CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Telephone Harlowton Exchange Improvement
Proposed Implementation Date:	May- August 2026
Proponent:	Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc.
Location:	NW4SW4, S2S2, Sec. 36, T7N R18E and NE4NE4, Sec. 2, T6N R15E
County:	Wheatland
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.) is proposing replacing existing telecommunication facilities which service their Harlowton Exchange. Replacing current fiber facilities will improve service and distribution while providing for future growth opportunities. The proposed route includes crossing School Trust Land at two locations. First NW4SW4, S2S2, Sec. 36, T7N R18E, and will run for 5210.84 feet in the existing Hwy 12 right of way. The second location is NE4NE4, Sec. 2, T6N R15E, and runs 19.98 feet in the existing county road right of way. TTCA Inc. has requested both easements be 20-foot-wide which will encompass a total of 2.31 acres of School Trust Land, both easements will benefit the Common Schools Trust.

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) & Lewistown Unit Office
Proponent: Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.)
Surface Lessees: Taber Ranch LLC, TwoDot Land and Livestock Co.
Other: Patrick Rennie (DNRC Archaeologist), Montana Sage Grouse Oversite Team (MSGOT)

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

The DNRC has jurisdiction over this proposed project. The project will be administered by the Lewistown Unit of the Northeastern Land Office.

The proponent is responsible for acquiring all necessary permits for the proposed project and settling all surface damages with the surface lessees.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant TTCA, Inc. the requested easement.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department authorizes TTCA, Inc. the requested Right of Way Easement across NW4SW4, S2S2, Sec. 36, T7N R18E and NE4NE4, Sec. 2, T6N R15E for the installation of buried fiber optic communication cable.

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.

All construction associated with this project are planned in previously disturbed areas along road rights of way.

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.

T7N R18E Sec.36

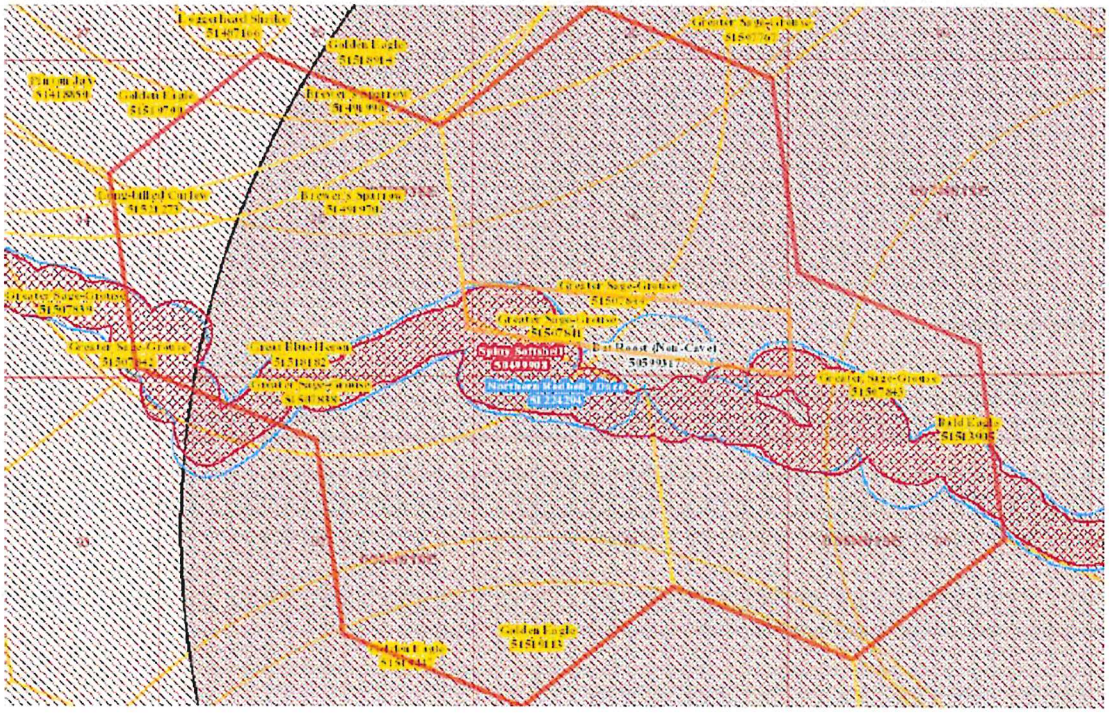
MONTANA STATE LIBRARY
NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM
A program of the Montana State Library's Natural Resource Information System

