

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Vigilante Electric Cooperative Easement Application Birch Creek Rd 2021 REVISED 2025
<b>Proposed</b>	
<b>Implementation Date:</b>	<b>Winter / Early Spring, 2026</b>
<b>Proponent:</b>	Vigilante Electric Cooperative
<b>Location:</b>	T5S R9W Sec 22 (Pine Hills School Trust) T5S R9W Sec 23 (Pine Hills School Trust) T5S R9W Sec 24 (Pine Hills School Trust) <b>T5S R9W Sec 26 (Pine Hills School Trust)</b> <b>T5S R9W Sec 27 (Pine Hills School Trust)</b>
<b>County:</b>	Beaverhead County

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Vigilante Electric Cooperative has applied to the MT DNRC, Dillon Unit to place an overhead powerline on the above referenced Montana Trust Land in the Dillon Unit. The new residential power line would provide improved electrical services including 3 phase service to the surrounding rural area. The upgrade comprises approximately 2.87 miles of new overhead electric transmission line.

The new line would parallel Birch Creek Road. The line would be operated at a voltage of 7,200 volts. The line would be approximately 20 – 25 feet above ground surface, poles at 30 feet total height. As proposed, poles will be topped with raptor friendly modifications.

Ground disturbance would be minimal, except for the placing of power poles at points along the installation route. The width of the requested easement over the 5 state tracts would be 30 feet wide, 15 feet each side of centerline and would encompass approximately 10.44 acres of state land. See attached maps.

Vigilante Electric Cooperative wishes to start construction in the Winter / Early Spring and complete the project by April, 2026.

### PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Scoping notices were sent to the following parties seeking comments for the proposed project:

Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Wildlife Biologist Vanna Boccadori

The DNRC State surface lessee, Hagenbarth Livestock, has been contacted by Vigilante Electric Cooperative and a completed and signed settlement of damages form has been submitted to DNRC.

DNRC: Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie

Montana Natural Heritage Program

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

During scoping for this project, no other government permitting issues were identified.

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Alternative A:** Grant Vigilante Electric Cooperative Five utility easements over state trust land sections in Beaverhead County for the installation of an overhead electric powerline. These easements would be granted for the specific purpose of installation and maintenance of an overhead electric powerline.

**Alternative B:** Deny Vigilante Electric Cooperative five utility easements over state land sections in Beaverhead County for the installation of an overhead electric powerline.

### 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 proposed Vigilante Electric Cooperative overhead power line route parallels a county road where disturbance has occurred in the past and the terrain is favorable. Power transmission poles will be buried to a depth of approximately 6 feet and a distance between poles of 330 to 350 feet. The scope of this project will cause very little disturbance to soils with little chance of erosion occurring from the proposal.

#### 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 affected area is shortgrass – dry upland. No surface water sources are located near the proposed project. The nearest surface water is Birch Creek located approximately 2 air miles to the Northwest. No impacts to water quality would occur under this 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 effects to air quality would result from this proposed 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.*

Some minor vegetative disturbance is expected. The disturbance would occur during initial transmission line installation activities that require equipment driving along the proposed route to place the line. It is not expected that the disturbed areas will need to be re-seeded with grass seed due to the small amount of disturbance that will occur. Any noxious weed infestations caused by construction on state land will be the responsibility of the proponent to control. All weed plans will be submitted to the Beaverhead County Weed Board for approval. If a large area of surface disturbance to vegetation does occur Vigilante Electric Cooperative will need to re-vegetate this area by spreading grass seed on the disturbed areas. DFWP Wildlife Biologist Vanna Boccadore reiterated the need to monitor and treat any weed infestations by the proponent.

#### 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.*

Antelope, occasional deer, small mammals, raptors, and various bird species use this area. The areas cover is very limited and consists of rolling topography since the primary vegetation on site is short grass species including blue grama and needle-and-thread grass, providing no vegetative cover for most species. Installation of the overhead transmission line would be adjacent to existing public road rights-of-way. Due to the relatively

small disturbance areas and brief installation period, minimal impacts are anticipated. Short duration disturbance may occur to any number of these species, however no long-term change in habitat will occur and no long term or cumulative effects to these species are anticipated. Mitigation measures recommended by DFWP Wildlife Biologist Vanna Boccadori requested that eagle roosts and perch sites be minimized to avoid electrocution of eagles. Vanna recommended that VEC contact Mark Restiani, Northwestern Energy Wildlife Biologist, in reference to eagle / raptor mitigation measures.

