CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Communication Geraldine Fiber Optic Upgrade Easements
Proposed Implementation Date:	May-August 2023
Proponent:	Triangle Communications
Location:	20N 12E 3, 11; 20N 13E 29; 21N 12E 20, 21; 22N 10E 20, 21; 22N 11E 5, 9, 16, 32
County:	Chouteau
Trust:	MSU Morrill (22N 10E 20 and 21), Common Schools (All other Tracts)

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The purpose of these easements is to expand the access to fiber optic broadband internet in the Geraldine area. All easements are along major highways or county roads 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: David A Rowland, Grant Harrer, Hucke Land and Livestock Inc., Marshall Larsen, Meissner Ranches 2 Inc., Robert E Stephens Jr.
Other: Montana Sage Grouse Oversite 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.

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.

None of the soils that would be affected by these easements had ratings available for off road erosion potential. However since all of them are located near existing disturbances with established erosion control vegetation and the minimal ground disturbance caused by the trenchless installation method there should be no major erosion issues.

All soils affected were rated as either somewhat or severely limited for shallow excavations. 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 or conduit in as it goes. Therefore there are no excavations that stay open and will not cause any safety issues and the limitations of the soils should not come into effect.

All soils are rated as severe for soil rutting hazard. This is easily remedied by only doing work when the conditions are dry. This will be a requirement of the easements which will alleviate any rutting 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 install with be a trenchless method there will be very little soil disturbance and the introduced grasses will revegetate quickly. Any areas of disturbance that are larger than that normally produced by a trenchless installation method will be reseeded using the seed mix and rates detailed in Appendix B. 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.

Most of the species of concern in the project areas are small birds. The exceptions are the sage grouse, black tailed prairie dog, and burrowing owl. The latter two should not be directly affected because there are no active prairie dog towns in the easement areas, the observations were all outside the actual disturbance area.

To mitigate the affects on sage grouse the proponent must follow the recommendations laid out by MSGOT in the letter found in Appendix E. These recommendations include no construction until after July 15th to avoid the breeding season. These recommendations should also significantly mitigate affects to 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 affect for most of the species of concern will be temporary displacement if they are even present.

Species of concern reports with a one mile buffer around the easement areas 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 III cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect on State School Trust Land. Two cultural resources were identified. One (24CH986) is the route of the former Fort Benton to Judith Basin Road. The other (24CH1038) is the abandoned Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific railroad. Neither cultural resource will be impacted with telecommunications cable installation work. As such, proposed developments will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

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.

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 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 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.

These easements would provide a total of $7,588.00 to the trusts. $6,574.00 would go to the common schools trust and $1,014.00 would go to the MSU Morrill Trust.

This project is part of a nationwide push by the federal government to provide broadband internet to rural areas. Increased broadband access provides more equitable access to goods and services that are increasingly only found online.

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 easements for buried fiber optic 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:**	Dustin Lenz
	Title:	Land Use Specialist
Signature:		**Date:** 28 DECEMBER 2022

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Jocee Hedrick
	Title:	Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office
Signature: Jocee Hedrick		**Date:** 12/28/22

Appendix A: Soil Ratings

20N 12E Sections 3 and 11 Soil Ratings

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
Null or Not Rated	59.7	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**59.7**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	57.8	96.8%
Very limited	1.9	3.2%
Totals for Area of Interest	**59.7**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	59.7	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**59.7**	**100.0%**

20N 13E Section 29

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
Null or Not Rated	22.3	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**22.3**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	22.3	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**22.3**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	22.3	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**22.3**	**100.0%**

21N 12E Sections 20 and 21

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
Null or Not Rated	15.6	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**15.6**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	15.6	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**15.6**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	15.6	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**15.6**	**100.0%**

Appendix A: Soil Ratings Continued

22N 10E Section 20

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

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Null or Not Rated	23.4	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**23.4**	**100.0%**

Table – Shallow Excavations – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Very limited	17.2	73.5%
Somewhat limited	6.2	26.5%
Totals for Area of Interest	**23.4**	**100.0%**

Table – Soil Rutting Hazard – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	14.9	63.9%
Moderate	8.4	36.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**23.4**	**100.0%**

22N 10E Section 21

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

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Null or Not Rated	2.1	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**2.1**	**100.0%**

Table – Shallow Excavations – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Very limited	2.1	98.8%
Somewhat limited	0.0	1.2%
Totals for Area of Interest	**2.1**	**100.0%**

Table – Soil Rutting Hazard – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	2.1	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**2.1**	**100.0%**

22N 11E Sections 5, 9 and 16

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

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Null or Not Rated	130.4	99.7%
Totals for Area of Interest	**130.8**	**100.0%**

Table – Shallow Excavations – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	130.4	99.7%
Totals for Area of Interest	**130.8**	**100.0%**

Table – Soil Rutting Hazard – Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	130.4	99.7%
Totals for Area of Interest	**130.8**	**100.0%**

Appendix A: Soil Ratings Continued

23N 11E 32

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

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Null or Not Rated	4.2	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**4.2**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	4.2	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**4.2**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	4.2	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**4.2**	**100.0%**

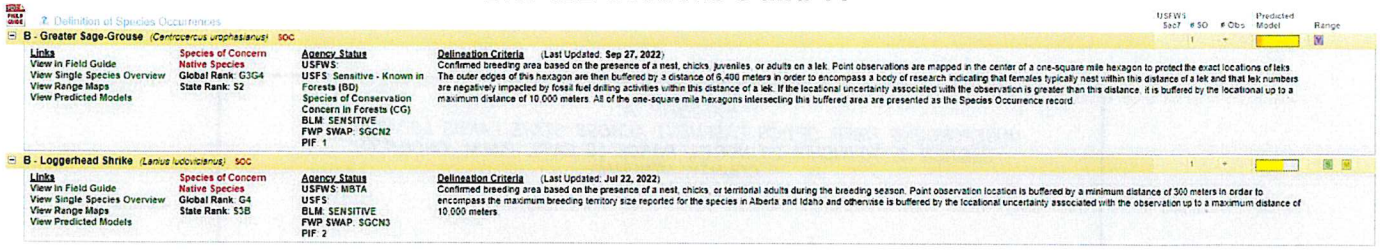
Appendix B: Seed Mix

Species	Percent
western wheatgrass	35%
slender wheatgrass	35%
bluebunch wheatgrass	15%
green needlegrass	10%
Lewis blue flax or purple prairie clover	5 %

