

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	N. Beartrap Canyon Road Utility ROW Application-Underground Distribution Powerline
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2025-Spring 2026
Proponent:	Northwestern Energy
Location:	T2S R1E Sec. 36
County:	Madison

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Northwestern Energy has submitted an easement application to authorize the extension of a 1 phase 7,200/12,740V electric primary distribution line on State Trust Land located in T2S R1E Section 36 pursuant to MCA 77-2-101 & 102. This extension will serve additional customers. This extension of power service will involve installation construction and require future maintenance on State Trust Land. The statement of necessity states there is a lack of alternative facilities nearby and this route is the only viable option to provide the power service. The route selected for the extension is along a public road, and the new underground powerline will lay adjacent to other utilities already encumbering the route along N. Beartrap Canyon Road. The proposed easement is approximately 3,871.18 feet long by 30 feet wide, encompassing 2.67 acres. See the attached exhibits for the proposed easement route and location.

Exhibits:

- Exhibit A: Vicinity Map
- Exhibit B: Topographical Map with Easement Location Indicated
- Exhibit C: Survey Exhibit

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

- Grazing Lessee, Turner Enterprises-Notice of Settlement of Damages sent by the proponent, signed May 30th, 2025.
- Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks- FWP Comments Email Platform (September 22, 2025)
- Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie

Public outreach was limited to the list above due to the larger impacted project corridor outside of State Trust Land (the impacted Trust Land involves a smaller segment of the proposed route) resulting in the supposition that local area residents are well informed of the project and the evident need for the replacement of important energy infrastructure.

No comments in opposition were received by DNRC.

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

The proposed easement would involve Montana State Trust Land allocated to the Common Schools Trust. Approval of the project is contingent on the proponent obtaining all necessary and lawful permits, licenses, and authorizations from the appropriate entities.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action alternative). The proposed project would not be approved.

Alternative B (Proposed Action Alternative): Recommend approval of the Montana Board of Land Commissioners to grant an easement to the proponent for the purpose of extending power service via an underground distribution powerline to include the installation, utilization, and maintenance of the buried power infrastructure.

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 project area. The proposed easement would be mainly located on Kalsted sandy loam loams-"well suited" (2 to 8 percent slopes), Yetull loamy sand- "well suited" (2 to 8 percent slopes), and Shurley-Rock outcrop complex-"unsuited" (25-60 percent slopes). Since this installation will occur within the existing road prism, with cut and fill slopes in the steep unsuited portion, serious impacts are not anticipated. Reclamation, reseeding, and success of revegetation will be monitored by DNRC.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to geology and soils would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the Montana Board of Land Commissioners to grant an easement to the proponent for the purpose of installation, utilization, and maintenance of the buried power infrastructure. Minor impacts to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture are expected following installation. Reclamation requirements will be monitored.

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.

The Madison River is adjacent to N. Beartrap Canyon Road. The underground powerline will be installed "15 feet distant northerly of the centerline of this road." The road lies between the proposed disturbance resulting from the utility installation and the Madison River. This road will serve as a barrier to undesirable sediment or other potential impacts to the river. No 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): Recommend approval of the Montana Board of Land Commissioners to grant an easement to the proponent for the purpose of extending power service via an underground distribution powerline to include the installation, utilization, and maintenance of the buried power infrastructure. No impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution are anticipated.

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.

Machinery and vehicles operating in the proposed easement area during installation will cause temporary impacts due to the resulting dust and exhaust, 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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain the buried power line. Minor 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 will be minimally impacted by this easement due to the relatively small area disturbed for the buried powerline which includes a public roadway. The proposed easement is 30' wide for future maintenance and repairs. Short-term impacts to vegetation cover, quantity and quality are expected in this easement corridor during installation. The disturbed area will be reclaimed and reseeded. The Montana Natural Heritage Map view classifies the project site as Rocky Mountain Lower Montane, Foothill, and Valley Grassland combined with Recently Burned Shrubland and Montane Sagebrush Steppe.

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 will 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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. 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.

No cumulative effect to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic life are anticipated from this proposed easement. The construction phase would be short duration, and the infrastructure will be underground along a publicly used roadway. FWP was contacted for comment; no comments or concerns were received.

