CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	**Austin Rd Utility ROW Application**
Proposed Implementation Date:	**Summer 2025**
Proponent:	**Spectrum Charter**
Location:	**T11N 5W Sec. 36**
County:	**Lewis and Clark**

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Ledcor, contracted by Charter Spectrum, has submitted an easement application for a buried fiber optic line on State Trust Land located in T11N R5W Section 16. The route selected for the buried primary power line were the shortest distance to serve the surrounding area and existing networks. See attached map in exhibit A for proposed easement route and location.

Exhibits:

- Exhibit A: Vicinity Map
- Exhibit B: Aerial Photo 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, Mathew Neuman-Notice of Settlement of Damages sent by the proponent.
- Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie
- Montana Natural Heritage Program
- Lewis and Clark County Road Department

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

Alternative B: Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to installing 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.

The following information was derived from Web Soil Survey for this section. The proposed easement would be mainly located on "Hauz-Sieben-Tolman channery loams, 8 to 45 percent slopes" soil type. This soil type has a "poorly suited" reclamation suitability rating. This is mainly due to the shallow soils, low moisture retention, and susceptibility to erosion. The proposed easement location is 36"- 42" below ground and will be place close to the existing road surface and within the disturbance prism. A vibratory plow and horizontal directional drill will be used to install conduit. Restorative work will be completed as the project progresses to return the landscape to its previous state.

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

Alternative B (Proposed Action): Action Alternative: 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.

No surface water was found in the proposed easement area. Due to the small footprint of the proposed infrastructure, minimal impacts to water quality, quantity, and distribution are expected.

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 proposed easement to install, utilize and maintain buried natural gas lines. 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.

Minimal short-term dust from the machinery and vehicles traveling the proposed easement areas during installation is anticipated, 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): Minimal 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 lack of vegetation within the proposed easement corridor.

DNRC staff completed a site visit to this section in July 2025. Observations at this time reported that there were limited amount of vegetation with the proposed limited easement corridor as it is located right next to the existing county road.

Alternative A (No Action): No work would occur. No direct impacts to vegetation cover, quantity, and quality would occur.

Alternative B (Proposed Action): 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. 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): 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, Evening Grosbeak, and the Veery.

The proposed easement is a necessary utility, and it would be installed below ground. Construction is anticipated to persist for a short duration. The area is semi-residential 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): 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, and a Class III level inventory of the APE was inventoried for the Sprint telecommunications cable in 1988.

Because the topographic setting and geology suggest a low to moderate likelihood of the presence of cultural or paleontologic resources, proposed telecommunications 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.

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 semi-rural/residential area of Lewis and Clark County northwest of Helena, MT. The proposed lines would be placed underground, and areas of disturbance would be restored. Other utilities are in the immediate vicinity of the proposed easement.

During the construction phase minor impacts to aesthetics are expected. The duration of the project is estimated to take 15 days to complete.

No anticipated long-term impacts to aesthetics.

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

Alternative B (Proposed Action): 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): 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 posed 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): 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 allow access to the buried lines for maintenance and repair purposes into the future.

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): 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): 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): 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): 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): 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.

This proposed easement will not negatively alter recreational activities in the area.

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): No impacts to access to and 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.

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): 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 are 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): 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): 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 these tracts of State Trust Lands would generate **$2,142.00** in revenue for the Common Schools Trust.

1.19 acres (Easement area) x $1,800/acre = $2,142.00 for (11N 5W 36 Common Schools)

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Adam Blythe	**Date:**	08/04/2025
	Title:	Unit Manager		

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: Allow the proponent to installing buried fiber optic cable.

