

# CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Buried Telecommunications Line, Project #433

Proposed Implementation Date: Spring/Summer, 2010

Proponent: Nemont Telephone Cooperative, PO Box 600, Scobey, MT 59623-0600

Type and Purpose of Action: Nemont Telephone Cooperative has submitted twelve Right of Way Easement Applications to place buried telecommunications line as part of Project #433. This EA is for the installation of part of the area in the Peerless exchange. The new telecommunications lines will be located in the following state owned tracts: **T37N, R44E**, Sec. 1 consisting of .416 acres of native range, .606 acres of tame pasture, .19 acres of agriculture. Sec. 3 consisting of 2.424 acres of agriculture, Sec. 7 consisting of .125 acres of native range, 1.087 acres agriculture, Sec. 8 consisting of .503 acres of native range, Sec. 18 consisting of 1.271 acres of native range, Sec.35 consisting of 2.449 acres of CRP, **T37N, R45E**, Sec. 6 consisting of .294 acres of agricultural land, .147 acres CRP and .147 acres tame grass, Sec. 7 consisting of .144 acres of CRP, Sec. 17 consisting of 1.212 acres of native rangeland, Sec. 26 consisting of 1.212 acres of agricultural land, Sec. 32 consisting of .126 acres of CRP. Nemont Telephone Cooperative will place the telecommunications lines in the county road Right of Way whenever possible and will move the pedestals to areas that will not interfere with the lessee's surface activities. A total of 17.207 acres of state owned land will be affected with 3.83 acres of native pasture, 0.753 acres of tame pastures, 9.1365 acres of agricultural land, and 3.4875 acres of Conservation Reserve Program. This part of project #433 will generate the school trust \$5,506.04 in return for this easement which will not affect the revenue generating ability of the tracts.

Location: Sections 1, 7, 8, 18, 35, Township 37 North Range 44 East, Sections 6, 7, 15, 17, 26, 31, 32, Township 37 North Range 45 East

County: Daniels

## I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

The applicant has completed Right of Way Applications and submitted them to the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Glasgow Unit Office along with the survey plats for each state tract that will be crossed. The purpose of the requests is to place new buried telecommunications lines as part of project #433. The new lines will be placed in close proximity to existing county road Right of Ways when available. The pedestals will be placed in a manner as to not interfere with the lessee's surface activities. Also, the surface lessee's have been contacted by Nemont Telephone Cooperative in order to settle for purposed surface damages.

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

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks-see attached comments.

Natural Resources and Conservation Service-3/10 permits may be required and Heberly and Associates are working on acquiring the necessary permits.

United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency- Will be contacted to obtain permission to cross and disturb State lands enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program.

United States Army Corps of Engineers-404 permits may be required and Heberly and Associates are working on acquiring the necessary permits.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: Grant Right of Way Easements to Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place new buried telecommunications lines on State owned tracts.

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| <p>No Action Alternative: Deny the Right of Way Easements requested by Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place new buried telecommunications lines on State owned tracts.</p> |
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## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

| RESOURCE   | POTENTIAL IMPACTS  |
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| <p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:<br/>           Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features?<br/>           Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>                             | <p>General Discussion: A total of 17.486 acres of state owned land will be affect. 7.528 acres of native pasture, 0.520 acres of tame pastures, 4.705 acres of agricultural land, and 4.733 acres of CRP would be temporarily disturbed. There are no fragile, compactable, or unstable soils present or any unusual geologic features. Department of Natural Resources and Conservation will require Nemont Telephone Cooperative to reseed the disturbed native pasture, tame pasture, and the Conservation Reserve Program acreage with Department of Natural Resources and Conservation approved seed mixes.</p> <p>Action: This disturbance caused by the installation of the buried telecommunications cable will be done using a static plow to install cable in less sensitive areas and by using a directional boring machine to install cable under roads and waterways. Mitigation: Department of Natural Resources and Conservation will require Nemont Telephone Cooperative to reseed the disturbed native pasture, tame pasture, and the Conservation Reserve Program acreages with Department of Natural Resources and Conservation approved seed mixes.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics will occur.</p> |
| <p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p> | <p>General Discussion: The perennial stream Coal Cree is present within the Township 37 North Range 44 East and Township 37 North Range 45 East which may require a 3/10 and 404 permits.</p> <p>Action: Impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface and ground water on or around the construction area will be reduced through mitigation. Mitigation: Disturbances to sensitive areas will be minimized by using directional boring to install the cable. Heberly and Associates is aware of these areas of concern and is in the process of</p>   |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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|  | <p>obtaining the necessary 3/10 and 404 permits.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.</p>  |
| 6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?   | <p>General Discussion: The project area is not located in an air quality regulation zone or airshed.</p> <p>Action: The air quality may or may not be temporarily reduced during installation. Small amounts of pollutants from machinery and particulates from the disturbance of the areas soil may be produced. The possible reduction in air quality will be minimal and will quickly return to normal by natural means.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the air quality will occur.</p>   |
| 7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?   | <p>General Discussion: No rare plants or cover types are present within the project area per the attached Natural Resource Inventory Survey.</p> <p>Action: Temporary disturbances to plant communities located within the proposed project area will occur. With proper mitigation, plant communities will not be altered long term. Mitigation: The disturbed vegetation will be reseeded using Department of Natural Resources and Conservation approved seed mixes and the applicant will be responsible for promptly controlling noxious weeds that may result from the proposed action.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality will occur.</p>                   |
| 8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?  | <p>General Discussion: This affected area is small in nature and mostly located along county and/or private roads. Montana Fish Wildlife &amp; Parks was contacted concerning Sharptail Grouse leks in the area. Montana Fish Wildlife &amp; Parks comments are attached. No species of concern were noted per the Natural Resource Inventory Survey.</p> <p>Action: Impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will be mitigated. Mitigation: Cables will be buried below ground and the waterways will be directional bored. Disturbed areas will be reclaimed in a timely manner.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.</p> |
| 9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern? | <p>General Discussion: A search of the Natural Resource Inventory Survey system found no species of special concern to be present within the proposed action areas.</p> <p>Action: It is anticipated that the implementation of</p>  |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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|  | <p>this action will not affect any known unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources. Any concerns about damages to the Coal Creek stream or other wetland areas can be mitigated. Mitigation: Directional boring machine must be used to install cable around wetland areas.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.</p>  |
| <p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>   | <p>General Discussion: Ethos Consultants, Inc. conducted a Class II intensity level cultural and paleontological resources inventory of the areas of potential effect on the state tracts impacted with installation of NEMONT's proposed, buried telecommunications line. One prehistoric Native American open-air campsite (24DN16) was identified or re-identified and documented in Sec. 27, T37N, R46E. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC Project #2009-6-16) and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.</p> <p>Action: Site 24DN16 has not been evaluated to determine significance and National Register listing eligibility, but the proposed cable route has been re-designed to fully avoid this archaeological property. In summation, although one cultural resource was identified in or adjacent to the project area of potential effect on state land, proposed developments will have <i>No Effect to Antiquities</i> as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act per Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation staff archeologist.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.</p> |
| <p>11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?</p> | <p>General Discussion: The project areas are located next to county roads. The landscape consists of gently rolling hills and plains.</p> <p>Action: The area has been disturbed in the past and no long term impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated. The cable will be buried and the pedestals are small enough that they will not interfere with the areas aesthetics. Increases of noise and light will occur during construction; these impacts will be eliminated as soon as the project is completed.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics will occur.</p>   |
| <p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other</p>            | <p>General Discussion: The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of general farming and/or ranching operations.</p>  |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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| activities nearby that will affect the project?  | <p>Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.</p> |
| 13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract? | <p>General Discussion: No such documents are known to exist.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects pertinent to this area are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects are anticipated to occur.</p>    |

