CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	3 Rivers Communication Fiber Optic Cable Installation
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring/Summer 2027
Proponent:	3 Rivers Telephone Coop, Inc. PO Box 429, Fairfield, MT 59436
Location:	T25N, R8W, Sec 11, SE4NW4 and SW4SE4
County:	Teton
Trust:	Capitol/Public Buildings

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

3 Rivers Communications proposes to install a buried fiber optic telecommunications cable located on state land, referred to herein as the "Project". The proposed easement route is located parallel to Black Leaf Cut across Road in the SE4NW4 and SW4SE4 of Section 11, T25N, R8W. The proposed easement will affect a total of 1.2736 acres and will be 10' wide. See **Exhibit A**, Easement Survey Map, and **Exhibit B**, Project Location Map. Installation of the fiber optic cable will provide access to high-speed internet for rural Montana residents.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The proponent is 3 Rivers Telephone Coop, Inc.
The proposed Project is on state land, owned by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The surface lessee of Section 11 T25N, 8W, SE4NW4 and SW4SE4 (Lease #6727) is Diamond B Ranch Properties LLC.

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

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this Project. The Project will be permitted under a Right-Of-Way Easement for Utilities Over, Under, Along, or Across State-Owned Lands.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny the proponent the requested easement and permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant the proponent the requested easement and permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

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.

Soil Properties:

There are three soil types that were found within the Project area.

(121B) Kiev-Judith Gravelly Loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes

These soils are a mixture of loamy and shallow soils that are more than 80 inches deep to restrictive features. These soils are found within stream terraces. The available water supply, 0 to 60 inches, is high at approximately 10 inches. The mean annual precipitation for the region is 15 to 19 inches. (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area; Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties, Montana, 2026).

(284D) Kiev-Roundor Gravelly Loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes

These soils are a mixture of loamy and shallow soils that are more than 80 inches deep to restrictive features. These soils are found within hill landforms. The available water supply, 0 to 60 inches, is high at approximately 10 inches. The mean annual precipitation for the region is 15 to 19 inches. (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area; Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties, Montana, 2026).

(184D) Kiev-Roundor Loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes

These soils are a mixture of loamy and shallow soils that are more than 80 inches deep to restrictive features. These soils are found within hill landforms. The available water supply, 0 to 60 inches, is high at approximately 10.2 inches. The mean annual precipitation for the region is 15 to 19 inches. (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area; Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties, Montana, 2026).

Soil Stability:

K – Factor:

Soils identified within the Project area have a Soil Erodibility (K) Factor of 0.10 to 0.20, see **Table 1** below for additional information. (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area; Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties, Montana, 2026). The K Factor range is 0.02 to 0.69 (0.69 being the most susceptible to sheet and rill erosion by water.) The K Factor is low for the Project area which indicates a low susceptibility to erosion by water.

Table 1 – K – Factor Rating by Soil Type

	Soil	Rating
121B	Kiev-Judith Gravelly Loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	0.10
284D	Kiev-Roundor Gravelly Loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes	0.10
184D	Kiev-Roundor Loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes	0.20

Soils identified within the Project area have a Wind Erodibility Group (WEG) of 6 to 7, see **Table 2** below for additional information (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area; Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties, Montana, 2026). The WEG range is 1 to 8 (1 being the most susceptible to wind erosion and 8 being the least susceptible). The WEG is low for the Project area which indicates a low susceptibility to erosion by wind.

Table 2 – WEG Rating by Soil Type

	Soil	Rating
121B	Kiev-Judith Gravelly Loams, 0 to 4 percent slopes	7
284D	Kiev-Roundor Gravelly Loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes	7
184D	Kiev-Roundor Loams, 2 to 15 percent slopes	6

**Tie–break Rule: Lower*

Suitability and Limitations for Use:

Shallow Excavations:

Soils identified within the Project area were identified as "somewhat limited" (121B, 184D, and 284D). (Soil Survey of Choteau-Conrad Area; Parts of Teton and Pondera Counties, Montana, 2026). "Somewhat limited" indicates that the soil has features that are moderately favorable for the specified use. The limitations can be overcome or minimized by special planning, design, or installation. Fair performance and moderate maintenance can be expected (NRCS, 2026). The proposed action has the potential to impact soils, however, given its low susceptibility to erosion, and suitability for shallow excavations, the Project is not expected to have a negative effect on the soil.

