

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Easement Application
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2024
Proponent:	Triangle Communications
Location:	T7N R9E Sec. 18 & T9N R10E Sec. 16
County:	Meagher

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Communications has submitted two easement applications for buried communication lines on State Trust Land located in T7N R9E Section 18 and T9N R10E Section 16. The routes selected for the buried lines were the shortest distance to serve the surrounding area and existing networks. See attached map in exhibits A and B for proposed easement routes and locations.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Wildlife Biologist, Jay Kolbe
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Ag & Grazing Surface Lessees
Montana Natural Heritage Program
Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program

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

The proposed easements would involve Montana State Trust Land allocated to the Common Schools Trust.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easement.

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 following information was derived from Web Soil Survey for this section. The proposed easements

would be located on various soil types shown on exhibits C and D. All of these soil types have “well suited” reclamation suitability ratings. The communications lines would be installed with a “direct plow”. This method entails cutting a trench, placing the infrastructure underground, and closing the trench in one motion. No cumulative impacts are anticipated to soils.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to geology and soils would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture are expected.

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.

No surface water is in the path of the proposed easements in T7N R9E Section 18 and T9N R10E Section 16. Due to the small footprint of the proposed infrastructure, minimal impacts to water quality, quantity, and distribution are expected.

Minimal cumulative impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are expected to occur.

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.

Some short-term dust from the machinery and vehicles traveling the proposed easement areas during installation is anticipated, but no long-term effects to air quality are expected.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to air quality would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to air quality are expected to occur.

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.

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities should not be significantly affected by this easement due to the small area disturbed for the communication line. The easement applications are for a 20' width for future maintenance and repairs, however, minimal impacts during installation are expected. Montana Natural Heritage Map view classifies the sites where the proposed lines would be installed as Rocky Mountain Lower Montane, Foothill, and Valley Grassland.

DNRC staff completed a site visit to this section in December 2023 and found the following species in the easement area locations including; sagebrush, needle and thread, prairie junegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, threadleaf sedge, various introduced grasses and various forbs.

DNRC will require the applicant to reseed and maintain weed management. Applicant will need to use a pre-approved seed mix for State Trust Land and would be responsible for weed management on the easement corridors.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to vegetation cover, quantity, and quality would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to vegetation cover, quantity, and quality are expected to occur.

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.

No cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic life are anticipated from these proposed easements. Montana FWP was contacted for comment and they did not have any concerns from a wildlife perspective.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur.

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 near the proposed easement area. Species that have habitat polygons occurring in the proposed communication line location include: Greater Sage-Grouse, Clark's Nutcracker, Evening Grosbeak, Pileated Woodpecker, Veery, and the Golden Eagle.

The proposed lines would be installed below ground and construction is anticipated to be short duration.

No cumulative impacts anticipated to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or

limited environmental resources are expected to occur.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventories have been conducted in the areas of potential effect (APE) on state land. No significant cultural or fossil resources were identified. 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. Formal reports of findings are 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 easements are in rural parts of Meagher County. The proposed lines would be placed underground, and disturbed areas will be reseeded.

No anticipated impacts to aesthetics.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to aesthetics would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, no impacts to aesthetics are expected to occur.

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.

No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from these proposed easements.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, no impacts to demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur.

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.

No other studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for these proposed easements.

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 health or safety risks are posed by the proposed easements. The only risk associated with the proposed easements would be during the installation phase, but this practice is a commonly used method of installing underground fiber optic lines.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to human health and safety would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, potential impacts to human health and safety are can occur.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

If approved, these proposed easements are designed to allow access to the buried lines for maintenance and repair purposes.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production are expected to occur. Enhanced internet/communication services would be expected across these rural areas.

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 easements may potentially create or eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to quantity and distribution of employment would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are expected to occur. Enhanced internet/communication services may allow for remote workers 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.

No significant increase in tax revenues are expected as a result of these proposed easements.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to local and state tax base and tax revenues would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to local and state tax base and tax revenues are expected to occur.

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.

No increased demand for government services are expected as a result of these proposed easements.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to demand for government services would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, no impacts to demand for government services are expected to occur.

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 locally adopted environmental plans will be affected by these proposed easements.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, no impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals are expected to occur.

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.

These proposed easements will not negatively alter recreational activities in the area.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to access to and quality of recreational and wilderness activities would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, no impacts to access to and quality of recreational and

wilderness activities are expected to occur.