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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain buried powerlines. Minimal 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 having habitat polygons occurring in the proposed project location include Grizzly Bear, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Western Pearlshell, Cassin's Finch, Little Brown Myotis, Northern Hoary Bat, Long-billed Curlew, Lewis' Woodpecker.

The proposed line is extending power service, and it would be installed below ground along a public roadway. Construction is anticipated to persist for a short duration. The area is rural with extensive public use with very limited or unlikely occurrences as the area is not considered critical habitat.

No 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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain buried a powerline. Minimal 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, but it should be noted that Class III level inventory work has not been conducted there to date.

Because of the extensive past ground disturbance in the APE, proposed developments 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 easement is in a rural area of Madison County seven miles northeast of Norris, MT. The proposed line would be placed underground, and areas of disturbance would be reseeded. This project area on State Trust Land is a smaller segment of a larger project area. Other utilities are in the immediate vicinity of the proposed easement. The construction phase will be short-term, and the area will be revegetated resulting in temporary, minor impacts to aesthetics.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to aesthetics would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain buried natural gas lines. Short-term impacts during installation and reclamation are expected, but no long-term impacts to aesthetics 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 cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project.

No cumulative effects to environmental resources will result from 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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. No impacts to demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are anticipated.

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 this proposed easement.

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.

No health or safety risks are anticipated by the proposed easement. Expected utility, work-related risk associated with the proposed easement would occur during the installation phase. Locating any other underground utilities would be the responsibility of the contractor to avoid these utilities during installation.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to human health and safety would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. Potential impacts to human health and safety are not expected to occur.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

As proposed, this easement is designed to extend power services to the community.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. Minimal impacts to industrial, commercial and agriculture activities and production are anticipated.

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.

Quantity and distribution of employment is not expected to change as a result of this proposed project.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to quantity and distribution of employment would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.

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 is anticipated as a result of this proposed easement.

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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. 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 is expected as a result of this proposed easement.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to demand for government services would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. 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 impacted by this proposed easement.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. No impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals 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 cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Recreational activity by the public is common in the project area; these activities include fishing, hunting, hiking, etc. This proposed easement could cause temporary delays to recreationalist traveling to recreational areas along N. Beartrap Canyon Road. During the construction phase, game animals may be temporarily displaced.

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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. Temporary, minimal impacts to access, 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.

Power service provided by the utility company will be extended. No impacts to density and distribution of population and housing are anticipated.

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): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. No impacts to density and distribution of population and housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No change in social structures and mores is expected as a result of this proposed easement.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to social structures and mores would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain a buried powerline. No impacts to social structures and mores are anticipated.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed easement has no anticipated impacts to the unique quality of the area.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Recommend approval of the proposed easement to install, utilize and

maintain a buried powerline. Minimal impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity are anticipated 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 easement on this State Trust Land would generate **\$14,685.00** in revenue for the Common Schools Trust.

2.67 acres (Easement area) x \$5,500/acre = \$14,685.00 (2S 1E 36 Common Schools)

This proposed easement would enable the proponent to extend power service to additional customers by installing, utilizing, and maintaining the proposed distribution powerline.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne	Date: 9/24/2025
	Title: Trust Land Program Manager- Central Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Two Alternatives presented and fully analyzed in the EAC.

Alternative A: No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Recommend approval of the Montana Board of Land Commissioners to grant an easement to the proponent for the purpose of extending distribution power service infrastructure to include the installation, utilization, and maintenance of a buried powerline.

On behalf of the DNRC, I have selected Alternative B: Action Alternative.

- The Action Alternative will benefit the surrounding community with new infrastructure and provide reliable utilities to homeowners.
- The lands involved in the project are held by the State of Montana in trust for the support of specific beneficiary institutions. This project is consistent with MCA 77-1-601 and MCA 77-1-202.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After Reviewing the two Alternatives, I find that the Action Alternative will have no significant adverse impacts on the Physical Environment or the Human Population.

Direct impacts have short duration. These impacts have been analyzed, and mitigations have been developed to reduce or prevent undesirable effects or impacts.