BMPs:

Buried placement of the fiber optic cable will be by trenching and/or horizontal directional drilling of a vacant duct(s) within the existing Black Leaf Cut across Road right-of-way (ROW). The process involves the placement of the duct to a depth of 36" to 42" through a temporary surface opening of approximately 6" in width. This opening is closed and repaired immediately behind the plow following insertion of the duct. All construction will be completed via Rural Utilities Service (RUS) procedures and utilizing RUS plans and specifications. As part of the stipulations under the granted easement, the DNRC will require 3 Rivers Telephone Coop, Inc. to re-seed the disturbed area with a seed mixture approved by the DNRC, Conrad Unit Office.

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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.

Clark Fork Muddy Creek is located North of the Project area, and flows south into Frenchy Creek, which flows west through Section 11 T25N, R8W. There are four "Statement of Claim" water rights associated with Section 11 T25N, R8W, however, the rights are not on state tract #6727. The proposed action will have no effect on water quality on state tract #6727. For additional information see http://wrqs.dnrc.mt.gov/default.aspx.

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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.

Air Quality:

There are no Nonattainment areas located on or near the Project, according to Montana Air Quality Non-Attainment Areas | Discover DEQ's Data. The proposed action will not affect air quality.

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.

Vegetative Community:
Vegetation around the Project area consists of native rangeland and was evaluated by a Land Use Specialist (LUS) in 2023. The predominant vegetation included Rough Fescue (*Festuca campestris*), Bluebunch Wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), Idaho Fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), Threadleaf Sedge (*Carex filifolia*) and Prairie Junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*). The proposed action is limited to the Black Leaf Cut across Road ROW, with no expected negative cumulative effects to Rangeland. Noxious weeds were not identified within the Project area. The Natural Heritage Program database did not indicate any plant species of concern within Township 25N Range 8W. The proposed action will result in a temporary disturbance to the vegetative community, but the proposed BMPs below will mitigate any long-term negative cumulative effects. Therefore, the proposed action is not expected to have negative cumulative effects on the vegetation.

BMPs:
As part of the stipulations under the granted easement, the DNRC will require 3 Rivers Telephone Coop, Inc. to replace topsoil, re-seed with a native seed mix, and monitor for noxious weeds. The recommended re-seeding mix shall consist of 30% Slender Wheatgrass (*Elymus trachycaulus*), 30% Idaho Fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), 10% Western Wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), 10% Bluebunch Wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), 10% Green Needlegrass (*Nassella viridula*), and 5% Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*). The mix shall be Certified Noxious Weed Seed Free, drilled at a seeding rate of 8 lbs/acre Pure Live Seed (PLS), if broadcast seeding, poundage shall be doubled and harrowed, and seeding shall occur either in the fall (after September 15) or early spring (before May 1).

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.

The project area is not considered critical habitat, according to the EPA. However, this state tract provides habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, and badger), upland game birds (sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), and other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds. The proposed has the potential to slightly impact wildlife temporarily during the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or travel corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. The proposed action is not expected to have long-term negative cumulative effects.

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.

Species of Concern/Threatened/Endangered:
Federally listed species that occur in Teton County, Montana include Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), Red Knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), and Wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*). The National Heritage Program database identifies Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos horriblis*) and Wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) as mammal species of concern within Township 25N, Range 8W. The National Heritage Program database also identifies Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*), Great Blue

Heron (*Ardea Herodias*), Long Billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*), and Thick-Billed Longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) as bird species of concern within Township 25N, Range 8W. There will be a temporary disruption in habitat during the installation of the fiber optic cable, which is not expected to have long-term negative cumulative effects on species of concern/threatened/endangered.

