

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Blackfoot Communications (LUL-309-2600001)
Proposed Implementation Date:	July 2025
Proponent:	Blackfoot Communications
Location:	Section 20, Township 01 North, Range 26 East (Common Schools Trust)
County:	Yellowstone County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Blackfoot Communications has applied to the DNRC Southern Land Office (SLO) for a Land Use License (LUL) to permit the installation of an underground fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower through a contract with Dish Network located on State Trust Land Section 20, T01N, R26E in Yellowstone County for the Common Schools Trust.

Fiber optic cable will be installed using a vibratory shank on a plow rig with a trench 3 inches wide and 30 inches deep. Cable will be buried once the project is completed.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. This section does not currently have a lessee.

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Issue a Land Use License to Blackfoot Communications to allow the installation of a fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower through a contract with Dish Network located on State Trust Land Section 20, T01N, R20E, in Yellowstone County for the Common Schools Trust.

No Action Alternative: Deny the Land Use License to Blackfoot Communications to allow the installation of a fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower through a contract with Dish Network located on State Trust Land Section 20, T01N, R20E, in Yellowstone County for the Common Schools Trust

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 soil in the work area consist mostly of Ryegate sandy loam and great plains sand prairie for vegetation according to the NRCS Soil Survey.

The proponent will be installing a fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower through a contract with Dish Network located on State Trust Land Section 20, T01N, R20E, in Yellowstone County for the Common Schools Trust.

Implementing the proposed action is not expected to cause significant adverse impacts to geology or soils.

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.

The proponent will be installing a fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower. There are no water sources on this Section. No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 adverse significant impact is expected to air quality if the proposed Land Use License is issued.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated that no plant species of concern are located on the subject section.

The proponent will be installing a fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower through a contract with Dish Network located on State Trust Land Section 20, T01N, R20E, in Yellowstone County for the Common Schools Trust.

No significant adverse impacts to vegetation cover, quantity or quality are expected as a result of implementing the proposed action.

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.

No significant adverse impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following species of concern in the proposed sections:

- Western Milksnake (*Lampropeltis gentilis*)
- Greater Short-horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma hernandesi*)
- Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*)
- Cassin's Finch (*Haemorhous cassinii*)
- Veery (*Catharus fuscenscens*)
- Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)
- Golden Eagle (*aquila chrysaetos*)
- Ferruginous Hawk (*buteo regalis*)

Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) While these species may be present in the general project area, no direct or lasting impacts are expected to occur to sensitive species. Due to the short duration and minimal disturbance, the project will have a minimal impact to the environment and habitat on State Land.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, it is not expected to have a significant long-term effect on any of the species identified on or around this parcel.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

No significant adverse impacts to historical or archaeological sites are expected from implementing the proposed action.

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 subject state land has no distinguishing features. No significant adverse impacts to aesthetics are expected from implementing the proposed action.

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.

Proposed actions will not create demand for scarce environmental resources, land or water. The purpose of the project is to place a fiber optic cable to service a cell tower by using a vibratory shank on a plow rig. No significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur because of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 is currently a 1st and 2nd filing for future commercial and/or residential development.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 significant impacts to human health and safety are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The issuance of the proposed Land Use License will allow Blackfoot Communications to install a fiber optic cable to serve a cell tower.

After a questionnaire with the MT Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program, it is shown that "The proposed disturbances for this project are all outside of the Sage Grouse Habitat as defined by Executive Order 12/2015. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would occur as a result of implementing the proposed action.

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 proposed action would not have a significant impact on employment.

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 proposed action will have no effect on local or state tax revenue.

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 implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate an increase in demand for government services.

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.

Implementation of the proposed action will not conflict with any locally adopted plans

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 proposed action will have no effect on access to or the quality of recreation.

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 proposed alternative would have no adverse effect on density and distribution of population and housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed alternative would not directly impact cultural uniqueness or diversity.

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 Common Schools Trust will benefit by getting a rental fee from Blackfoot Communications of \$2000.00 for Land Use License 309-2600001.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Michelle Yeager	Date: July 11, 2025
	Title: Area Planner, Southern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed action has been selected, and it is recommended that Land Use License 309-2600001 be issued to Blackfoot Communications to permit the installation of an underground fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower through a contract with Dish Network located on State Trust Land Section 20, T01N, R26E in Yellowstone County for the Common Schools Trust.


This alternative can be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the long-term sustainable natural resource management of the area.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action, with is the installation of an underground fiber optic cable to serve an existing cell tower through a contract with Dish Network located on State Trust Land Section 20, T01N, R26E in Yellowstone County for the Common Schools Trust. There are no natural features that could produce adverse impacts or species of concern occupying the parcel.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Joe Holzwarth
	Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Signature: 	Date: 8/8/25