

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Grizzly Broadband Buried Fiber Optic Stevensville 2025

Proposed Implementation Date: Fall 2025

Proponent: Hamilton Unit, Southwest Land Office, Montana DNRC

County: Ravalli

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Action:

The granting of 10 foot-foot-wide easements for the installation of underground fiber optic cable. The total acreage of easements across all sections would be 2.043 acres. The cable would provide telecommunications to landowners in the area. The cable would be placed underground along existing roads. The proposed route was determined by field review as the most direct route between terminus locations. The proposed route will provide accessibility for installation and maintenance since it is located along existing roadways. The project is located east of Stevensville, MT (refer to Attachments vicinity map A-1 and project maps A-2) and includes the following sections: 8N 19W 18 & 19, 8N 20W 25, 10N 19W 16, 21, & 22.

Project Development

SCOPING:

- PUBLIC SCOPED:
 - Grazing lessees were scoped
- AGENCIES SCOPED:
 - None
- COMMENTS RECEIVED:
 - How many: None
 - Concerns: None
 - Results: N/A

DNRC specialists were consulted, including: Patrick Rennie DNRC Archeologist

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS

NEEDED: *(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

None.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative: the DNRC would deny Grizzly Broadband's request for permanent easements.

Action Alternative: the DNRC would grant Grizzly Broadband permanent easements for the installation of buried fiber optic along existing roadways in six different sections as proposed.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

VEGETATION:

Vegetation Existing Conditions: The route proposed along existing roads is currently covered with various grass species.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of this resource would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easements would be granted along existing roads. Some grass would be removed to install the buried cable. Due to the mitigations listed below, minor impacts of short duration would be anticipated to these resources.

Vegetation Mitigations: stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by the installation, as directed by DNRC, to replace any grass removed and minimize potential seedbeds for noxious weed establishment and; (2) equipment would be washed to remove potential noxious weed seed prior to entry into the area.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions: The proposed route is currently covered with various grass species. The slope angles of the roads along which the cable would be placed are between 0% to 6%.

No-Action: The condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Action Alternative: The easements would be granted along existing roads. Minor impacts of short duration would be anticipated to these resources.

Soil Mitigations: stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by the installation, as directed by DNRC, to minimize erosion; (2) gated roads would remain closed to prevent increased erosion risk from motorized access by the public.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions: The proposed route would cross Willoughby Creek in 8N 19W 19 and the Bitterroot Irrigation Ditch in 8N 20W 25 and 10N 19W 22.

No-Action: The condition of this resource would remain unchanged.

Action Alternative: The crossings would involve directional boring underneath the channel of the stream and ditch. Bed and banks would be unaffected. If impacts do occur, they would be minor and short duration.

Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations: Disturbed areas would be grass seeded. Crossings would directionally bore underneath channels avoiding impacts to bed and banks.

FISHERIES:

Fisheries Existing Conditions: The proposed route would cross Willoughby Creek in 8N 19W 19 and the Bitterroot Irrigation Ditch in 8N 20W 25 and 10N 19W 22.

No-Action: No direct or indirect impacts would occur to affected fish species or affected fisheries resources beyond those described in Fisheries Existing Conditions. Cumulative effects (other related past and present factors; other future, related actions; and any impacts described in Fisheries Existing Conditions) would continue to occur.

Action Alternative: The crossings would involve directional boring underneath the channel of the stream and ditch. Bed and banks would be unaffected. If impacts do occur, they would be minor and short duration.

Fisheries Mitigations: Disturbed areas would be grass seeded. Crossings would directionally bore underneath channels avoiding impacts to bed and banks.

WILDLIFE:

No-Action: The condition of this resource would remain unchanged

Action Alternative: Minor and temporary changes to grass coverage along the roads would occur. There would be no expected changes to other vegetation types. Minor disturbance to wildlife of short duration would occur due to the operation of equipment during installation.

Wildlife Mitigations: Stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by the installation, as directed by DNRC, to replace any grass removed; (2) gated

roads would remain closed to prevent increased disturbance of wildlife from motorized access by the public.

AIR QUALITY:

No-Action: The condition of this resource would remain unchanged.

Action Alternative: The condition of this resource would remain unchanged. If the Action Alternative is selected, equipment used during installation would produce minor amounts of exhaust and dust. It is not anticipated that any activities associated with the installation would result in significant and/or long-term amounts of particulate matter.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL 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.

Considering the nature of proposed developments, 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.

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

Impacts on the Human Population

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Human Population.

