CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Telephone Rudyard Exchange Improvement
Proposed Implementation Date:	May- August 2026
Proponent:	Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc.
Location:	S2SE4- Sec. 22, S2S2- Sec. 36, T30N R09E
County:	Hill
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. (TTCA, Inc.) is proposing to extend fiber optic telecommunication cable to their Rudyard exchange facility. The most direct route includes crossing School Trust Land, located at S2SE4- Sec. 22 and S2S2 - Sec. 36, T30N R09E. TTCA Inc. has requested two 20-foot-wide easements which will run 2633.28 feet in section 22 and 5280.8 feet in section 36. The project will encompass a total of 3.62 acres of School 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.

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Northeastern Land Office (NELO) & Lewistown Unit Office
Proponent: Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc.
Surface Lessees: Dandi Acres, RD&B Farms INC
Other: Patrick Rennie (DNRC Archaeologist),

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

The DNRC, and NELO have jurisdiction over this proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for acquiring all necessary permits for the proposed project and settling all surface damages with the surface lessees.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant TTCA, Inc. the requested Right of Way Easement.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does grant TTCA, Inc. the requested Right of Way Easement across S2SE4- Sec. 22, S2S2- Sec. 36, T30N R09E for installation of buried fiber optic communication 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.

All soil types in the project area are rated as somewhat limited for shallow excavations, due to instability when trenched into and being dusty. This should not be an issue because a trenchless installation method will be used. This method involves using the ripper on the back of a bulldozer that drops the cable and conduit in as it goes, thus negating the possible negative impacts associated with the soil characteristics.

The most limiting soil characteristic in the project area is rutting hazard. Soils are rated as severe to moderate for rutting hazards, when exposed to equipment operation. To mitigate this hazard, operations will be restricted to dry periods when the soil is most stable.

All soils in section 22 and 36 are rated as slight for erosion hazard. Since all projects are occurring in previously disturbed areas with established erosion control vegetation, the minimal ground disturbance caused by the trenchless installation method will limit possible erosion issues.

All applicable soil ratings can be seen in Appendix A. No significant cumulative impacts to geology or soil quality, stability, and moisture are anticipated.

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 significant impacts to local or regional water resources 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.

No significant impacts to air quality are anticipated.

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.

All easements are located within the current road ROWs that are already dominated by introduced species such as smooth brome and crested wheatgrass. Since the method of installing is a trenchless there will be very little soil disturbance allowing the introduced grasses to quickly revegetate.

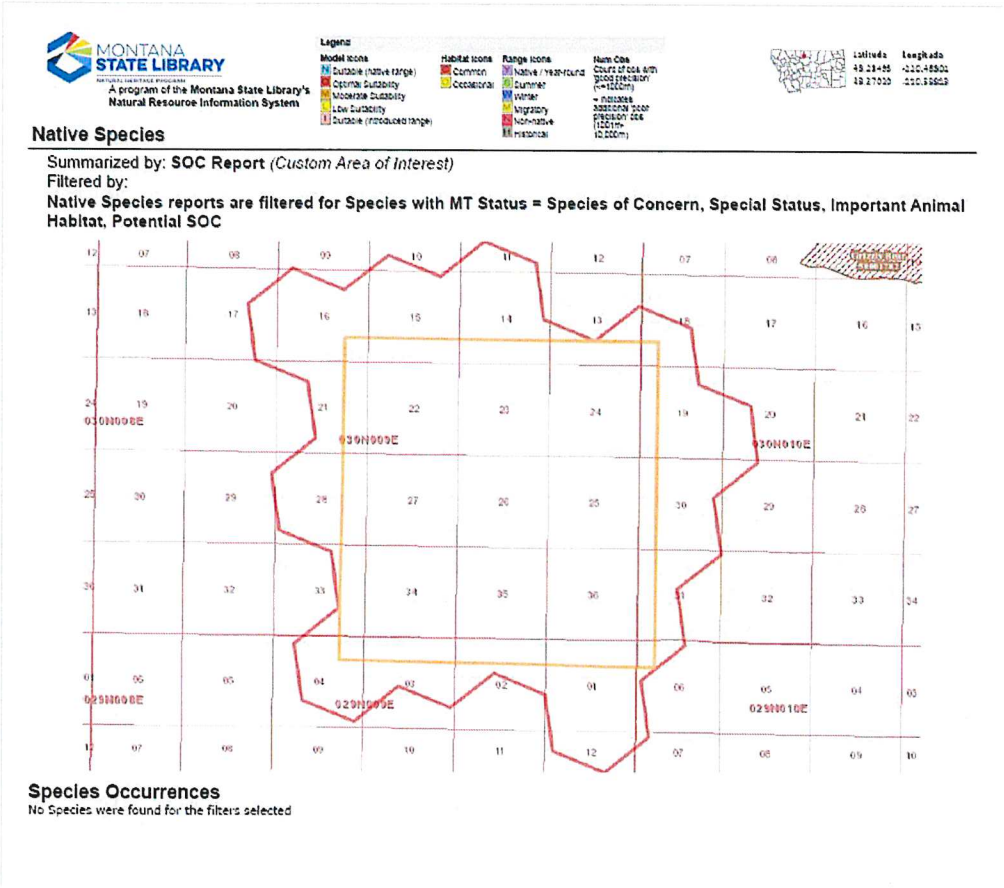
If re-seeding is necessary the proponent will acquire certified, weed free seed and refer to the Plant Materials Tech Note No. MT-46 (Rev. 4) dated September 2013 for seeding rates. See Appendix B for additional seeding details.

