CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative Fiber Optic Line
Proposed Implementation Date:	2026
Proponent:	Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative, Inc.
Location:	T8N-R56E-Sec 24 - N2
County:	Fallon County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative, Inc. has requested a right of way (ROW) easement from the DNRC Eastern Land Office. These ROW easements are for the purpose of placing underground fiber optic cables across the above-mentioned tract of State Trust Land and will provide more effective telecommunications and internet services to the local community.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative, Inc. has requested that the DNRC allow the passage of the new telecommunication line mentioned across a corner of this state-owned tract. The surface lessee was contacted and has filled out a settlement of damages form DS-457. The line on T8N-R56E-Sec 24 would parallel Westmore Road and come to a corner on this tract and turn east. Easement would be 16 feet in width (8 feet on either side of centerline, 69.64 feet in length, and have a total acreage of 0.03 acres.

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

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A- Grant the proponent a right of way easement for the construction and maintenance of the proposed fiber optic line.

Alternative B- No Action.

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.

Alternative A- Disturbance of the soil will occur through the trenching and burying of this line, but effects should be minimal. The proponent would utilize a direct plow construction methodology. There should be no lasting adverse effects to the soil quality, stability or moisture. Soil structures are not fragile or unstable.

Alternative B-No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No 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.

Alternative A- Pollutants and Particulates may be increased during the construction of the project. After the completion of the project pollutant and particulate levels should return to normal. Increase in pollutants during construction should be almost negligible. Minimal impacts expected.

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- Where the construction and maintenance take place there may be disturbance to the vegetation cover. Vegetation is comprised mainly of perennial hay mix on agricultural land. Disturbance should not cause a long term effect on the agricultural plant community.

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A-There should be very minimal effect on any animal habitats within the boundaries of the project construction. Once construction is complete the agricultural hay site will be allowed to naturally reseed or the hay can be replanted in that area. The line would be buried and covered.

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program Database shows four species of concern that have been observed in the general project area: the Chestnut-collared Longspur *(Calcarius ornatus)*, Long-billed Curlew *(Numenius americanus)*, Greater Sage Grouse *(Centrocercus urophasianus)*, and the Bobolink *(Dolichonyx oryzivorus)*. While these species may be present, no impact is expected due to this project. This project in T8N-R56E-Sec 24 is located within sage grouse habitat. Consultation with the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program has occurred (Project # 5489). The program has responded with mitigation

recommendations for the construction of the service line which will be implemented. The closest active lek to this segment of line on this tract is about 4 miles from the project area. This project would be outside of the 0.25 mile NSO and nesting period restrictions set forth by EO-10-2014 and EO-12-2015.

Alternative B- No Impact

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10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Alternative A- 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 no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE.

Because of extensive cultivation and road construction in the APE, it is unlikely that intact cultural resources exist. Proposed cable installation activities are expected to have *No Effect* to *Antiquities*. 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.

Alternative B- No Impact

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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.

Alternative A- Midrivers Telephone Cooperative will need to be able to perform maintenance on the communication line from time to time. Any aesthetic degradation should only be temporary until the site recovers.

Alternative B- No Impact

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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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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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

- *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.

Alternative A- There may be risks to human health and safety in the construction of the project, but this should be done by qualified professionals. Safety concerns become minimal for work done in this fashion. Once completed this line would increase communication reliability in rural areas of Fallon County.

Alternative B- No Impact

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

Alternative A- It should have a positive effect on Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production. Minimal impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- This project has the potential to create jobs with further development possibilities. Minimal impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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

Alternative A- No Impact expected

Alternative B- No impact expected

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

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.

Alternative A - This would provide income for the trust in the form of the purchase of a permanent easement. The easement on T8N-56E-Sec 24 would be set at a price of $1,300.00 per acre. The project on this tract would total $100.00 for the trust.

Alternative B- No Impact

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Randell Hopkins	Date: 06-17-2026
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative A

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The granting of the requested right of way easement upon this tract of state owned trust lands for the proposed fiber optic telecommunications line should not result in nor cause significant environmental impacts. The predicted environmental impacts have been identified and mitigation measures addressed in the EA checklist. The predicted impacts will be adequately mitigated through the construction plans. An environmental assessment checklist is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action. The proposed easement fee would satisfy the trust fiduciary mandate.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Scott Aye	
	Title: Lands Program Manager	
Signature: S Aye		Date: 6-17-2026

