CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	NEW Helena-Three Forks Natural Gas Pipeline
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2028
Proponent:	Northwestern Energy
Location:	SE ¼, SE ¼, Section 23, Township 3 North, Range 2 East
County:	Broadwater and Gallatin

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed action is the issuance of a Right-of-Way Easement by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to allow Northwestern Energy to install and operate a natural gas pipeline beneath State-owned riverbeds of the Missouri River in Broadwater and Gallatin Counties.

The project involves installation of a 16-inch carbon steel pipeline using horizontal directional drilling (HDD) at depths of approximately 30 to 80 feet below the riverbed, avoiding surface disturbance. This crossing is part of a larger 74-mile pipeline from Helena to Three Forks, with this easement covering a portion of Phase 2 (approximately 116,160 feet). The easement would include a 50-foot-wide, 25 feet on each side of centerline corridor, 244.70 ft in length, beneath the river encumbering 0.28 acres.

The purpose of the project is to meet increasing natural gas demand and improve system reliability by enhancing connectivity, increasing capacity, and reducing flow constraints.

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 DNRC did not conduct formal public scoping for this project. Initial coordination occurred during the submission of the Joint Application for Work in Montana's Streams, Wetlands, Floodplains, and Other Water Bodies and through the DNRC Right-of-Way Easement application process in February 2026. Regulatory agencies, adjacent landowners, and the lessee were notified as part of these processes.

Agency review and coordination are ongoing, and all required permits associated with the Joint Application will be obtained and submitted to DNRC prior to issuance of the easement. No formal public comments were received as part of this effort.

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

The proposed pipeline project may be subject to additional permits from various governmental agencies to ensure compliance with applicable environmental, safety, and land use regulations. The following permits have been identified as potentially necessary for the proposed action:

- Broadwater Conservation District: 310 Permit and Floodplain Permit
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Section 404 Permit for impacts to waters of the United States
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ): 318 Permit and 401 Water Quality Certification
- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks: SPA 124 Permit
- Montana Department of Transportation: Utility Occupancy Permit
- BNSF Railway: Pipeline/Wire Line Crossing and/or Longitudinal Permit

The applicant is responsible for obtaining all required permits prior to the commencement of construction. Ensuring compliance with these permits will help maintain environmental protection, water quality, public safety, and coordination with other land use and infrastructure activities.

Cumulative effects associated with permit compliance are expected to be negligible, as these requirements are designed to minimize impacts on environmental resources and coordinate with ongoing or future projects in the area.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A – No Action: Under this alternative, the request to issue an easement for the installation of a pipeline beneath the Missouri River would be denied. Northwestern Energy would need to identify an alternative route for the pipeline.

Alternative B – Action Alternative: This alternative would approve the request to grant an easement, allowing installation of the natural gas pipeline beneath the Missouri River using horizontal directional drilling.

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 project area in Broadwater County is characterized by diverse geologic materials, including unconsolidated alluvial, colluvial, and eolian deposits such as gravel, sand, silt, and clay, typically less than 30 feet thick. These overlie thicker sedimentary and volcanic bedrock formations (e.g., limestone, sandstone, shale, and volcanic ash) formed in ancient marine, fluvial, and lacustrine environments. Older elevated gravel terraces and loosely consolidated hillslope deposits are also present, reflecting dynamic geomorphic processes.

Mapped soils along the project corridor consist primarily of loams, silt loams, and cobbly or channery soils derived from alluvium, colluvium, and residuum. Dominant soil types include Musselshell loams, Crago complexes, Radersburg very cobbly loam, and Brocko silt loams, among others. These soils are generally well-drained but may be susceptible to compaction (particularly fine-textured soils), erosion (especially coarse or unvegetated soils), and reduced stability on steeper slopes or in areas of unconsolidated colluvium.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, no disturbance to geology or soils would occur. Soil quality, stability, and moisture conditions within the project area would remain unchanged, and no cumulative impacts would result.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline would be installed using horizontal directional drilling at depths of approximately 30 to 80 feet below the riverbed, thereby avoiding surface disturbance to soils within the Missouri River. As a result, no direct impacts to soil quality, stability, or moisture are anticipated within the riverbeds or on State of Montana Trust Lands.