Legend
Model Icons: Suitable (native range); Optimal Suitability; Moderate Suitability; Low Suitability; Suitable (introduced range)
Habitat Icons: Common; Occasional
Range Icons: Native / Year-round; Summer; Winter; Migratory; Non-native; Historical
Num Obs: Count of obs with 'good precision' (<=1000m) - indicates additional 'poor precision' obs (1001m-10,000m)

Latitude 45.30042 Longitude -106.38857
45.33238 -106.44961

Native Species

Summarized by: **T7N R18E Sec36** *(Custom Area of Interest)*
Filtered by:
Native Species reports are filtered for Species with MT Status = Species of Concern, Special Status, Important Animal Habitat, Potential SOC



Several speceis of concern exist in close proximity to the planned project area. Most notably of these are Northern Redbelly Dace, Spiny Softshell, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Pinyon Jay, Great Blue Heron and Greater Sage Grouse. All these species show the highest probability of using this area based on predictive models. Most of these speces are closley tied to the riparian ecosystem of the Musselshell River, which runs south of Highway 12. The project area in this section is north of the highway in the existing right of way. With this project occuring in a previously disturbed area there are no significant impacts to these species anticipated.

during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

No significant effects on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources are anticipated.

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 on 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.

The main risk to human health and safety would be during the construction of the project. It would be the responsibility of the proponent to mitigate any risks during construction. After construction there will be some health and safety benefits provided by increased internet access. The better internet will allow residents of the area to have better access to telehealth and phone service for better communication with emergency services

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 other industrial, agricultural, or commercial activities in the area.

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 to 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.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department authorizes TTCA, Inc. the requested Right of Way Easement across NW4SW4, S2S2, Sec. 36, T7N R18E and NE4NE4, Sec. 2, T6N R15E for the installation of buried fiber optic communication cable.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

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

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Cole Stumpf **Title:** Land Use Specialist	
Signature: Cole T. Stumpf		**Date:** 22 Jan. 2026

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Josh Stoychoff **Title:** Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office	
Signature: Josh Stoychoff		**Date:** 1/22/26

T6N R15E Sec.2

Table — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	55.2	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**55.2**	**100.0%**

Description — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail)

The ratings in this interpretation indicate the hazard of soil loss from off-road and off-trail areas after disturbance activities that expose the soil surface. The ratings are based on slope, soil erosion factor K, and an index of rainfall erosivity (R). The soil loss is caused by sheet or rill erosion in off-road or off-trail areas where 50 to 75 percent of the surface has been exposed by logging, grazing, mining, or other kinds of disturbance.

The ratings are both verbal and numerical. The hazard is described as "slight," "moderate," "severe," or "very severe." A rating of "slight" indicates that erosion is unlikely under ordinary climatic conditions; "moderate" indicates that some erosion is likely and that erosion-control measures may be needed; "severe" indicates that erosion is very likely and that erosion-control measures, including revegetation of bare areas, are advised; and "very severe" indicates that significant erosion is expected, loss of soil productivity and off-site damage are likely, and erosion-control measures are costly and generally impractical.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the specified aspect of forestland management (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

The map unit components listed for each map unit in the accompanying Summary by Map Unit table in Web Soil Survey or the Aggregation Report in Soil Data Viewer are determined by the aggregation method chosen. An aggregated rating class is shown for each map unit. The components listed for each map unit are only those that have the same rating class as listed for the map unit. The percent composition of each component in a particular map unit is presented to help the user better understand the percentage of each map unit that has the rating presented.

Other components with different ratings may be present in each map unit. The ratings for all components, regardless of the map unit aggregated rating, can be viewed by generating the equivalent report from the Soil Reports tab in Web Soil Survey or from the Soil Data Mart site. Onsite investigation may be needed to validate these interpretations and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given site.

Tables — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary By Map Unit

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	55.2	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**55.2**	**100.0%**