- Native Mix
- Certified Noxious Weed Seed Free
- Drill seeding rate of 8 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: Species of Concern

20N 12E Sections 3 and 11



Definition of Species Occurrences

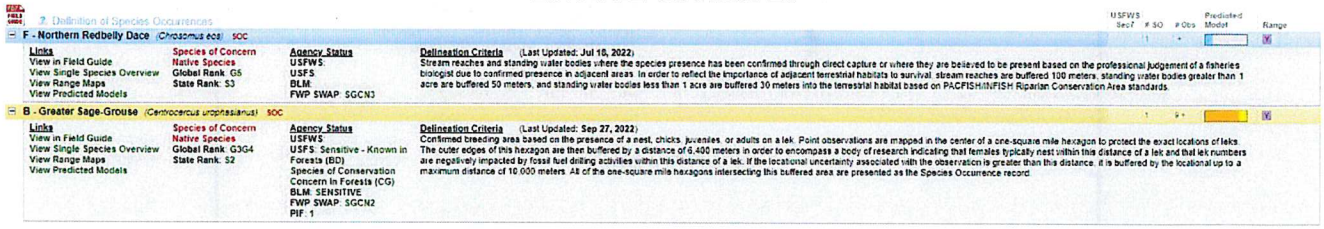
	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) SOC		1	+		Y

Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Sep 27, 2022)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G3G4 State Rank: S2	USFWS: USFS: Sensitive - Known in Forests (BD) Species of Conservation Concern in Forests (CG) BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN2 PIF: 1	Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, juveniles, or adults on a lek. Point observations are mapped in the center of a one-square mile hexagon to protect the exact locations of leks. The outer edges of this hexagon are then buffered by a distance of 6,400 meters in order to encompass a body of research indicating that females typically nest within this distance of a lek and that lek numbers are negatively impacted by fossil fuel drilling activities within this distance of a lek. If the locational uncertainty associated with the observation is greater than this distance, it is buffered by the locational up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters. All of the one-square mile hexagons intersecting this buffered area are presented as the Species Occurrence record.

	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) SOC		1	+		S M

Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Jul 22, 2022)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G4 State Rank: S3B	USFWS: MBTA USFS: BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN3 PIF: 2	Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 300 meters in order to encompass the maximum breeding territory size reported for the species in Alberta and Idaho and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters.

20N 13E Section 29



Definition of Species Occurrences

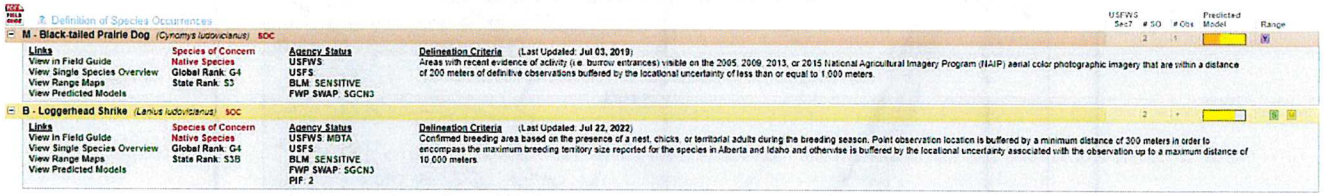
	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
F - Northern Redbelly Dace (*Chrosomus eos*) SOC		1	+		Y

Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Jul 18, 2022)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G5 State Rank: S3	USFWS: USFS: BLM: FWP SWAP: SGCN3	Stream reaches and standing water bodies where the species presence has been confirmed through direct capture or where they are believed to be present based on the professional judgement of a fisheries biologist due to confirmed presence in adjacent areas. In order to reflect the importance of adjacent terrestrial habitats to survival: stream reaches are buffered 100 meters, standing water bodies greater than 1 acre are buffered 50 meters, and standing water bodies less than 1 acre are buffered 30 meters into the terrestrial habitat based on PACFISH/INFISH Riparian Conservation Area standards.

	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) SOC		1	9+		Y

Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Sep 27, 2022)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G3G4 State Rank: S2	USFWS: USFS: Sensitive - Known in Forests (BD) Species of Conservation Concern in Forests (CG) BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN2 PIF: 1	Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, juveniles, or adults on a lek. Point observations are mapped in the center of a one-square mile hexagon to protect the exact locations of leks. The outer edges of this hexagon are then buffered by a distance of 6,400 meters in order to encompass a body of research indicating that females typically nest within this distance of a lek and that lek numbers are negatively impacted by fossil fuel drilling activities within this distance of a lek. If the locational uncertainty associated with the observation is greater than this distance, it is buffered by the locational up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters. All of the one-square mile hexagons intersecting this buffered area are presented as the Species Occurrence record.

21N 12E Sections 20 and 21



Definition of Species Occurrences

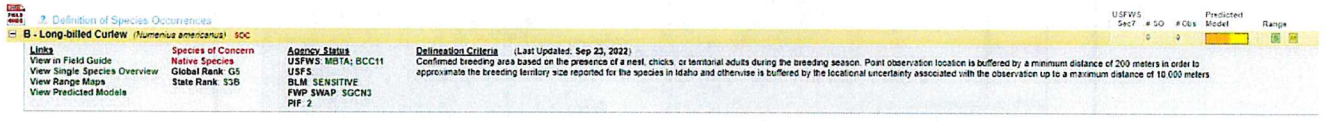
	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
M - Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) SOC		2	1		Y

Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Jul 03, 2019)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G4 State Rank: S3	USFWS: USFS: BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN3	Areas with recent evidence of activity (i.e. burrow entrances) visible on the 2005, 2009, 2013, or 2015 National Agricultural Imagery Program (NAIP) aerial color photographic imagery that are within a distance of 200 meters of definitive observations buffered by the locational uncertainty of less than or equal to 1,000 meters.

