

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Vigilante Electric Cooperative Big Hole Battlefield Transmission Line Easement Request
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2009 / Winter 2010
Proponent:	Vigilante Electric Cooperative
Location:	T2S R16W Section 28
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent wishes to install a 14.4 Kv power line through the above mentioned Trust Land tract to provide a reliable power source to the Big Hole National Battlefield. The proposed power line would parallel the State Highway 43 right of way on the North side of the highway.

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 Montana Natural Heritage Program was solicited for input regarding Montana Species of Concern and unique or fragile environmental resources.

Vanna Boccadori of Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks was solicited for comment regarding wildlife impacts.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist, was solicited for comment regarding historic & cultural resources.

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

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A – No Action Alternative. The transmission line would not be allowed to be placed on Trust Land.

Alternative B – Allow the transmission line to be placed on Trust Land

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 proposed project would entail placement of up to 10 transmission line poles on the Trust Land. Soil disturbance would be limited to equipment use on the surface and excavation of approximately 10 holes less than 3 feet in diameter over approximately 3,323 feet of Trust Land included in this project. No fragile or unstable soils are located on the site that would create a negative impact to the environmental resources and would not pose a negative impact to the transmission line along the proposed route.

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.

An unnamed fork of the North Fork Big Hole River is located on the Trust Land tract. The riparian area along the creek is very narrow with good vegetative composition of rhizomatous sedges. Banks are undercut, the channel is very narrow and deep. Numerous brook trout were noted during a field inspection of the tract in the Fall of 2009. This proposed project is for an overhead transmission line and would not affect water quality, quantity, or distribution.

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.

This project would not alter the air quality of the area.

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.

The primary vegetation on the site is big sagebrush and Idaho fescue. The proposed project would have minimal disturbance of vegetative communities. Disturbance would include temporary use of equipment to place the poles and transmission lines during construction and infrequent future use to maintain the line. No cumulative negative effect of the vegetative community would occur as a result of this proposed project.

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.

The unnamed fork of the North Fork Big Hole River traverses the tract. Brook trout were noted during an inspection this Fall and antelope were abundant. Some older sagegrouse sign was also found, but no birds were seen. The tract does have public access. This proposed project is for an overhead transmission line and would not affect aquatic habitat. The proposed route is located in close proximity to State Highway 43 which would minimize impacts to terrestrial wildlife.

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 Heritage Program was solicited for comments regarding unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources. The report received from them included two species of concern. These species are listed below:

1) **Gray wolf – (*Canis lupus*)** – The gray wolf has been recently delisted from the Endangered Species Act. The species continues to be listed as a sensitive species by the BLM, USFS, and State of Montana. The proposed overhead transmission line is located next to State Highway 43 and would not have significant effect on the gray wolf.

2) **Greater Sage-Grouse – (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)** – Greater sage-grouse are not listed on the endangered species list. Sage-grouse are listed by the State of Montana, BLM, and USFS as a Sensitive Species. Sage-grouse are known to be negatively impacted by overhead power lines. These negative impacts include both direct and indirect impacts. Direct impacts include collisions in-flight by sage-grouse hitting power line wires and indirect impacts include use of poles as hunting perches by birds of prey. Highest impact of

power lines upon sage-grouse is the proximity to lek breeding ground areas where the artificial perches created by the transmission poles can significantly affect sage-grouse use of the area and increase mortality. This proposed project would be located next to Highway 43 where increased disturbance to grouse by the power line would be minimized. Montana DFWP was consulted regarding the proximity of known leks to the project area. The nearest lek is located 1.5 miles North of the project and would not substantially impact use of the lek by sage-grouse.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archaeologist, was consulted regarding historical and archaeological resources on the tract. Patrick found no recorded archaeological or historical sites in a records search and noted that the site had an archaeological inventory conducted by Ethos Consultants for the power line project in 2008. The inventory found no cultural resources on the Trust Land.

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 cumulative effects to aesthetics would occur as a result of this project.

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.

None

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.

None found or reported during the scoping process.

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.

None

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The project is designed to provide a more reliable power supply to the Big Hole National Battlefield. It would not alter any current use of 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.

No additional jobs would be created as a result of this project.

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.

Local and State tax revenues may increase slightly as a result of the transmission line construction.

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 additional demand for government services would result from this project.

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 additional plans or goals were reported during the scoping for 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.

The proposed project would not alter recreational activities and is not located adjacent to any currently proposed wilderness areas.

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 change in population or housing would result from this proposed project.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No change in social structures and mores would occur as a result of this project.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The project would not alter any 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 includes an easement request 3,323 feet in length by 8 feet in width, totaling 26,584 square feet or 0.61 acres of Trust Land. The value of this land is approximately \$1000.00 per acre for a return

to the Capital Buildings Trust of approximately \$610.00. The tract is currently under a grazing lease and will remain as classified grazing land into the foreseeable future. No cumulative economic or social effects are expected as a result of the proposed action.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Charles Maddox	Date: 11/18/09
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B – Allow the transmission line to be placed on Trust Land

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This power line easement will have very little overall impact to the area. The line will run along the Highway 43 corridor and will create very little new disturbance to the ground water or air. Vigilante Electric will be responsible for weed control along the corridor.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Timothy Egan
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager
Signature: /S/ Timothy Egan	Date: November 19,2009