

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Communications Easement Applications Geraldine Replacement Upgrade Project
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring/Summer 2023
Proponent:	Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc.
Location:	Section 33, Township 21 North, Range 12 East Section 6, Township 21 North, Range 11 East Section 14, Township 21 North, Range 10 East Section 8, Township 21 North, Range 11 East Section 22, Township 23 North, Range 10 East Section 18, Township 22 North, Range 11 East Section 27, Township 22 North, Range 11 East Section 26, Township 22 North, Range 11 East Section 1, Township 21 North, Range 10 East Section 9, Township 21 North, Range 11 East
County:	Chouteau County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. is applying for ten 20' easements on a parcels of Trust land in Chouteau County for the construction and maintenance of a fiber optic cable as described below:

- Section 33-T21N-R12E: The proposed 1.25-acre easement would run south to north from the SE4NW4 to just east of the mid-point of the north property boundary in the NE4NW4 of Section 33.
- Section 6-T21N-R11E: The proposed 1.29-acre easement would run east to west along the southern edge, just north of the property boundary, of the SW4 of Section 6.
- Section 14-T21N-R10E: The proposed 1.27-acre easement would northeast to southwest just north of Big Sag Rd.
- Section 8-T21N-R11E: The proposed 2.44-acre easement would run east to west directly south of Big Sag Rd along the northern border of Section 8.
- Section 22-T23N-R10E: The proposed 1.78-acre easement would run east to west, directly south of Highway 80.
- Section 18-T22N-R11E: The proposed 2.59-acre easement would contain two sections of easement. One would run east to west just north of Jacks Hill Rd in the NE4 and the other would run north to south, just east of McIntosh Rd.
- Section 27-T22N-R11E: The proposed 1.14-acre easement would run directly adjacent to and along the western side of Highway 80.
- Section 26-T22N-R11E: The proposed 1.97-acre easement would run directly adjacent to and along the western side of Highway 80.
- Section 1-T21N-R10E: The proposed 4.20-acre easement would contain two sections of easement. One would run east to west just north of Big Sage Rd in the S2S2 of Section 1 and the other would run north to south, just west of Finlayson Dr in the E2E2 of Section 1, to a homestead.
- Section 9, Township 21 North, Range 11 East: The proposed 2.38-acre easement would run east to west directly south of Big Sag Rd along the northern edge of Section 9.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. A Settlement of Damages form was obtained from each of the ag & grazing lessees.

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

Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT)

-- Recommendation was acquired by Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association and submitted with easement applications to DNRC.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request to issue ten 20' easements to Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. for the underground installation of fiber optic cable on the tract listed above in Chouteau County.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request to issue ten 20' easements to Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. for the underground installation of fiber optic cable on the tract listed above in Chouteau County.

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.*
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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 routes proposed in the easements generally parallel existing roads. The NRCS Soil Survey shallow excavation ratings for all the easement areas were rated as somewhat limited and include such potential issues as unstable excavation walls and dusty tendencies. The cable is proposed to be installed using a tractor-crawler and friction-type plow blade that will create a soil disturbance approximately 36 inches deep and 6 inches wide and then the ground will be compacted back after the cable is installed.

Based on the proposed action and relatively short disturbance time for cable installation, no significant adverse impacts to geology and soils are expected by implementing the proposed action.

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 proposed easement's locations do not cross any streams or bodies of water.

No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are expected from implementing the proposed action.

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.

There may be short-term isolated impacts from the equipment exhaust that is used to install the fiber optic cable.

No significant impact to air quality is expected from implementation of the proposed action.

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 cable is proposed to be installed using a tractor-crawler and friction-type plow blade that will create a soil disturbance approximately 36 inches deep and 6 inches wide and then the ground will be compacted back after the cable is installed. The area disturbed by the trenching activity and from vehicle travel could have short term impacts on vegetation.

No significant adverse impacts to vegetative cover, quantity or quality are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

None of the state-owned tracts listed in this proposal are in Sage Grouse General or Core Habitat. Other privately owned portions of the Geraldine Replacement Upgrade project are within General Sage Grouse Habitat, and therefore a consultation with MSGOT was included with the easement applications. See attached for their recommendations for the areas within General Habitat.

No significant impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

Most of the tracts with proposed easements were noted to have bird species of concern occurrences within 1 mile of the project area. Only three of the easement locations were noted to have reptile species of concern occurrences noted. The proposed actions and easements will have little to no adverse impacts to the bird or reptile species of concern as they will be installed next to existing commonly used public roads in areas that have had disturbance before. There may be some displacement of species of concern during construction, but post construction, there should be no significant impacts. A complete list of the species of concern reports for each tract is attached.