## III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

| RESOURCE  | POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES   |
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| 14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?                                | <p>General Discussion: The proposed project will create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation and maintenance of the communications line. The area is sparsely populated and risks from working near County road Right of Ways are minimal due to the low levels of traffic.</p> <p>Action: The employer and employee identify these risks as occupational hazards. These risks will only be present during installation and maintenance of the proposed line.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.</p> |
| 15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities? | <p>General Discussion: The surface lessee may have decreased revenues due to surface disturbance caused by the installation of the buried telecommunications cables.</p> <p>Action: The decrease in revenues will be mitigated by the compensation received from Nemont Telephone Cooperative to the surface lessee through the Settlement of Surface Damages Form.</p> <p>No Action: No action will reduce future potentials for industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities in the area.</p>   |
| 16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.    | <p>Action: Because the project will be completed in a relatively short time frame, no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of</p>  |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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|  | employment will occur.   |
| 17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?   | <p>Action: The granting of the Right of Way easements for the project will increase the county tax base by adding infrastructure.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues will occur.</p>   |
| 18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?                                    | <p>General Discussion: The area receives minimal traffic during most of the year due to low population levels. Slight increases in traffic occur during time periods with increased ranching and farming activities.</p> <p>Action: Increases in traffic levels will occur during installation. The increased traffic is not anticipated to occur as substantial levels. No impacts to government services are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the level of demand for road use or government services will occur.</p>  |
| 19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?  | <p>General Discussion: There are no known zoning or management plans in affect in the construction areas.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated to occur as the construction is in remote areas.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals will occur.</p>  |
| 20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract? | <p>General Discussion: Most of the tracts of State land are legally accessible and provide recreational opportunities. No wilderness areas, wilderness study areas or areas of critical environmental concern are located within a close proximity to the proposed project area.</p> <p>Action: Proposed action area is mostly located near existing county roads. The project area contains minimal recreational opportunities. No impacts to recreational quality or recreational opportunities are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.</p> |
| 21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?   | <p>Action: The service provided by the new telecommunications line may or may not increase the likelihood of future rural development in this area. No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.</p>  |
| 22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some   | Action: No impacts to the areas social structures,   |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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| <p>disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>                                  | <p>native/traditional lifestyles, or communities are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities will occur.</p>   |
| <p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p> | <p>Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity will occur.</p>   |
| <p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</p>   | <p>General Discussion: The project will provide the opportunity for local businesses to supply the applicant with materials needed for installation of the telecommunications line and to supply the material used for the line itself. This opportunity may or may not benefit local businesses.</p> <p>Action: The state trust will receive \$5,506.04 as compensation for the Right of Way easements and the county will benefit from an increased tax base. Also, the rural residents in the project area will benefit from 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and be able to obtain high speed internet.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances will occur and the state trust will not receive additional revenue from the sale of the Right of Way easement.</p> |

EA Checklist Prepared By:         /S/          
Randy Dirkson (Land Use Specialist)

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## IV. FINDING

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| <p>25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:</p>                    | <p>Action alternative using mitigation measures. Recommend approving Right of Way easement applications for this portion of Nemont Telephone Cooperative's project.</p>   |
| <p>26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:</p>       | <p>Short-term and small-scale impacts to the native pasture, tame pasture, agricultural land, and Conservation Reserve Program located within proposed action area are expected. Mitigation measures will be used to reduce anticipated impacts. No Archaeological sites are present within the project area. This project will benefit the school trust by generating an additional \$5,506.04 in revenue from the Right of Way easements. Completion of the project will increase Daniels county resident's ability to receive services from Nemont Telecommunications.</p> |
| <p>27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:</p> |   |



