

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Spectrum Pacific West Fiber Optic Bitterroot River

Proposed Implementation Date: Fall/Winter 2026

Proponent: Hamilton Unit, Southwest Land Office, Montana DNRC

County: Ravalli

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Action:

Spectrum Pacific West, LLC is requesting an easement across the Bitterroot River to install an underground fiber optics cable near Hamilton and Conner, MT. The proposal would provide high-speed internet and related services to residences and businesses. The project is located in the following areas: NE1/4 SE1/4 of section 26 T6N R221W, SE1/4 SE1/4 of section 7 T2N R20W, SE1/4 SE1/4 of section 17 T2N R20W, NW1/4 SW1/4 of section 22 T2N R20W.

Spectrum Pacific West has requested to bore under the river to bury the cables. All construction equipment will be staged upland above the low water mark of the river. The proposed project would bore a 1.25" diameter conduit under the river approximately 10 feet below the lowest point of the riverbed, and 35 feet from the high water marks of the river.

Montana Code (MCA 70-16-201) and the Equal Footing Doctrine (1844) provides for state ownership from the low water mark to the low water mark on navigable water bodies. Based on historical evidence the Bitterroot River is commercially navigable from the mouth of Jennings's Camp Creek on the east fork (SW1/4, Sec.27, T2N, R18W) to its confluence with the Clark Fork River. Therefore, the state claims ownership of the riverbed below the low water mark between these two points. DNRC has received four applications for 20-foot wide easements across the main channel of the Bitterroot River from Spectrum Pacific West involving 0.20 acres of State-owned property below the low water mark of the river.

Project Development

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Montana DNRC, US Army Corps of Engineers, Bitterroot Conservation District, Ravalli County Floodplain Administrator

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED: *(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

- **Bitterroot Conservation District-** 310 Permit
- **Ravalli County Floodplain Administrator-** Floodplain Permit
- **Army Corps of Engineers-** Letter from USACE states no permit is needed for this project due to the fact that all construction equipment will remain upland outside the low water marks.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative: Not granting the easement request for installation of an underground fiber optics line as proposed.

Action Alternative : Granting four easements for the installation of a fiber optic lines under the Bitterroot River 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:

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

Action Alternative: During installation, physical ground disturbance and temporary removal of vegetation could occur. Any disturbance by equipment would be short-term. Spectrum Pacific West would revegetate disturbed areas in accordance with a county floodplain permit. Topsoil will be replaced (no fill will be brought in), seeding and revegetation will be conducted with native seed mix. All equipment will be cleaned before being brought on site, and weeds will be treated if they appear 1 year later. Installation would occur above the riverbanks. As such, there would be no physical disturbance of State trust lands below the low water mark.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

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

Action Alternative: During installation using a boring machine physical ground disturbance and temporary removal of vegetation could occur. Any disturbance by equipment would be short-term. Spectrum Pacific West would revegetate disturbed areas in accordance with a county floodplain permit. Topsoil will be replaced (no fill will be brought in), seeding and revegetation will be conducted with native seed mix. All equipment will be cleaned before being brought on site, and weeds will be treated if they appear 1 year later. Installation would occur above the riverbanks approximately 35 feet from the banks. As such, there would be no physical disturbance of State trust lands by equipment.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

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

Action Alternative: Some minor sediment delivery may occur due to soil disturbance during installation. The bed and banks of the river would not be altered. Boring and equipment will be kept 35 feet away from the riverbanks. Prior to construction, structural erosion and sediment controls will be installed to prevent sediment from leaving the site. Seeding and revegetation will be conducted immediately following installation. Any disturbance would be short-term (until removed vegetation reestablishes).

FISHERIES:

Fisheries Existing Conditions:

No-Action: No direct or indirect impacts would occur to affected fish species or affected fisheries resources.

Action Alternative: This would be an underground fiber optic line. No in stream activities would occur. The bed and banks of the river would not be altered. Boring and equipment will be kept 35 feet away from the riverbanks. No impacts to fisheries would be expected.

WILDLIFE:

No-Action: No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, no effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Action Alternative: Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur. The proposed project would take place next to bridges, roads, and highway 93 that receive regular vehicle traffic. In addition, the areas contain several occupied homes with regular human presence near the river. Disturbed soils would be revegetated with native seed mix, and noxious weeds would be treated if they appear. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, short-term negligible effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

AIR QUALITY:

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

Action Alternative: Some temporary emission releases would be expected during construction activities; however, air quality would not be impacted to any measurable degree.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Because only the bed of the Bitterroot River is state-owned land in the project's area of potential effect, there are no cultural resource concerns. Issuance of an easement will have No Effect to state owned heritage properties as defined in the State Antiquities Act.

