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# CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Project Name: Thieltges Farms - Buried Telecommunications Cable - Class III Easement**

**Proposed Implementation Date: April 15, 2004**

**Proponent: Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association Inc., PO Box 1220, Havre, MT 59501-1220**

**Type and Purpose of Action: Triangle Telephone Cooperative has been petitioned by Thieltges Farms, Inc. to install a telecommunications line to their house in southern Blaine County. Triangle Telephone Cooperative is proposing to cross state land with the buried telecommunications cable from an existing buried telephone line. Triangle Telephone Cooperative is applying for a right-of-way easement across the portion of state land the buried telecommunications cable will be crossing. The purpose of the easement will be for the construction and maintenance of the buried telecommunications cable. The easement will disturb approximately 0.595 acres of state land.**

**Location: NW¼SE¼, NE¼SE¼, Section 19, Township 29.0 North, Range 22.0 East**

**County: Blaine County, Montana**

## 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 Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has been petitioned by Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. to obtain a utilities right-of-way easement across state land. Triangle Telephone Cooperative has contacted State surface lessee, Nick Faber to settle the damages that are expected with the installation of a buried telecommunications cable. Triangle Telephone's statement of necessity states that a field survey determined the most direct route between terminus locations, while also providing access to existing and future network considerations.

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

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**LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OFFICE**

The Montana DNRC is the only agency that has jurisdiction for this type of project on state land. This project will take place on State School Trust Land, which is managed by the Trust Land Management Division of the Montana DNRC. Triangle Telephone Cooperative needs to obtain a right-of-way easement from the Montana DNRC for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications cable that will be crossing state land.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Action Alternative:** Grant Triangle Telephone Cooperative a right-of-way easement across state land for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications cable.  
**No Action Alternative:** Deny Triangle Telephone Cooperative a right-of-way easement across state land for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications cable that will be crossing state land.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> The soils on the State land will be disturbed with the burial of a telecommunications cable. The area of disturbance will be small in scope and the surrounding vegetative communities will reclaim the disturbed vegetation through time. The disturbance may cause the soil in certain areas to become compacted and possibly eroded. Installation of the telecommunications cable will only take place while the topsoil is frozen or dry. There will be no long-term impacts to the native grazing land with the burial of a telecommunication cable. The soil quality and stability will not be jeopardized on this tract of state land.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be issued a right-of-way easement. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be able to cross state land and they will have to seek a new alternative to bury a telecommunications line for Thieltges Farms, Inc.</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><b>Action Alternative:</b> The installation of a telecommunications line will have no impacts on the water quality, quantity, and distribution in this area. The buried line will follow the adjacent county road and all important surface and groundwater resources will be avoided at all costs. The buried telecommunications line does not have the potential to violate ambient water quality standards or contaminate drinking water.</p>
	<p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The water quality, quantity, and distribution will not be impacted on this tract of state land. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be issued a right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line. Water quality, quantity, and distribution will remain the same in this area.</p>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Continued on Next Page)</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> Air quality will not be impacted with this type of activity. No pollutants or particulates will be produced from the installation of a buried telecommunications line. The project is not influenced by air quality regulations or zones. The telecommunications cable will be buried approximately six feet deep in the ground.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Continued on Next Page)</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Continued from Previous Page)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">(Continued from Previous Page)</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The air quality will not be impacted on this tract of state land. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be issued a right-of-way easement across state land for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> The native vegetation will be altered where the trench will be dug for the telecommunications line. The equipment used for the installation will destroy a small amount of vegetation as well. However, over time the existing plant communities on site will reclaim the disturbed areas and slowly bring them back to their native status.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The native vegetation will not be negatively influenced. Triangle Telephone will not be granted a right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line.</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><b>Action Alternative:</b> Wildlife habitat will not be impacted by this type of project. Wildlife species may be temporarily relocated with this type of activity. Construction and maintenance activities will increase traffic into the area during certain times, but no wildlife species will be permanently relocated. Once the project is completed, wildlife in the area will return to normal activities.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> Wildlife may be negatively influenced, if the proponent has to construct an overhead facility with poles in an alternative location. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be issued a right-of-way easement. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be able to cross state land and they will have to seek a new alternative to bury a telecommunications line for Thieltges Farms, Inc. Triangle Telephone will not be granted a right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line across this tract of state land.</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<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><b>Action Alternative:</b> Threatened and endangered species will be able to migrate through this area. The area of impact contains no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources. The proposed project area contains no wetlands. Sensitive species and species of special concern that may be located in this area will not be impacted by burying a telecommunications line in this area. These species will not be permanently relocated with this type of activity.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> Unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources that are unknown will not be impacted. Listed, threatened, and endangered wildlife species and their habitat will remain the same on this tract of state land. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be issued a right-of-way easement. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be able to cross state land and they will have to seek a new alternative to bury a telecommunications line for Thieltges Farms, Inc.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> A Cultural Resource Inventory Report was completed for this project by John H. Brumley of Ethos Consultants, Incorporated. The cultural resource inventory indicated that no cultural resources of any kind were identified in the route of the proposed right-of-way easement. Staff from the Havre Unit Office has never found any cultural resources or surface features in the area of the proposed route during past scheduled field appraisals that have been conducted on this tract. Montana DNRC Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie does not have any cultural resource concerns with this project.</p>
	<p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> There are no known historical or cultural resources present in the proposed route of the telecommunications line on this tract of state land. The Montana DNRC will continue to comply with the State of Montana's, Antiquity Act, to make sure all archaeological and cultural resources are documented and recorded with the National Register of Historic Places.</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<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><u>Action Alternative:</u> The aesthetic character found on this tract of State land will not be impacted with the installation of a telecommunications line. The telephone line will not be visible to the public since it will be buried. The installation of this line will create some excessive noise during the initial phase of digging the trench. However, once the telecommunications line is buried, noise levels will return to normal in this area.</p> <p><u>No Action Alternative:</u> The aesthetics character found on this tract of the State land will remain the same. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be issued a right-of-way easement. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be able to cross state land and they will have to seek a new alternative to bury a telecommunications line for Thielges Farms, Inc.</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 activities nearby that will affect the project?</p>	<p><u>Action Alternative:</u> This project will demand the environmental resource of a small portion of land for the construction of the telecommunications line. Forage production will be decreased somewhat with this type of activity. Livestock grazing will not be impacted on this tract of State land. Once the project has been completed, surrounding vegetation will reclaim the disturbed area over time. This project will not use resources that are limited in this area.</p> <p><u>No Action Alternative:</u> The Montana DNRC will continue to monitor tracts of state land every ten years to set stocking rates and evaluate the grazing management practices on tracts of land that are classified as grazing land. <del>The Montana DNRC does not expect any</del> other demands on the environmental resources that are known to exist in this area.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p><u>Action Alternative:</u> The Havre Unit Office will perform a field evaluation on this tract every 10 years to determine stocking rates for livestock grazing and to monitor grazing management practices. The Montana DNRC does not have any other studies, plans, or projects on this tract of state land.</p> <p><u>No Action Alternative:</u> The project will not impact other studies, plans, or projects that the DNRC has on this tract of State land. Triangle Telephone will not be granted a right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> Triangle Telephone Cooperative, its subcontractors, and/or their employees understand the risks associated with the installation of a buried telecommunications line. Those people assume these risks as an occupational hazard. Installing a buried telecommunications line will not increase the health and safety risks found in this area.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> This project will not impact the health and human safety risks of the people that were involved with the installation of these developments. Triangle Telephone will not be granted a right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> This project will not decrease the overall long-term productivity of the grazing land. The native vegetation will continue to produce the same amount of forage for livestock on this tract of state land. The trenching activity will not alter the soil on the grazing land, as long as the topsoil is stockpiled on the upslope side of the trench. Commercial activity will increase with the burial of a new telecommunications line across the state land.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> There will be no impacts on the industrial, commercial, agricultural activities, or production that occurs on this tract of state land. The native forage production levels associated with this tract will be evaluated on a ten year basis to adjust stocking rates for livestock grazing according to long-term precipitation levels.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> The project will not create, move, or eliminate jobs within the surrounding area. The quantity and distribution of employment will not be disturbed. The installation of new telecommunications line will provide Thieltges Farms, Inc. with reliable telephone service.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The project will not impact the quantity and distribution of employment in the surrounding area. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be granted a utilities right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line across state land.</p>