None of the state-owned tracts listed in this proposal are in Sage Grouse General or Core Habitat. Other privately owned portions of the Geraldine Replacement Upgrade project are within General Sage Grouse Habitat, and therefore a consultation with MSGOT was included with the easement applications. See attached for their recommendations for the areas within General Habitat.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the installation of underground fiber optic cable, it is not expected that this action will have any significant adverse impacts to any of the species identified on or around these ten proposed easement routes.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

A Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect on state land. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified in the easement corridor. No additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have No Effect to Antiquities as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

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 proposed action would result in the installation of underground fiber optic cable adjacent to existing roads and highways. Once the easement area is rehabbed from the disturbance due to the installation, the only indication that there is an underground fiber optic line would be from any above-ground warning markers. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to aesthetics is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 known studies or future government actions planned for these three Trust parcels.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 proponent and their employees accept the risks associated with installation and maintenance of the fiber optic cable.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety are expected to occur due to implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

All the proposed easements parallel existing road routes, but not anticipated to alter traffic routes during installation. The location of the easements does not traverse any crop lands. A signed Lessee Settlement form was included in the proposed easements application materials.

No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities and production are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 proposed action will not have a significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

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 have an adverse impact on tax revenue.

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 implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate any additional demands on governmental 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.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans.

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.

All of the tracts with proposed easements currently have public access. The installation is expected to occur in the spring/summer of 2023 prior to the start of rifle and archery hunting seasons. Impacts due to installation should be minimal considering the easements run parallel to existing roads.

The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to have an adverse impact on the ability of recreational use of these Trust lands.

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.

No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed alternative will not have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

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 State will benefit by getting a total one-time fee of \$10,758.00 from Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association for the purchase of the ten easements. The Common Schools Trust would be the beneficiary of this payment. The fees would be as follows:

Section 33, Township 21 North, Range 12 East— 1.25 acre easement – \$750.00
Section 6, Township 21 North, Range 11 East—1.29-acre easement – \$774.00
Section 14, Township 21 North, Range 10 East—1.27 acre easement – \$762.00
Section 8, Township 21 North, Range 11 East—2.44 acre easement – \$1464.00
Section 22, Township 23 North, Range 10 East—1.78 acre easement – \$1068.00
Section 18, Township 22 North, Range 11 East—2.59 acre easement -- \$1554.00
Section 27, Township 22 North, Range 11 East—1.14 acre easement -- \$684.00
Section 26, Township 22 North, Range 11 East—1.97 acre easement -- \$1182.00
Section 1, Township 21 North, Range 10 East—4.20 acre easement -- \$2520.00
Section 9, Township 21 North, Range 11 East—2.38 acre easement -- \$1428.00

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jocee Hedrick	Date: 03/2/2023
	Title: Lewistown Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that ten permanent 20' easements be granted to Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. for the purpose of installing underground fiber optic cable on the following parcels:

- Section 33, Township 21 North, Range 12 East
- Section 6, Township 21 North, Range 11 East
- Section 14, Township 21 North, Range 10 East
- Section 8, Township 21 North, Range 11 East
- Section 22, Township 23 North, Range 10 East
- Section 18, Township 22 North, Range 11 East
- Section 27, Township 22 North, Range 11 East
- Section 26, Township 22 North, Range 11 East
- Section 1, Township 21 North, Range 10 East
- Section 9, Township 21 North, Range 11 East

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action which would entail the issuing of the easements and installation of underground fiber optic cable. There are no natural features that could produce adverse impacts or species of concern occupying the parcels that are expected to be impacted by implementing the proposed action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:☐