No rare plants or cover types are present. No significant impacts to vegetation are anticipated.

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 significant impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic habitats are anticipated.

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.



All easement areas are adjacent to existing disturbances with frequent human use, mostly roads, as such the habitat is already degraded and the most common impact for most species will be temporary displacement.

No significant impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources are anticipated, though temporary displacement of local wildlife may occur during the project.

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 revealed that *Antiquities* have not 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.

No significant effects on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources are anticipated.

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.

No significant impacts on the aesthetics of the area 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 limited environmental resources will be significantly impacted because of this project. This project will also not add any significant cumulative demands to environmental resources.

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 projects or plans being considered on the tracts listed in this EA Checklist.

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 only risk to human health and safety would be during the construction of the project. It would be the responsibility of the proponent to mitigate any risks during construction. After construction there will be some health and safety benefits provided by increased internet access. The better internet will allow residents of the area to have better access to telehealth and phone service for better communication with emergency services.

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

The resulting broadband internet access from these easements could potentially provide recipients with the ability to use E-commerce for more profitable operations and better marketing of agricultural products. However, all benefits to industry, commerce, and agriculture are incidental and not a direct result of the easements.

This project will not add to or deter from other industrial, agricultural, or commercial activities in the area.

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.

These easements would not directly create any jobs but may indirectly create opportunities for employment for the end users of the internet access. With the current trend for more teleworking having high quality broadband internet would create possible opportunities for end users to access teleworking labor markets that are currently inaccessible.

The project will not create or eliminate any jobs, so no significant effects to the employment market 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.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue for the proposed project.

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

There will not be any significant increases in traffic, school attendance, or need for fire and police protection if this project is approved.

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.

There are no zoning or other agency management plans affecting this project.

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.

There will be no significant direct or cumulative effects on access to or quality of recreation and wilderness activities because of this project.

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 project does not include any changes to housing or developments.

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 significantly impacted by the proposal.

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

The proposed project will have no significant impact on any culturally 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 proposed project will not have any significant cumulative economic or social effect.

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does grant the requested easements for buried fiberoptic cables

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined no significant impact to the environment because of this project.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:** Cole Stumpf **Title:** Land Use Specialist	
Signature: Cole T. Stumpf		**Date:** 3 Dec. 2025

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Josh Stoychoff **Title:** Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office	
Signature: Josh Stoychoff		**Date:** 12/3/25

Appendix A: Soils Data

S2SE4- Sec. 22 T30N R9E

Tables — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary By Map Unit

Summary by Map Unit — Hill County, Montana (MT041)

Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Totals for Area of Interest					**461.7**	**100.0%**

Table — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	461.7	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**461.7**	**100.0%**

Description — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail)

The ratings in this interpretation indicate the hazard of soil loss from off-road and off-trail areas after disturbance activities that expose the soil surface. The ratings are based on slope, soil erosion factor K, and an index of rainfall erosivity (R). The soil loss is caused by sheet or rill erosion in off-road or off-trail areas where 50 to 75 percent of the surface has been exposed by logging, grazing, mining, or other kinds of disturbance.