Wetlands:
The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) does not identify the Project area within the state tract #6727 as a wetland. However, within Section 11 T25N, R8W, wetlands are classified as freshwater emergent wetland habitat (PEM1A), freshwater/shrub wetland habitat (PSSA), freshwater pond habitat (PUSCh), and riverine habitat (R4SBC) on private land. The proposed action will have no negative effects on wetland systems in state tract #6727. For more information go to https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/Mapper.html.

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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 the topographic setting and geology suggest a low to moderate likelihood of the presence of cultural or palaeontologic resources, proposed telecommunications installation activities are expected to have *No Effect* on *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.

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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 Project area is located parallel to Black Leaf Cut across Road, which is approximately 20 miles from Choteau, Montana. The proposed action will impact those who utilize Black Leaf Cut across Road, but only for a short duration until the project is complete. The fiber optic cable will be buried, so there will be no visual change. This proposed action will have no negative cumulative effects on aesthetics.

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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 on environmental resources.

The proposed action does not propose the utilization of limited resources. There will be no effect on environmental resources.

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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.

There are no other plans or projects being considered on this tract. The surrounding land is privately owned rangeland. Any future development in the area will likely be restricted to utility or mineral development, with minimal impacts to the surface. Future development of projects are not expected to have negative cumulative effects.

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.

The proposed action will have no effect on human health and safety. This Project is limited to 3 Rivers Telephone Coop Inc. personnel, where the health and safety risks fall under their day-to-day operations.

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15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Land Use:
The current land use on state lease #6727, where the fiber optic cable will be installed consists of 120 acres of grazing land. The Project will be parallel to Black Leaf Cut across Road and is expected to be contained with the ROW. The proposed action will benefit the Capitol/Public Buildings Trust due to the easement application fee of $50.00 and appraised easement fee of $1,528.32. The Project will not have any negative effects on the industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities and production.

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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 action will not create nor eliminate any jobs, as the Project will be completed by the proponent itself. There will be no effect on the employment market.

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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.

The proposed action is expected to increase the tax revenue via easement fees, therefore having a beneficial effect on the Capitol/Public Buildings Trust.

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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

The Project is of small scale and being funded by 3 Rivers Telephone Coop Inc. There will be no excessive stress placed on existing infrastructure of the area. Additional government services (fire protection, police, schools) are not required for underground fiber optic cable installation and maintenance. There will be no effect on traffic. Overall, there will be no negative cumulative effects on government services.

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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.

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. The Project will be granted under an easement issued by the DNRC. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

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.

The Project is located on legally accessible land via Black Leaf Cut across Road. The proposed action is not expected to negatively affect recreational and wilderness activities.

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

The proposed action does not require changes to housing or developments. There will be no negative effects on population and housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

The Project is located approximately 3.47 miles southwest of the Miller Hutterite Colony. The fiber optic cable will be buried, therefore that does not conflict with or disrupt established surface land uses. There will be no negative effects on native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

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

The proposed action will not affect the unique quality of the area.

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 Project will benefit the Capitol/Public Buildings Trust in terms of an application fee of $50.00 and the appraised easement fee of $1,528.32. The Project will not impede upon the existing production of State Lease #6727. Any future development in the area will likely be restricted to utility or mineral development, with minimal impacts to the surface. Future development of projects is not expected to have negative cumulative effects. The proposed action will benefit the rural residents of northwestern Teton County.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Samantha Johnson	**Date:** 10/20/2026
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDINGS

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant 3 Rivers Telephone Coop Inc. the requested easement and permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are expected. A temporary disturbance will occur due to installation of the fiber optic cable, but it has been determined the effects will not be cumulative or significantly adverse. Granting the easement for installation of the underground fiber optic cable will benefit rural residents in northwestern Teton County.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