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				X				X					
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	X				X				X					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	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		
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	X				X				X					
Demand for Government Services	X				X				X					
Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X				X				X					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X				X				X					
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X					
Action														
Health and Human Safety	X				X				X					
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production		X				X				X				
Quantity and Distribution of Employment		X				X				X				
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					
Density and Distribution of population and housing		X				X				X				
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X					

Comments:

The proposed project would be underground beneath the channel and would not pose an impediment to navigability or create a safety hazard to boating or floating on the river. The proposed project would provide high-speed internet service in the area and benefit any associated activities linked to those services.

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.

No Action: The No Action alternative would not generate any return to the Trust at this time.

Action: Granting of the proposed easements would return approximately \$6,112 to the Public Land- Navigable Rivers trust.

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: October 2, 2026

Finding

Alternative Selected

I select the action alternative; granting four easements involving .20 acres of State-owned property below the low water mark of the Bitterroot River, thereby accommodating the installation of underground fiber optic lines as proposed by Spectrum Pacific West, LLC.

Significance of Potential Impacts

The action alternative will not result in significant environmental impacts

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

☐

EIS

☐

More Detailed EA

☒

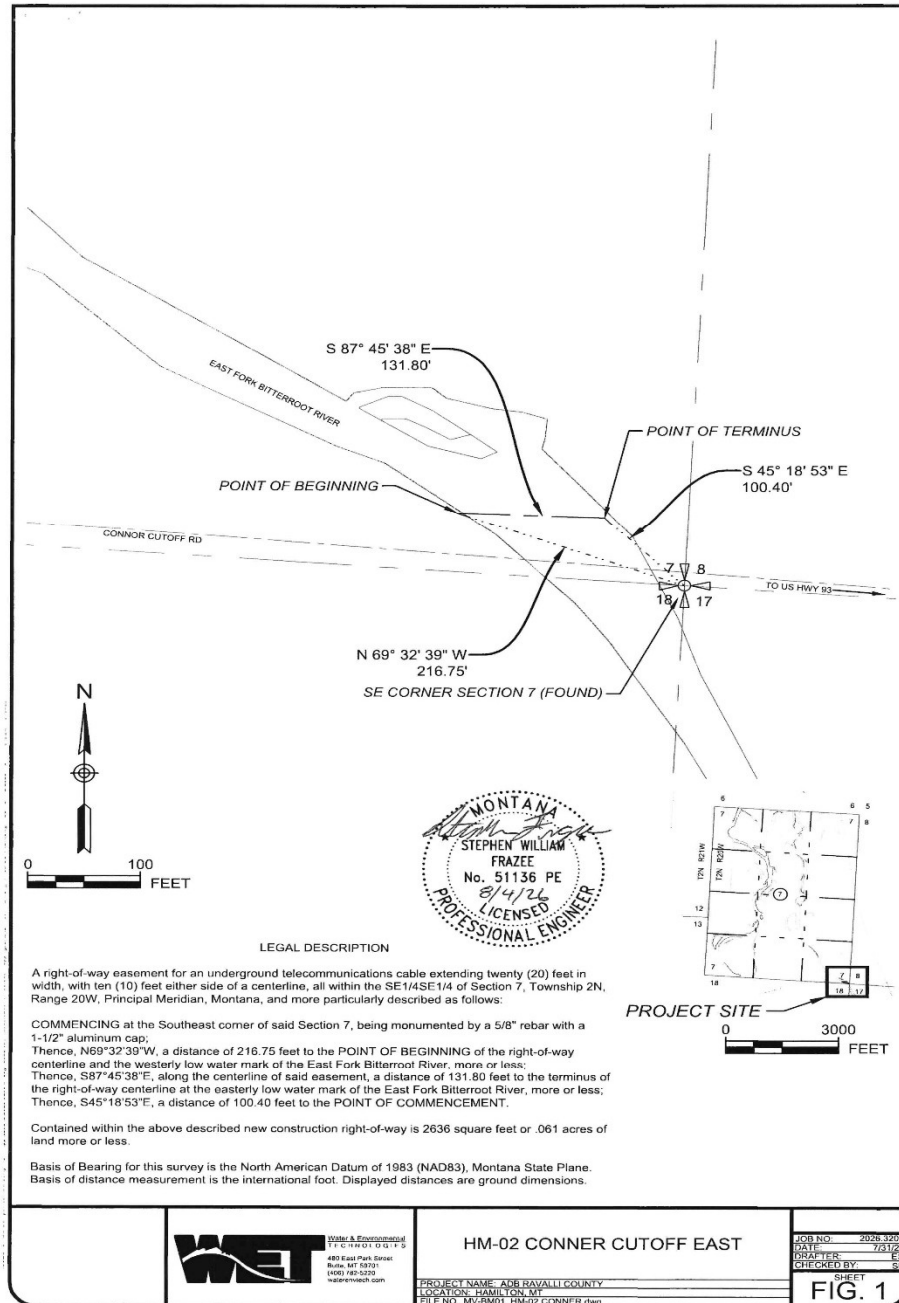
No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