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 change in population will result from these proposed easements.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to density and distribution of population and housing are expected to occur.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No change in social structures and mores are expected as a result of these proposed easements.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to social structures and mores would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to social structures and mores are expected to occur.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed easements have no anticipated affects to the unique quality of the area.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity are expected to occur.

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 proposed easements on these tracts of State Trust Lands would generate approximately \$4,890 in

revenue for the Common Schools Trust.

\$1,500 x 2.73 acres = \$4,095 (7N 9E 18 Common Schools)

\$1,500 x .53 acres = \$795 (9N 10E 16 Common Schools)

DNRC will require the applicant to reseed and maintain weed management. Applicant will need to use a pre-approved seed mix for State Trust Land and would be responsible for weed management on the easement corridors.

These proposed easements would enable the proponent to install, utilize, and maintain the proposed communication lines for their customers.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to other appropriate social and economic circumstances would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, minimal impacts to other appropriate social and economic circumstances are expected to occur. The common schools trust would generate revenue through an easement on state lands.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Dylan Craft	Date: 4/17/2024
	Title: Land Use Specialist- Helena Unit	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements. No long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated from the implementation of this proposal.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EI

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Adam Blythe
	Title: Helena Unit Manager
Signature:	Date:

Exhibit A:
9N 10E Sec. 16 Proposed Easement indicated by the dashed Orange Line in NE Corner.