## 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 within or near the project area. The query results found 7 species that are listed below:

**Great Blue Heron** (*Ardea herodias*) – The Great Blue Heron is currently listed as sensitive by the State of Montana. According to the MNHP site, the blue heron primarily inhabits riparian areas and wetland habitats. This proposal will take place in dry short grass dominated uplands 3.5 miles away from the Big Hole River riparian area and would not impact blue heron or their habitat.

**McCowan's Longspur** (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – McCowan's longspur is listed as both a USDI BLM and State of Montana sensitive species. There is little information on this species at the MNHP site. The site does infer that the species is a seasonal inhabitant to the area during nesting season. Nesting season begins in early May and runs through July. This project is slated for construction in the Fall when the species is not considered to be present in the area. Duration of equipment use and increased human presence would be of short duration and the project as proposed would be completed by the time McCowan's longspurs return to the area to nest.

\*Tops of power poles should be treated to reduce incidence of use by raptors to reduce potential predation from high (30') artificial raptor perches created by the poles.

**Long-billed Curlew** - (*Numenius americanus*) – Long-billed curlews are listed as sensitive by the BLM and as a species of concern by the State of Montana. Curlews prefer areas like the project site that is dominated by short native grass, forbs, and sub-shrubs. The site matches curlew nesting habitat preference, which is short to mixed grass prairie. Without mitigating measures, the newly constructed power line would create new long-term raptor and avian predator (such as ravens) perches that would negatively affect Curlews, especially during nesting and brood rearing seasons. Mitigation measures to limit predator perches are necessary to reduce impacts to all ground nesting bird species in the area.

**Greater Sage-grouse** (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – Greater sage-grouse was listed as a species of concern in the Montana Natural Heritage report, but the site is outside of identified core and general habitat. The site is comprised mainly of short-growing native grasses including needle-and-thread grass, blue grama, and Sandberg bluegrass, low forbs, and sub-shrubs such as fringed sagewort and winterfat. Sagebrush is not found in proximity to the project area.

**Burrowing Owl** (*Athene cunicularia*) – According to the NRIS Site, burrowing owls prefer to nest in short grass sites and have been documented using the area within and around the project site. Unmodified overhead transmission line poles creating artificial avian predator perches could be detrimental to burrowing owls. Mitigation measures to limit perch use is necessary to reduce impacts to all ground nesting bird species in the area.

**Spotted Bat** (*Euderma maculatum*) – The spotted bat is listed as sensitive by the State of Montana, USFS, & BLM. Its general habitat is defined as cliffs with rock crevices. Topography is flat to rolling with no rock outcroppings within and immediately surrounding the project area. No impacts to spotted bat habitat is expected to occur as a result of this proposed project.

**Columbia Plateau Pocket Mouse** (*Perognathus parvus*) – The Columbia plateau pocket mouse primarily inhabits sandy soil types with at least some brush cover. The proposed project will not affect the Columbia

Plateau pocket mouse habitat due to the sparse and short nature of the vegetation type on-site and lack of shrub species.

During the installation of the overhead transmission line, some of the species of concern could be disturbed. To limit potential disturbance to the above species, the project will be of short duration and would occur in late fall or winter when sensitive bird species have moved from nesting grounds. Long-term cumulative effects of the transmission line to short grass ground nesting bird species require avian predator mitigation measures to reduce impacts from power pole use as hunting platforms and perches.

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

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

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist, was solicited for input regarding the potential for historical and archaeological sites in the vicinity of the proposed project. His input follows:

*A previous Class III cultural resource inventory has been conducted in the project area of potential effect. Only the historic Birch Creek Road (24BE2045) has been identified. Construction of the proposed powerline will not impact the roadway, so there will be no adverse effect to state owned heritage properties.*

#### **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 location of the proposed project is in a sparsely populated area and will not significantly impact aesthetics. The new overhead powerline will be visible from the county road, Birch Creek Road, once installed. No long term or cumulative effects to aesthetics are anticipated from this proposed project.