Temporary, localized soil disturbance would occur at entry and exit points outside of the riverbeds. Best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize impacts. These include installation of erosion control measures (e.g., silt fencing, straw wattles), dust suppression (e.g., water application), segregation and replacement of topsoil, and prompt reclamation. Disturbed areas would be reseeded with appropriate vegetation to achieve at least 70% of pre-disturbance cover, along with weed management measures to restore soil stability and function

No unusual geological features are known to be present within the project area. Due to the depth of installation and limited surface disturbance, impacts to fragile, compactable, or unstable soils are not anticipated.

Cumulative impacts to soils are expected to be minor. Project-related disturbances would be temporary and localized, with reclamation restoring soil structure and productivity over time. While some incremental effects such as compaction or reduced productivity could occur in repeatedly disturbed areas (e.g., agricultural lands or existing corridors), the implementation of BMPs and the limited spatial extent of disturbance would minimize long-term degradation. Overall, the project is not expected to result in significant cumulative impacts to soil quality, stability, or moisture.

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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, no construction or ground disturbance would occur; therefore, no impacts to surface water or groundwater resources would be expected. Water quality, quantity, and distribution within the project area would remain unchanged, and no cumulative impacts to water resources would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline would be installed beneath the Missouri River using horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet. The active riverbed would not be disturbed, and no direct impacts to surface water quality are anticipated. Temporary, localized turbidity could occur near entry and exit points of the drilling operation, but best management practices, including containment of drilling fluids and erosion control measures, would minimize potential impacts. Groundwater quality and quantity are not expected to be affected, as the pipeline is buried well below the riverbed and existing aquifers.

The project area is subject to Montana water quality regulations and federal Clean Water Act standards. All required permits, including those from the Joint Application for Work in Montana's Streams, Wetlands, Floodplains, and Other Water Bodies, would ensure compliance with state and federal water quality standards.

Cumulative effects on water resources are expected to be negligible. The project would not contribute to long-term water quality degradation or alter surface or groundwater distribution. Existing uses of water resources in the area, including recreational, municipal, and ecological functions, would continue without measurable impact.

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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, air quality in the project area would remain unchanged. No new sources of emissions or particulate matter would occur, and no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on air quality would result.

Under the **Action Alternative**, short-term, localized impacts to air quality may occur during construction of the pipeline. Activities such as operation of construction equipment and vehicle traffic could generate minor exhaust emissions, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter. Temporary dust may also result from soil disturbance at the entry and exit points of the horizontal directional drilling. These effects would be limited in duration and confined to the immediate construction areas.

The project is in Broadwater and Gallatin Counties, which are designated as a Class II air quality area and are currently in attainment or unclassifiable status under federal air quality standards (NAAQS). The project is not located within a Class I airshed or other specially protected air quality zone. All construction activities are expected to comply with applicable state and federal air quality regulations.

Cumulative effects to air quality are expected to be negligible. Short-term emissions during construction would be minor and localized, and the completed buried pipeline would produce no ongoing emissions. Overall, the project is not expected to affect regional or local air quality standards or airshed designations.

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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, no changes to vegetation cover, quantity, or quality would occur. Aquatic vegetation within the river channel would remain undisturbed, and no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to vegetation would result.

Under the **Action Alternative**, vegetation within the project area is limited to aquatic species within the river channel. The proposed pipelines would be installed approximately 30 to 80 feet below the riverbed, and no surface disturbance to aquatic vegetation is anticipated. As a result, no direct impacts on vegetation cover, quantity, or quality would occur. Indirect effects, such as temporary increases in turbidity during construction, are expected to be minimal and short-term, with no measurable impact on aquatic vegetation. No rare or

special-status plant species are known to occur within the project area due to the aquatic nature of the site. Cumulative effects to vegetation are expected to be negligible, as the project would not result in surface disturbance or long-term changes to vegetative communities.