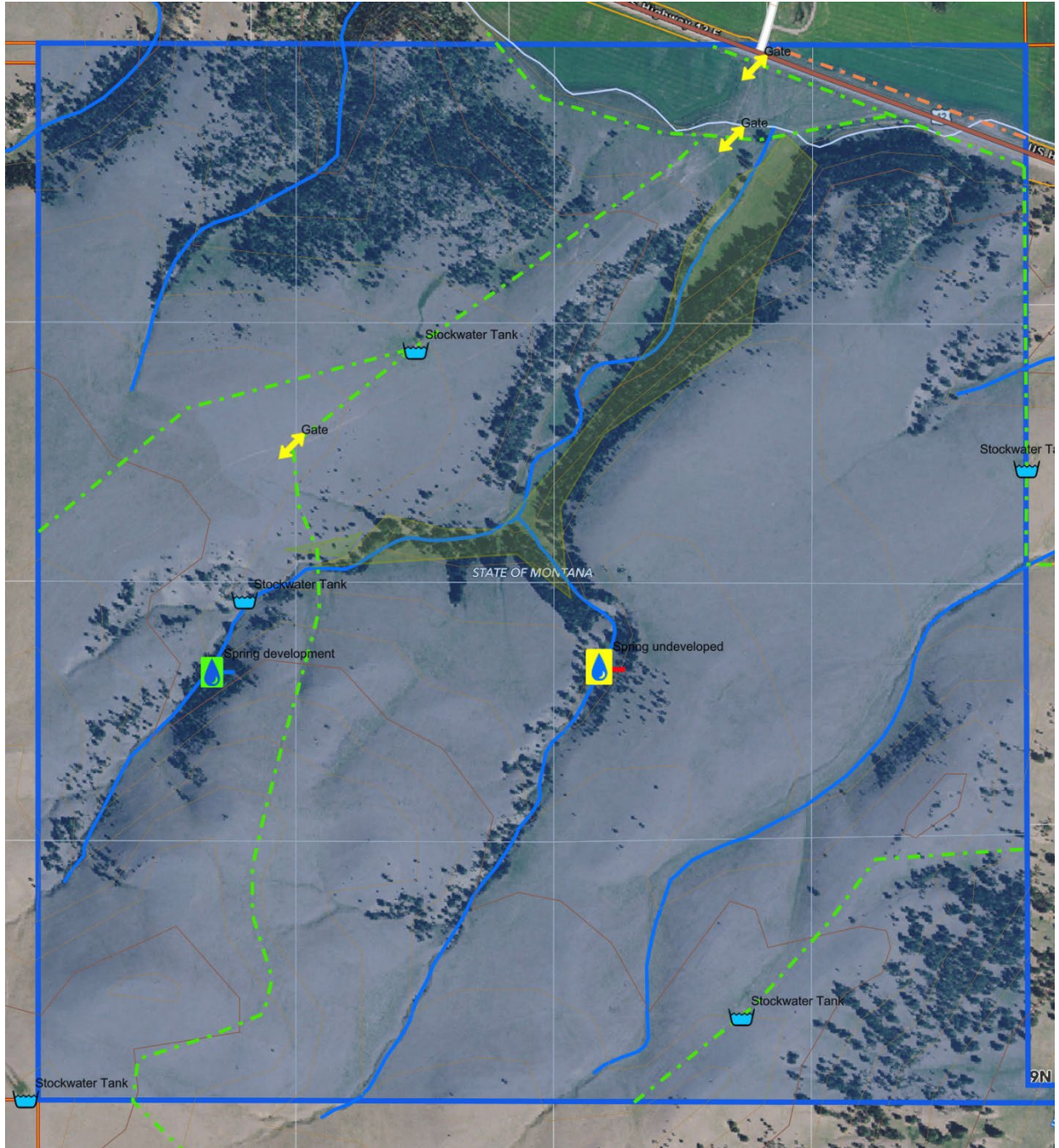


Exhibit B:
7N 9E Sec. 18 Proposed Easement indicated by the dashed Orange Line.

