

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Geraldine East FTTP (Fiber-To-The-Premise) Upgrade. Easement application for the installation of a buried fiber optic cable to upgrade residential services.
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2015
Proponent:	Central Montana Communications Inc., Havre, Montana
Location:	See attached list of tracts below
County:	Chouteau
Trust:	Common Schools (CS)

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Central Montana Communications has requested Right-of-Way Easements across the named tracts of State Land to install a buried fiber optic cable. The fiber optic cable will cross 8 tracts of state land.

The cable will be placed by directional boring machine, single bladed plow, or trenching machine. The cable will be buried at a minimum depth of 42" in the fields and 30" minimum in the Homesites.

The proposed easement will be 20 feet wide through the state owned land.

Geraldine East FTTP Upgrade							
Township	Range	Section	Lease#	Fiber Optic Cable Location	Acres Affected	\$/acre	Approx. value
21N	12E	6	1444	LOT5,4, SE4NW4,S2NE4	3.616	950	3435.2
21N	13E	36	9839, 398	NW4,W2 NE4,NE4NE4	2.687	300	806.1
22N	11E	24	7540	W2NW4	0.567	950	538.65
22N	11E	24	8965	SW4NW4NW4, NW4SW4NW4	0.174	0	0
22N	11E	13	5605	SW4NW4	0.612	950	581.4
22N	12E	4	9311	SW4SW4	0.607	300	182.1
22N	12E	30	110	Lot 4	0.641	950	608.95
22N	11E	36	9471	SE4SE4 (Homesite)	0.108	0	0
23N	11E	36	2930	S2SE4	1.212	950	1151.4
TOTAL					10.224		7,303.80

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Proponents - Central Montana Communications Inc., Triangle Communications
State of Montana -The Montana Department of Resources and Conservation/ Trust Lands Management Division (DNRC/TLMD) – Northeastern Land Office (NELO)

Surface Lessees:

Knedler Farms Inc. - Lease #1444
Evening Hatch LLC - Lease #398, #9839
Hucke Land & Livestock Inc. - Lease #5605, #7540, #8965 (Homesite)
Silverado Farms II Partnership- Lease #9311
John V. Botsford- Lease #110
Eric J. Anderson– Lease #2930
Charles and Glenda Tonne – Lease #9471 (Homesite)

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

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – The DNRC **does not** grant Central Montana Communications the requested Right-of-Way Easements across the named tracts of State Land to install a buried fiber optic cable.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – The DNRC **does** grant Central Montana Communications the requested Right-of-Way Easements across the named tracts of State Land to install a buried fiber optic cable.

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.

Soils on the proposed project sites are variously silty, sandy, and shallow in texture. The topography is gently rolling and the fiber optic cable will be mostly installed along existing county roads. These soils and slopes are generally suitable for the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Equipment will cause localized areas of soil compaction and will disturb the soil where the buried fiber optic cable is being placed.

The proponent will be responsible for reclamation and reseeding in accordance with DEQ/EPA protocols.

There are no unusual geologic features in the proposed project area.

No cumulative effects to the soils are anticipated.

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.

There are no important surface or groundwater resources within the proposed project area.

No cumulative effects to the water resources are anticipated.

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.

There may be some airborne particulates as part of the trenching operation. The dusty conditions are expected to be minimal and of short duration.

No cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

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.

Vegetation will be minimally impacted as the fiber optic cable will be installed with a directional boring machine, single bladed plow, or trenching machine.

The vegetation consists primarily of native species, introduced species, and agricultural land. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed construction areas are a concern, but this concern will be mitigated as the proponents are responsible for controlling weeds within the disturbed areas.

Cumulative impacts on the vegetative resources are not expected as the proposed construction areas will be reclaimed and reseeded.

No plant species of concern or potential species of concern were noted on a search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program.

No rare plants or cover types are present.

No long term cumulative effects to vegetation are anticipated.