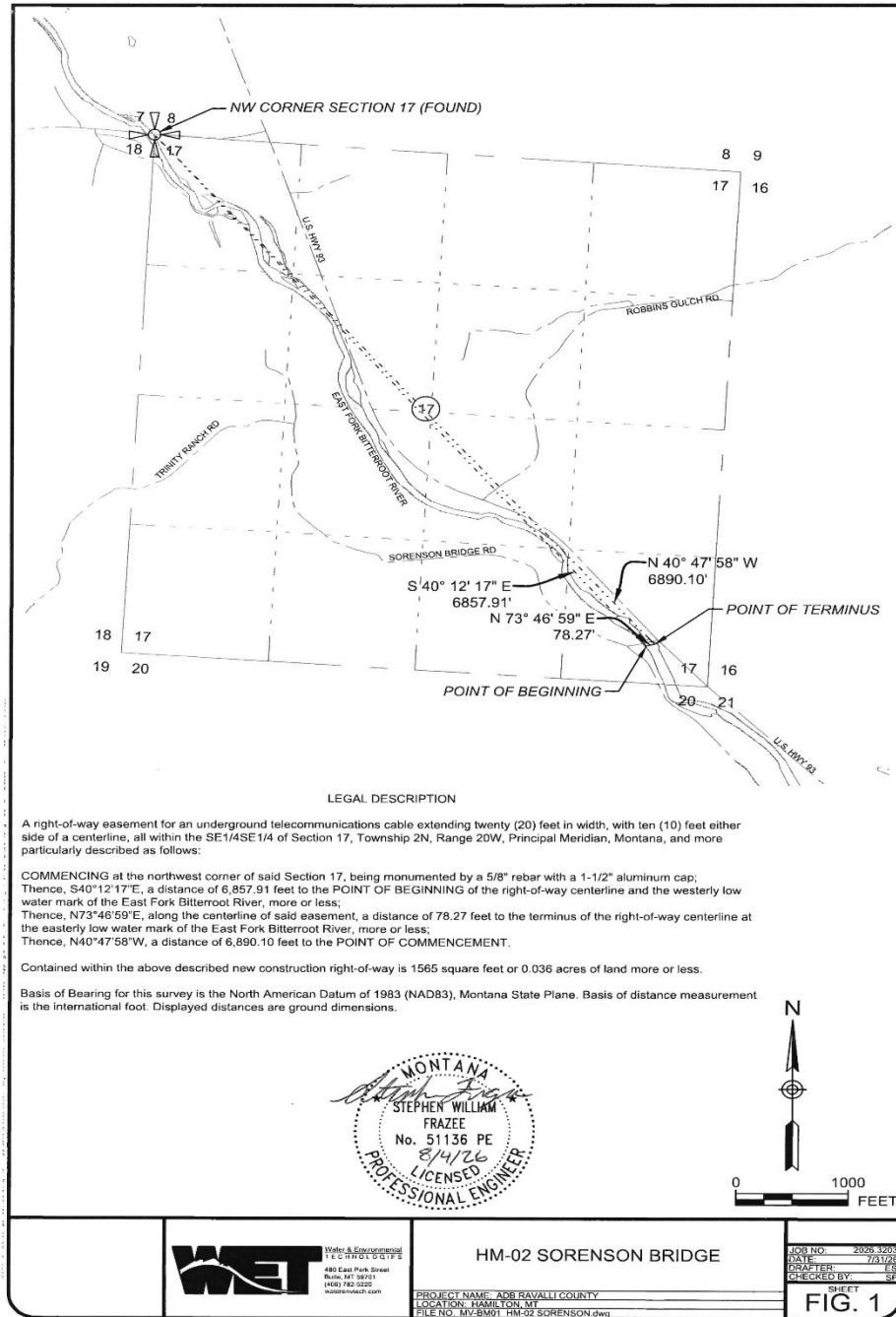
Name: Seth Goodwin
Title: SWLO Area Operations Manager
Date: October 2, 2026
Signature: */s/ Seth Goodwin*

