

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Mid-Rivers Telephone Coop Fiber Optic Cable Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2015
Proponent:	Mid-Rivers Communications
Location:	Section 36, Township 8 North, Range 26 East
County:	Musselshell County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative is applying for a 16' easement on Section 36, T8N, R26E in Musselshell County in order to install underground fiber optic cable adjacent to an existing county road, W Parrot Creek Road. This would allow for an upgrade of telecommunications services to their customers by installing a buried fiber optic cable. Mid-Rivers also included in this application a very small section of fiber optic cable running from the above mentioned fiber optic cable near the county road toward the northeast corner of the subject section. The total length of the easement would be 3966 feet and would encompass an area of approximately 1.35 acres. Please see the attached map for details.

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. A Settlement of Damages form was obtained from the grazing lessee.

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

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request to issue a 16' easement to Mid-River Telephone Cooperative for the purpose of installing an underground fiber optic cable on Section 36, Township 8 North, Range 26 East in Musselshell County.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request to issue a 16' easement to Mid-River Telephone Cooperative for the purpose of installing an underground fiber optic cable on Section 36, Township 8 North, Range 26 East in Musselshell County.

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 main underground fiber optic cable is proposed to be installed parallel to the existing county road, W Parrot Creek Road, which generally runs from northwest to southeast through the NE¼ of the subject section. Also included in this application is a very small section of underground fiber optic cable that will run from the main fiber optic cable to the northeast until it reaches the section line. The topography of the area where the fiber optic cable will be installed is flat to gently rolling. The soils in the easement area are mainly comprised of somewhat deep loamy soils. The NRCS Soil Survey does indicate that there are some limitations in both soils for shallow excavations and they include such potential issues as unstable excavation walls and dusty tendencies. However, these issues are not expected to 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.

West Parrot Creek runs parallel to West Parrot Creek Road and the proposed easement. The underground fiber optic line proposed to be installed within this easement will cross a small section of West Parrot Creek once, but it will be within an area that has already been disturbed by the county road corridor and there is a culvert for the county road already installed at the point of intersection with West Parrot Creek. No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are expected from implementing 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 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 underground fiber optic cable would have a minimal disturbance to existing vegetative cover along West Parrot Creek Road. 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 proposed project area search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database identified four vertebrate animals that are listed as a species of concern, threatened, or endangered: Great Blue Heron, Hoary Bat, Spotted Bat, and Greater Short-horned Lizard. Of these four species, none have had any confirmed sightings on the subject section. These species may traverse this section, but are not known to occupy it.

The area for the proposed easement is in the General Habitat area for Sage Grouse and the nearest active lek is more than 6 miles to the north of the proposed easement. The mitigations required by the Governor's Executive Order No. 10-2014 will all be followed for the proposed easement. These mitigations include:

- Co-locating the underground fiber optic cable with already installed underground utilities along the highway corridor.
- Ensuring that vegetation removal will be limited to the minimum amount of disturbance needed.
- Reclaiming the impacted areas to re-establish vegetation cover and species composition to that of the previous levels before the proposed easement.

These mitigations, in my opinion, will be sufficient to avoid having any significant adverse impacts to the Sage Grouse General Habitat.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the installation of the main underground fiber optic cable along an existing county road, it is not expected that this action will have any significant effect on any of the species identified on this parcel. The surface disturbance will be temporary and adjacent to the existing county road.

No significant adverse impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

The proposed easement is located adjacent to an existing county road that has previously disturbed the surface, along with other existing utilities parallel to the road. A field survey was completed on December 11th, 2014. The survey found no trace of any historical or archeological materials. No significant adverse impacts to historic or archaeological sites are 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 an underground fiber optic cable adjacent to an existing county road, West Parrot Creek Road. Once the easement area is rehabbed from any disturbance due to the installation, the only indication that there is an underground fiber optic line would be from any 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 projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i> • <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i> • <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i>

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 location of the easement does not traverse any crop lands. 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 will not 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 will not 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 will 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 will not 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 Trust parcel that would be affected by the approval of the proposed easement does have public access via an improved county road, West Parrot Creek Road. The easement is proposed to mainly run parallel to the road and not in an area that has active recreational use. The implementation of the proposed alternative will not have an adverse impact on the recreational use of this Trust land.

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 significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would 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 will not 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 a one-time fee of \$675.00 from Mid-River Telephone Cooperative for the purchase of the easement on this Trust parcel. The Common Schools Trust will be the beneficiary of this payment.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jocee Hedrick	Date: 31 December 2014
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Southern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that a 16' easement be granted to Mid-River Telephone Cooperative for the purpose of installing an underground fiber optic cable on Section 36, Township 8 North, Range 26 East in Musselshell County.