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Health and Human Safety	X													
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	X													
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	X													
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	X													
Demand for Government Services	X													
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X													
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X													
Social Structures and Mores	X													
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X													
Action														
Health and Human Safety		X				X				X				1
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production		X				X				X				2
Quantity and Distribution of Employment		X				X				X				3
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	X				X				X					
Demand for Government Services	X				X				X					
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities		X				X				X				4
Density and Distribution of population and housing		X				X				X				5
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X					

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X					

Comments:

1. There would be a minor safety risk due to machinery operating in the area. These effects would be temporary during installation.
2. Because the cable will be located underground along existing roads, only minor temporary impacts would occur to these activities during installation.
3. There would be a minor direct short-term increase in employment for a small crew during installation of the cable.
4. The roads along which the cable will be buried are a mix of gated, private, and open public roads. The impact to recreation would be minor and temporary during installation. All gated roads would remain closed. Some roads may be partially blocked by equipment during installation but would remain passable.
5. There may be an increased potential for new housing/development of adjacent private lands due to the availability of broadband internet access. None of this possible increase would occur directly on State Lands.

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.*

- None

Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances:

Under the No Action Alternative, there would not be any return to the Common Schools Trust or Capital Buildings.

Under the Action Alternative, the following returns would be delivered to the listed Trusts:

8N 20W SEC. 25	Value \$2,760 – Common Schools Trust
10N 19W SEC. 16	Value \$3,960 – Common Schools Trust
8N 19W SEC. 18	Value \$1,140 – MSU Morrill Trust
8N 19W SEC. 19	Value \$3,120 – Common Schools Trust
10N 19W SEC. 21	Value \$2,280 - MSU Morrill Trust
SEC. 22	Value \$1,500 – Common Schools

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

None.

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

None.

Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:

Name: Thayer Jacques
Title: Hamilton Unit Manager
Date: 4/24/2025

Finding

Alternative Selected

I select the Action Alternative with the mitigations noted above. This alternative provides broadband internet access to local landowners while providing compensation (revenue) to the Common Schools Trust and MSU Morrill Trust and contains mitigations to address concerns noted in the Environmental Assessment.

Significance of Potential Impacts

I find the impacts associated with implementation are not significant.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

