

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Blackfoot Communications – Gold Creek- Navigable Water Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	July 2024
Proponent:	Blackfoot Communications
Location:	NW1/4SW1/4 Section 25, T10N-R11W.
County:	Powell

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Blackfoot communications is requesting an easement across the Clark Fork River to install an underground fiber optics cable near Gold Creek, MT. Blackfoot Communications has requested to bore under the river to bury the cable.

Montana Code (MCA 70-16-201) provides for state ownership from the low water mark to the low water mark on navigable water bodies. Based on historical documentation, the Clark Fork River is commercially navigable from Deer Lodge, Montana to the Idaho state line. Therefore, the state claims ownership of the riverbed below the low water mark between these two points. DNRC has received an application for a 20-foot wide by 107.94-foot-long easement across the Clark Fork River from Blackfoot Communications for this project involving .05 acres of State-owned property below the low water mark of the river.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

Montana DNRC, Deer Lodge Conservation District

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

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

310 Permit

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

Alternative A – Not granting the easement request for installation of underground fiber optics line as proposed.

Alternative B –Granting an easement for the installation of a fiber optics line under Clark Fork River.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

No Action: The condition of resources would remain unchanged.

Action Alternative: During installation using a boring machine physical ground disturbance and temporary removal of vegetation could occur. Any disturbance by equipment would be short-term.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

No Action: The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Action Alternative: Some minor sediment deliver may occur due to soil disturbance during installation. The bed and banks of the river would not be altered. Bore pits are placed outside of stream banks in upland areas. Any disturbance would be short-term until removed vegetation reestablishes.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e., particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

No change would be anticipated with either alternative.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

No Action: The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Action Alternative: A minor amount of vegetation may be slightly disturbed from equipment. No measurable impact would be anticipated.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

No Action: No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur.

Action Alternative: Some short-term disturbance could occur. There is regular traffic on the bridge already.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

No Action: No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur.

Action Alternative: Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated.

Bull Trout Existing Conditions: Bull trout is a federally threatened species and occurs in the Clark Fork River. No changes to existing fisheries would be expected to occur, as this is an underground crossing, and the utility line would be below the river.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

No measurable impacts would be 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

No measurable impacts would be 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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

None

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.

None

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i>

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

None

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

None

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

No measurable impacts would be anticipated.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No change from existing conditions would be expected.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

None

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.

None

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

No measurable impacts would be anticipated.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

None

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

No measurable impacts would be anticipated as a result of the proposed action.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Granting of the proposed easement would return approximately \$100 to the Public Land-Navigable Rivers Trust.

**EA Checklist
Prepared By:**

Name: Craig Hansen

Date: 03/04/2024

Title: Unit Manager

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The Action Alternative (Alternative B) - recommending Land Board approval of this easement application.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant, unacceptable or measurable impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:☐


EIS

☐

More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Title: Trust Lands Program Manager, Southwestern Land Office.
Signature: 	Date: 03/15/2024