# CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Project Name: Blackfoot Telephone Smiley Slough Easement**
**Proposed Implementation Date: March, 2023**
**Proponent: Blackfoot Telephone, Plains Unit and the DNRC Northwestern Land Office.**
**Location: S36, T20N, R26W**
**County: Sanders**

## I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Plains Unit of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) along with Blackfoot Telephone is proposing the Blackfoot Telephone Smiley Slough Easement. Blackfoot telephone proposes to install a fiber optic communication line along an existing road. The project is in the Smiley Slough area approximately 1 air mile SE of Plains, Montana in Section 36, Township 20 North, Range 26 West.

## 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.*

A Letter of Intent was sent to the grazing lessees and the adjacent landowner in Smiley Slough.

### 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.*

NA

### 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.*

**No-Action Alternative:** The easement to Blackfoot Communications would not be issued. The existing fiber cables would not have legal access and would not be updated or repaired.

**Action Alternative:** A permanent easement on 0.60 miles of an open road would be issued to Blackfoot Communications, providing legal access for the installing fiber optic cable along with maintenance access.

## 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.*

Soils present along the proposed easement route were reviewed using the Natural Resources Conservation Service WebSoil Survey (Web Soil Survey - Home (usda.gov). Information on the Web Soil Survey is referenced from the *Soil Survey of Sanders and Parts of Lincoln and Flathead Counties,* MT.
The proposed easement would cross three soils. All soils generally have a low risk of erosion with a low sediment delivery risk based upon slope and distance from surface water.

Equipment used to install the buried cable would likely result in some level of compaction and displacement, however, because the cable would be installed within the existing road easement, additional cumulative impacts over the existing condition would be minimal and short-lived. Disturbed areas would be grassed immediately upon cable installment.

### 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.*

Because the project is not intended to remove vegetation and is located well away from surface water, no risk of cumulative impacts to water quality or quantity would be expected.

### 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.*

The installation is expected to be complete in one day. Due to the short duration of the project the effects should be minimal.

### 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.*

The vegetation on approximately 0.60 miles of road exist on State lands is mostly grass and some noxious weeds such as knapweed and some thistle. The minimal disturbance due to fiber optic line construction and the effects to grazing capacity is expected to be temporary. No rare plants have been identified.

**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.*

The proposed easement and associated underground facility installation would occur along an existing driveway easement and within 700 feet of Montana Highway 200. The surrounding habitat is mostly grassland with a few scattered pockets of trees. Construction activities would be of short duration and minimal impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat would be anticipated. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to wildlife are expected as a result of the proposed Action.

**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.*

No suitable habitat for threatened or endangered species is present in the Project Area. Appreciable use of the easement area by threatened, endangered or sensitive species is not anticipated. Construction activities would be of short duration and minimal effects to wildlife and wildlife habitat would be anticipated. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to threatened, endangered or sensitive species are expected as a result of the proposed Action.

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**
*Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

No historical and archaeological resources have been identified.

**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.*

No significant impacts have been identified.

**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.*

No significant impacts have been identified.

**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 projects have been identified.

## 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.*

NA

**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**
*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

NA

**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.*

NA

**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.*

NA

**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*

NA

**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 significant impacts have been identified.

**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.*

No increase in recreation is expected following the project.

**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.*

NA

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**
*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

NA

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**
*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

NA

**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.*

The easement would generate additional revenue for the Common Schools Trust. The estimated return to the trust for the proposed harvest is $310.00 based on an estimated acreage and land values. Costs, revenues, and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives, they are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return.

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| **EA Checklist Prepared By**: | **Name: Ty Colombo** | **Date:** January 10, 2023 |
| | **Title: Forest Management Supervisor** | |

## V. FINDING

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**
The Alternative Action is selected for implementation.