☐ EIS

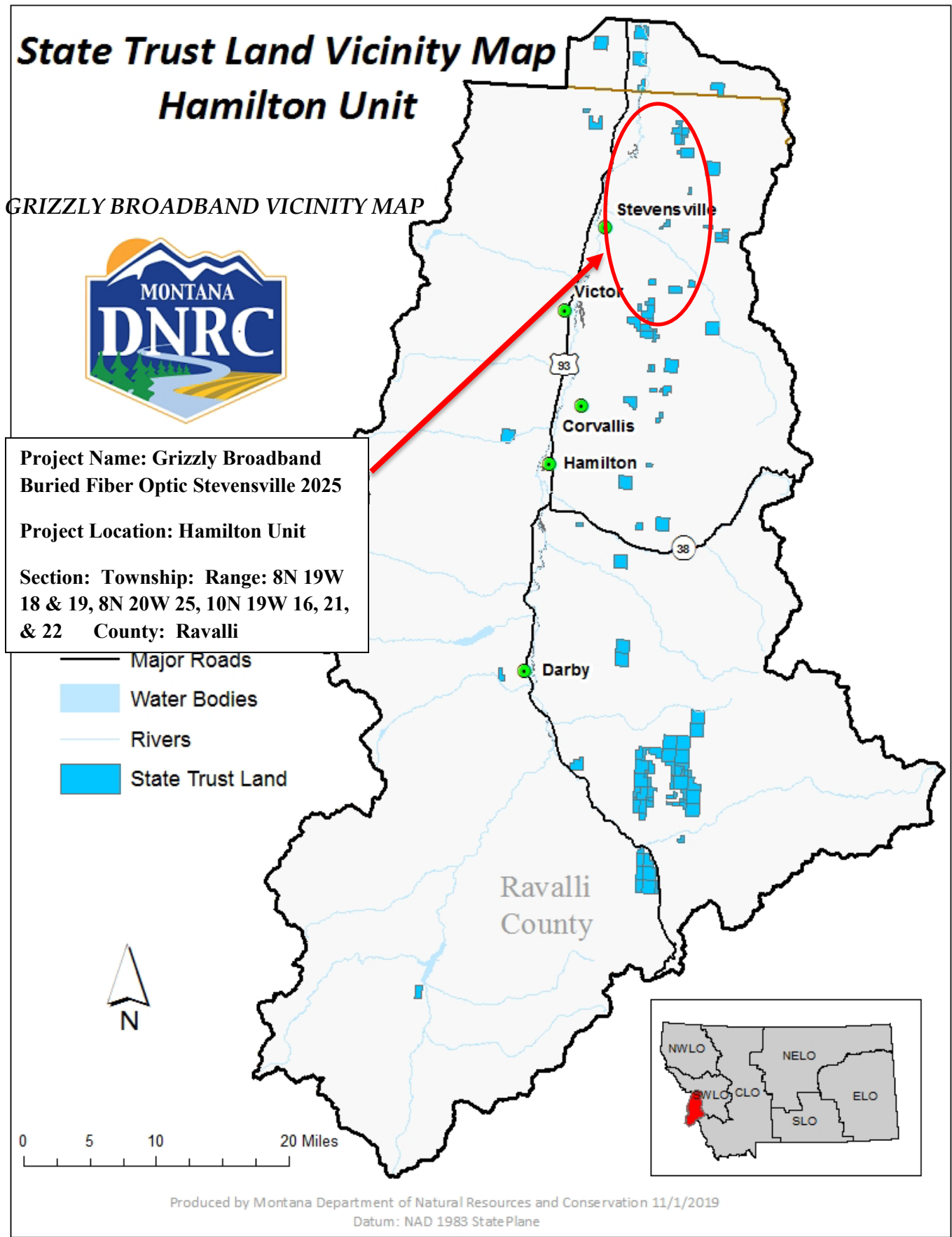
☐ More Detailed EA

☒ No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