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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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, existing aquatic habitats within the Missouri River in the project area would remain unchanged. Fish and other aquatic species would continue to utilize the river without disturbance, and no cumulative effects from human activities in the project area would be expected.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline would be installed beneath the riverbed using horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet, with no surface disturbance to the river or its banks. Because the construction occurs entirely below the riverbed, no direct impacts to fish or other aquatic species are anticipated. Temporary, minor turbidity could occur near the entry and exit points of the drilling operation, but this would be localized and short-term, with negligible effect on aquatic life.

Cumulative effects to aquatic life and habitat are expected to be negligible. The project does not involve permanent alterations to river flow, substrate, or riparian habitat, and the localized, short-term construction effects would not significantly add to ongoing pressures on fish or other aquatic species in the Missouri River.

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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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no new disturbance to habitat or potential environmental resources in the project area, and existing ecological conditions would remain unchanged with no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to species or habitats of concern.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the project would install a natural gas pipeline beneath the riverbed of the Missouri River using horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet below the surface, resulting in no surface disturbance to riparian areas or wetlands associated with the river. As a result, direct impacts to federally listed threatened or endangered species and their habitat are not anticipated.

A query of Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) data for Broadwater and Gallatin Counties indicates that several aquatic and riparian-associated species of concern occur in the region, such as pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*), which is federally listed as endangered and inhabits the Missouri River basin, and other species of concern associated with similar river systems (e.g. Ute ladies'-tresses in nearby counties) and aquatic habitats. Although pallid sturgeon and other Missouri River–dependent species are known from the broader river system, no specific MTNHP occurrence records are currently reported for the immediate pipeline APE, and the deep, sub-riverbed installation would avoid direct contact with aquatic habitats where these species are found.

Because the project footprint is below the active riverbed and does not involve surface disturbance or alteration of flow, effects to wetlands and riparian vegetation are not expected. Wetlands associated with the Missouri River are outside the construction disturbance zone, and no change in water quality or habitat function is anticipated.

Cumulative effects to unique or sensitive species and their habitats are expected to be negligible. The project would not contribute significant habitat loss or degradation in an area where existing conditions remain largely intact, and the minimal, temporary disturbances associated with drilling operations would not appreciably add to ongoing habitat pressures. Should any previously unknown cultural or biological resources be encountered during project activities, work would cease until appropriate assessment and protective measures are implemented.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Under the **No Action Alternative**, no disturbance to cultural or paleontological resources would occur, and no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would result.

Under the **Action Alternative**, a Class I (literature review) inventory was conducted by DNRC staff for the Area of Potential Effect (APE). This review included inspection of project maps, DNRC's cultural sites and site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey plats, and control cards. The Class I review indicated that no known cultural or paleontological resources have been previously identified within the APE.

Because the APE on State land is limited to the active riverbed, the potential for intact cultural resources is low, and no additional archaeological field investigations are proposed. Therefore, no direct impacts to known cultural or paleontological resources are anticipated. Indirect effects are also not expected due to the lack of surface disturbance within the APE.

Cumulative effects to cultural and paleontological resources are expected to be negligible.
In the event that previously unidentified cultural or paleontological materials are encountered during project-related activities, all work in the immediate area will cease until a qualified professional can assess the discovery and appropriate measures are implemented.

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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no change to the existing visual character of the Missouri River or surrounding areas. The river, its banks, and the views from nearby recreational and residential areas would remain unchanged, and no noise, light, or other visual disturbances would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline would be installed beneath the riverbed using horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet, resulting in no surface disturbance to the river or adjacent lands. Because installation occurs entirely below the riverbed, the project would not be visible from populated areas, recreational areas, or scenic viewpoints. Noise and light associated with construction would be minimal and limited to the entry and exit sites outside the river channel; these effects would be temporary and short-term. Long-term visual impacts from the pipeline would not occur, as the pipeline is buried and would not alter the landscape.

