

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	<b>Charter Easement Application</b>
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	<b>Summer 2024</b>
<b>Proponent:</b>	<b>Flathead Fiber Optic and Consulting</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>T8N 3W Sec. 16</b>
<b>County:</b>	<b>Jefferson</b>

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Flathead Fiber Optic and Consulting has submitted an easement application for buried communication lines on State Trust Land located in T8N R3W Section 16. The route selected for the buried lines were the shortest distance to serve the surrounding area and existing networks. See attached map in exhibit A for proposed easement route and location.

### 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- FWP Comments Email Platform  
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie  
Montana Natural Heritage Program

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

The proposed easement 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 to install, utilize, and maintain buried communication lines.

### 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 easement would be located on a "Breeton coarse sandy loam, 4 to 15 percent slopes" soil type. This soil type has a "moderately suited" reclamation suitability ratings. No cumulative impacts are anticipated to soils. Much of this corridor along the private road have existing utilities and have seen some form of soil

disturbance in the past.

**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 easement 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.*

Small amounts of surface water/sub-irrigated area is in the path of the proposed easement in T8N R3W Section 16. Due to the small footprint of the proposed infrastructure, minimal impacts to water quality, quantity, and distribution are expected. It will be the proponent's responsibility to mitigate any potential issues crossing this area.

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 easement 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 easement 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 15' 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 Ponderosa Pine Woodland and Savanna.

DNRC staff completed a site visit to this section in April 2024 and found the following main species



in the easement area locations including; ponderosa pine, needle and thread, bluebunch wheatgrass, various sedges, 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 easement 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 this proposed easement. This is a relatively common practice within close proximity to residential subdivisions. Montana FWP was contacted and asked for comment, but they did not provide a comment.

**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 easement 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: the Grizzly Bear, Clark's Nutcracker, Evening Grosbeak, Pileated Woodpecker, and the Veery.

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 easement 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.*

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that some historic placer mining activity has been identified in and near the APE, but no mining related features will be impacted with installation of the proposed telecommunications cable.

No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

## 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 easement is in a residential part of Jefferson County outside of Clancy, MT. The proposed lines would be placed underground, and disturbed areas would be reseeded. Other utilities are in the immediate vicinity of the proposed easement.

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 easement 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 this proposed easement.

**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 easement 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 easement.



#### 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 easement. The only risk associated with the proposed easement would be during the installation phase and putting the communication line near the existing gas line. There are buried gas lines and other utilities in the area and it would be the responsibility of the contractor to locate and avoid these utilities during installation.

**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 easement to install, utilize and maintain buried communication lines, potential impacts to human health and safety are not expected to occur.

#### 15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

If approved, this proposed easement is 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 easement 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 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 easement 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 easement 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 this proposed easement.

**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 easement 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 this proposed easement.

**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 easement 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 this proposed easement.

**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 easement 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.*

This proposed easement 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 easement 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 this proposed easement.

**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 easement 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 this proposed easement.

**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 easement 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 easement has 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 easement 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 easement on these tracts of State Trust Lands would generate approximately \$46,400.26 in revenue for the Common Schools Trust.

**1.03 acres (Easement area) x \$45,048.84/acre = \$46,400.26 (8N 3W 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.

This proposed easement 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 easement 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.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Dylan Craft	<b>Date:</b> 5/6/2024
	<b>Title:</b> Land Use Specialist- Helena Unit	

**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

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

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easement. 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

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Adam Blythe
	<b>Title:</b> Helena Unit Manager
<b>Signature:</b> 	<b>Date:</b> 05/06/2024

Exhibit A:  
8N 3W Sec. 16 Proposed Easement indicated by the dashed Orange Line along the Old Alhambra Rd.