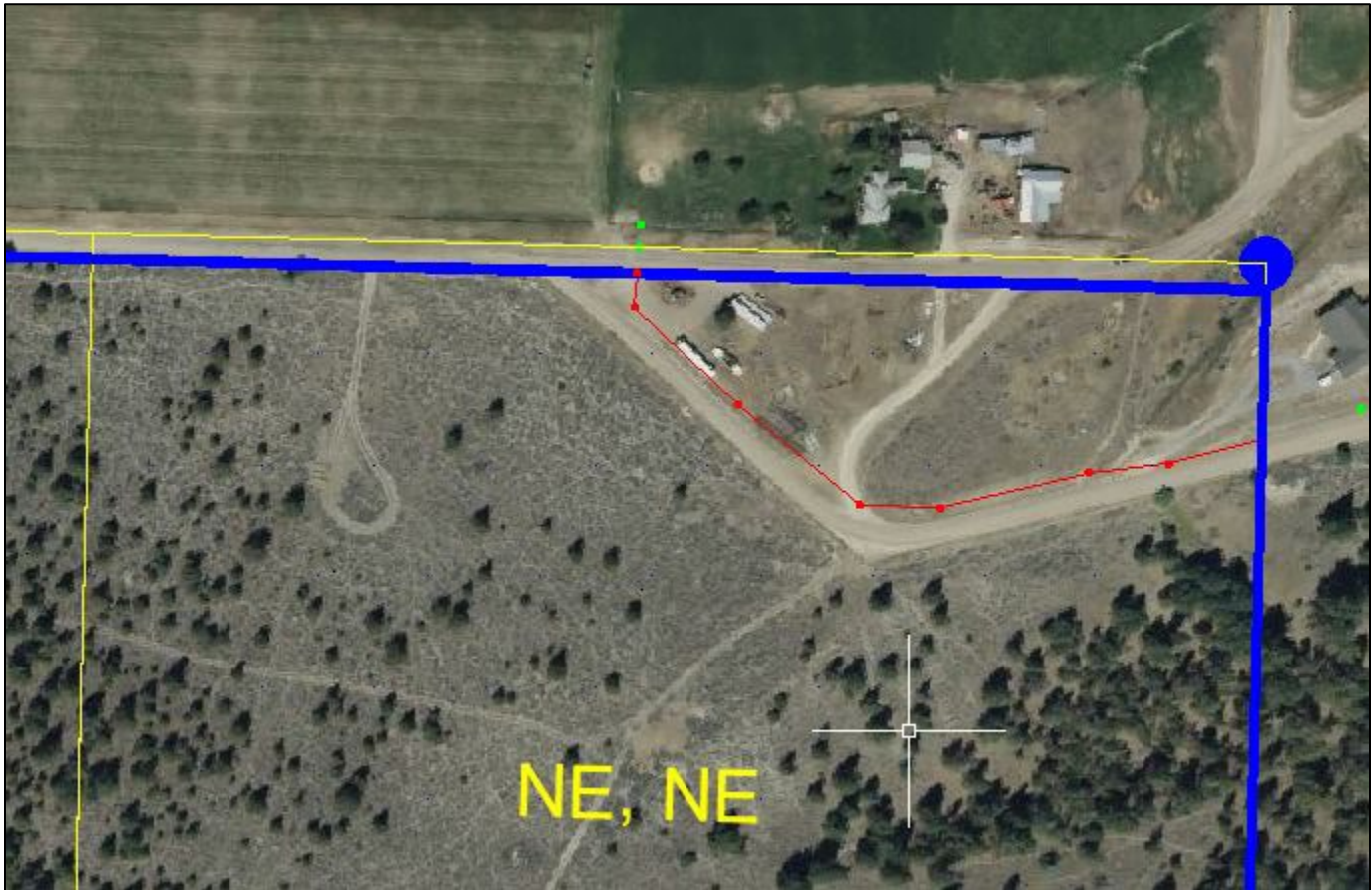
Name: Teodora Rautu
Title: Acting SWLO Trustlands Program Manager
Date: September 15, 2025
Signature: *Is/ Teodora Rautu*