#### **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.

#### **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.*

The Dillon Unit is not currently evaluating any other proposals within the project 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 increased impacts to Health and Safety are expected to occur as a result of this proposed project.

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

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

No changes to agricultural activities would occur as a result of this proposed project.

**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 proposal will not create nor eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

**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 not significantly increase tax revenues or result in an increase or decrease of the tax base.

**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 proposed power line will not increase 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.*

No known zoning laws or management plans are in place for any of the proposed locations under the action alternative.

**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 project would not affect recreational access. No impacts to recreational activities are anticipated under this alternative.

**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 power line will not affect distribution of population or housing in the Glen areas or the rest of SW Montana.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

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

The proposed power line will have no effect on social structures or mores of the surrounding area.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

The power line is not expected to alter the cultural uniqueness and diversity 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.*

**Alternative A:** This alternative will provide improved electrical service to the rural Glen, Montana area. It will also generate approximately \$15,660.00 for the Pine Hills School Trust, with land valued at \$1,500 per acre for 10.44 acres encumbered.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Charles Maddox <b>Title:</b> Land Use Specialist	<b>Date:</b> July 28, 2021 <b>Final Revision:</b> January 22, 2026
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**V. FINDING****25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

**Alternative A:** Grant Vigilante Electric Cooperative Five utility easements over state trust land sections in Beaverhead County for the installation of an overhead electric powerline. These easements would be granted for the specific purpose of installation and maintenance of an overhead electric power line.

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

Mitigation requirements include monitoring and spraying noxious weeds and invasive grasses for at least three years after installation. Any large, disturbed areas due to powerline construction and installation will be seeded with a department approved dryland grass seed mix in the spring of the year. Proponent will install raptor perch mitigation measures on new power poles to reduce predation of nesting ground bird species such as Curlews, Mc Cowan Longspur, and burrowing owls. If mitigation measures are followed no long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated from this proposal.