Environmental Summary

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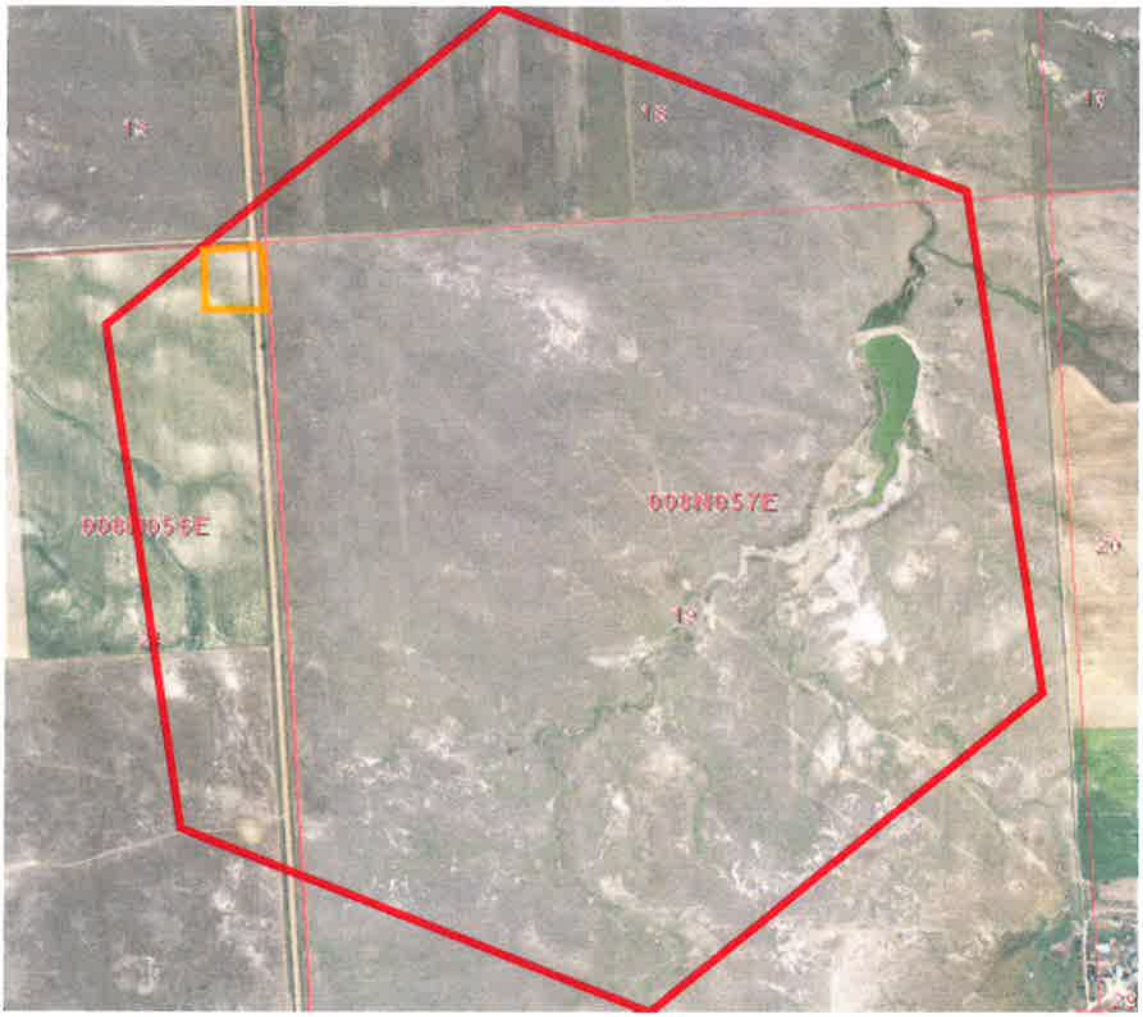
NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM mtnhp.mt.gov

1201 11th Ave ▪ P.O. Box 201800 ▪ Helena, MT 59620-1800 ▪ fax 406-444-0266 ▪ phone 406-444-3989

Latitude	Longitude
46.43008	-104.63470
46.44682	-104.66040

Summarized by:
midrivers plevna 2026
(Custom Area of Interest)



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for Latitude 46.43008 to 46.44682 and Longitude -104.63470 to -104.66040. Retrieved on 6/17/2026.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program is part of the Montana State Library's Natural Resource Information System. Since 1985, it has served as a neutral and non-regulatory provider of easily accessible information on Montana's species and biological communities to inform all stakeholders in environmental review, permitting, and planning processes. The program is part of the NatureServe network that is composed of over 60 member programs across North America that work to provide current and comprehensive distribution and status information on species and biological communities.