	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) SOC		2	+		S M

Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Jul 22, 2022)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G4 State Rank: S3B	USFWS: MBTA USFS: BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN3 PIF: 2	Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 300 meters in order to encompass the maximum breeding territory size reported for the species in Alberta and Idaho and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters.

22N 10E Sections 20 and 21

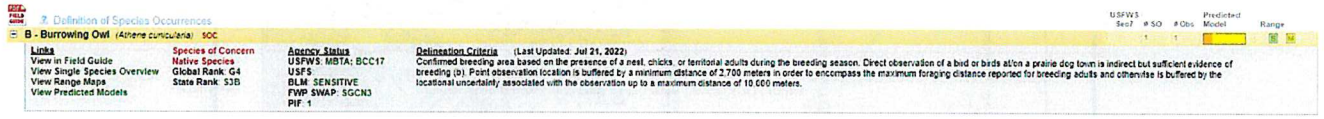


Definition of Species Occurrences

	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) SOC		0	0		S M

Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Sep 23, 2022)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G5 State Rank: S3B	USFWS: MBTA; BCC11 USFS: BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN3 PIF: 2	Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 200 meters in order to approximate the breeding territory size reported for the species in Idaho and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters.

22N 11E Sections 5, 9 and 16; 23N 11E Section 32



Definition of Species Occurrences

	USFWS Sec7	# SO	# Obs	Predicted Model	Range
B - Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) SOC		1	1		S M

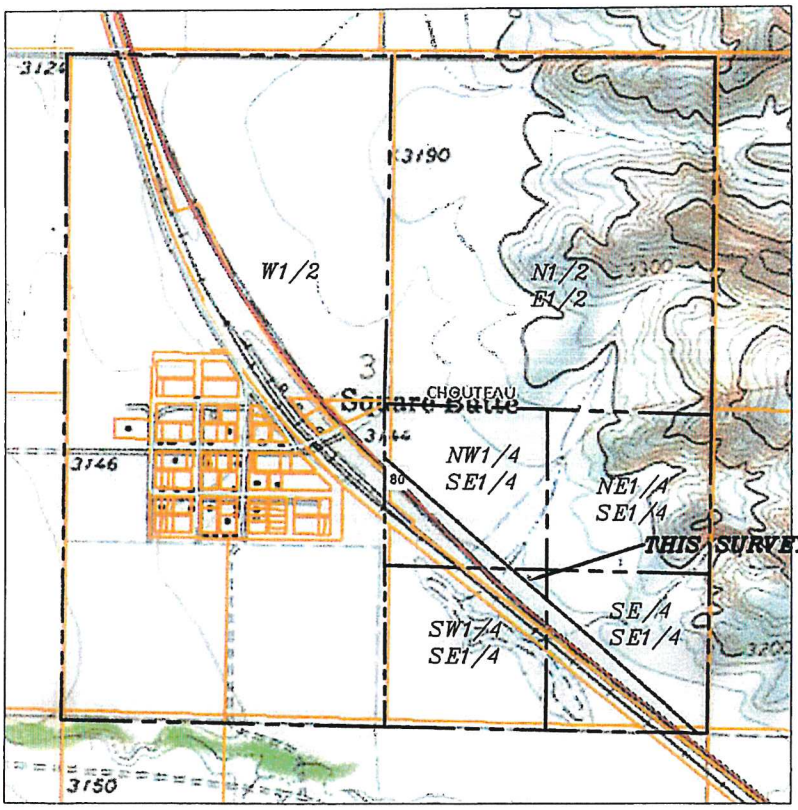
Links	Species of Concern	Agency Status	Delineation Criteria (Last Updated: Jul 21, 2022)
View in Field Guide View Single Species Overview View Range Maps View Predicted Models	Native Species Global Rank: G4 State Rank: S3B	USFWS: MBTA; BCC17 USFS: BLM: SENSITIVE FWP SWAP: SGCN3 PIF: 1	Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Direct observation of a bird or birds at/on a prairie dog town is indirect but sufficient evidence of breeding (b). Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 2,700 meters in order to encompass the maximum foraging distance reported for breeding adults and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters.

Appendix D: Maps

EXHIBIT "A"
UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 3, TOWNSHIP 20 NORTH, RANGE 12 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS
MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99928549
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:
ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5180