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.

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, these tracts may provide habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, and badger), upland game birds (sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds.

The proposal does not include any land use change which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The fiber optic cable installation will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or travel corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the installation of the buried fiber optic cable.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to wildlife habitat are anticipated.

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.

At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (on file) identified the following species of concern that may occur in the proposed project area.

<i>Anthus spragueii</i>	Sprague's Pipit
<i>Ardea herodias</i>	Great Blue Heron
<i>Cynomys ludovicianus</i>	Black-tailed Prairie Dog
<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Long-billed Curlew
<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Loggerhead Shrike
<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Long-billed Curlew
<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Ferruginous Hawk
<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Burrowing Owl
<i>Spea bombifrons</i>	Plains Spadefoot
<i>Bufo cognatus</i>	Great Plains Toad

These species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of the 2014 Sage-grouse lek and lek area data in DNRC Sage-grouse Base Map showed no sage grouse leks in the proposed project area.

No wetlands are present in the proposed project area.

No cumulative effects to species of concern or habitat are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

Ethos Consultants conducted a Class III cultural resources inventory of the area of potential effect on state land. The proposed project will have No Effect to state owned heritage properties. No additional archaeological investigative work is recommended for this proposed telecommunications project.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to archeological, paleontological, or historical resources are anticipated.

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.

These tracts are located in a rural agricultural area. There are no prominent topographic features. There are no populated or scenic areas nearby. The proposed project will not produce significant increased light or noise levels. The state land does not provide any unique scenic qualities not also provided on adjacent private lands.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to aesthetics are anticipated.

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.

The proposed project will not affect any nearby activities.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to environmental resources are anticipated.

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 tracts listed in this EA Checklist.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *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.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Health and safety risks associated with fiber optic line installation are assumed by the proponent and are considered occupational hazards

Once the installation has been completed, there will be no health and safety concerns associated with this project.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

This project will not add to or deter from other industrial, agricultural, or commercial activities in this area.

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 proposal would have no effect on quantity and distribution of employment.

The proposed activity will require a limited number of personnel positions. These positions are already held by employees of the proponent. No new jobs will be created.

No cumulative effects to the employment market are anticipated.

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.

No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to the local and state tax base are anticipated.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue for the proposed project.

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

No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to the demand for government services are anticipated.

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.

There are no zoning or other agency management plans affecting these lands.

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.

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on recreation or wilderness activities.

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 proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments. Population and housing will not be affected.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

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 proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

The proposed project will have no effect on any unique quality of the area.

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.

This project will benefit the school trust in terms of the \$50.00 fee generated from each of the eight easement applications for a total of \$400.00.

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TOTAL					10.224		7,303.80

The total acres affected by the easements are 10.224 acres and the total revenue generated is \$7,303.8 from the proposed easement.

Cumulative impacts are not likely as the area is only used for agricultural and grazing and the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the long-term viability of agriculture and grazing on the tracts.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Bill Creamer
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Northeastern Land Office
Signature: /S/ Bill Creamer	Date: 3/16/2015

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – The DNRC **does** grant Central Montana Communications the requested Right-of-Way Easements across the named tracts of State Land to install a buried fiber optic cable.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The applicant is applying for an easement across 8 tracts of state land to bury a fiber optic cable. This project will provide area residents with upgraded telecommunications services. Significant impacts are not anticipated as a result of the selected alternative. Disturbed areas will be reclaimed and reseeded in accordance with specifications outlined by EPA and DEQ.

The surface lessee's have been notified and do not anticipate any damages. Easement values are estimated at \$300/ac for rangeland and \$950/ac for cropland.

I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined that no negative long-term environmental impacts will result from the proposed cable installation.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

<input type="checkbox"/>	EIS	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Detailed EA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No Further Analysis
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EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Barny D. Smith
	Title: Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office
Signature: /S/ Barny D. Smith	Date: 3/16/2015