MONTANA STATE LIBRARY NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

NATURESERVE

Table of Contents

Introduction to Environmental Summary Report

Environmental Summary Reports from the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) provide information on species and biological communities to inform all stakeholders in environmental review, permitting, and planning processes. For information on environmental permits in Montana, please see permitting overviews by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the Index of Environmental Permits for Montana and our Suggested Contacts for Natural Resource Management Agencies. The report for your area of interest consists of introductory and related materials in this PDF and an Excel workbook with worksheets summarizing information managed in the MTNHP databases for: (1) species occurrences; (2) other observed species without species occurrences; (3) other species potentially present based on their range, presence of associated habitats, or predictive distribution model output if available; (4) structured surveys that follow a protocol capable of detecting one or more species; (5) land cover mapped as ecological systems; (6) wetland and riparian mapping; (7) land management categories; and (8) biological reports associated with plant and animal observations. If your area of interest corresponds to a statewide polygon layer (e.g., watersheds, counties, or public land survey sections) information summaries in your report will exactly match those boundaries. However, if your report is for a custom area, users should be aware that summaries do not correspond to the exact boundaries of the polygon they have specified, but instead are a summary across a layer of hexagons intersected by the polygon they specified as shown on the report cover. Summarizing by these hexagons which are one square mile in area and approximately one kilometer in length on each side allows for consistent and rapid delivery of summaries based on a uniform grid that has been used for planning efforts across North America.

In presenting this information, MTNHP is working towards assisting the user with rapidly assessing the known or potential species and biological communities, land management categories, and biological reports associated with the report area. Users are reminded that this information is likely incomplete and may be inaccurate as surveys to document species are lacking in many areas of the state, species' range polygons often include regions of unsuitable habitat, methods of predicting the presence of species or communities are constantly improving, and information is constantly being added and updated in our databases. **Field verification by professional biologists of the absence or presence of species and biological communities in a report area will always be an important obligation of users of our data. Users are encouraged to only use this environmental summary report as a starting point for more in depth analyses and are encouraged to contact state, federal, and tribal resource management agencies for additional data or management guidelines relevant to your efforts. Please see the Appendix for introductory materials to each section of the report, additional information resources, and a list of relevant agency contacts.**

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Legend

Model Icons
- Suitable (native range)
- Optimal Suitability
- Moderate Suitability
- Low Suitability
- Suitable (introduced range)

Habitat Icons
- Common
- Occasional

Range Icons
- Native / Year-round
- Summer
- Winter
- Migratory
- Non-native
- Historical

Num Obs
Count of obs with 'good precision' (<=1000m)
+ indicates additional 'poor precision' obs (1001m-10,000m)

Latitude	Longitude
46.43008	-104.63470
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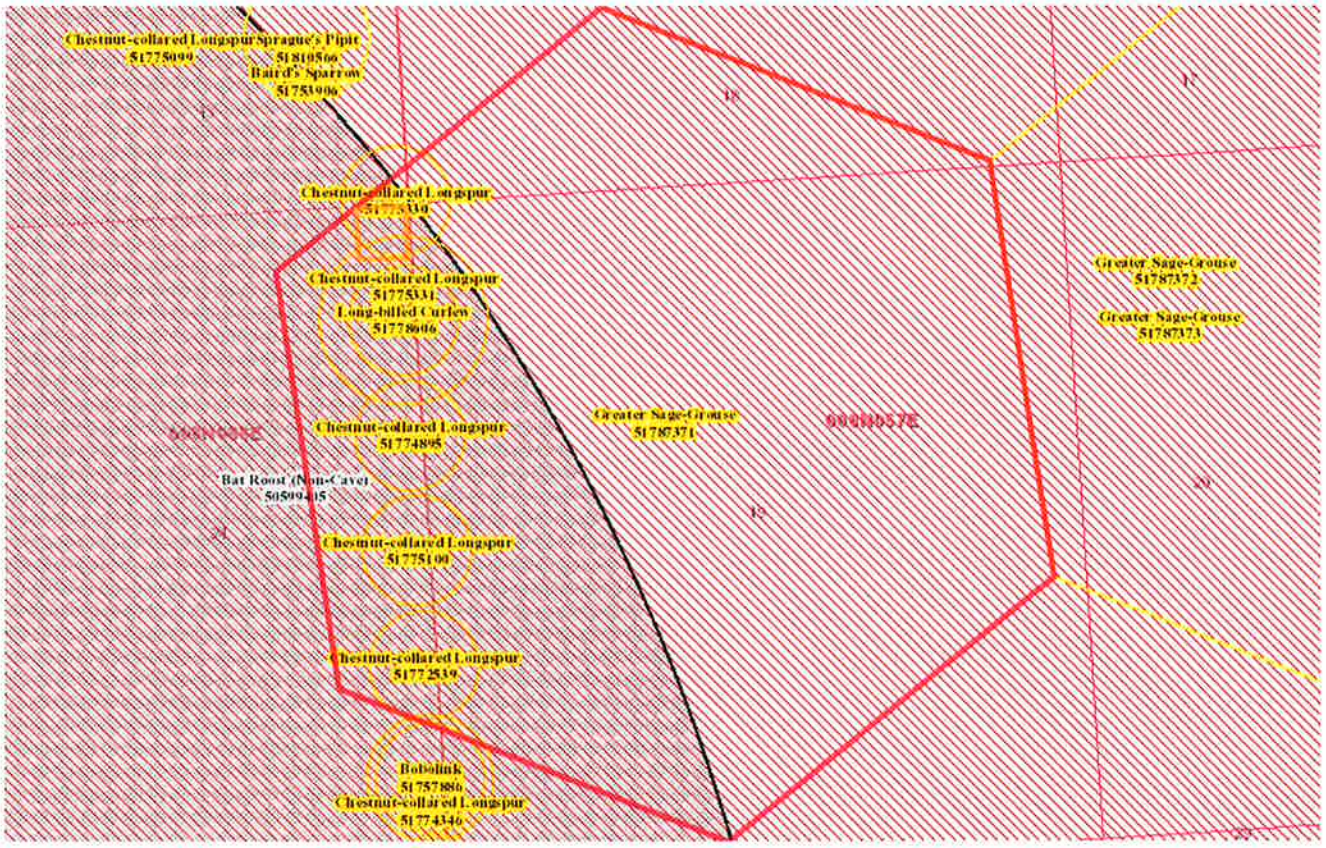
Native Species

