

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Clearway Energy Easement Application
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall of 2024
Proponent:	Clearway Energy Group
Location:	T7N R11E Sec. 4, 10, and 16
County:	Meagher

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Clearway Energy Group has submitted three easement applications for installing overhead transmission lines on State Trust Land located in T7N R11E Section 4 and T9N R10E Section 16. The routes selected for the proposed easements were the shortest distance to serve the surrounding area and existing networks. See attached map in exhibit A 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, Justin Paugh
Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Wildlife Biologist, Megan O'Reilly
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Ag & Grazing Surface Lessee
Montana Natural Heritage 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 and the Pine Hills School 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 exhibit B. Both soil types in the proposed easement area have “well suited” reclamation suitability ratings. The power poles would be installed on a drilled concrete pier structure with a relatively low footprint. 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 overhead transmission 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 R11E Sections 4, 10, and 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 overhead transmission 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 overhead transmission 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 transmission line. The easement applications are for a 150' 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 on June 11th, 2024 and found the following species in the easement area locations including; 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 overhead transmission 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.

Potential cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic life are anticipated from these proposed easements. Montana FWP was contacted for comment, and they stated that the area is winter elk range and year-round antelope range. Constructing the utilities outside of the wintering elk movements would be helpful to mitigate impacts to wintering elk.

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 overhead transmission lines, and 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 transmission line location include: Greater Sage-Grouse, bobolinks, and the Golden Eagle.

The proposed power lines would be connecting future wind energy to a power grid network of power stations and other powerlines. There will be potential negative impacts to avian wildlife, including the species of concern that were found in this area.

Cumulative impacts are 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 overhead transmission lines, negative 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 no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE.

Proposed 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.

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 remote parts of Meagher County. The proposed lines would be up to 200 feet tall, but there is currently other powerlines in the area. Aesthetics of the area would be slightly altered with the proposed infrastructure.

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 overhead transmission lines, 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.

This proposed easement would provide power to the surrounding area from the wind farm project occurring on private lands. No demands for environmental resources of land water, air or energy are expected as a result of 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 easements to install, utilize and maintain overhead transmission 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.

There is potential human health and safety risks associated with this project. The powerlines would create a hazard for any low flying aircraft or for the surrounding area in the event of a structural area. Although the potential risks for human health and safety can be severe, large powerlines are common infrastructure in the area.

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 overhead transmission 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 increase energy production and supply the local economy and power grid.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. Direct direct impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production would occur. If not approved, the proponent would not be able to harness the energy coming from the windfarm.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Allow the proponent to apply for the proposed easements to install, utilize and maintain overhead transmission lines, direct impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production are expected to occur. Increased power supply to the local area from the neighboring windfarm is the ultimate goal of the proponent.

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 overhead transmission lines, minimal impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are expected to occur.

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 overhead transmission 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 overhead transmission 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 overhead transmission 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 overhead transmission 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 overhead transmission 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 overhead transmission 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. There are already large powerlines in 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 overhead transmission 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 \$62,180 in revenue for the Common Schools Trust and \$15,990 for the Pine Hills School Trust.

\$10,000 x .037 acres = \$370.00 (7N 11E 4 Common Schools)
\$10,000 x 6.181 acres = \$61,810.00 (7N 11E 16 Common Schools)
\$10,000 x 1.599 acres = \$15,990.00 (7N 11E 10 Pine Hills School)

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 overhead transmission lines to harness wind energy from a nearby wind farm.

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 overhead transmission lines, minimal impacts to other appropriate social and economic circumstances are expected to occur. The common schools trust and pine hills school trust would generate revenue through these easements on state lands.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Dylan Craft	Date: 6/27/2024
	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 overhead transmission 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: 6/27/24

Exhibit A:

7N 11E Sec. 4,10, and 16 Proposed Easement indicated by the dashed red line.

