CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Whitefish Yards Pedestrian Bridge Right-of-Way Easement (ROW-19771)
Proposed Implementation Date	September – October 2025
Proponent:	City of Whitefish
Location:	Section 36,Township 31 North, Range 22 West (Kalispell Unit)
County:	Flathead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The City of Whitefish is proposing a right of way easement for a pedestrian bridge through navigable waters of the Whitefish River. The City of Whitefish is proposing to encumber a strip of land 12 feet wide, 6 feet on each side of a centerline located in the Northwest quarter of the Northwest quarter of Section 36, Township 31 North, Range 22 West, Principal Meridian, Montana, more particularly described as follows:

> Commencing at Northeast corner of Lot 1, Hendrix Tracts, City of Whitefish, Records of Flathead County, thence N3°56'29"W, 290.00 feet to the TRUE POINT-OF-BEGINNING, said point being the intersection of the centerline of the Whitefish Yards Pedestrian Bridge and the Westerly low water mark of Whitefish River, a state navigable river; thence following the centerline of said bridge.
> N72°01 '42"E, 76.19 feet to the Easterly low water mark of said river, said point being the POINT-OF TERMINUS; thence S9°30'50"W, 317.80 feet to the Northeast corner of said Lot 1, Hendrix Tracts; containing 0.021 acres more or less.

The lands involved in this proposed project are held by the State of Montana in trust for Montana Public Land-Trust Navigable Rivers Trust per the Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11. The Board of Land Commissioners and DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

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II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

Public Scoping occurred by posting in the legal section of the Daily Inter Lake and Flathead Beacon. Letters were sent to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State Historic Preservation office, Department

of Natural Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Services, and the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in July, 2025.
DNRC Hydrologist, Josh Harris, and DNRC Biologist, Justin Cooper, were consulted during the writing of this Environmental Assessment Checklist. All DNRC Trust Lands Bureau Chiefs; Dan Rogers, Trevor Taylor, Kelly Motichka, and Deidra Kloberdanz, as well as DNRC Trust Lands Archaeologist Patrick Rennie were also consulted.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:
Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

- 318 Authorization for Short Term Water Quality Impacts Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- 401 Certification – Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- Floodplain Permit – City of Whitefish Planning Office
- 124 Permit – Montana Stream Protection Act – Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:
Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

No-Action Alternative A
No pedestrian bridge would be built, and Navigable waters would continue in its present condition.

Action Alternative B
Action Alternative would recommend Land Board approval of this easement to The City of Whitefish for a pedestrian bridge over Navigable Waters. The only impact to State Trust Land would be airspace. This alternative will result in the construction of the proposed pedestrian bridge and maintain the navigability of the water.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

The site is geologically characterized by Phanerozoic-Cenozoic aged gravels. Locally, soil types are part of the Half Moon series which consist of deep, light-colored medium-textured soils. These soils have developed in calcareous, light-colored, thinly stratified silt and fine sand deposited by glacial stream and in temporary lakes that were formed when the glacier left Upper Flathead Valley Area. There are no unusual or unstable geologic features or special reclamation considerations within the proposed project area. Temporary or permanent impacts to geology or soils are not expected as work will occur outside of the ordinary high-water mark (OHWM).

References:

Web Soil Survey, 2025. Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana (MT617), Natural Resources Conservation Service, Retrieved on Sep 14, 2025, from https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx

Vuke, S.M., Porter, K.W., Lonn, J.D., and Lopez, D.A., 2007, Geologic Map of Montana - Compact Disc: Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology: Geologic Map 62-C, 73 p., 2 sheets, scale 1:500,000. This map was digitized in 2012 as a result of a contract between the U.S. Geological Survey and the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

The Whitefish River is adjacent to and flows through the site. The proposed bridge abutments are located above the interpreted ordinary high-water mark and base flood elevation level, and the bridge spans the width between the abutments with no additional supports. Temporary or permanent impacts to water quality, quantity, or distribution are not expected.
Water Quality Mitigations:
Sediment and erosion control Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as silt fence, straw bale dikes, wattles, and other sediment controls will be deployed to minimize sedimentation during phase installation of the bridge and the project will adhere to a SLOPES Conservation Measures plan.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

NONE

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

A minor amount of vegetation may be slightly disturbed from equipment during installation. No measurable impacts would be anticipated.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

No terrestrial wildlife habitat would be altered, therefore no adverse impacts to wildlife are anticipated.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

No terrestrial wildlife habitat would be altered, therefore no adverse impacts to wildlife are anticipated.