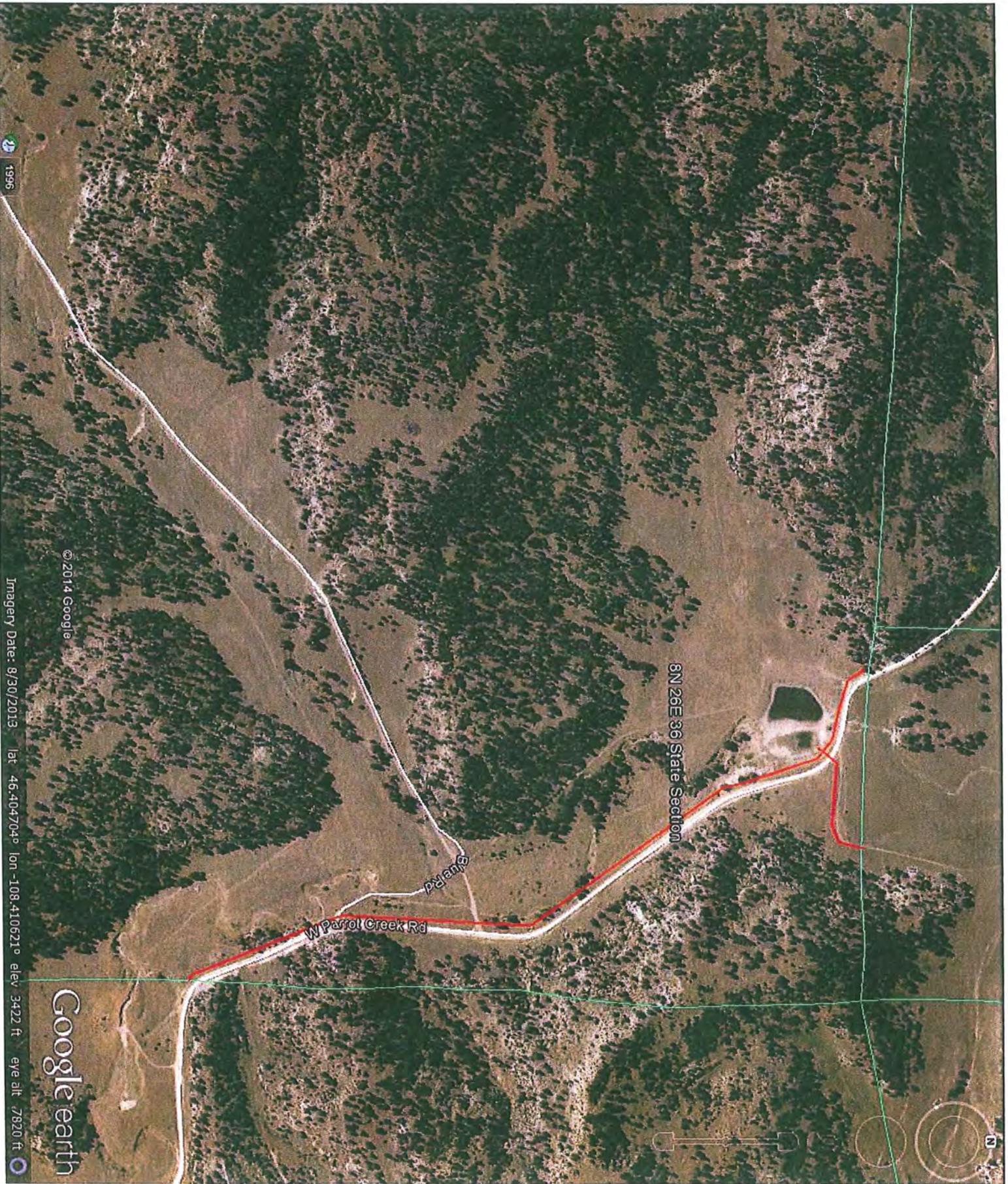
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined that no significant adverse environmental impacts will result from the proposed activity.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

- EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Matthew Wolcott
	Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Signature: 	Date: January 12 2015



8N 29E 36 State Section

Blue Rd

W Parrot Creek Rd



1996

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Imagery Date: 8/30/2013 lat 46.404704° lon -108.410621° elev 3422 ft eye alt 7820 ft

Google earth