Summarized by: **midrivers plevna 2026** *(Custom Area of Interest)*
Filtered by:
Native Species reports are filtered for Species with MT Status = Species of Concern



Species Occurrences

	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Greater Sage-Grouse *(Centrocercus urophasianus)* **SOC**		2			

View in Field Guide | View Predicted Models | View Range Maps

Species of Concern - Native Species Global: **G3** State: **S2** USFS: **Sensitive - Known in Forests (BD)** **Species of Conservation Concern in Forests (CG)** BLM: **SENSITIVE** FWP SWAP: **SGCN** PIF: **1**

Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, juveniles, or adults on a lek. Point observations are mapped in the center of a one-square mile hexagon to protect the exact locations of leks. The outer edges of this hexagon are then buffered by a distance of 6,400 meters in order to encompass a body of research indicating that females typically nest within this distance of a lek and that lek numbers are negatively impacted by fossil fuel drilling activities within this distance of a lek. If the locational uncertainty associated with the observation is greater than 5,000 meters, the observation is not valid for creation of a species occurrence. All of the one-square mile hexagons intersecting this buffered area are presented as the Species Occurrence record. (Last Updated: Mar 19, 2026)

Predicted Models: M 100% Moderate (inductive)

B - Bobolink *(Dolichonyx oryzivorus)* **SOC**		1	1		S M

View in Field Guide | View Predicted Models | View Range Maps

Species of Concern - Native Species Global: **G5** State: **S3B** USFWS: **MBTA; BCC10; BCC11; BCC17** FWP SWAP: **SGCN** PIF: **3**

Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 150 meters in order to conservatively encompass male territory size reported for the species and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Mar 18, 2026)

Predicted Models: M 100% Moderate (inductive)

B - Chestnut-collared Longspur *(Calcarius ornatus)* **SOC**		6	16		S M

View in Field Guide | View Predicted Models | View Range Maps

Species of Concern - Native Species Global: **G5** State: **S2B** USFWS: **MBTA; BCC11; BCC17** BLM: **SENSITIVE** FWP SWAP: **SGCN** PIF: **2**

Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 115 meters in order to encompass the maximum breeding territory size reported for the species and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Mar 18, 2026)

Predicted Models: M 100% Moderate (inductive)

B - Long-billed Curlew *(Numenius americanus)* **SOC** 1 1

View In Field Guide **View Predicted Models** **View Range Maps**

Species of Concern - Native Species Global: **G4** State: **S3B** USFWS: **MBTA; BCC11** BLM: **SENSITIVE** FWP SWAP: **SGCN** PIF: **2**

Delineation Criteria Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 200 meters in order to approximate the breeding territory size reported for the species in Idaho and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters. (Last Updated: Mar 18, 2026)

Predicted Models: 100% Low (inductive)

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Native Species reports are filtered for Species with MT Status = Species of Concern

Other Observed Species

No Species were found for the filters selected