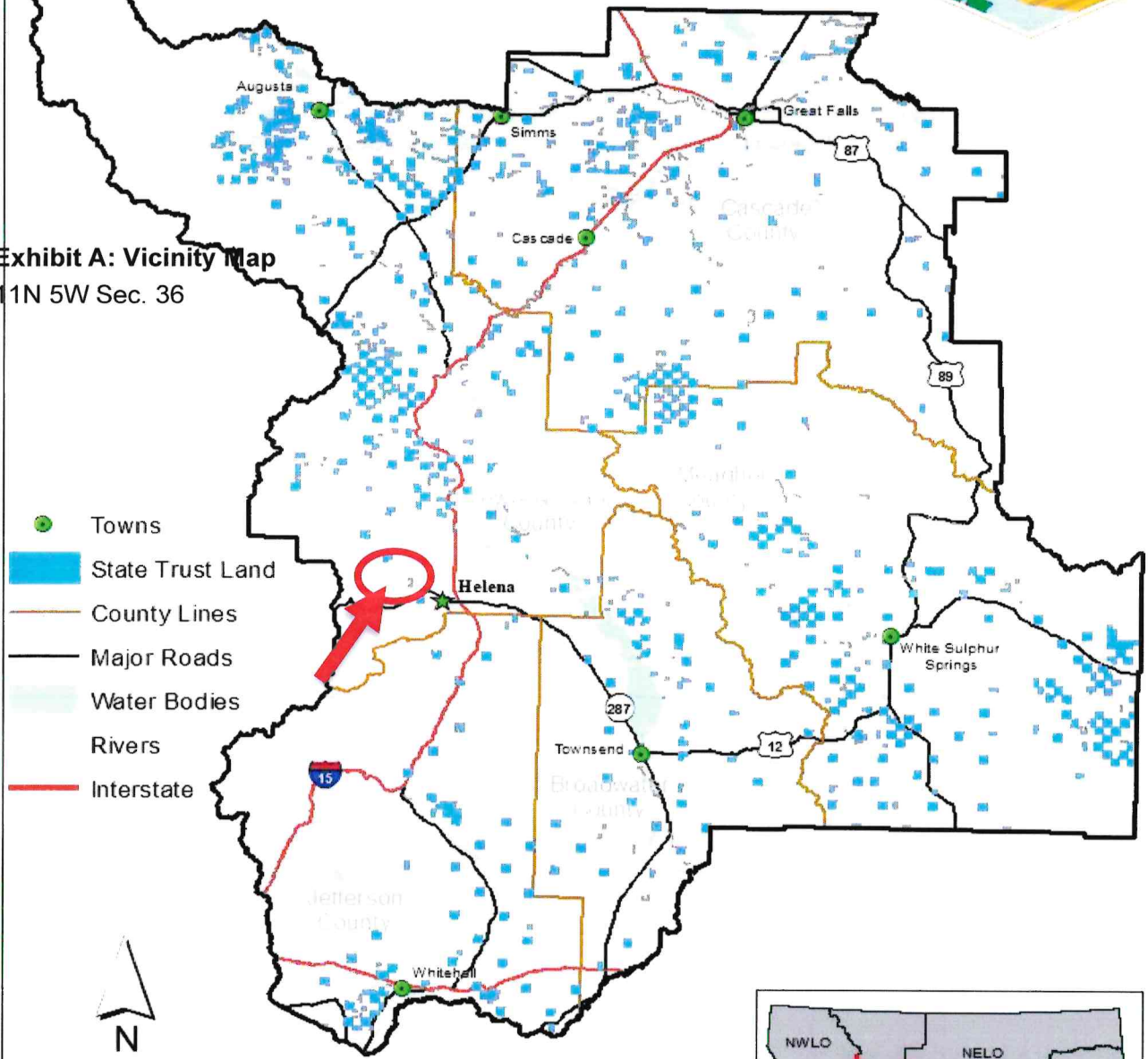
**Date:**

*8/10/2026*

# State Trust Land Vicinity Map Helena Unit

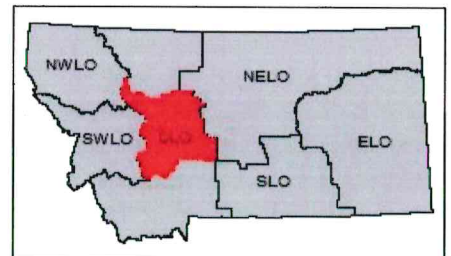


**Exhibit A: Vicinity Map**  
11N 5W Sec. 36



0 10 20 40 Miles

Produced by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation 12/1/2029  
Datum: NAD 1983 StatePlane