No secondary or cumulative impacts have been identified.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EI

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

**EA Checklist
Approved By:**

Name:

Title:

Michaela Kalinowski – Acting Bozeman Unit Manager

Signature:

Michaela Kalinowski

Date:

10/15/2025

Exhibit A: Vicinity Map

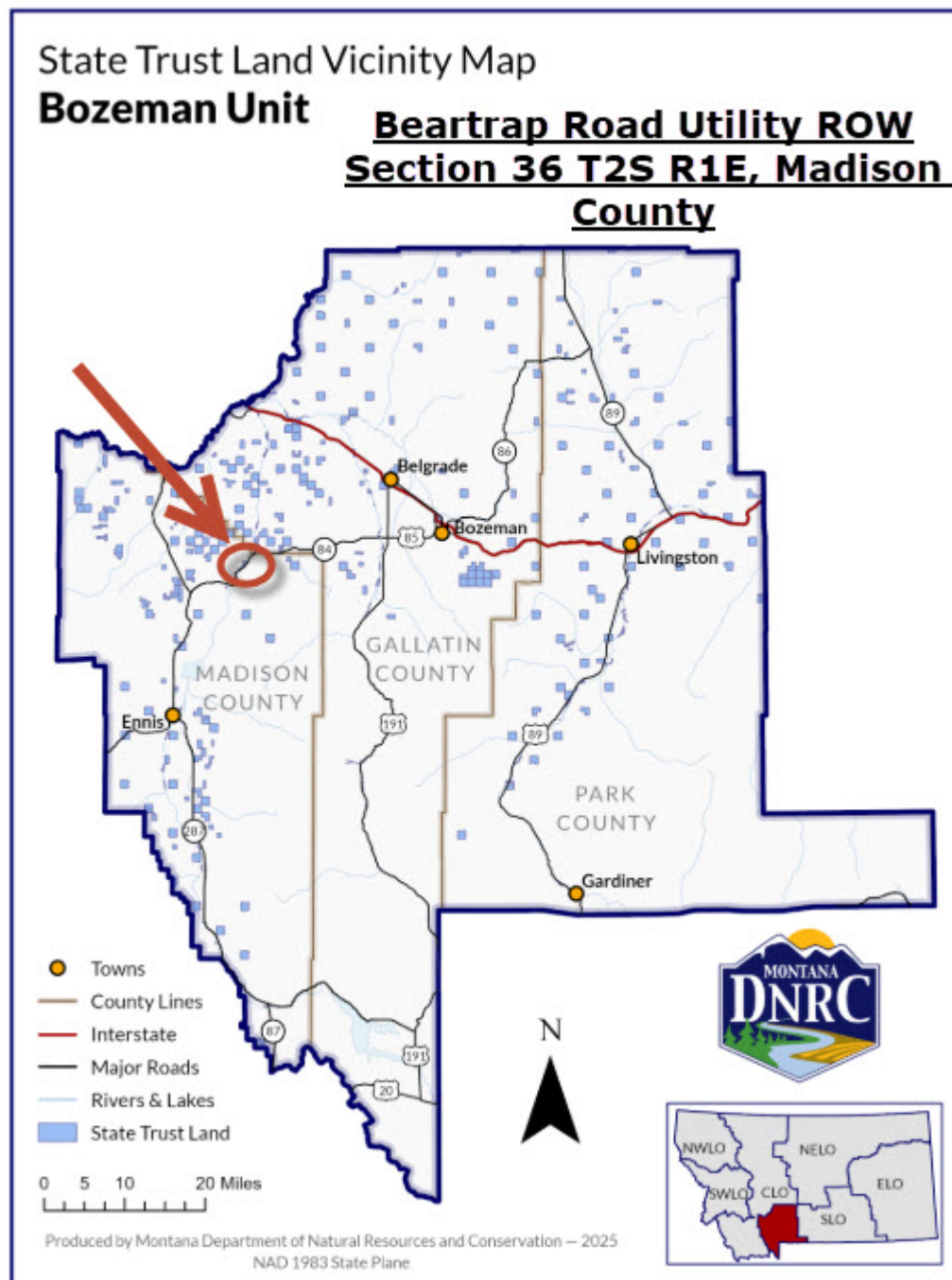


Exhibit B: Easement Location

Proposed Easement indicated by the solid red line along Beartrap Canyon Road.