Cumulative effects to aesthetics are expected to be negligible, as the project would not introduce permanent visual features or significant disturbances to the surrounding environment. Overall, the visual character, scenic quality, and recreational experience of the area would remain unchanged.

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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, no additional demands on land, water, air, or energy resources would occur. Existing conditions would remain unchanged, and no new disturbances or emissions would be introduced. Nearby residential, seasonal residential, and recreational uses would continue unaffected. Cumulative effects on environmental resources would remain consistent with current conditions.

The **Action Alternative** would result in minimal, short-term demands on environmental resources. Land disturbance would be limited to the project footprint and would be temporary in nature. Water use would be negligible and primarily limited to dust suppression, if needed. Minor, short-term impacts to air quality would occur from construction equipment and vehicle use, along with minimal energy consumption associated with construction activities.

Nearby residential, seasonal residential, and recreational uses may experience minor, temporary disturbances during construction, but no long-term effects are anticipated.
Cumulative effects to environmental resources are expected to be minimal, as the project's impacts are localized, short-term, and would not result in substantial long-term demands on land, water, air, or energy resources.

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.

Under the **No Action** Alternative, no new permits, projects, or actions would occur on this State Trust Land property. Existing conditions would remain unchanged, and no cumulative effects from private, state, or federal actions are expected.

Under the **Action Alternative**, other permits required by local, state, or federal agencies for the proposed project are summarized in Section 2 of this document. These permits provide necessary environmental compliance and coordination with relevant agencies. No other studies, plans, or projects are currently known to be occurring on this tract, and there are no definite future government actions planned for this property. As a result, cumulative environmental impacts from current or foreseeable actions in the analysis area are expected to be negligible.

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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no new health or safety risks in the project area. Existing conditions would remain unchanged, and no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to human health or safety would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the installation of the natural gas pipeline beneath the Missouri River would involve horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet. Construction-related risks are limited to typical occupational hazards such as vehicle and equipment operation, handling of materials, and potential slips, trips, or falls at the entry and exit points. Standard safety procedures, personal protective equipment, and construction best management practices would be implemented to minimize these risks.
Because the pipeline would be buried well below the riverbed, there is minimal risk of exposure to the public once construction is complete. Operational risks, including leaks or failures, would be mitigated through industry-standard pipeline monitoring and maintenance procedures. No long-term health hazards to the public are anticipated.

Cumulative effects on human health and safety are expected to be negligible. The short-term construction risks are localized and controlled, and the completed pipeline would not introduce ongoing hazards to nearby residents or recreational users of the river.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Under the **No Action Alternative**, existing industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities in the project area would continue unchanged. No new impacts or alterations to production would occur, and no cumulative effects would result.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline installation beneath the Missouri River would have minimal impact on industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities. The construction would be limited to entry and exit points outside the active riverbed, and the buried pipeline would not interfere with existing land uses, including adjacent agricultural lands or recreational and commercial operations. No long-term restrictions or modifications to production activities are anticipated.

Cumulative effects on industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities are expected to be negligible. The project would not contribute to any significant disruptions to existing operations, and the minor, temporary

construction activity would not materially affect ongoing production or economic activities in Broadwater or Gallatin Counties.

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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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, the project would not proceed, and no new jobs would be created in the local employment market. Existing employment levels in Broadwater and Gallatin Counties would remain unchanged, and no cumulative effects on the employment market would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, construction of the pipeline would create a limited number of short-term jobs, primarily in construction, equipment operation, and project support. These positions would be temporary and last only for the duration of construction activities associated with the pipeline installation, estimated at several weeks to a few months. No permanent employment changes are anticipated because of the project once construction is complete.

Cumulative effects to local employment are expected to be minor. While temporary construction jobs may provide a short-term boost to the local economy, they would not result in long-term changes to the overall employment market in Broadwater or Gallatin Counties. The project is not expected to displace existing jobs or significantly alter employment patterns in the region.