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:

	EI		More Detailed EA	X	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Hoyt Richards
	Title:	CLO Area Manager 8/6/2025
Signature:		**Date:**

Exhibit A: Vicinity Map

11N 5W Sec. 36

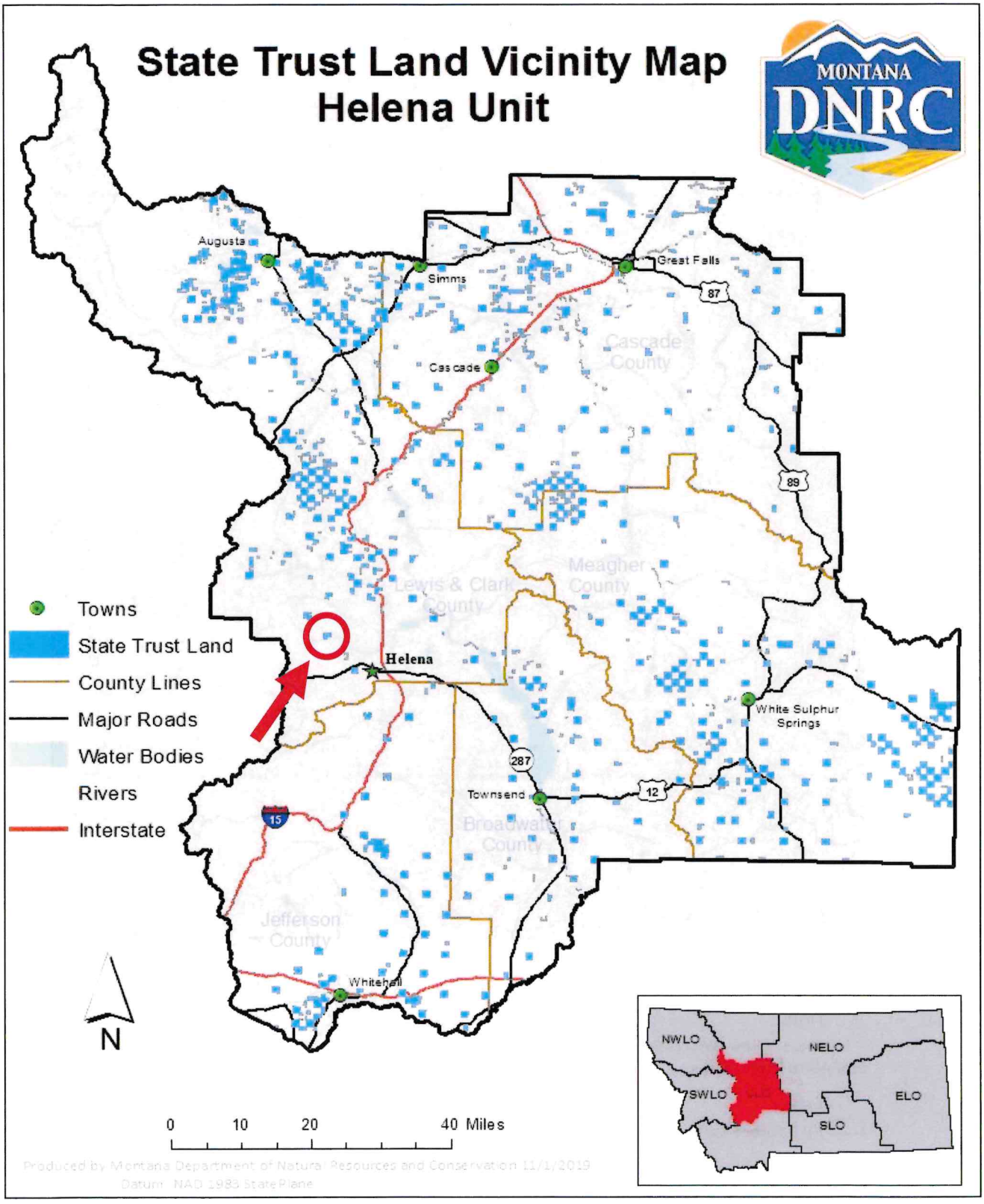
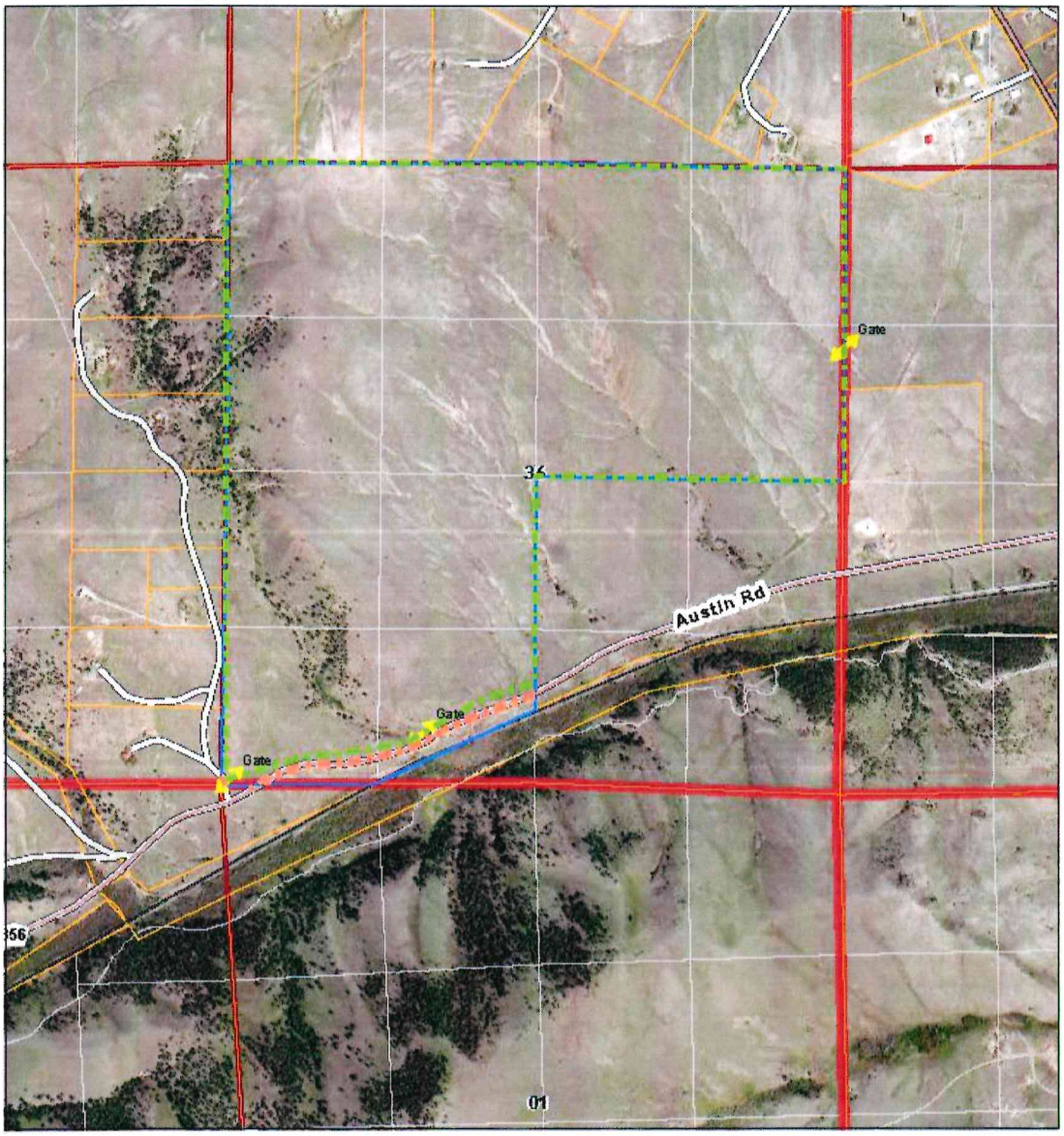


Exhibit B: Aerial Photo Easement Location

Proposed Easement show as the dashed orange line along Austin Rd.

T11N, R5W, Sec. 36_ Spectrum/Charter Fiber Easement Proposed



8/4/2025

EDIT FTLD Lines

Fence

Phone or Fiber Optics cable

EDIT AGMB Point Features

Gate

FTLD Surface Tracts

World Imagery

Low Resolution 15m Imagery

High Resolution 60cm Imagery

High Resolution 30cm Imagery

Citations

4.8m Resolution Metadata

1:21,112

0 0.13 0.25 0.5 mi

0 0.17 0.35 0.7 km

Lewis & Clark County, Maxar

Exhibit C: Survey Exhibit

11N 5W Sec. 36