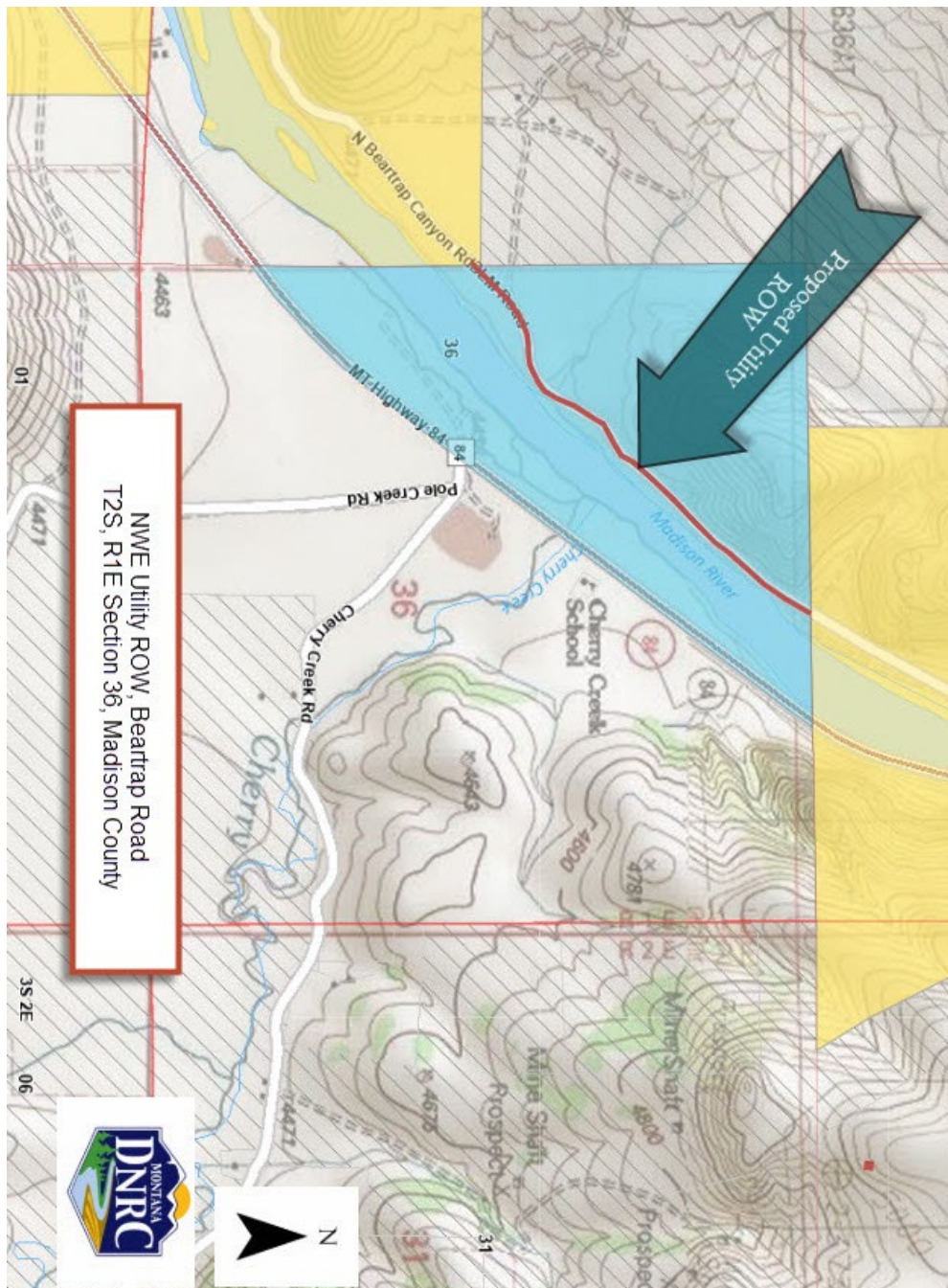


Exhibit C: Survey Exhibit