The ratings are both verbal and numerical. The hazard is described as "slight," "moderate," "severe," or "very severe." A rating of "slight" indicates that erosion is unlikely under ordinary climatic conditions; "moderate" indicates that some erosion is likely and that erosion-control measures may be needed; "severe" indicates that erosion is very likely and that erosion-control measures, including revegetation of bare areas, are advised; and "very severe" indicates that significant erosion is expected, loss of soil productivity and off-site damage are likely, and erosion-control measures are costly and generally impractical.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the specified aspect of forestland management (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

The map unit components listed for each map unit in the accompanying Summary by Map Unit table in Web Soil Survey or the Aggregation Report in Soil Data Viewer are determined by the aggregation method chosen. An aggregated rating class is shown for each map unit. The components listed for each map unit are only those that have the same rating class as listed for the map unit. The percent composition of each component in a particular map unit is presented to help the user better understand the percentage of each map unit that has the rating presented.

Other components with different ratings may be present in each map unit. The ratings for all components, regardless of the map unit aggregated rating, can be viewed by generating the equivalent report from the Soil Reports tab in Web Soil Survey or from the Soil Data Mart site. Onsite investigation may be needed to validate these interpretations and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given site.

Tables — Shallow Excavations — Summary By Map Unit

Summary by Map Unit — Hill County, Montana (MT041)

Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Totals for Area of Interest					**461.7**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	461.7	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**461.7**	**100.0%**

Description — Shallow Excavations

ENG - Engineering

Shallow excavations are trenches or holes dug to a maximum depth of 5 or 6 feet for graves, utility lines, open ditches, or other purposes. The ratings are based on the soil properties that influence the ease of digging and the resistance to sloughing. Depth to bedrock or a cemented pan, hardness of bedrock or a cemented pan, the amount of large stones, and dense layers influence the ease of digging, filling, and compacting. Depth to the seasonal high water table, flooding, and ponding may restrict the period when excavations can be made. Slope influences the ease of using machinery. Soil texture, depth to the water table, and linear extensibility (shrink-swell potential) influence the resistance to sloughing.

The ratings are both verbal and numerical. Rating class terms indicate the extent to which the soils are limited by all of the soil features that affect the specified use. "Not limited" indicates that the soil has features that are very favorable for the specified use. Good performance and very low maintenance can be expected. "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. "Very limited" indicates that the soil has one or more features that are unfavorable for the specified use. The limitations generally cannot be overcome without major soil reclamation, special design, or expensive installation procedures. Poor performance and high maintenance can be expected.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the use (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

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Tables — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary By Map Unit

Summary by Map Unit — Hill County, Montana (MT041)

Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Totals for Area of Interest					**461.7**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	264.9	57.4%
Moderate	196.8	42.6%
Totals for Area of Interest	**461.7**	**100.0%**

Description — Soil Rutting Hazard

FOR - Forestry

The ratings in this interpretation indicate the hazard of surface rut formation through the operation of forestland equipment. Soil displacement and puddling (soil deformation and compaction) may occur simultaneously with rutting.

Ratings are based on depth to a water table, rock fragments on or below the surface, the Unified classification of the soil, depth to a restrictive layer, and slope. The hazard is described as slight, moderate, or severe. A rating of "slight" indicates that the soil is subject to little or no rutting. "Moderate" indicates that rutting is likely. "Severe" indicates that ruts form readily.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the specified aspect of forestland management (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

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Other components with different ratings may be present in each map unit. The ratings for all components, regardless of the map unit aggregated rating, can be viewed by generating the equivalent report from the Soil Reports tab in Web Soil Survey or from the Soil Data Mart site. Onsite investigation may be needed to validate these interpretations and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given site.