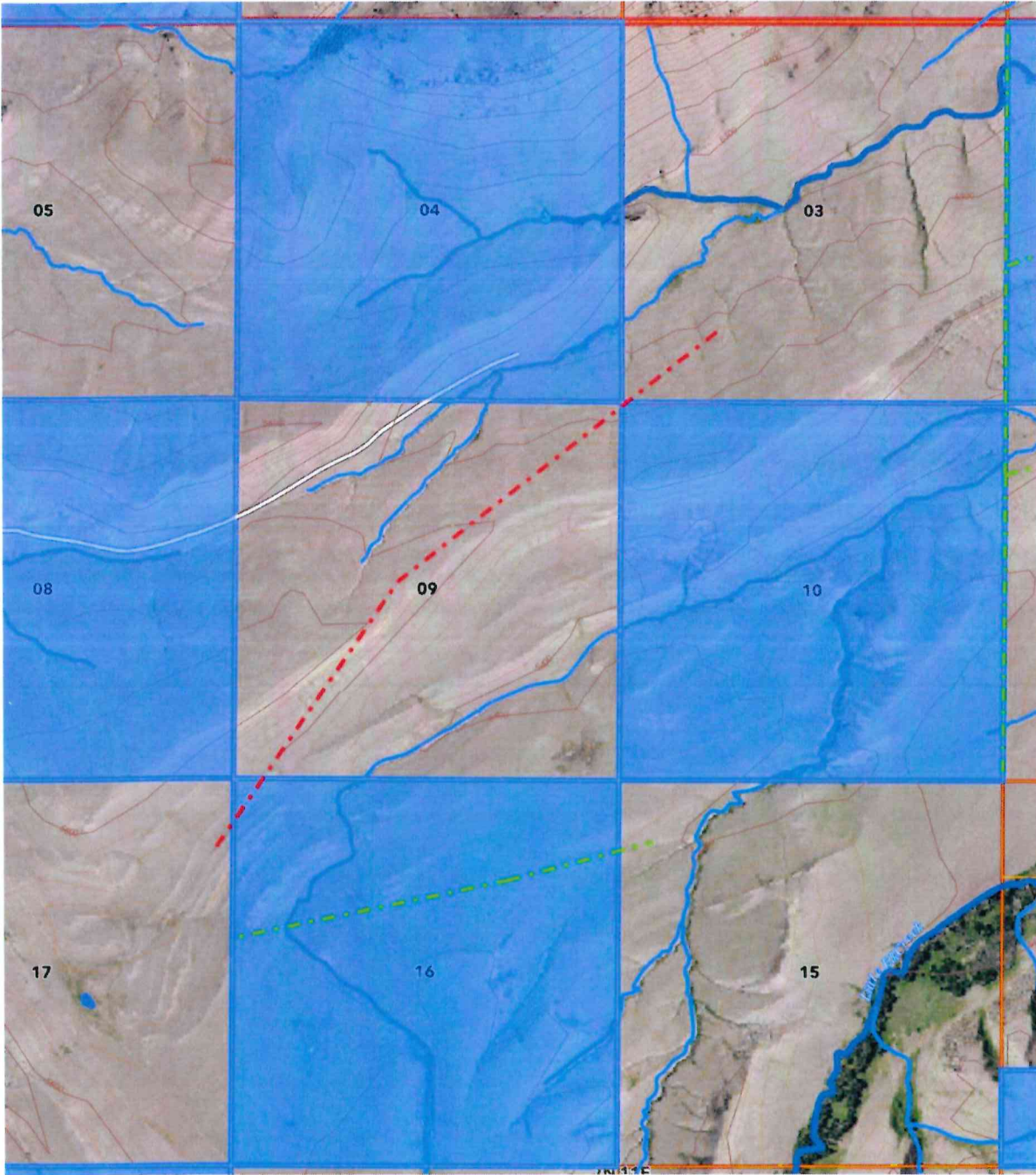
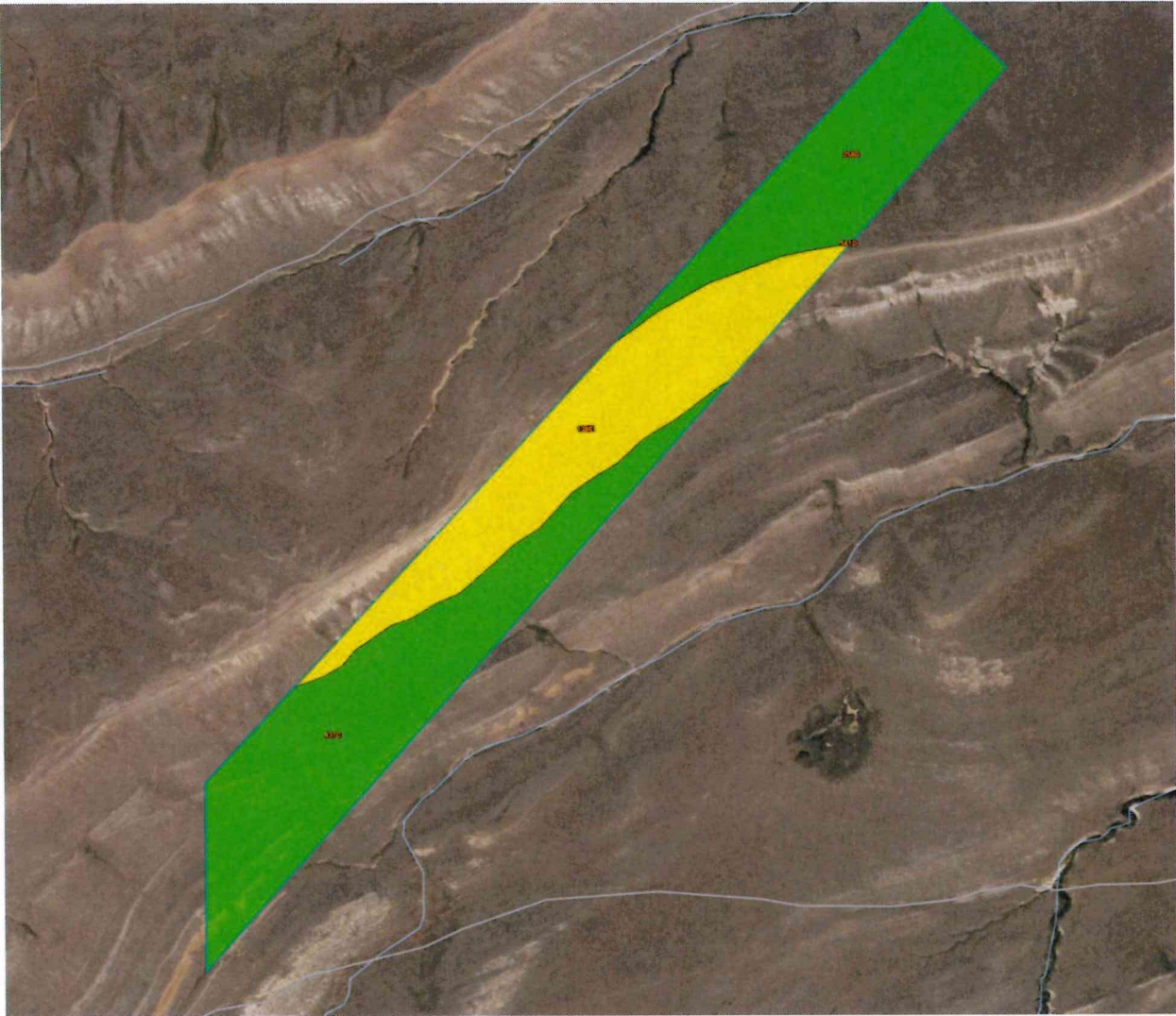


Exhibit B- Geology 7N-11E Sections 4,10,and 16



Summary By Map Unit — Meagher County Area, Montana (HT637)

Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
134E	Delpoint-Cabbart complex, 8 to 35 percent slopes	Moderately suited	Delpoint (60%)	Water Erosion (0.59) Wind Erosion (0.50)	54.8	32.8%
258D	Bacbuster-Reedwest-Castner complex, 4 to 15 percent slopes, foothills	Well suited	Bacbuster (40%) Reedwest (25%)		43.5	26.0%
437C	Delpoint-Cabbart complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes, fan	Well suited	Delpoint (50%) Boxveff (5%) Yamocall (5%)		69.0	41.2%
561D	Blaincreek-Castner complex, 2 to 15 percent slopes	Moderately suited	Blaincreek (70%)	Droughtiness (0.77)	0.0	0.0%
Totals for Area of Interest					167.4	100.0%