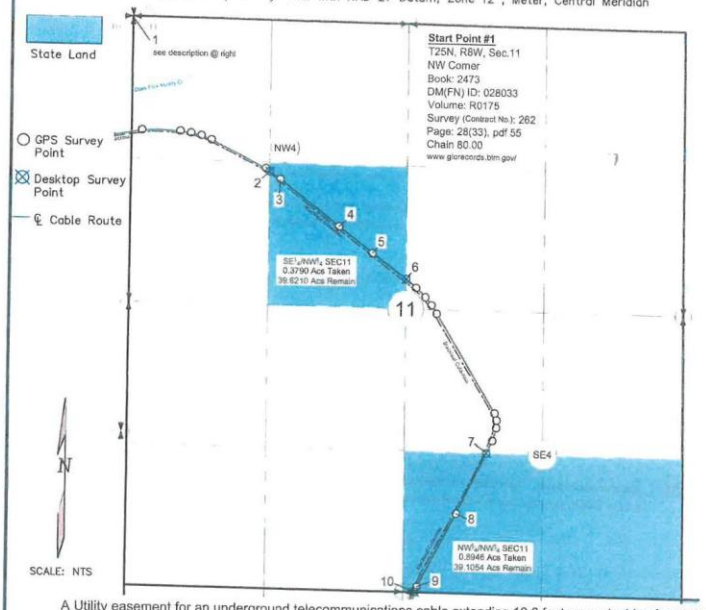
☐	EIS	☐	More Detailed EA	X	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Erik Eneboe **Title:** Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC	
Signature:		**Date**: Oct 22, 2026

Exhibit A
Easement Survey Map

EASEMENT SURVEY - EXHIBIT "A"

NOTE: All bearings and distances on section are taken from:
field GPS survey data corrected in system: WGS84 (Molodensky Approximation).
and Desktop survey: UTM with NAD 27 Datum, Zone 12 , Meter, Central Meridian



A Utility easement for an underground telecommunications cable extending 10.0 feet on each side of a centerline all within land owned by the STATE OF MONTANA located in SECTION 16 - T22N, R5W, P.M. MT, Teton County, Montana, more fully described as follows:

LINE TABLE
T25N R8W sec11

*-Denotes State Land effected by easement

COURSE			METERS	BEARING	FT.	TRENCH WIDTH	AREA	ACRES	
1	-	2	591.0500	S 42d40'17" E	1939.1168	-	-	-	Start Survey NW corner of sec11
* 2	-	3	38.9400	S 54d48'20" E	127.7544	10	1277.54352	0.0293	
* 3	-	4	216.6600	S 52d36'58" E	710.8837	10	7108.83744	0.1632	
* 4	-	5	123.7800	S 53d8'21" E	406.0974	10	4060.97424	0.0932	
* 5	-	6	123.7800	S 53d8'21" E	406.0974	10	4060.97424	0.0932	
								0.3790	Acres Taken SE¼NW¼ sec11
6	-	1	1089.7500	N 47d26'24" W	3575.2518	-	-	-	Close Survey NW corner of sec11
1	-	7	1613.6100	S 40d17'32" E	5293.9317	-	-	-	Start Survey NW corner of sec11
* 7	-	8	196.0500	S 26d1'6" W	643.2008	10	6432.0084	0.1477	
* 8	-	9	241.0000	S 27d50'44" W	790.6728	10	7906.728	0.1815	
* 9	-	10	16.0100	S 18d41'24" W	52.5256	10	525.25608	0.0121	
								0.8946	Acres Taken SW¼NW¼ sec11
10	-	1	1838.2700	N 27d11'1" W	8030.9962	-	-	-	Close Survey NW corner of sec11
			SE4/NW4 Sec11-	Acs. Taken	0.3790	SW4/SE4 Sec11-	Acs. Taken	0.8946	
				Acr. Remaining	39.6210		Acr. Remaining	39.1054	

SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

QUADRANGLE MAP	Twin Lakes 47112h5 - 1995 7.5 MINUTE SERIES
CONTROL	USGS, and USC&GS / mt.gov and NRIS(Montana GIS Portal)
PROJECTION	NAD 27, ZONE 12
METHOD	(GPS) GARMIN Montana 650 3 meter Accuracy