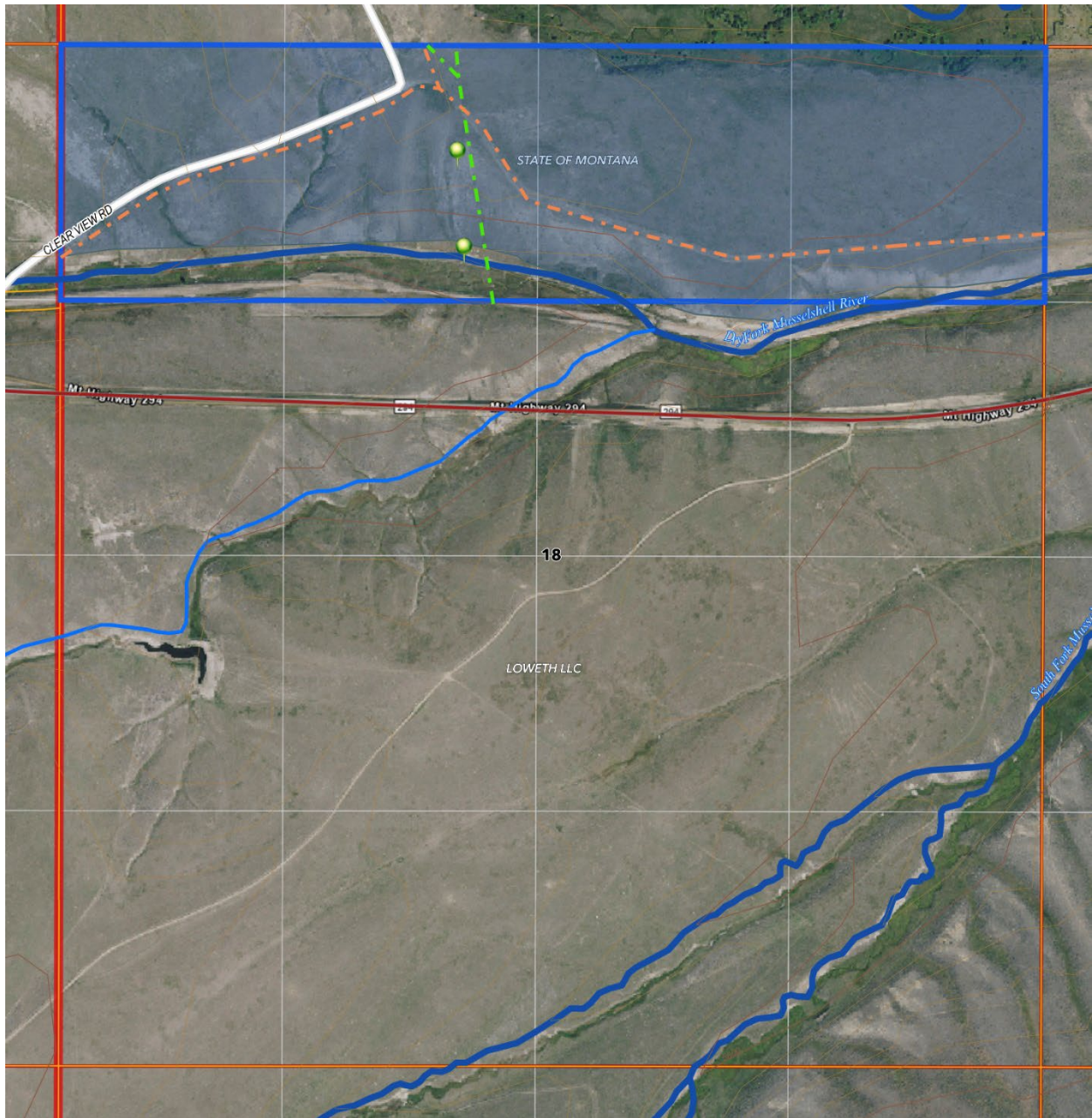


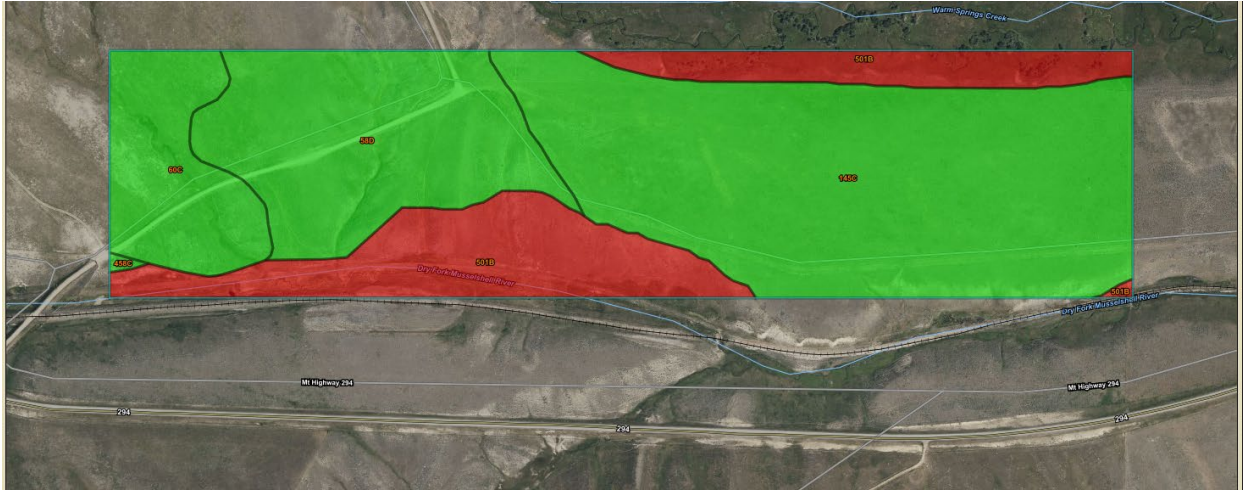
Exhibit C:
 9N 10E Sec. 16 Soil Map with Reclamation Suitability Ratings



Tables — Reclamation Suitability (MT) — Summary By Map Unit

Summary by Map Unit — Meagher County Area, Montana (MT637)						
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
103F	Maiden-Lap-complex, 15 to 60 percent slopes	Poorly suited	Lap (20%)	Droughtiness (1.00)	5.3	29.7%
				Water Erosion (0.23)		
				Rooting Depth (0.01)		
			Cabba (12%)	Droughtiness (1.00)		
				Rooting Depth (0.81)		
				Water Erosion (0.23)		
			Vershal (10%)	Droughtiness (1.00)		
				Rooting Depth (1.00)		
				Water Erosion (0.09)		
			Rock outcrop (8%)	Vegetation Not Supported (1.00)		
Water Erosion (1.00)						
Wind Erosion (1.00)						
662B	Meagher gravelly loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes, foothills	Well suited	Meagher (85%)		12.6	70.3%
			Martinsdale (5%)			
			Shawmut (5%)			
			Tamaneen (5%)			
Totals for Area of Interest					18.0	100.0%

Exhibit D:
7N 9E Sec. 18 Soil Map with Reclamation Suitability Ratings



Tables — Reclamation Suitability (MT) — Summary By Map Unit

Summary by Map Unit — Meagher County Area, Montana (MT637)						
Summary by Map Unit — Meagher County Area, Montana (MT637)						
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
58D	Bacbuster-Reedwest-Castner complex, 4 to 15 percent slopes, mountains	Well suited	Bacbuster (40%) Reedwest (35%)		31.2	21.2%
60C	Work clay loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Well suited	Work (90%) Meagher (10%)		15.4	10.5%
145C	Reedwest loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Well suited	Reedwest (90%) Meagher (10%)		68.6	46.6%
458C	Reedwest-Bacbuster complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	Well suited	Reedwest (55%) Bacbuster (30%) Farnuf (5%)		0.2	0.2%
501B	Mannixlee-Clunton, frequently flooded-Meadowcreek complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Poorly suited	Mannixlee (35%) Clunton (30%) Water (5%)	Water Erosion (1.00) Water Erosion (1.00) Vegetation Not Supported (1.00) Water Erosion (1.00) Wind Erosion (1.00)	31.7	21.6%
Totals for Area of Interest					147.2	100.0%