Attachment A - Exhibits

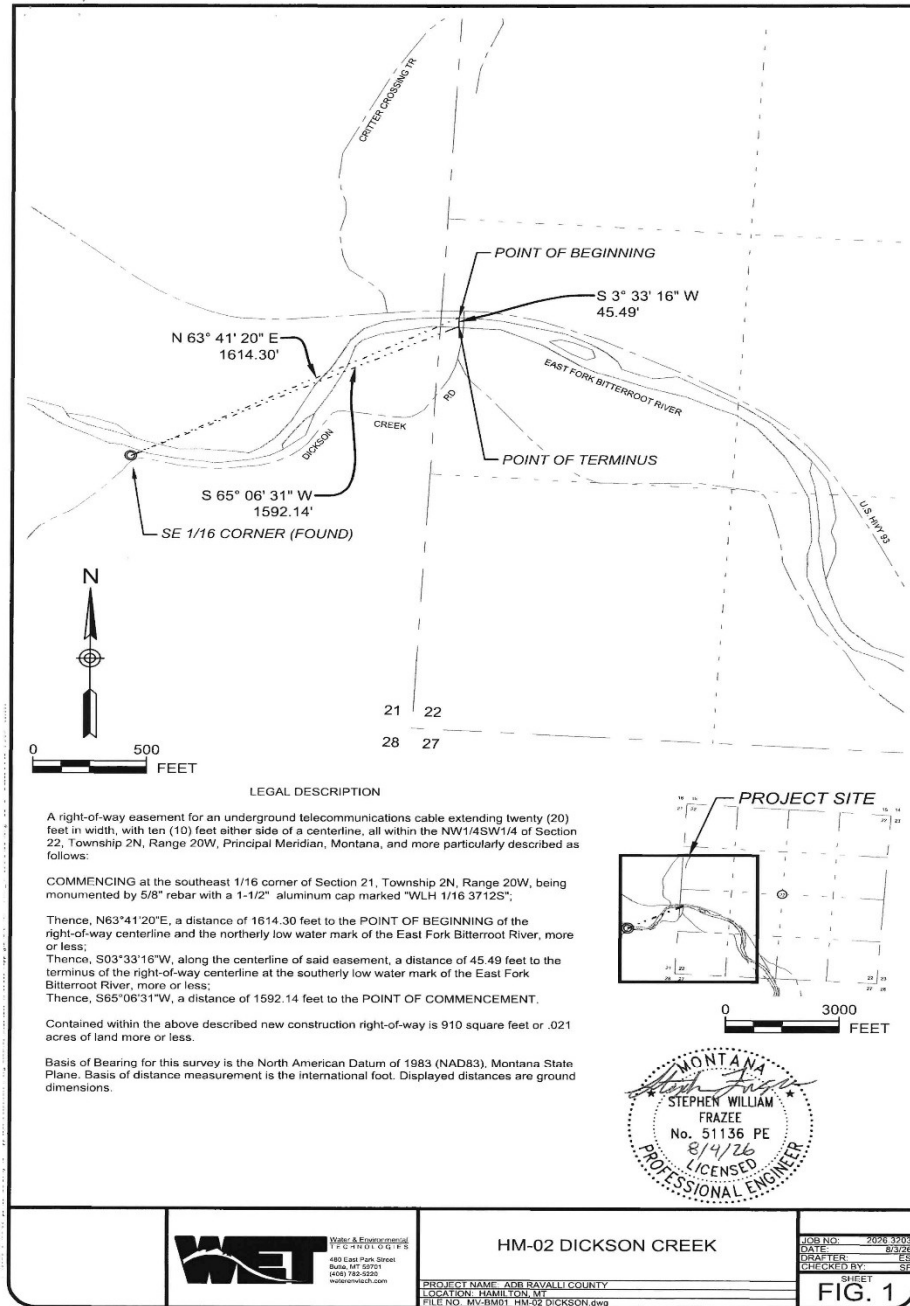
A-1: Conner Cutoff East Crossing



A-2: Sorenson Bridge Crossing Section 17 T2N R20W



A-3: Dickson Creek Crossing Section 22 T2N R20W



A-4: Hamilton Main Street Crossing Section 26 T6N R21W

