

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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| Project Name: | Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative Temporary Construction Licenses and Easement Amendments |
| Proposed Implementation Date: | June/July 2010 |
| Proponent: | Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative, Inc. |
| Location: | Section 7, Township 6 North, Range 24 East Section 36, Township 10 North, Range 25 East |
| County: | Musselshell County |

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative is proposing to upgrade telecommunications services to their customers by installing additional buried cable within two existing easements. The work that is proposed expands beyond the approval in the existing easements, therefore the need to amend the existing easements. Mid-Rivers is proposing to begin the work prior to the approval of the easement amendments and this could be accomplished if a Temporary Construction License were approved.

The first easement that is proposed for amendment is located in Section 7, T6N, R24E and was approved in 1990 for a "...right of way for buried communications cable (existing)...". This easement was approved via Deed No. D-9111 (Application No. 10055). The width of this easement is 30' and the new additional cable would be located within the previously approved easement area.

The other easement proposed for amendment is D-10307 (Application No. 11380) located in Section 36, T10N, R25E which was approved in 2000 for a "...right of way for a buried copper distribution communications cable...". The width of the approved easement is 20' and the new additional cable would be located within the previously approved area.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. Settlement of Damages forms were obtained from the grazing lessee of both sections.

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

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request to issue temporary construction licenses and easements for both requested sections that will permit the installation of additional buried telecommunications cable within the previously approved easements.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request to issue temporary construction licenses and easements for both requested sections to permit the installation of additional buried telecommunications cable within the previously approved easements.

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.

In Section 7-6N-24E, the area that the easement traverses is generally flat, however, there is one area along the north section line where the line climbs out of the Musselshell River bottom up onto a bench. The soils in the easement area consist mostly of loams. The NRCS soil survey indicates that the most significant potential constraint with shallow excavation is the depth to soft bedrock and potential steep slopes.

The easement area in Section 36-10N-25E follows a gently sloping grade along the east section line. The NRCS soil survey shows the easement area consisting of loams that have some limitations, with the main potential limitation being depth to soft bedrock.

The NRCS Soil Survey does not indicate any weaknesses to these soils that would significantly impact the proposed action.

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 adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are anticipated from the proposed action.

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 impact to air quality is expected from the implementation of the proposed action.

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 installation of the buried telecommunications cable on the two sections should have minimal disturbance of existing vegetative cover. The areas that are disturbed will be required to be rehabbed and re-seeded. No significant adverse impacts to vegetative cover, quantity or quality are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following:

Section 7-T6N-R24E: There was one species reported in the vicinity of this parcel, the spiny softshell turtle. The habitat for the spiny softshell is in and along the Musselshell River. This parcel does not have frontage on the Musselshell River; therefore there should be no impact on this species if the proposed action is implemented.

Section 36-T10N-R25E: The only result for this parcel was the Greater Sage Grouse. There were 5 observations in the vicinity of this section, but none on the property itself. The proposed action would be implemented outside of lekking season (March through May) and would be of short duration. Therefore, no significant impacts are expected from implementing the proposed action.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The proposed easements are located adjacent to existing public roads that have previously disturbed the surface for both road construction and the prior installation of underground telecommunications cable. No significant adverse impact to historic or archaeological sites is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

The proposed action would result in the installation of buried telecommunications cable adjacent to existing public roads. Once the easement areas are rehabbed from any disturbance due to the installation, the only indication that there is an underground telecommunications cable would be from above-ground warning markers. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to aesthetics is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 known studies or future government actions planned for these two Trust parcels.

| IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES</i> 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.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The proposed easements do not traverse any crop lands and settlements with the grazing lessees have been obtained. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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.

The proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

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.

The proposed action is not expected to have an adverse impact on tax revenue.

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

The implementation of the proposed alternative should not generate any additional demands on governmental services.

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.

Implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to conflict with any locally adopted plans.

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 two Trust parcels that would be impacted by the approval of the proposed action have public access via improved public roads and the easements will generally run parallel to these roadways. The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to have any adverse impact on the ability to access these Trust lands for recreational use.

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 action is being initiated Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative to offer increased services to their members/customers. No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing should occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

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 impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed alternative is not expected to have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

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 State will benefit by getting one-time fees of \$150 and \$250 for each Temporary Construction License and will also receive a one-time fee for the additional burden placed on the easements on these two Trust parcels. The Common Schools Trust will be the beneficiary of this payment.

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| EA Checklist Prepared By: | Name: Jeff Bollman, AICP | Date: 15 June 2010 |
| | Title: Area Planner, Southern Land Office | |

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| V. FINDING |
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25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that a Temporary Construction License and amended easements be granted to Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the purpose of installing buried telecommunications cable on the following sections in Musselshell County:

- Section 7, Township 6 North, Range 24 East
- Section 36, Township 10 North, Range 25 East

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action which include the issuance of temporary construction licenses and amended easements to permit the installation of additional buried telecommunications cable. There are no other natural features or nearby species of concern that could produce adverse impacts from the proposed action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

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| EA Checklist Approved By: | Name: Richard A. Moore |
| | Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office |
| Signature: /s/ Richard A. Moore | Date: June 16, 2010 |