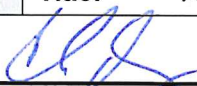
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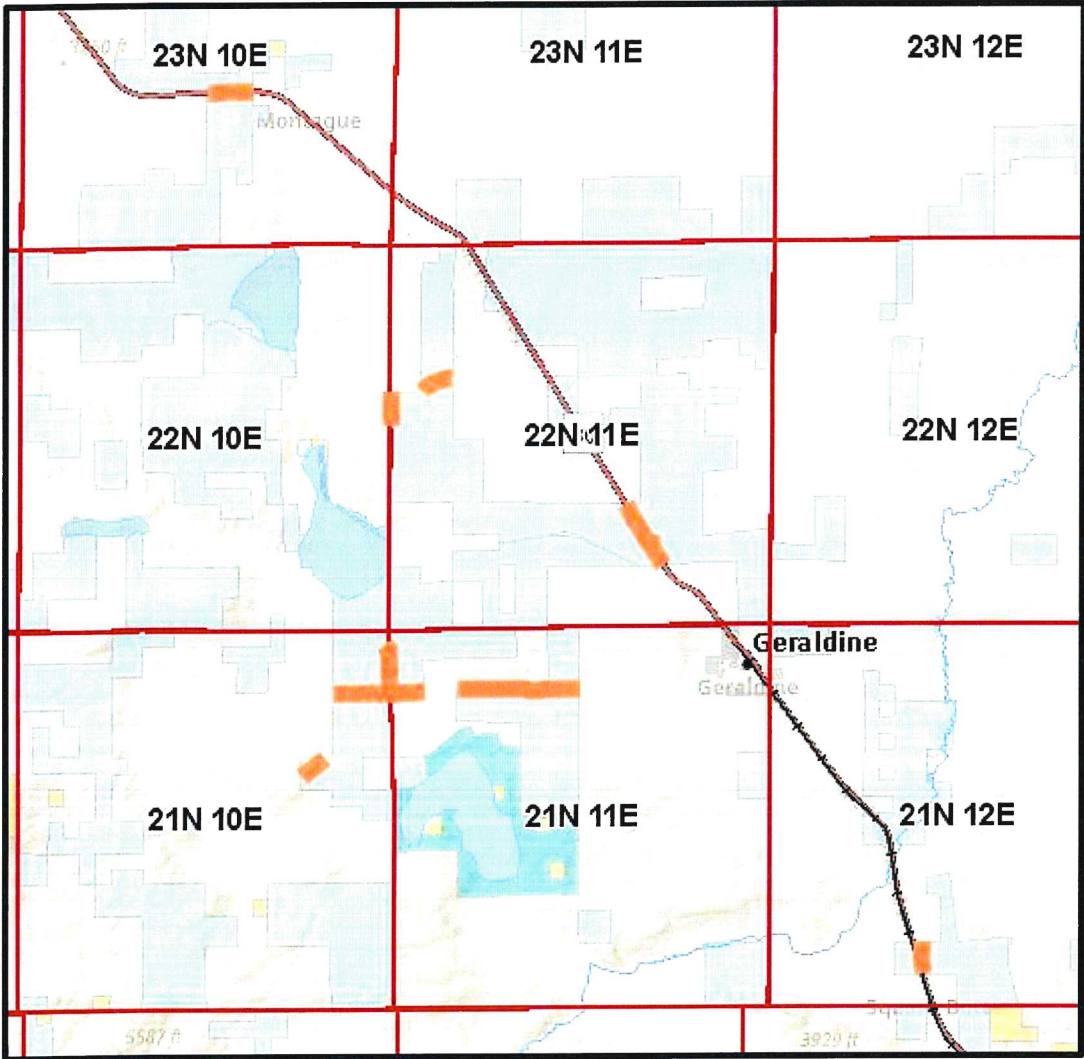
More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Clive Rooney Title: Area Manager, Northeastern Land Office
Signature: 	Date: 3/2/2023

**Triangle Communications Easement Applications
Geraldine Replacement Upgrade Project
Spring/Summer/Fall 2023**



 Easement Application Locations

Montana Natural Heritage Report

Species of Concern

Section 33, T21N R12E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
2	Field Guide	ABPBR01030	Birds	Loggerhead Shrike	Lanius ludovicianus

Section 6, T21N R11E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
2	Field Guide	ABNSB10010	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia
2	Field Guide	ABNKC19120	Birds	Ferruginous Hawk	Buteo regalis
3	Field Guide	ARACF12080	Reptiles	Greater Short-horned Lizard	Phrynosoma hernandesi

Section 14, T21N R10E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Field Guide	AMAFB06010	Mammals	Black-tailed Prairie Dog	Cynomys ludovicianus
2	Field Guide	ABNSB10010	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia
2	Field Guide	ABNKC19120	Birds	Ferruginous Hawk	Buteo regalis

Section 8, T21N R11E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Field Guide	AMAFB06010	Mammals	Black-tailed Prairie Dog	Cynomys ludovicianus
2	Field Guide	ABNSB10010	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia
2	Field Guide	ABNKC19120	Birds	Ferruginous Hawk	Buteo regalis
2	Field Guide	ABPBR01030	Birds	Loggerhead Shrike	Lanius ludovicianus
3	Field Guide	ARACF12080	Reptiles	Greater Short-horned Lizard	Phrynosoma hernandesi

Section 22, T23N R10E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
2	Field Guide	ABPBXA6040	Birds	Chestnut-collared Longspur	Calcarius ornatus
2	Field Guide	ABNNF07070	Birds	Long-billed Curlew	Numenius americanus
2	Field Guide	ABPBM02060	Birds	Sprague's Pipit	Anthus spragueii

Section 18, T22N R11E

No species of concern occurrences were found at this location.				
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Section 27, T22N R11E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
2	Field Guide	ABNSB10010	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia
2	Field Guide	ABPBXA6040	Birds	Chestnut-collared Longspur	Calcarius ornatus
2	Field Guide	ABPBR01030	Birds	Loggerhead Shrike	Lanius ludovicianus

Section 26, T22N R11E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
2	Field Guide	ABNSB10010	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia
2	Field Guide	ABPBXA6040	Birds	Chestnut-collared Longspur	Calcarius ornatus
2	Field Guide	ABPBR01030	Birds	Loggerhead Shrike	Lanius ludovicianus

Section 1, T21N R10E

Sort	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
2	Field Guide	ABNSB10010	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia

Section 9, T21N R11E

Sort	Or	Field Guide	ELCODE	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name
2		Field Guide	<u>ABNSB10010</u>	Birds	Burrowing Owl	Athene cunicularia
2		Field Guide	<u>ABNKC19120</u>	Birds	Ferruginous Hawk	Buteo regalis
2		Field Guide	<u>ABPBR01030</u>	Birds	Loggerhead Shrike	Lanius ludovicianus
3		Field Guide	<u>ARACF12080</u>	Reptiles	Greater Short-horned Lizard	Phrynosoma hernandesi