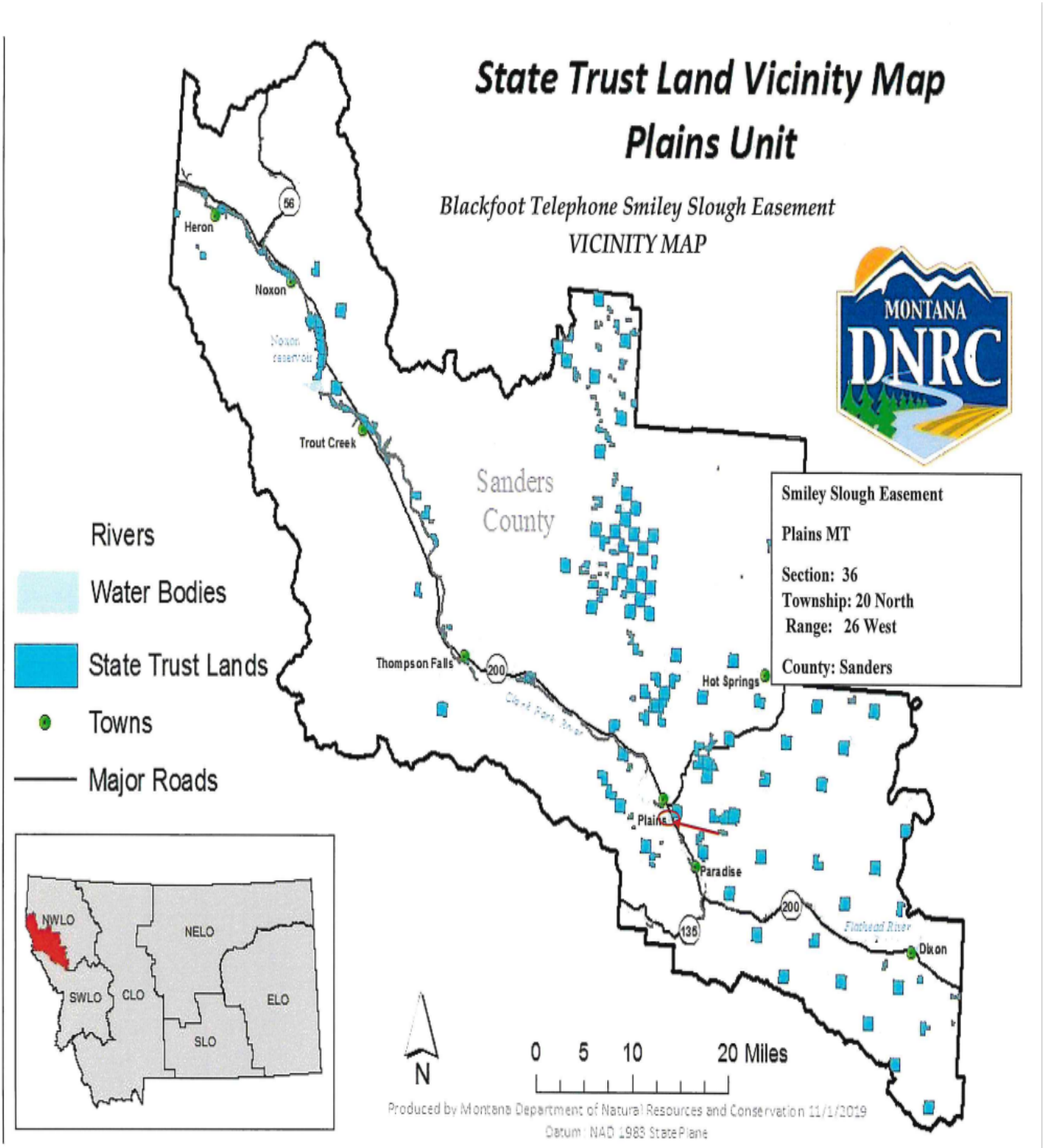
**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

No significant impacts were identified.

**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| [ ] | EIS | [ ] | More Detailed EA | [X] | No Further Analysis |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **EA Checklist Approved By**: | **Name: David M Olsen** | |
| | **Title: Plains Unit Program Manager** | |
| **Signature:** David M. Olsen | | **Date**: January 12, 2023 |


State Trust Land Vicinity Map
Plains Unit
Blackfoot Telephone Smiley Slough Easement
VICINITY MAP
MONTANA
DNRC
Heron
Noxon
Noxon reservoir
Trout Creek
Sanders County
Thompson Falls
Hot Springs
Plains
Paradise
Dixon
Clark Fork River
Flathead River
56
200
138
Rivers
Water Bodies
State Trust Lands
Towns
Major Roads
Smiley Slough Easement
Plains MT
Section: 36
Township: 20 North
Range: 26 West
County: Sanders
NWLO
NELO
SWLO
CLO
ELO
SLO
N
0 5 10 20 Miles
Produced by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation 11/1/2019
Datum: NAD 1983 State Plane

# Blackfoot Telephone Smiley Slough Easement
# S36, T20N, R26W