Appendix A: Soils Data Continued

S2S2- Sec. 36, T30N R09E

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	411.4	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**411.4**	**100.0%**

Description — Shallow Excavations

ENG - Engineering

Shallow excavations are trenches or holes dug to a maximum depth of 5 or 6 feet for graves, utility lines, open ditches, or other purposes. The ratings are based on the soil properties that influence the ease of digging and the resistance to sloughing. Depth to bedrock or a cemented pan, hardness of bedrock or a cemented pan, the amount of large stones, and dense layers influence the ease of digging, filling, and compacting. Depth to the seasonal high water table, flooding, and ponding may restrict the period when excavations can be made. Slope influences the ease of using machinery. Soil texture, depth to the water table, and linear extensibility (shrink-swell potential) influence the resistance to sloughing.

The ratings are both verbal and numerical. Rating class terms indicate the extent to which the soils are limited by all of the soil features that affect the specified use. "Not limited" indicates that the soil has features that are very favorable for the specified use. Good performance and very low maintenance can be expected. "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. "Very limited" indicates that the soil has one or more features that are unfavorable for the specified use. The limitations generally cannot be overcome without major soil reclamation, special design, or expensive installation procedures. Poor performance and high maintenance can be expected.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the use (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

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Other components with different ratings may be present in each map unit. The ratings for all components, regardless of the map unit aggregated rating, can be viewed by generating the equivalent report from the Soil Reports tab in Web Soil Survey or from the Soil Data Mart site. Onsite investigation may be needed to validate these interpretations and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given site.

Table — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	833.9	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**833.9**	**100.0%**

Description — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail)

The ratings in this interpretation indicate the hazard of soil loss from off-road and off-trail areas after disturbance activities that expose the soil surface. The ratings are based on slope, soil erosion factor K, and an index of rainfall erosivity (R). The soil loss is caused by sheet or rill erosion in off-road or off-trail areas where 50 to 75 percent of the surface has been exposed by logging, grazing, mining, or other kinds of disturbance.

The ratings are both verbal and numerical. The hazard is described as "slight," "moderate," "severe," or "very severe." A rating of "slight" indicates that erosion is unlikely under ordinary climatic conditions; "moderate" indicates that some erosion is likely and that erosion-control measures may be needed; "severe" indicates that erosion is very likely and that erosion-control measures, including revegetation of bare areas, are advised; and "very severe" indicates that significant erosion is expected, loss of soil productivity and off-site damage are likely, and erosion-control measures are costly and generally impractical.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the specified aspect of forestland management (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

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Rating Options — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail)

Aggregation Method: Dominant Condition

Component Percent Cutoff: *None Specified*

Tie-break Rule: Higher

Tables — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary By Map Unit

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	672.3	80.6%
Moderate	161.6	19.4%
Totals for Area of Interest	**833.9**	**100.0%**

Description — Soil Rutting Hazard

FOR - Forestry

The ratings in this interpretation indicate the hazard of surface rut formation through the operation of forestland equipment. Soil displacement and puddling (soil deformation and compaction) may occur simultaneously with rutting.

Ratings are based on depth to a water table, rock fragments on or below the surface, the Unified classification of the soil, depth to a restrictive layer, and slope. The hazard is described as slight, moderate, or severe. A rating of "slight" indicates that the soil is subject to little or no rutting. "Moderate" indicates that rutting is likely. "Severe" indicates that ruts form readily.

Numerical ratings indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the specified aspect of forestland management (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

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Other components with different ratings may be present in each map unit. The ratings for all components, regardless of the map unit aggregated rating, can be viewed by generating the equivalent report from the Soil Reports tab in Web Soil Survey or from the Soil Data Mart site. Onsite investigation may be needed to validate these interpretations and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given site.

Appendix B: Seeding Recommendation

Species	Percent
Sandberg Bluegrass	25%
slender wheatgrass	30%
Prairie Junegrass	15%
Needle and Thread	15%
Lewis blue flax or purple prairie clover	15 %

- Native Mix
- Certified Noxious Weed Seed Free
- Drill seeding rate of 6 lbs/acre Pure Live Seed (PLS)
- Seed poundage should be doubled and harrowed if the area is broadcast seeded
- Seeding shall occur in the fall (after September 15) or early spring (before May 1).

Appendix C: Project Map

S2SE4- Sec. 22, S2S2- Sec. 36, T30N R09E