

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Right-of-Way for Buried Fiber Telecommunication Cables
Proposed Implementation Date:	July 2026
Proponent:	Triangle Communications
Location:	N2NW4, SE4NW4, SW4NE4, N2SE4, SE4SE4 Section 16, T37N R20E
County:	Blaine
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed action is the authorization of a Right-of-Way for the installation, operation, and maintenance of underground fiber-optic infrastructure across state-owned land. The purpose of the action is to allow the applicant to construct telecommunications facilities necessary to provide and improve broadband service within the project area, while ensuring the use of state land is consistent with DNRC's trust responsibilities, existing land uses, and applicable management requirements.

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 Communications
Surface Lessees: AG#5466 Cox's TT Ranch Co
Other: The Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program

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

The DNRC has jurisdiction over the proposed project, which would be administered by the Northeastern Land Office (Lewistown Unit). The proponent is responsible for obtaining all necessary permits for the proposed project and for resolving any surface damage with the surface lessees.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under the No Action Alternative, the Department would not approve the requested Right-of-Way authorization, and the proposed installation of underground fiber-optic facilities across state-owned land would not occur. Existing land uses and management practices would continue unchanged.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under the Action Alternative, the Department would approve and issue a Right-of-Way authorization for the installation, operation, and maintenance of underground fiber-optic facilities across state-owned land, subject to applicable terms, conditions, and permitting requirements. The proponent would be responsible for obtaining all necessary permits and for addressing surface disturbance and reclamation in coordination with surface lessees.

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 project area consists primarily of rangeland and previously disturbed areas. Construction would temporarily remove or disturb vegetation along the ROW, including native grasses and forbs. Impacts would be localized and short-term, with vegetation expected to recover following reclamation and reseeding to preexisting rangeland conditions.

Temporary use of a backhoe may be permitted; if used, disturbed areas will be promptly reseeded to minimize the spread of invasive and noxious weeds. Weed management is required within sage-grouse habitat to maintain habitat quality.

Because the area has historically been managed for grazing, the action is not expected to result in significant changes to vegetation cover, quantity, or quality at the landscape scale. With proper reclamation and adherence to standard erosion control and weed management measures, cumulative effects to vegetative communities are anticipated to be minimal.

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.

The project area consists of rangeland and previously disturbed areas managed for grazing. Construction activities may temporarily displace wildlife; these effects would be localized and reversible following reclamation and reseeding to preexisting rangeland conditions. No perennial waters are present within the disturbance footprint, so direct effects to fish or aquatic habitat are not anticipated.

The footprint occurs within general habitat for greater sage-grouse and black-footed ferret. To minimize impacts to these species and comply with Executive Order 12-2015:

- No fiber installation will occur between March 15 and July 15 within two miles of any active sage-grouse lek.
- Trenchless methods will be utilized where feasible to minimize surface disturbance.
- Temporary use of a backhoe may be permitted; disturbed areas will be promptly reseeded to reduce the spread of invasive and noxious weeds.
- Weed management measures are required within sage-grouse habitat to maintain habitat quality.
- Construction outside primary nesting periods for other sensitive birds will be implemented where practicable, and avoidance buffers will be established around sensitive habitats.

With these measures in place, construction impacts are expected to be minor, localized, and short-term. No significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic habitats, including sage-grouse and black-footed ferret habitat, 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.

The project area contains portions of designated sage-grouse and black-footed ferret habitat. Other species of concern potentially occurring in or near the project area include the American bumble bee, golden eagle, and prairie shrew; a full list is provided in Appendix C. Construction activities could temporarily disturb wildlife through noise, vegetation removal, or soil disturbance; however, these effects would be localized and short-term, and habitat within the immediate disturbance footprint is limited to previously disturbed rangeland.

Because the project is confined to an existing rangeland landscape and does not involve high-demand industrial operations, it is not expected to significantly affect nearby activities or compete with other resource users. Standard construction practices, including erosion control, dust suppression, and prompt reclamation, would minimize temporary demands on soil, water, and air resources.

Cumulative effects on environmental resources are expected to be minimal, as the scale of the disturbance is small and the project occurs in an area already managed for grazing. No long-term or significant impacts to land, water, air, or energy resources are anticipated.

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.

Other environmental studies and planning documents relevant to the project area include rangeland management plans, previous DNRC Right-of-Way authorizations, and local county land use plans. The project area contains portions of designated sage-grouse and black-footed ferret habitat; no recently completed environmental impact assessments have been documented within the immediate project footprint.

Cumulative impacts in the analysis area may result from ongoing grazing management, infrastructure maintenance, and other authorized ROW projects. Future state actions under MEPA review or permitting within the analysis area are expected to be minor and localized, similar in scale to the current project. When combined with the proposed action, these activities are not anticipated to result in significant cumulative effects to environmental resources in the surrounding landscape.

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.

Short-term construction risks include slips, trips, falls, and equipment-related hazards. These risks will be minimized through compliance with OSHA standards, use of appropriate personal protective equipment, and standard safety practices. The completed underground fiber-optic facility will not pose a risk to public health or safety. No significant impacts to human health or safety are anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The project will not add to or deter from existing industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities in the area. No significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects are anticipated.

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, relocate, or eliminate any jobs. No significant effects to the local or regional employment market are anticipated.

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – The Department would approve and issue a Right-of-Way authorization for the installation, operation, and maintenance of underground fiber-optic facilities across state-owned land, subject to applicable terms, conditions, and permitting requirements. Existing land uses would continue, and reclamation measures would be implemented following construction.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Based on the analysis of the proposed action and alternatives, potential impacts to environmental resources are expected to be minor, localized, and temporary. Short-term effects may occur during construction, including temporary soil disturbance, vegetation removal, dust generation, and noise from equipment. These effects would be mitigated through standard construction practices, reclamation, and revegetation measures.

The disturbance footprint is limited to previously disturbed rangeland within sage-grouse and black-footed ferret habitat. Mitigation measures will minimize potential effects on these and other sensitive species. No perennial waters, unusual geologic features, or visually prominent landscapes would be affected. Air and water quality impacts would be minimal and short-term, and cumulative effects from existing or reasonably foreseeable activities in the area are expected to be negligible.

Given the limited scale of the project, the existing rangeland context of the site, and the mitigation measures proposed, the action is not expected to result in significant direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental impacts. Under the No Action Alternative, no environmental impacts would occur, and existing conditions would be maintained.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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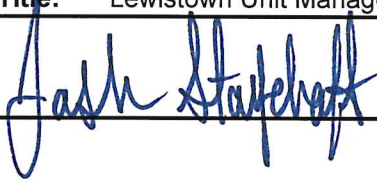
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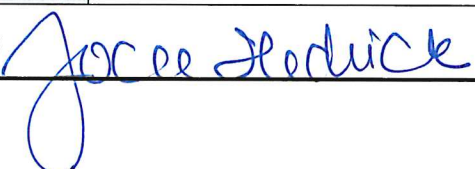
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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

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Signature:	 Date: 1/27/26

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Signature:	 Date: 1/27/26