<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> The project will create higher tax revenue in Blaine County. The higher tax revenue will be used to maintain this facility and update existing facilities. The local and state tax base will not change as a result of burying a telecommunications line across this tract of state land.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The project will have no impact on the local and state tax base. The project will not create additional tax revenue in Blaine County, if it is not installed.</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><b>Action Alternative:</b> The project will add substantial traffic to the existing roads during the installation of the telecommunication line. There will be no demand for government services with the installation of a buried telecommunications line across state land.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> This type of project will not create a demand for government services such as fire protection, police, or schools. Installing and updating telecommunication facilities, benefits all people who use this type of communication equipment.</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><b>Action Alternative:</b> There are no locally adopted environmental plans or goals that need to be addressed. The Montana DNRC will continue to monitor this tract of state land every ten years to evaluate management objectives and to generate additional revenue for the School Trust Fund of Montana.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The Montana DNRC will continue to manage the State of Montana's trust land resources to produce revenues for the trust beneficiaries, while considering environmental factors and protecting the income-generating capacity of the land. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be granted a utilities right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line across state land.</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><b>Action Alternative:</b> This tract of state land does have a perfected legal access via a county road that runs parallel to the south of the proposed right-of-way. Recreational activities such as hunting and hiking are the main types of activities that occur on this tract of state land. These recreational activities will continue to occur regardless of the buried telecommunication line. The installation of a telecommunications line will not impact these recreational activities at all. The telecommunication line will not be visible to the public, once it has been buried.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> Recreational activities like hunting and hiking will continue to be the main recreational activities that occur on this tract of state land. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be granted a utilities right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line across state land.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> This project will not impact the density and distribution of population and housing in this area. This area consists primarily of ranching and farming communities. The people in this area are dependent upon these livelihoods and a new telecommunication line will assist them in their everyday activities.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The project will not add to the population, nor will it require additional housing. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be granted a utilities right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line across state land.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p><b>Action Alternative:</b> The project will not disturb any of the native or traditional lifestyles that are found in this area. This community is dependent upon grazing lands to raise livestock and farming lands to grow cereal grains. There will be no impact to the agricultural community in this area with the installation of a telecommunications line for telephone service.</p> <p><b>No Action Alternative:</b> The project will not impact the social structures and mores that currently exist in this area. Triangle Telephone Cooperative will not be granted a utilities right-of-way easement for the construction and maintenance of a buried telecommunications line across state land.</p>



IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	N.S.I.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:  <input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By: Clive Rooney  
Name

Area Manager, Northeastern Land Office  
Title

*Clive Rooney*  
Signature  
Clive Rooney

3/30/04  
Date  
Lowstown Unit Manager,  
NELO, DNRC-TLMD