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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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no changes to local or state tax revenues. Existing tax contributions from the land and surrounding activities would remain unchanged, and no cumulative effects to the tax base would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline construction would result in minimal short-term economic activity, such as purchases of supplies and services and temporary employment. These activities could generate a small, temporary increase in local and state tax revenues through sales taxes and related economic activity. Once construction is complete, there would be no long-term taxable property added to the tax base, as the pipeline would be buried beneath the riverbed on State Trust Land and would not constitute a taxable improvement.

Cumulative effects on local and state tax revenues are expected to be negligible. While short-term economic activity during construction may provide a minor temporary increase in tax receipts, the project would not significantly alter the overall tax base or long-term revenue streams in Broadwater or Gallatin Counties.

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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

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no changes to government services in the project area. Traffic patterns, fire protection, law enforcement, schools, and other public services would continue as currently provided, and no cumulative effects would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline construction would result in a limited and temporary increase in traffic along access routes to the Missouri River entry and exit points. This increase would be short-term and primarily associated with construction equipment, materials delivery, and personnel commuting to the site. No long-term changes to traffic patterns are anticipated.

The project is not expected to require additional fire protection, police, or emergency services beyond normal response capacity. Schools and other community services would not be impacted, as construction personnel are temporary and the project does not involve permanent residential or commercial development.

Cumulative effects on government services are expected to be negligible. The temporary nature of construction activity, combined with the small workforce and limited traffic impacts, would not significantly increase demand

for public services in Broadwater or Gallatin Counties, nor would it contribute measurably to cumulative pressures from other projects in the region.

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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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, the project would not proceed, and no interactions with local, state, or federal environmental plans or goals would occur. Existing conditions and land management objectives would remain unchanged.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the project would comply with all applicable environmental plans, zoning regulations, and management goals established by the State of Montana, Broadwater and Gallatin Counties, and relevant federal agencies, including the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). No Tribal lands or special management zones are affected by the project. The project site on State Trust Land is consistent with DNRC land use policies and does not conflict with locally adopted environmental plans or goals.

Cumulative effects are not anticipated, as the project does not alter existing land management objectives or violate any local, state, or federal environmental plans. All required permits and approvals, as summarized in Section 2 of this EA, ensure compliance with applicable planning and management frameworks.

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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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, existing recreational opportunities and access within the project area would remain unchanged. The Missouri River and surrounding lands would continue to provide the same level of public use for fishing, boating, and other recreational activities, and no cumulative effects to recreation or wilderness areas would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline would be installed beneath the Missouri River using horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet, with no surface disturbance to the riverbed or adjacent lands. As a result, public access to the river and recreational uses, including boating, fishing, and other river-based activities, would not be affected during or after construction. Temporary, minor activity at the entry and exit points could slightly affect access immediately adjacent to those areas, but these effects would be localized and short-term.
No designated wilderness areas or managed recreational lands are located within the project footprint. Cumulative effects to recreational or wilderness activities are expected to be negligible, as the project does not permanently alter river access, scenic values, or recreational opportunities within the tract.

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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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no changes to population or housing in the project area. Existing residential patterns in Broadwater and Gallatin Counties would remain unchanged, and no cumulative effects on population or housing would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline construction would involve a temporary workforce for site access, materials delivery, and installation activities. This workforce would be small and short-term, and it would not require the development of new housing or result in permanent changes to population distribution. The project does not involve residential or commercial development on State Trust Land, and no long-term population shifts are anticipated.

Cumulative effects on population and housing are expected to be negligible. The temporary construction presence is unlikely to affect housing availability or local population patterns, and the project would not contribute to long-term demographic changes in the region.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no changes to social structures, traditional lifestyles, or community practices in the project area. Existing social and cultural dynamics would remain unchanged, and no cumulative effects would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline installation beneath the Missouri River would involve a small, temporary construction workforce. Activities would be limited to the entry and exit points for horizontal directional drilling, and no permanent changes to land use, access, or community structures are anticipated. Because the project is located on State Trust Land and does not cross Tribal lands or established residential communities, it is not expected to disrupt native, traditional, or local lifestyles.