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

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

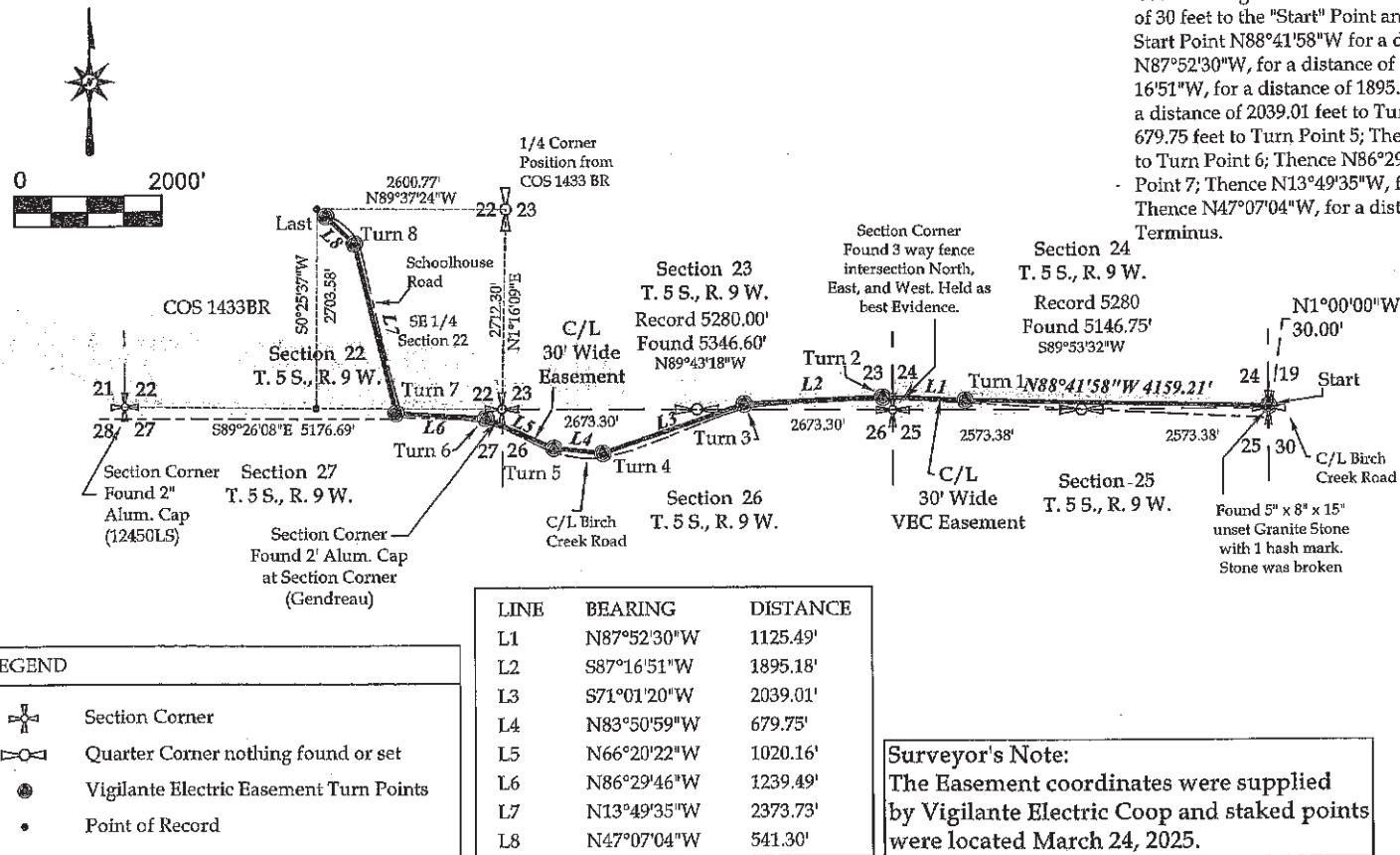
<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Timothy Egan <b>Title:</b> Dillon Unit Manager
<b>Signature:</b>	/S/ Timothy Egan

*Exhibit A*

*To Create a 30 Feet Wide Easement for Vigilante Electric Cooperative  
Across State of Montana Lands  
Situated in Sections 22, 23, 24, 26, and 27,  
Township 5 South, Range 9 West, P.M.M.,  
Beaverhead County, Montana.*

For: Vigilante Electric Cooperative

Date: June 27, 2025



**Vigilante Electric Utility Easement:**

**Legal Description:**

A 30.0 foot wide Utility Easement situated in and part of Sections 22, 23, 24, 26, and 27, Township 5 South, Range 9 West, P.M.M., Beaverhead County, Montana and whose centerline is more particularly described as follows:

Commencing at the SE Corner of Section 24: Thence N01°00'00"W for a distance of 30 feet to the "Start" Point and True Point of Beginning; Thence from said Start Point N88°41'58"W for a distance of 4159.21 feet to Turn Point 1; Thence N87°52'30"W, for a distance of 1125.49 feet to Turn Point 2; Thence S87°16'51"W, for a distance of 1895.18 feet to Turn Point 3; Thence S71°01'20"W, for a distance of 2039.01 feet to Turn Point 4; Thence N83°50'59"W, for a distance of 679.75 feet to Turn Point 5; Thence N66°20'22"W, for a distance of 1020.16 feet to Turn Point 6; Thence N86°29'46"W, for a distance of 1239.49 feet to Turn Point 7; Thence N13°49'35"W, for a distance of 2373.73 feet to Turn Point 8; Thence N47°07'04"W, for a distance of 541.30 to the "Last" Point and Point of Terminus.

Sections 22, 23, 24, 26 and 27 T.5S., R.9W.		
Vigilante Electric Coop		
Utility Easement Exhibit		
Schauber Surveying 266-4602		
2000 Ft/ln	PLAT/100'	INCHES
8-30-2025	4864.TRV	
Survey by	INCHES	1/1
bms		1864