PAGE 2 OF 3

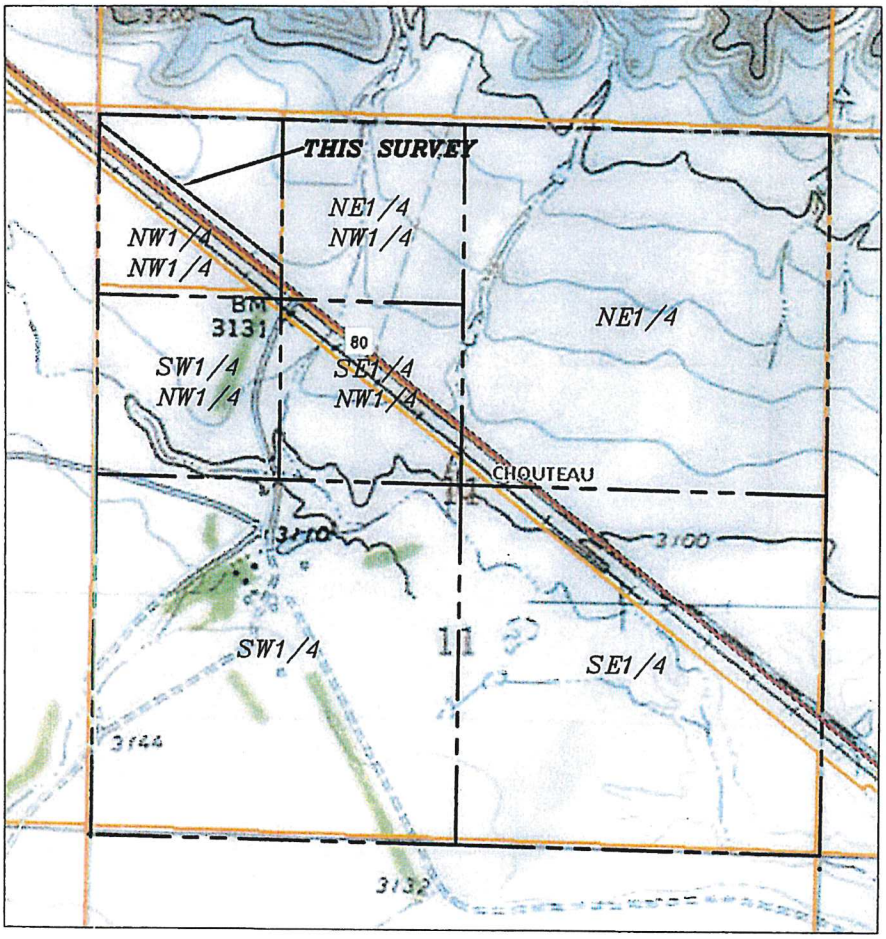
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 11, TOWNSHIP 20 NORTH, RANGE 12 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99928549
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

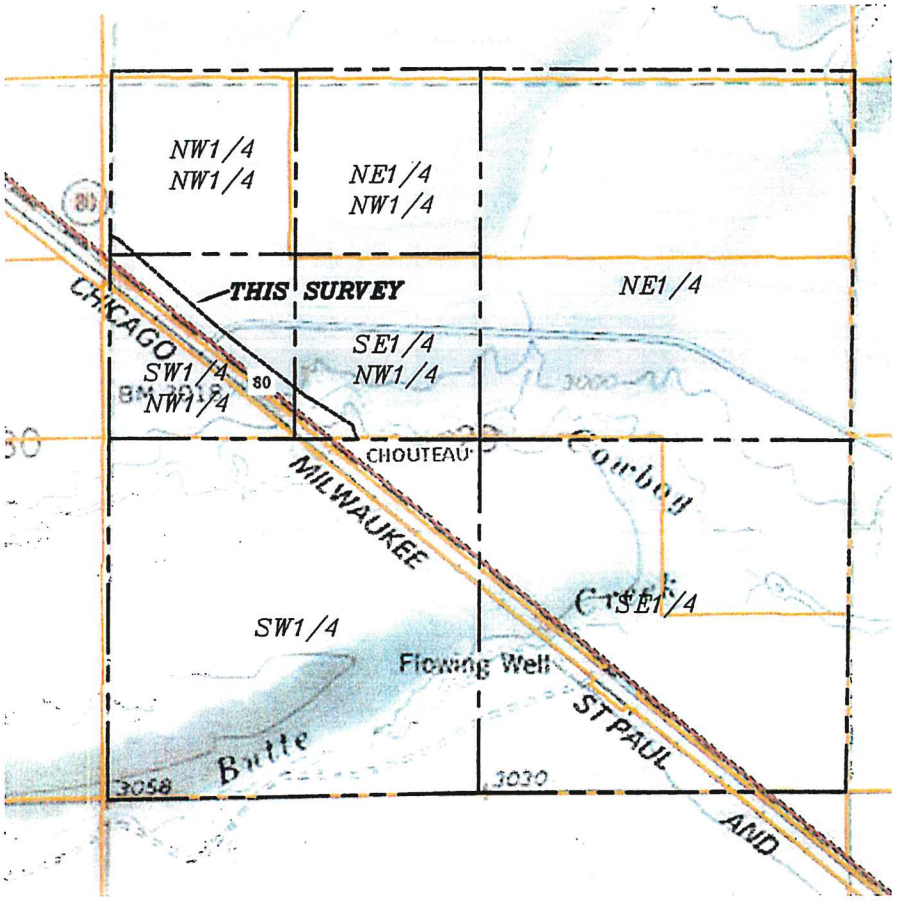
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 29, TOWNSHIP 20 NORTH, RANGE 13 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99928062
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

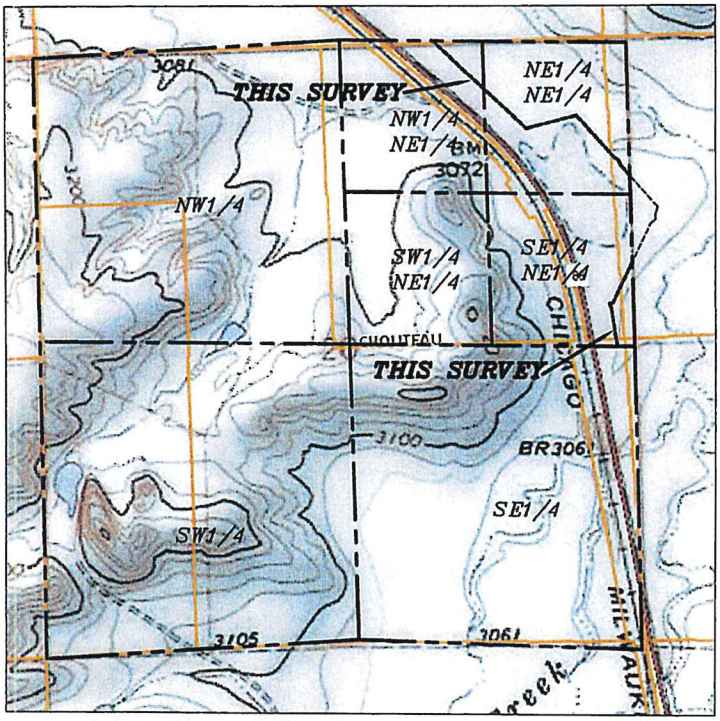
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 20, TOWNSHIP 21 NORTH, RANGE 12 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99930973
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