The Project Area is over a mile from any known bald eagle nest site (MNHP, 2025). However, there are multiple observations of eagles foraging and traveling in the vicinity of the proposed project (MNHP, 2025). Eagles that use this area are likely habituated to substantial levels of human disturbance from surrounding residential, highway, and watercraft activity. Considering the limited duration and scope of the proposed project and the existing level of disturbance, negligible adverse direct, secondary, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.

Wildlife Mitigations:
If a threatened or endangered species is encountered, consult a DNRC biologist immediately. Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area, contact a DNRC biologist.

References:

MNHP. 2025. Natural Heritage Map Viewer. Montana Natural Heritage Program. Retrieved on August 14 2025, from http://mtnhp.org/MapViewer.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative 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 portion of the APE under the jurisdiction of the DNRC.

Because the DNRC only owns the riverbed, no cultural or palaeontologic resources are expected. Authorization of the proposed development will result in No *Effect* to *Antiquities*. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

No measurable impacts are anticipated.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

NONE

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.

NONE

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

NONE

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

NONE

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No change from existing conditions is anticipated.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

NONE

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.

City of Whitefish Zoning Code
City of Whitefish Growth Policy
Floodplain Development Code

A floodplain development permit is anticipated to be required by the City of Whitefish Planning Office. Upon issuance of the permit, no measurable impacts are anticipated.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Recreational access to and on the Whitefish River should be considered across the subject area. Completion of the project will provide additional recreational opportunities for the residents of Whitefish and surrounding neighborhoods. The proposed bridge project is designed to provide access across the river while maintaining a clear travel path over the river commensurate with the other bridge spans crossing the Whitefish River in the area. Calculations were conducted to ensure the project will not obstruct the navigability of the river.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

NONE

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

NONE

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

NONE

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Granting the easements would generate $8,400.00 for the Public Land-Trust Navigable Rivers Trust. Valuation was determined on current market land values per acre which includes a 50% deduction for navigable waters.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Rachel Payne	**Date:**	9/3/25
	Title:	Kalispell Unit – Real Property Agent		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED: Upon Review of the Checklist EA, and attachments, I find the Action Alternative, as proposed, meets the intent of the project objectives as stated in the Type and Purpose of Action section of this document.

The area involved in this project are held by the State of Montana in trust for the support of specific beneficiary institutions and DNRC is required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X Section 11; and 77-1-212 MCA).

The Action Alternative complies with all pertinent environmental laws and is based upon a consensus of professional opinion on limits of acceptable environmental impact. For these reasons and on behalf of DNRC I have selected Action Alternative B to be implemented on this project.

26.SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS: After a review of the scoping documents and comments, project file, and Department policies, standards, and guidelines, I find that all the identified resource management concerns have been fully addressed in this Checklist EA and its attachments. Specific project design features and various recommendations by the resource management specialists will be implemented to ensure that this project will fall within the limits of environmental change. Taken individually and cumulatively, the proposed activities are common practices, and no project activities are being conducted on important,

unique, or fragile sites.

I find there will be no significant impacts to the human environment as a result of implementing the Action Alternative. In summary, I find that the identified impacts will be controlled, mitigated, or avoided by the design of the project to the extent that the impacts are not significant.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐	EIS	☐	More Detailed EA	**X**	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	David M. Poukish
	Title:	Kalispell Unit Manager
Signature:	*/c/ David M. Poukish*	**Date:** 09/09/25