**Exhibit B: Aerial Photo Exsisting Pipeline Location**

12N 5W Sec. 36



Proposed Project indicated by the green line.

**Exhibit C: Survey Exhibit**

12N 5W Sec. 36

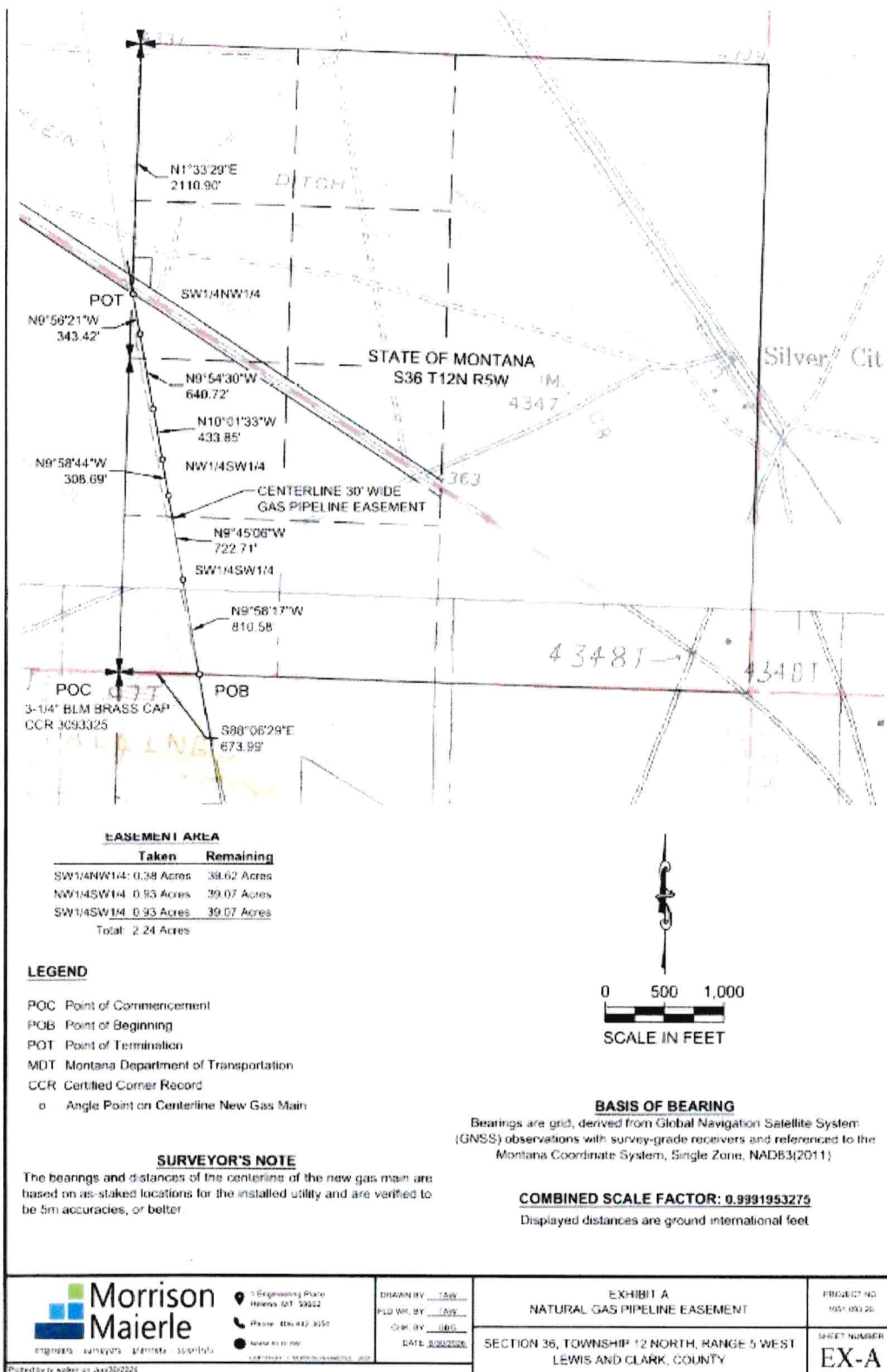
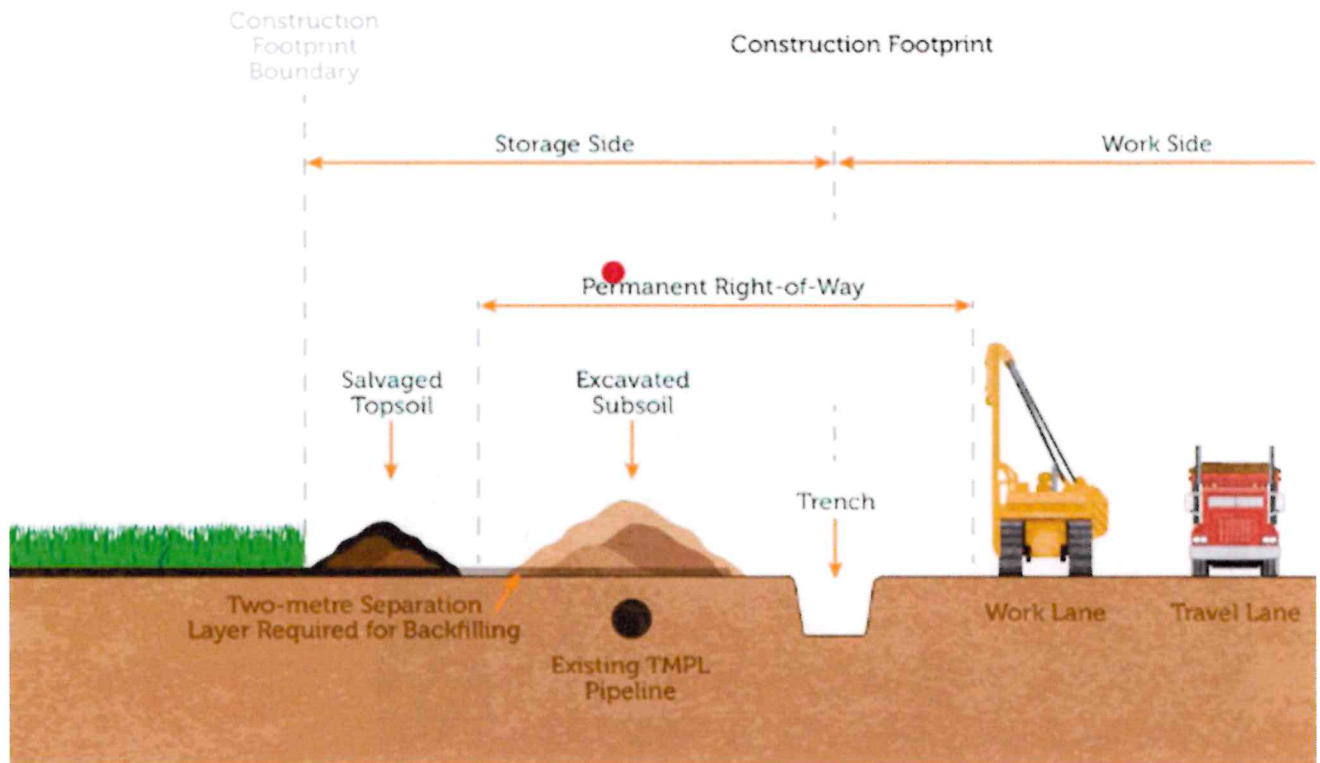


Exhibit D: Construction (Typical) Footprint Drawing



**Exhibit D: Site Visit Photos from July 28, 2026**  
12N 5W Sec. 36