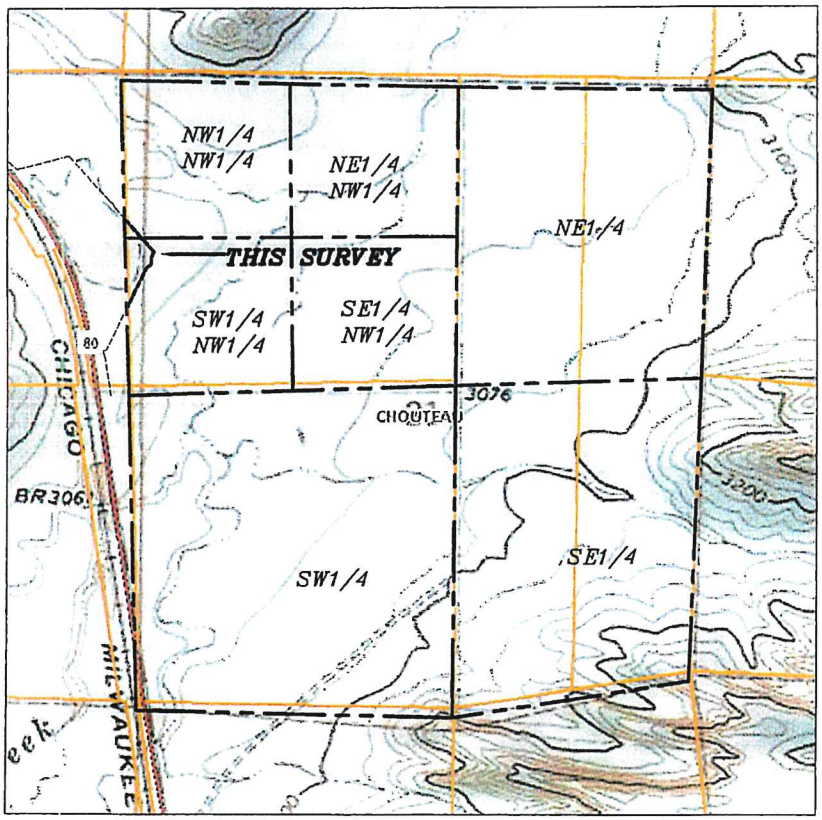
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 21, TOWNSHIP 21 NORTH, RANGE 12 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99930973
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

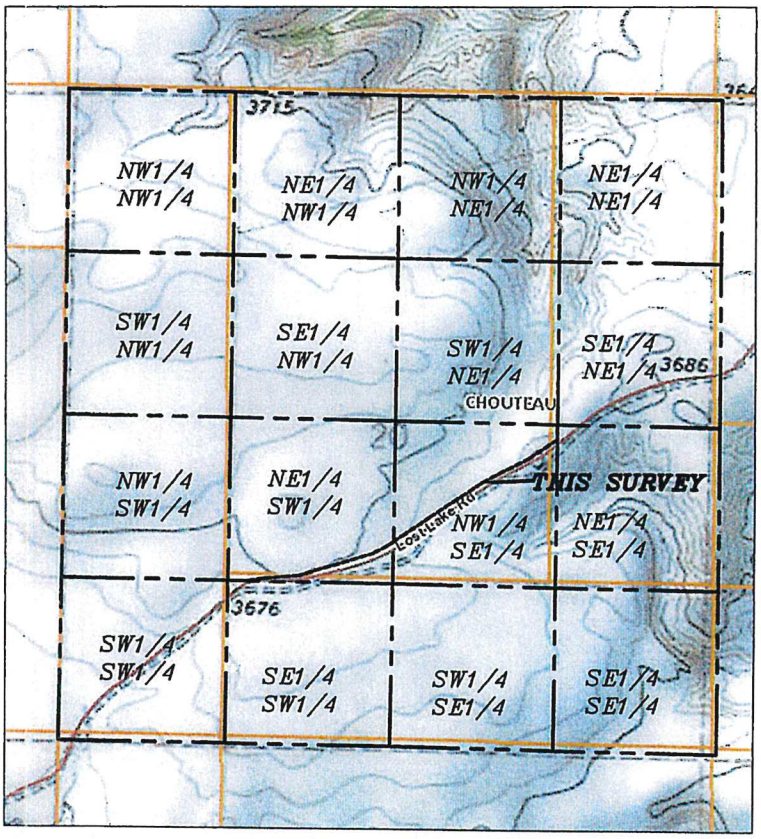
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 20, TOWNSHIP 22 NORTH, RANGE 10 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99928317
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

