

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Communication Chouteau County Fiber
Proposed Implementation Date:	May-August 2026
Proponent:	Triangle Communications
Location:	24N 8E Section 15
County:	Chouteau
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The purpose of this easement is to expand the access to fiber optic broadband internet in Chouteau County. All easements are along a county road and will provide access to internet to currently unserved people.

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 Communications
Surface Lessees: Van Horn Legacy
Other: Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT), 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 easements for buried fiber optic cables.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does grant easements for buried fiber optic cables.

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 species of concern in this area are the Grizzly Bear, two species of bat, three bird species, and multiple aquatic species. I believe the application mentioned Sage Grouse, which isn't showing up on Natural Heritage.

To mitigate the effects on sage grouse the proponent must follow the recommendations laid out by MSGOT in the attached letter. These recommendations include no construction until after July 15th to avoid the breeding season. These recommendations should also significantly mitigate effects on the other affected birds.

All easement areas are adjacent to existing disturbances with frequent human use, mostly roads, as such the habitat is already degraded and the only effect for most of the species of concern will be temporary displacement if they are even present. This project will have no effect on the riparian areas, as it is some distance away so the aquatic species will not be effected.

Species of concern reports can be found in Appendix C.

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. One cairn and stone circle were noted near the project but would not be affected. 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 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 on environmental resources.

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.

This easement will generate the minimum \$250 for the trust.

The proposed project will not have any significant cumulative economic or social effect.

Appendix A: Soil Ratings

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

Summary by Rating Value		
Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	146.5	91.8%
Moderate	13.1	8.2%
Totals for Area of Interest	159.6	100.0%

Table – Soil Rutting Hazard – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value		
Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Moderate	141.1	88.4%
Severe	18.5	11.6%
Totals for Area of Interest	159.6	100.0%

Table – Shallow Excavations – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value		
Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	146.5	91.8%
Very limited	13.1	8.2%
Totals for Area of Interest	159.6	100.0%

Appendix C: Species Occurrences

Species Occurrences

Species List | plus Occurrences | plus Obs (may take a while)

⊕ Mammals - Grizzly Bear (<i>Ursus arctos</i>)	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 11	Earliest Obs: 2005	Recent Obs: 2020
⊕ Mammals - Northern Hoary Bat (<i>Lasiurus chereus</i>)	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 1	Earliest Obs: 2008	Recent Obs: 2008
⊕ Mammals - Silver-haired Bat (<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>)	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 1	Earliest Obs: 1961	Recent Obs: 1961
⊕ Birds - Bobolink (<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>)	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 1	Earliest Obs: 2021	Recent Obs: 2021
⊕ Birds - Burrowing Owl (<i>Athene cucularia</i>)	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 1	Earliest Obs: 2021	Recent Obs: 2021
⊕ Birds - Great Blue Heron (<i>Ardea herodias</i>)	SO Count: 4	Obs Count: 7	Earliest Obs: 1977	Recent Obs: 2021
⊕ Reptiles - Spiny Softshell (<i>Apalone spinifer</i>)	SO Count: 2	Obs Count: 282	Earliest Obs: 1805	Recent Obs: 2025
⊕ Fish - Blue Sucker (<i>Cytelestus elongatus</i>)	SO Count: 2	Obs Count: 10	Earliest Obs: 2010	Recent Obs: 2017
⊕ Fish - Northern Redbelly Dace (<i>Chrosomus eos</i>)	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 3	Earliest Obs: 1994	Recent Obs: 2005
⊕ Fish - Pallid Sturgeon (<i>Scaphirhynchus albus</i>)	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 2	Earliest Obs: 2017	Recent Obs: 2017
⊕ Fish - Sauger (<i>Sander canadensis</i>)	SO Count: 2	Obs Count: 69	Earliest Obs: 2000	Recent Obs: 2016
⊕ Fish - Sturgeon Chub (<i>Moxostoma valenciennesi</i>)	SO Count: 2	Obs Count: 1	Earliest Obs: 1979	Recent Obs: 1979

Appendix D: Map of Project Area