

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Buried Telecommunications Line, Peerless Exchange

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 nine Right of Way Easement Applications to place buried telecommunications lines (Scobey Exchange). The proposed ROWs are for the following State owned tracts: **T36N, R45E, Sec. 3** consisting of 2.361 acres of CRP land, **Sec. 4** consisting of 0.101 acres of agricultural land, **Sec. 8** consisting of 2.126 acres of agricultural land, **Sec. 10** consisting of 3.614 acres of agricultural land, **Sec. 15** consisting of 1.094 acres of tame pasture and 0.657 acres of agricultural land (1.751 acres total), **Sec. 16** consisting of 0.182 acres of tame pasture and 0.182 acres of agricultural land (0.364 acres total), **Sec. 17** consisting of 0.610 acres of native range, **Sec. 31** consisting of 1.560 acres of CRP land, and **Sec. 33** consisting of 1.212 acres of agricultural land. A total of 13.699 acres of State land is included in this portion of the proposed project. This part of Nemont's project has the potential to generate \$450.00 from application fees and \$4,719.25 from the sale of the ROW easements.

The purpose of the project is to install a new underground communications line. The new line will increase the applicant's ability to provide residents of Daniels county with the capability to receive up to date technology and services.

Location: Sec. 3, 4, 8, 10, 15, 16, 17, 31, 33 all of T36N, R45E

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 DNRC-Glasgow Unit Office along with the survey plats for each state tract that will be crossed. The purpose of the requests is to install new buried telecommunications lines. Nemont has worked to create a plan allowing the majority of new lines to be placed in a close proximity to existing county road ROWs. They also plan to place pedestals on the edges of fields as to not interfere with the other surface activities. The surface lessee's have been contacted by Nemont Telephone Cooperative in order to settle for surface damages. Ethos Consultants Inc. was contracted to conduct an Archaeological study along the proposed routes. A copy of their findings was submitted to the Glasgow Unit Office.

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

MT FWP-see attached comments.
 NRCS-3/10 permits may be required. Heberly and Associates will be responsible for these permits and is currently working on acquiring all necessary permits.
 Farm Service Agency- Will be contacted by Nemont to obtain permission to cross and disturb State lands enrolled in the CRP program.
 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.

<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>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	<p>N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)</p>
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>General Discussion: A total of 13.699 acres of State land is included in this portion of the ROW applications. There are no fragile, compactable, or unstable soils present or any unusual geologic features.</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: DNRC will require Nemont Telephone Cooperative to reseed the disturbed native pasture, tame pasture, and the CRP with DNRC 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 project area crosses various intermittent drainages. None of these drainages are considered navigable waterways and most only contain limited water during periods of either high precipitation or runoff. The area does not contain any significant surface or groundwater resources.</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 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>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air</p>	<p>General Discussion: The project area is not located in an air quality regulation zone or airshed.</p>

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<p>quality regulations or zones (Class I 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>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>General Discussion: No rare plants or cover types are present within the project area per the attached NRIS 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 DNRC 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>
<p>8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>General Discussion: This affected area is small in nature and mostly located along county and/or private roads. A list of species found on the Montana Natural Heritage Program lists is attached to this document and discussed in the next section. The listed species is not known to substantially use any of the habitats located within the project area. FWP was contacted concerning Sharptail Grouse leks in the area. FWP's comments are attached.</p> <p>Action: Small areas of the associated habitats will be temporarily disturbed. Mitigation: All disturbed areas determined to need reclamation must be reclaimed in a timely manner. Applicant must also control all noxious weeds in a timely manner. Using these mitigation measures will ensure impacts are minimal, temporary, and insignificant.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.</p>
<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>	<p>General Discussion: The proposed area is small in size and mostly located along county and/or private roads. A NRIS survey was completed and attached. Montana Natural Heritage Program lists the Ferruginous Hawk as a "Species of Concern" located within T36N, R45E.</p> <p>Action: The Ferruginous Hawk does not substantially use the proposed project area. This species requires sagebrush grasslands. The project area does not</p>

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	<p>contain habitat suitable for this species. Potential impacts to the Ferruginous Hawk and other terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will be mitigated as much as possible. Mitigation: Cables will be buried below ground and the waterways will be directional bored. Disturbed areas will be reclaimed in a timely manner. Using the mitigation measures would further reduce the potential for impacts to the listed species.</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. During the course of inventory two fully removed historic highway bridges (24DN61 and 24DN93), an abandoned historic road bed segment (24DN108); a historic earthen barricade or berm (24DN109); the Daniels county portion of the Plentywood to Scobey branch line of the Great Northern Railroad (24DN136); and two prehistoric Native American open-air campsites (24DN82 and 24DN16) were identified or re-identified and documented. Cultural properties 24DN61, 24DN82 and 24DN93 no longer exist as a result of previous highway reconstruction work. Site 24DN109 is outside the area of potential effect and will not be physically or visually impacted. The cable route will be bored beneath the impacted portions of site 24DN136 and will have <i>No Effect</i> to this National Register Eligible Property. Lastly, 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 six cultural resources were identified in or adjacent to the project area of potential effect on state land, proposed developments will have <i>No Effect</i> to <i>Antiquities</i> as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC (DNRC Project #2009-6-16) and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.</p> <p>Action: The proposed cable route has been re-designed to fully avoid archaeological sites. The proposed developments will have <i>No Effect</i> to <i>Antiquities</i> as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act per Patrick Rennie, DNRC 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</p>

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	<p>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>
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 activities nearby that will affect the project?	<p>General Discussion: The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of general farming and/or ranching operations.</p> <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>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	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
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 ROWs 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 area is primarily used for ranching and farming. Commercial and industrial activities are very limited near the project area.</p> <p>Action: The surface owner and/ or lessee may experience damages in the form of decreased revenue due to surface disturbances from the proposed action. The decrease in revenues will be mitigated by the compensation received from Nemont Telephone Cooperative to the surface owner/lessee through the Settlement of Surface Damages Form. Once completed,</p>

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	<p>the new line will provide the potential for industries and/or individuals to use the line for future developments/advances requiring telecommunications.</p> <p>No Action: No action will reduce future potentials for industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities in the area.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<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 employment will occur.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>Action: The granting of the ROW 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>
<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>	<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 of 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>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<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 occur as the construction is in remote areas.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals will occur.</p>
<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>	<p>General Discussion: Most of the tracts of State land are legally accessible and provide recreational opportunities. No wilderness areas 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>

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<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<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>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to the areas social structures, 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.</p> <p>Action: The state trust will receive \$4,719.25 as compensation for the ROW easements and the county will benefit from an increased tax base. Also, the rural residents in the project area will benefit fit from 21st 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 ROW easement.</p>

EA Checklist Prepared By: /s/
 Matthew Poole (Land Use Specialist)

Date: April 19, 2010