Aaron Barnett
Engineering Supervisor

Widener New Service		
W/O # : 46626002	Date: 08/2026	

3 RIVERS COMMUNICATIONS
202 5th Street S.
P.O. Box 429
FAIRFIELD, MONTANA

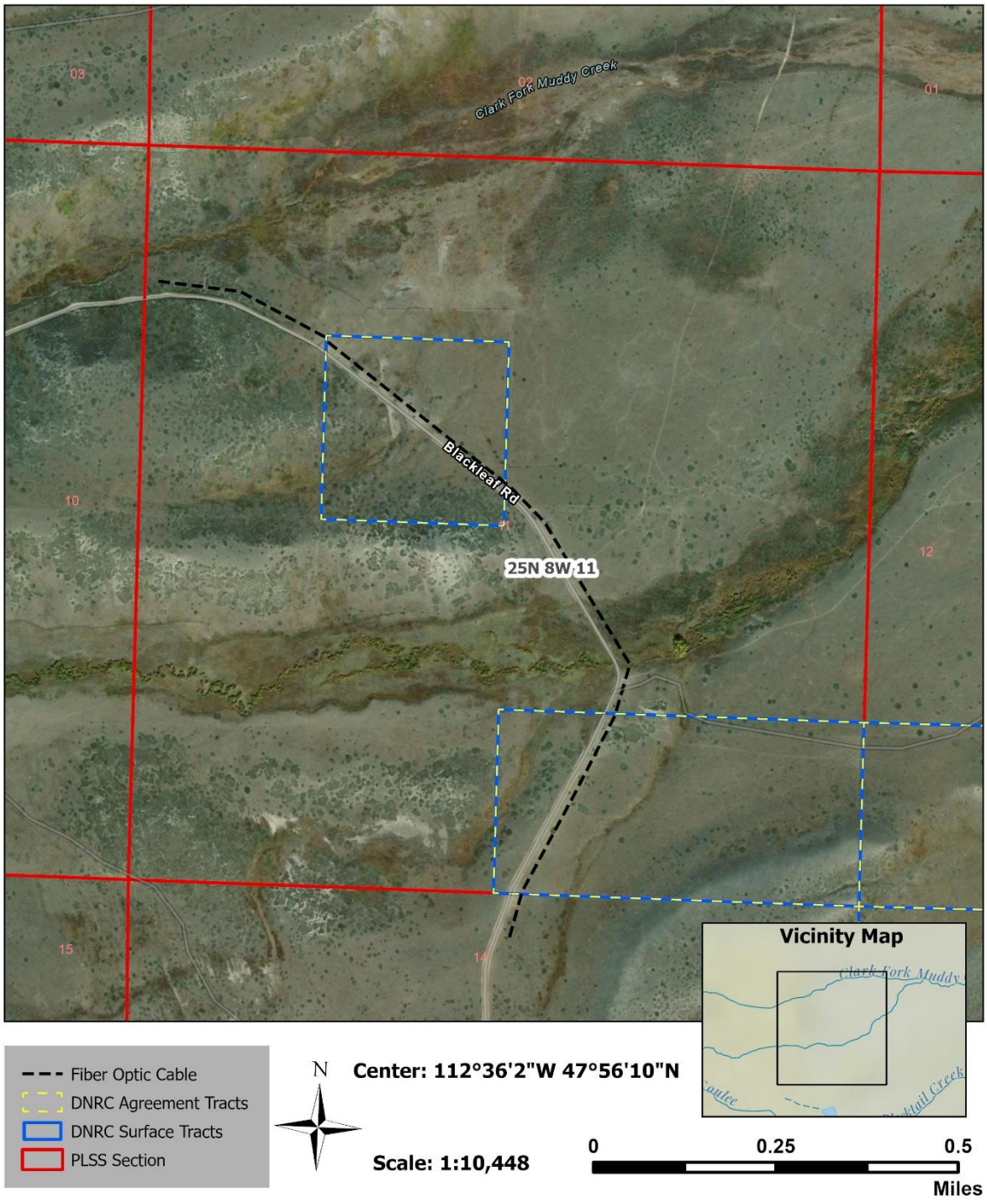
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Exhibit B
Project Location Map

The Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

3 Rivers Telephone Coop, Inc.
Fiber Optic Cable Installation
Exhibit B - Project Location



End of Documentation