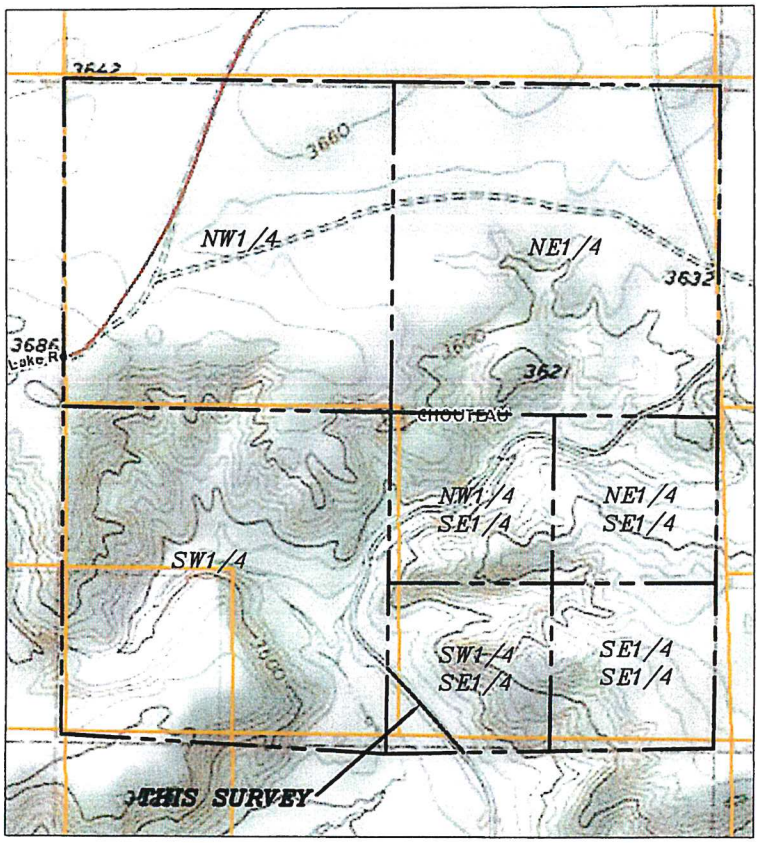
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 21, TOWNSHIP 22 NORTH, RANGE 10 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99928317
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

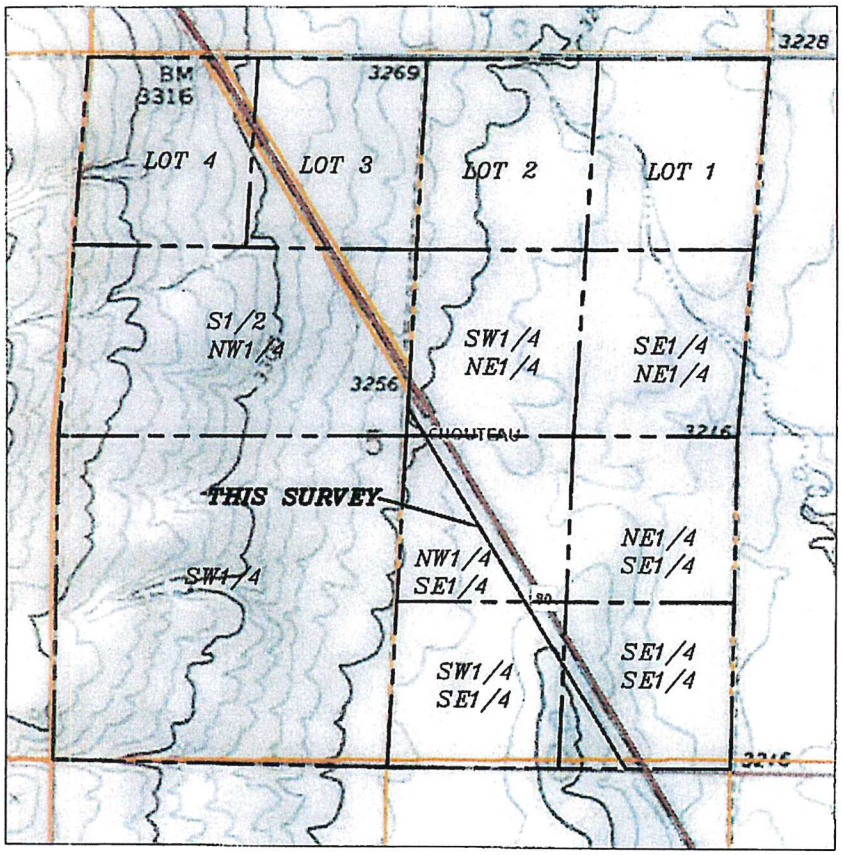
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 5, TOWNSHIP 22 NORTH, RANGE 11 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99930973
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

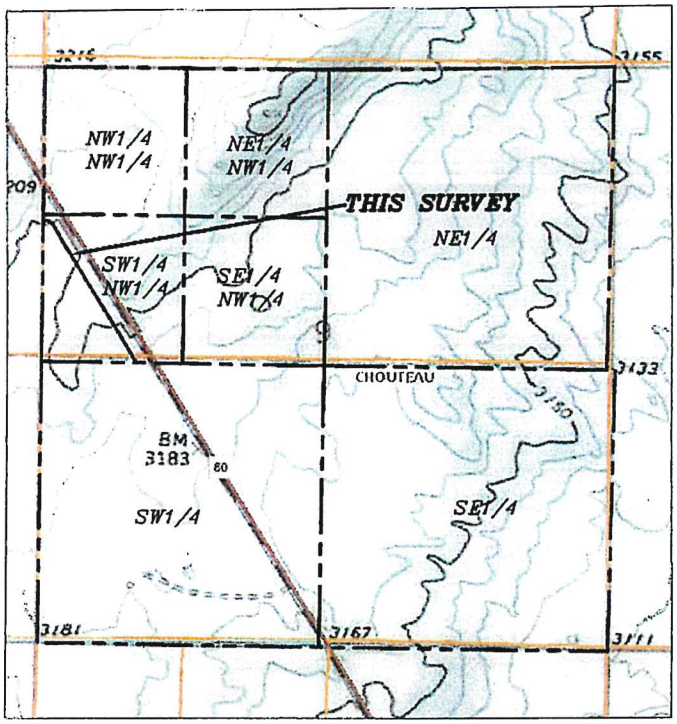
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 9, TOWNSHIP 22 NORTH, RANGE 11 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99930973
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:
ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