Attachment A - Maps

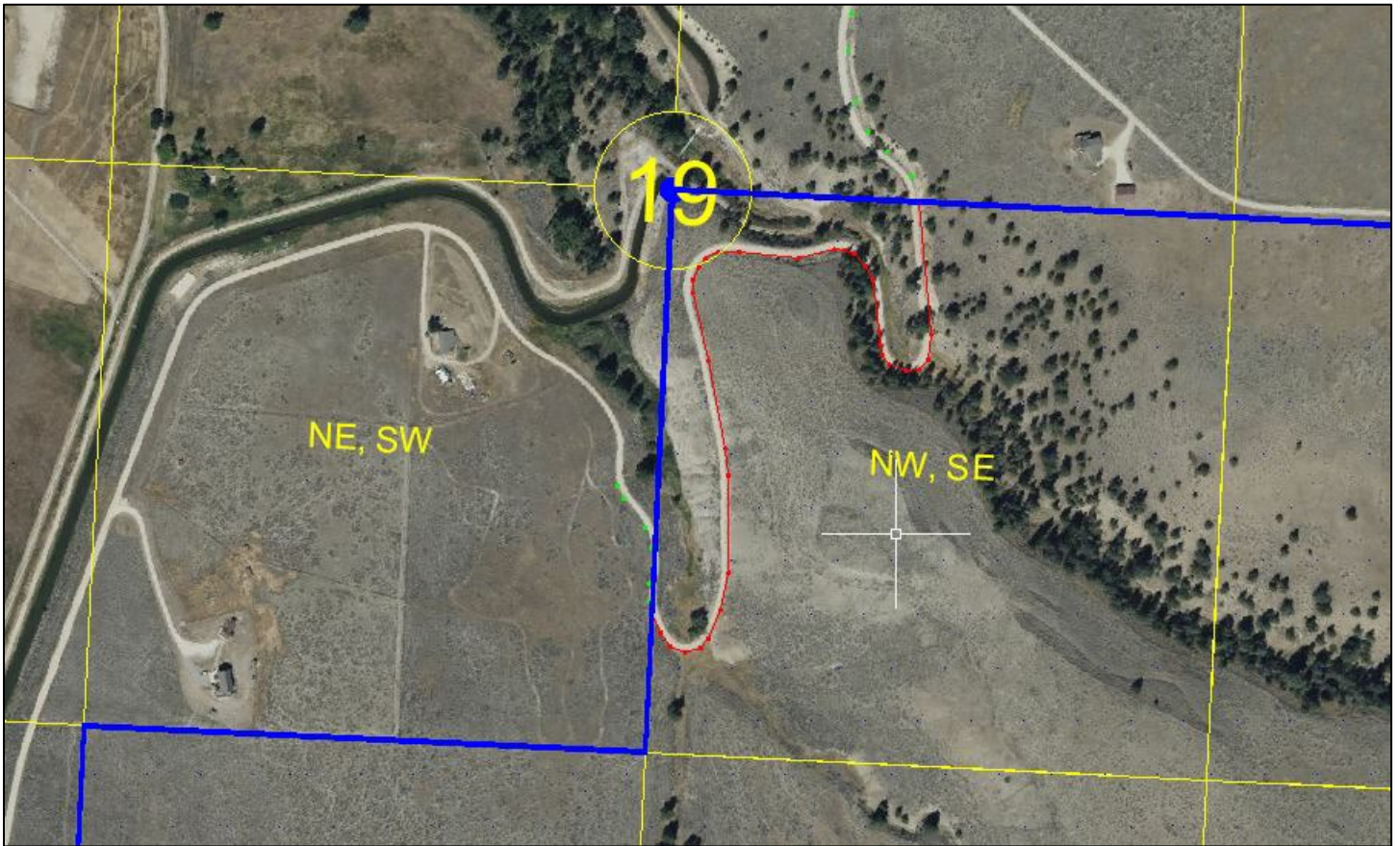


A-2: Project Maps

8N 19W Section 18



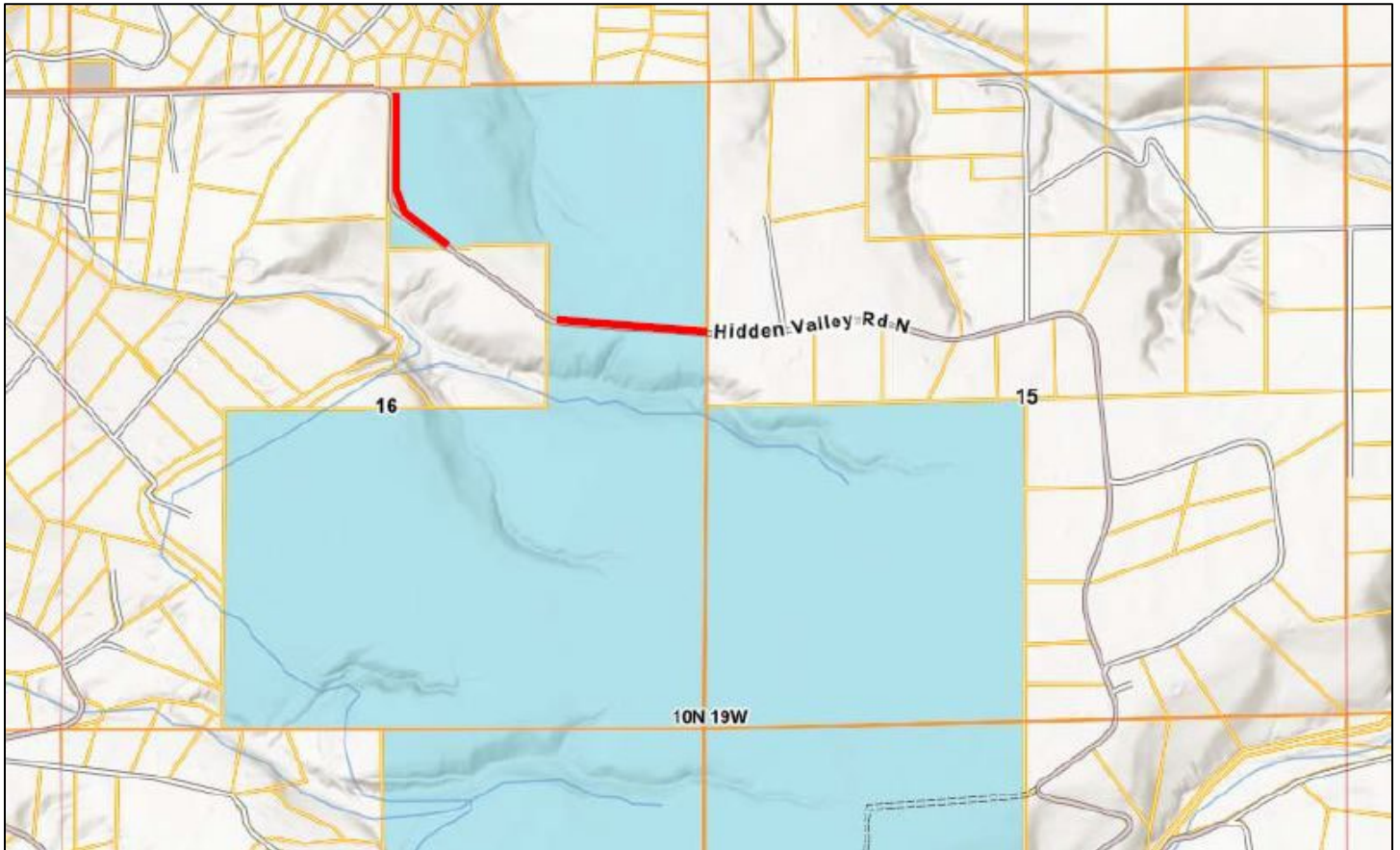
8N 19W Section 19



8N 20W Section 25



10N 19W Section 16



10N 19W Section 21 & 22

