

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

|                             |  |
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| <b>Project Name:</b>        | South Malta Exchange Telecommunications Upgrade, Ag-8554 |
| <b>Proposed</b>             |  |
| <b>Implementation Date:</b> | 2026   |
| <b>Proponent:</b>           | Triangle Telephone Coop. Assn., Inc.                     |
| <b>Location:</b>            | 24N 29E 36   |
| <b>County:</b>              | Phillips   |
| <b>Trust:</b>               | Common Schools   |

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Proponent is proposing to replace existing copper telecommunications facilities (ROW-13215) with fiber optics. This will extend their telecommunications facilities in their South Malta Exchange. These improvements will offer state-of-the-art telecommunications toll and distribution facilities, as well as future growth capabilities for the community.

The proposed route was determined by field review as the most direct route between terminus locations while also providing access to existing and future network considerations. The proposed route will provide accessibility for construction and maintenance since it is located primarily along existing roadways.

### 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) & Glasgow Unit Office  
Proponent: Triangle Communications  
Surface Lessees: Ag-8554 Veseth & Veseth Livestock Co Inc  
Other:

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

The DNRC, and NELO have jurisdiction over this proposed project.

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Alternative A (No Action)** – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant this request.

**Alternative B (the Proposed Action)** – Under this alternative, the Department does grant this request.

### 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.*

No significant cumulative impacts to geology or soil quality, stability, and moisture are anticipated.

Triangle Communications will utilize the direct plow method. This is considered a trenchless method. This plow creates a narrow opening in the soil, inserts the cable at a depth of three to six feet, covers the cable, and smooths the disturbed soil in a single pass.

**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.

**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 majority of the vegetation cover is grass consisting mostly of Western Wheat grass and small amounts of forbs. There will be a small amount of disturbance to the vegetation from the plow and machinery upon installation. When considering the trenchless method, which will be used, the disturbance is insignificant.

**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 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.*

No significant impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources are anticipated, though temporary displacement of local wildlife may occur during the project.

Species of Concern occurrences from the Montana NHP include Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Greater Sage-Grouse, Long-billed Curlew, Ferruginous Hawk.

**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 APE and Class III level inventory work was previously conducted.

Proposed telecommunications cable installation 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.*

No significant impacts on the aesthetics of the area 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 will be significantly impacted because of this project. This project will also not add any significant cumulative demands to 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 being considered on the tracts listed 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.*

There will be an increase in equipment usage along this corridor upon installation. There is minimal potential for individual harm to occur.

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

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

This project will not add to or deter from any industrial or agricultural activities. Commercially this project will replace the current copper telecommunications facilities with new state-of-the-art fiber optic, resulting in future growth capabilities.

**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 any jobs, so 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.*

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue for the proposed project.

**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*

There will not be any significant increases in traffic, school attendance, or the need for fire and police protection if this project is approved.

**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 or other agency management plans affecting 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.*

There will be no significant direct or cumulative effects on access to or quality of recreation and wilderness activities because of this project.

**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 project does not include any changes to housing or developments, therefore, there are no significant changes in density and distribution of population and housing.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

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

There is no native, unique, or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be significantly impacted by the proposal.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

The proposed project will have no significant impact on any culturally unique quality 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.*

The proposed project will not have any significant cumulative economic or social effect.

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

**Alternative B (the Proposed Action)** – Under this alternative, the Department recommends that this electrical improvement be approved

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

I have evaluated the potential environmental effects and have determined no significant impact on the environment because of this project.

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

|                          |     |                          |                  |                                     |                     |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | EIS | <input type="checkbox"/> | More Detailed EA | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No Further Analysis |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|

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|------------------------------|---|
| EA Checklist<br>Prepared By: | Name: Tanner Roness<br>Title: Glasgow-Unit, Land use Specialist |
| Signature:                   | Date: 01/13/2026  |

*[Handwritten signature of Tanner Roness over the signature line]* *1/14/2026*

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| EA Checklist<br>Approved By: | Name: Don Pyrah<br>Title: Glasgow Unit Manager |
| Signature:                   | Date: 1/14/2026                                |

*[Handwritten signature of Don Pyrah over the signature line]* *1/14/2026*