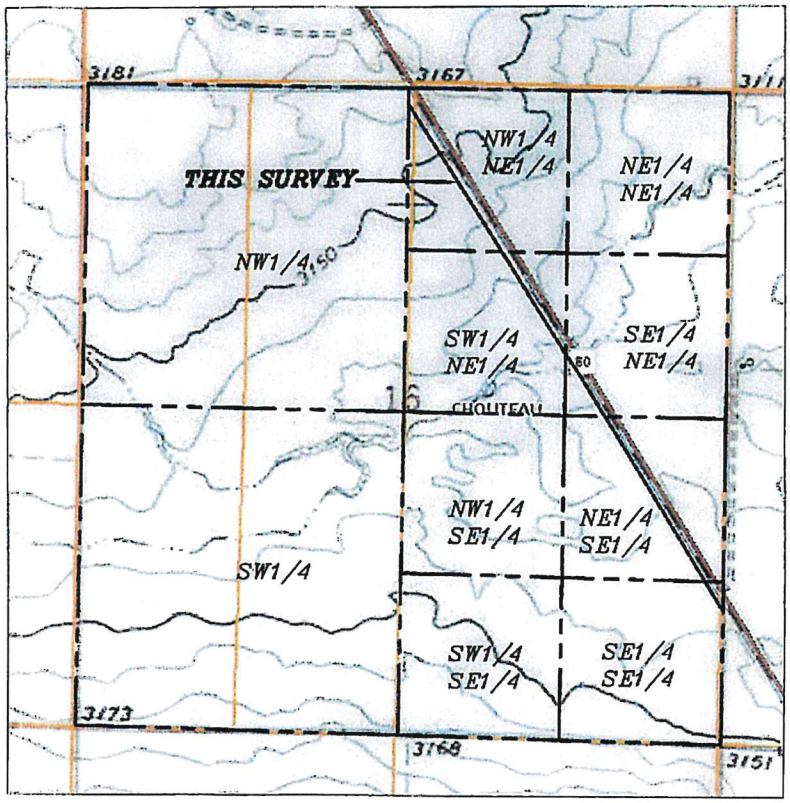
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS LOCATED IN SECTION 16, TOWNSHIP 22 NORTH, RANGE 11 EAST, P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011), INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99930973
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

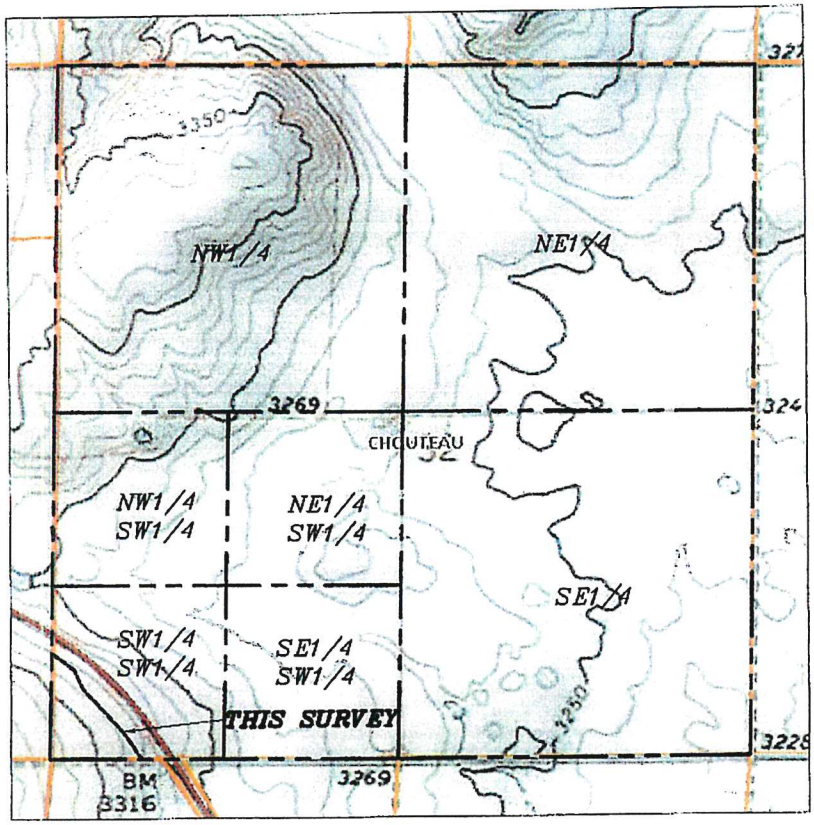
EXHIBIT "A"

UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTICS EASEMENT ACROSS STATE LANDS
LOCATED IN SECTION 32, TOWNSHIP 23 NORTH, RANGE 11 EAST,
P.M.M. CHOUTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA

BASIS OF BEARINGS

MONTANA STATE PLANE COORDINATE
SYSTEM, ZONE 2500, NAD83(2011),
INTERNATIONAL FEET.
COMBINED SCALE FACTOR: 0.99930973
DISTANCES SHOWN ARE GRID

VICINITY MAP



SURVEYED BY:

ESSEX SURVEYING, LLC
1350 PK ROAD, SHEPHERD, MT
406-665-5188

PAGE 2 OF 3

Appendix E: Sage Grouse Recommendations

MONTANA SAGE GROUSE
HABITAT CONSERVATION PROGRAM

GREG GIANFORTE, GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA
1539 ELEVENTH AVENUE
PHONE: (406) 444-0554
FAX: (406) 444-6721
PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601

Project No. 4827
Governor's Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015
Geraldine – 2023 Project

Cory Baker
Westech Environmental Services
3005 Airport Road
Helena, MT 59601

June 8, 2022

Dear Mr. Baker,

The Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program received a request for consultation and review of your proposed activity on June 2, 2022. Based on the information provided, all or a portion of this project is located within General Habitat for sage grouse. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) classifies portions of this area as General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA).

Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015 set forth Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy. Montana's goal is to maintain viable sage grouse populations and conserve habitat so that Montana maintains flexibility to manage our own lands, our wildlife, and our economy and a listing under the federal Endangered Species Act is not warranted in the future. Similarly, BLM has incorporated sage grouse conservation measures into their Resource Management Plans.