Description — Soil Rutting Hazard

FOR - Forestry

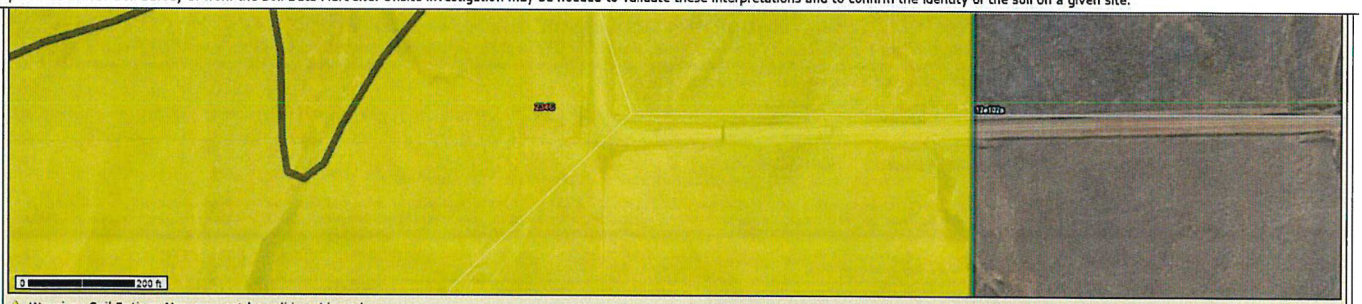
The ratings in this interpretation indicate the hazard of surface rut formation through the operation of forestland equipment. Soil displacement and puddling (soil deformation and compaction) may occur simultaneously with rutting.

Ratings are based on depth to a water table, rock fragments on or below the surface, the Unified classification of the soil, depth to a restrictive layer, and slope. The hazard is described as slight, moderate, or severe. A rating of "slight" indicates that the soil is subject to little or no rutting. "Moderate" indicates that rutting is likely. "Severe" indicates that ruts form readily.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the specified aspect of forestland management (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

The map unit components listed for each map unit in the accompanying Summary by Map Unit table in Web Soil Survey or the Aggregation Report in Soil Data Viewer are determined by the aggregation method chosen. An aggregated rating class is shown for each map unit. The components listed for each map unit are only those that have the same rating class as listed for the map unit. The percent composition of each component in a particular map unit is presented to help the user better understand the percentage of each map unit that has the rating presented.

Other components with different ratings may be present in each map unit. The ratings for all components, regardless of the map unit aggregated rating, can be viewed by generating the equivalent report from the Soil Reports tab in Web Soil Survey or from the Soil Data Mart site. Onsite investigation may be needed to validate these interpretations and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given site.



Warning: Soil Ratings Map may not be valid at this scale.

Tables — Shallow Excavations — Summary By Map Unit

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	55.2	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**55.2**	**100.0%**

Description — Shallow Excavations

ENG - Engineering

Shallow excavations are trenches or holes dug to a maximum depth of 5 or 6 feet for graves, utility lines, open ditches, or other purposes. The ratings are based on the soil properties that influence the ease of digging and the resistance to sloughing. Depth to bedrock or a cemented pan, hardness of bedrock or a cemented pan, the amount of large stones, and dense layers influence the ease of digging, filling, and compacting. Depth to the seasonal high water table, flooding, and ponding may restrict the period when excavations can be made. Slope influences the ease of using machinery. Soil texture, depth to the water table, and linear extensibility (shrink-swell potential) influence the resistance to sloughing.

The ratings are both verbal and numerical. Rating class terms indicate the extent to which the soils are limited by all of the soil features that affect the specified use. "Not limited" indicates that the soil has features that are very favorable for the specified use. Good performance and very low maintenance can be expected. "Somewhat limited" indicates that the soil has features that are moderately favorable for the specified use. The limitations can be overcome or minimized by special planning, design, or installation. Fair performance and moderate maintenance can be expected. "Very limited" indicates that the soil has one or more features that are unfavorable for the specified use. The limitations generally cannot be overcome without major soil reclamation, special design, or expensive installation procedures. Poor performance and high maintenance can be expected.

Species Occurrences

	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Greater Sage-Grouse *(Centrocercus urophasianus)* SOC		1	6		

View in Field Guide | View Predicted Models | View Range Maps

Species of Concern - Native Species Global: G3 State: S2 USFS: Sensitive - Known in Forests (BD) Species of Conservation Concern in Forests (CG) BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN PIF: 1

Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, juveniles, or adults on a lek. Point observations are mapped in the center of a one-square mile hexagon to protect the exact locations of leks. The outer edges of this hexagon are then buffered by a distance of 6,400 meters in order to encompass a body of research indicating that females typically nest within this distance of a lek and that lek numbers are negatively impacted by fossil fuel drilling activities within this distance of a lek. If the locational uncertainty associated with the observation is greater than 5,000 meters, the observation is not valid for creation of a species occurrence. All of the one-square mile hexagons intersecting this buffered area are presented as the Species Occurrence record. (Last Updated: Jan 10, 2025)

Predicted Models: 100% Low (inductive)

Appendix C: Project Location Maps

T7N R18E Sec.36- NW4SW4, S2S2,