ACHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Communications
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2026
Proponent:	Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc)
Location:	E ½ SW, SW ¼, SE ¼ of Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 23 East (Common Schools Trust) ±1.36 Acres
County:	Yellowstone County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent, Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.), is applying to extend a fiber optic telecommunications line located on the E ½ SW, SW ¼, SE ¼ of Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 23 East in Yellowstone County. The route will be placed along an existing MDT right of way. The easement will allow the proponent to offer state-of-the-art telecommunications toll and distribution facilities, as well as future growth capabilities for the community.

The easement will encumber at total of ±1.36 acres of State Trust Land.

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.

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. The proponent has obtained a Settlement of Damages form from the grazing lessee.

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.

The proponent will secure all necessary permits prior to construction.

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.

Proposed Alternative: Issue the 20' wide easement to Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.) for the installation of fiber optic cable across E ½ SW, SW ¼, SE ¼ of Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 23 East in Yellowstone County.

No Action Alternative: Deny the 20' wide easement to Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.) for the installation of fiber optic cable across E ½ SW, SW ¼, SE ¼ of Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 23 East in Yellowstone County.

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 route generally runs parallel to an existing MDT right of way. The land area is categorically considered Great Plains Mixedgrass Prairies and according to the NRCS Soil Survey, the area consists of a clay loam soil type with small portions of silty loam across the general easement area. The fiber optic cable is proposed to be installed using the direct plow method that entails opening the ground with a plow blade pulled behind a tracked cable plow. This method creates a narrow opening in the soil, inserts the cable, covers that cable and smooths the disturbed soil in a single pass. This installation method is considered trenchless. Based on the proposed action and relatively short disturbance time for cable installation, no significant adverse impacts to geology and soils are expected by implementing the proposed action.

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 proposed easement corridor does not cross any stream beds. No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are anticipated by implementing the proposed action.

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.

There may be short-term isolated impacts from the equipment exhaust that is used to install the fiber optic cable. No significant adverse impacts to air quality are expected by implementing the proposed action.

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.

The land classification is considered Great Plains Mixed grass Prairies. Grasses typically comprise the greatest canopy cover with Western Wheatgrass being the dominant species. The cable is proposed to be installed using direct plow method that entails opening the ground with a plow blade pulled behind a tracked cable plow. This method creates a narrow opening in the soil, inserts the cable, covers that cable and smooths the disturbed soil in a single pass. This installation method is considered trenchless. The area disturbed by the trenching activity and from vehicle travel could have short term impacts on vegetation.

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.

A variety of big game (antelope, deer, elk, and mountain lions), small mammals, raptors, and songbirds may traverse the subject section. The proposed project activities could temporarily disrupt wildlife movement and patterns during construction. The proposed alternative generally follows an existing MDT right of way. Due to the relatively short project duration and nature, no significant adverse impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following species of concern in the proposed sections:

- **B – Loggerhead Shrike** (Lanius Ludovicianus) , **Long-Billed Curlew** (Numenius americanus), **Black-necked Stilt** (Himantopus mexicanus) , **Burrowing Owl** (Athene cunicularia), **Ferruginous Hawk** (Buteo regalis), **Thick-billed Longspur** (Rhynchophanes mccownii), **Bobolink** (Dolichonyx oryzivorus), **Chestnut-collared Longspur** (Calcarius ornatus), **Veery** (Catharus fuscescens), **Bald Eagle** (Haliaeetus leucocuphalus)
- **R – Greater Short-horned Lizard** (Phrynosoma hernandesi)
- **M – Black-Tailed prairie Dog** (Cynomys ludovicianus)
- **V – Senecio integerrimus var. scribneri** (Scribner's Ragwort)

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the installation of underground fiber optic cable, following an existing MDT right of way, is not expected to have a significant long-term effect on any of the species identified on or around this parcel.

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 revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. 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.

The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. Formal reports of findings are available through the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

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.

The proposed alternative would result in the installation of underground fiber optic cable along an existing MDT right of way. Once the easement areas are rehabbed from the installation disturbance, the only indication that

there is an underground fiber optic line would be from any above-ground warning markers. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to aesthetics is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

No significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 known studies or future actions planned for this Trust land parcel.

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 significant adverse impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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

The location of the easement does not traverse any crop lands. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

The proposed action will have no significant adverse impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

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.

The proposed action will have no adverse impact on tax revenue.

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

The implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate any additional demands on governmental services.

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.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans.

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.

The subject parcel has legal public access via a MDT road. The project consists of installing a fiber optic line along an existing MDT right of way. In addition, the project will only last a short duration. The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to have a long-term adverse impact on recreational use of the Trust land parcel.

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.

No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

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

The proposed alternative will not have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

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.

The Common Schools Trust Permanent Fund will benefit by getting a one-time fee of $950.00 from Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.) for the easement on this Trust parcel.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Michelle Yeager	Date: 10/14/2025
	Title: AREA PLANNER, SOUTHERN LAND OFFICE	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected, and it is recommended that an easement be granted to allow Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.) to install a new fiberoptic line for the purpose of installing a fiber optic cable on E ½ SW, SW ¼, SE ¼ of Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 23 East in Yellowstone County.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action which would entail the issuing of an easement and installation of underground fiber optic cable. The installation and disturbance are expected to be completed in a short timeframe. The easement corridor generally parallels an existing MDT right of way. There are no natural features that could produce adverse impacts or species of concern occupying the parcel that is expected to be impacted by implementing the proposed action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Joe Holzwarth	
	Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office	
Signature:		Date: 10/20/25