The Program has completed its review, including:

Project Description:

Project Type: Infrastructure – Communication
Project Disturbance: 12.11 Miles of New Buried Fiber Optic Cable
Construction Dates: January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023, Temporary (< 1 Year)
Operation Duration: No Operations Phase

Project Location:

Legal: Township 19 North, Range 12 East, Sections 1, 10, 11, 12, 15
Township 19 North, Range 13 East, Section 6
Township 20 North, Range 12 East, Sections 10, 11, 12, 13
Township 20 North, Range 13 East, Sections 19, 29, 30, 32, 33

County: Chouteau, Fergus
Ownership: Montana State Trust Lands, Private, Bureau of Land Management

Project Description and Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015 Consistency:

The Geraldine – 2023 Project proposes to bury new fiber optic cable in locations where copper lines presently exist, in General Habitat for sage grouse.

Triangle Communications proposes to install a total of 87.1 miles fiber-optic cable for Montana residents in Choteau and Fergus counties. See Figure 1 (Geraldine – 2023 Project Location Map). Of the 87.1 total miles, 75 miles are located outside of designated sage grouse habitat and 12.1 miles are located within designated General Habitat for sage grouse. This Program review is confined to the 12.1 miles of fiber optic cable located within sage grouse habitat.

All 12.1 miles will be replacing existing copper cable line. Each segment will be installed immediately adjacent to existing infrastructure.

To implement this Project, Triangle Communications will utilize a trenchless plow method. A tracked cable plow will be used to install the cable. This equipment creates a narrow opening in the soil, inserts the cable at a depth of between 36 and 44 inches, covers the cable, and smooths the disturbed soil in a single pass. A directional boring method will be used at locations where a road or water crossing is necessary. Installation of the cable is anticipated to progress at a rate of approximately three miles per day.

Based on the information you provided, your Project is not within two miles of an active sage grouse lek.

Discussion:

On June 9, 2020, the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) approved a modified policy approach to mitigation which may be applied to disturbance types that are buried using equipment that meets the definition and criteria of "trenchless methods" and that are not otherwise exempted from Executive Order 12-2015.

This modified approach applies only to buried disturbances that are implemented using machinery that meets a standardized definition. The precise design and configuration of trenchless equipment is expected to evolve over time. Currently, the key distinguishing features are a narrow vertical slot is opened up and filled back in during a single pass of machinery. Typical equipment names include: static plow, vibratory plow, or pull plow. Equipment that would not be considered a trenchless method include trenchers, back hoes, bull dozers, or scrapers.

Additionally, this modified approach is to be applied to buried disturbance types that meet the following criteria:

- machinery is equipped with a shank or vertical blade that penetrates the surface to bury cable, electric line or pipe as the shank is pulled forward; and

- machinery opens a slot in the ground about 6" wide, typically 3 -5' deep; and
- conduit, cable, or pipe is fed into the ground, through a chute behind the blade as the slot opening is made; and
- soil is not scraped or removed; and
- vegetation and its root structure are not excavated, or removed; and
- ground disturbance is primarily associated with the vertical blade/shank; and
- vegetation may be crushed out to 12 feet by the equipment but is expected to grow back within one growing season.

In addition to meeting the standardized definition of trenchless methods, the Project will also be analyzed to determine whether or not the buried features are co-located with existing surface disturbance associated with a road corridor or meets the spirit of being co-located. The co-location zone for trenchless method projects is defined according to the road size category (e.g. 100 feet for local roads, 200 feet for county roads, 240 feet for state highways and 260 feet for interstate highways).

Activities that meet both the standardized definition of "trenchless methods" and are determined to be co-located with existing surface disturbance are not subject to mitigation, but seasonal stipulations or other aspects of Executive Order 12-2015 may still apply.

Here, fiber optic cable will be installed using plowing, trenching, and boring, which will create a narrow opening in the soil, insert the cable, cover the cable, and smooth the disturbed soil in a single pass. This method falls within the "trenchless method" standardized criteria.

Additionally, all 12.1 miles will replace existing copper lines. Each segment will be installed immediately adjacent to the existing infrastructure.

The Project is not within two miles of an active lek. Therefore, the Project is consistent with Executive Order 12-2015.

The Program has determined that the Geraldine – 2023 Project meets the trenchless guidelines and will remain consistent with Executive Order 12-2015. Therefore, no mitigation was assessed.

Program Recommendations:

The following stipulations are taken from Montana Executive Order 12-2015. These stipulations are designed to maintain existing levels of suitable sage grouse habitat by managing uses and activities in sage grouse habitat to ensure the maintenance of sage grouse abundance and distribution in Montana. Development should be designed and managed to maintain populations and sage grouse habitats.

- Reclamation should re-establish native grasses, forbs, and shrubs during interim and final reclamation. The goal of reclamation is to achieve cover, species composition, and life form diversity commensurate with the surrounding plant community or desired ecological

condition to the benefit of sage grouse and replace or enhance sage grouse habitat to the degree that environmental conditions allow.

- Weed management is required within General Habitat for sage grouse. Reclamation of disturbed areas must include control of noxious weeds and invasive plant species, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicas*).

- Under the modified trenchless approach, the temporary use of a backhoe may be permitted. If this occurs, the Program recommends that active reseeding and weed monitoring occur in these areas to prevent invasion and spread of weeds or non-native species in sage grouse nesting habitat.

Your proposed project or activity may need to obtain additional permits or authorization from other Montana state agencies or possibly federal agencies. They are very likely to request a copy of this consultation letter, so please retain it for your records.

Please be aware that if the location or boundaries of your proposed project or activity change in the future, or if new activities are proposed within one of the designated sage grouse habitat areas, please visit https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/projects/ and submit the new information.

Thanks for your interest in sage grouse and your commitment to taking the steps necessary to ensure Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy is successful.

Sincerely,

Therese Hartman
Acting Manager
Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program

Attachments:
Figure 1: Geraldine – 2023 Project Location Map