Cumulative effects on social structures are expected to be negligible. The temporary nature of construction, minimal workforce size, and lack of permanent land-use changes indicate that the project would not affect social cohesion, cultural practices, or community traditions in Broadwater or Gallatin Counties.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Under the **No Action Alternative**, there would be no changes to the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the project area. Existing characteristics, including historic, aesthetic, and community qualities, would remain unchanged, and no cumulative effects would occur.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the pipeline would be installed beneath the Missouri River using horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet, with no surface disturbance to the riverbed or surrounding lands. Because the project is limited to subsurface installation and does not occur on Tribal lands or other culturally sensitive areas, it is not expected to alter any unique cultural qualities, local traditions, or community diversity. Any distinctive aesthetic or recreational experiences associated with the river would remain unchanged, and no impacts on cultural or historic resources are anticipated.

Cumulative effects to cultural uniqueness and diversity are expected to be negligible. The project would not contribute to changes in the character, identity, or distinctive qualities of the area, and no long-term effects on cultural resources are anticipated.

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.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, the State of Montana would not receive any payment for easements, and no changes to economic returns to the Public Lands Trust would occur. Existing management and land use would continue, and no cumulative social or economic effects would result.

Under the **Action Alternative**, the State of Montana would receive a one-time fee for each Right of Way Easement granted to Northwestern Energy. The fee is based on surrounding land values, with surface land values divided in half to account for riverbed easement values, as determined by the Real Estate Management Bureau. The total cost of the easement acreage of 0.28 to Northwestern Energy would be $700.00, and the proceeds would directly benefit state trust lands.

Potential future uses of the analysis area would remain consistent with current management; the buried pipeline would not preclude continued recreational, agricultural, or ecological uses of the river or adjacent lands. Cumulative economic and social effects are expected to be minor but positive. The one-time easement payment would provide an incremental economic return to state trust land beneficiaries, supporting its ongoing mission and management responsibilities. Other than the pipeline itself, no long-term changes to land use, social conditions, or economic activity are anticipated in the analysis area.

	Name: Kasydi Lucas	**Date:** March 18, 2026

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Title: Land Use Specialist, Bozeman Unit

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B – Action Alternative: Under this alternative, Northwestern Energy will be granted a Right of Way Easement to install a 16-inch natural gas pipeline beneath the Missouri River in the SE¼, SE¼, Section 23, Township 3 North, Range 2 East, Broadwater and Gallatin Counties, Montana. The pipeline will be installed using horizontal directional drilling at depths of 30 to 80 feet, with no surface disturbance to the riverbed or surrounding lands.

This alternative was selected because it allows the project to proceed while minimizing environmental impacts. Surface disturbance is avoided, water quality and aquatic habitats are protected, and temporary construction impacts are localized and short-term. The proposed action also provides a one-time economic return to the State of Montana Public Lands Trust through easement fees and complies with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to Public Trust Lands, specifically the navigable Missouri River riverbed, is minimal. This is largely due to the use of horizontal directional drilling and the installation of the pipeline at a depth of 30 feet or greater beneath the existing riverbed.

Most potential impacts identified in previous sections are short-term and construction-related, including localized turbidity, minor dust, and temporary equipment activity at entry and exit points. No natural features, unique habitats, or species of concern are present in the immediate project area that would result in significant adverse impacts.

Overall, the proposed action avoids surface disturbance, protects aquatic habitats, and preserves the environmental and recreational values of the river. Potential impacts are temporary, localized, and not significant, and cumulative effects with other actions in the region are expected to be negligible.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Kara Huyser Title: Bozeman Unit Manager
Signature: Kara Huyser	Date: 5/18/2026