

# CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Froid Rural Exchange, FTTP

Proposed Implementation Date: Spring/Summer 2014

Proponent: Nemont Telephone Cooperative, PO Box 600, Scobey, MT 59623-0600

Type and Purpose of Action: Nemont Telephone Cooperative has submitted 4 Right of Way Easement Applications to install buried fiber optic telecommunication cable on/across State land in Roosevelt and Sheridan Counties. The proposed ROWs would include 8.9 acres across 4 tracts of State land (3.0 acres of grazing land, 2.4 acres of CRP land, and 3.5 acres of agricultural land). Nemont has obtained signed Settlement of Damages forms for all 4 tracts and agree to pay lessees for all "actual damages" resulting from the installation of the lines. Using the DNRC's "County Fee Schedule for Roosevelt County", Nemont would be responsible for paying \$6,525.00 to the Trust as compensation for the acreage involved in the easements.

Location: S2 of Sec. 36 of T31N – R57E; SE4 & E2 of Sec. 16 of T30N - R56E; SE4SE4 of Sec. 21 of T29N - R55E; S2 of Sec. 16 of T30N - R58E

County: Roosevelt (3) and Sheridan (1)

## 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 submitted Right of Way Applications to the DNRC-Glasgow Unit Office along with the survey plats for each state tract that would be crossed. The purpose of the requests is to install new buried fiber optic telecommunication 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 and all lessees have signed Settlement of Damages forms.

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

NRCS-3/10 permits may be required. According to Nemont personnel, Finley Engineering is aware of the regulations/requirements regarding these permits and they are responsible for obtaining these permits.

Farm Service Agency- Nemont must obtain permission to cross and/or disturb State lands enrolled in the CRP program.

Government agencies holding land within the project area would be involved if their land holdings are planned to be utilized.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: Grant Right of Way Easements to Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place new buried telecommunications lines on the listed State owned tracts.

No Action Alternative: Deny the Right of Way Easements requested by Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place new buried telecommunications lines on State owned tracts.

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS  N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)
<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>A total of 8.9 acres of State land is included in the 4 ROW easement applications. There are no fragile, compactable, or unstable soils present or any unusual geologic features. The installation of the buried fiber optic telecommunications lines would be completed using a vertical plow pulled by a crawler tractor and a directional boring machine to install the lines under roads and waterways. The project would also include cleanup and reseeded. Nemont would be responsible for all reclamation if project proceeds.</p> <p>Action: Impacts to the soils would be temporary and soils are anticipated to return to normal. No impacts to fragile, compactable, or unstable soils or any unusual geologic features are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics would 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>The project area does not contain any significant surface or groundwater resources. There is one intermittent stream that will be crossed in Sec. 16 of T30N - R56E. The installation would include a directional boring machine to be used to install the lines under waterways.</p> <p>Action: Impacts to water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface and ground water are not anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution would occur.</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>The project area is not located in an air quality regulation zone or 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 would be minimal and would quickly return to normal by natural means.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to air quality would 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>The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 4 plant "species of concern" and 1 plant "Potential Species of Concern" within the ROW's T-31 N, R-57E township. The ROW would go through section 36 in this township, which is currently in CRP and agriculture. No rare plants or cover types are known to exist within the project area.</p>

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	<p>Action: Temporary disturbances to plant communities located within the proposed project area would occur. Vegetative communities would not be permanently altered. No impacts to rare plants or cover types are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality would 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>The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 26 animal "species of concern" and 8 "potential species of concern" within the ROW's respective townships. None of the listed species are known to substantially use the habitats located within the project area. The proposed area is mostly located along county and/or private roads. None of the area's wildlife would be affected beyond temporary displacement during installation and maintenance of the lines.</p> <p>Action: Habitats would be temporarily disturbed during installation of the lines. No lasting impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and/or habitats are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats would 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>The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 26 "(animal) species of concern", 8 "(animal) potential species of concern" and 4 "(plant) species of concern" and 1 "(plant) potential species of concern" within the ROW's respective townships. None of the listed species are known to substantially use the habitats located within the project area. The proposed area is mostly located along county and/or private roads. None of the area's wildlife would be affected beyond temporary displacement during installation and maintenance of the lines.</p> <p>Action: <b>No lasting impacts</b> to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are anticipated.</p> <p><b>No Action: No impacts</b> to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources would occur.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) administers state land within the project Area of Potential Effect (APE). Ethnoscience conducted a Class III inventory of cultural resources of the project APE as it relates to state owned land. No cultural resources were found along the areas of the proposed buried fiber optic telecommunication lines. Proposed developments will have No Effect to State owned Heritage Properties.</p> <p>Action: <b>No impacts</b> to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources are anticipated.</p>

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	No Action: No impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources would occur.
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>The landscape consists of gently rolling hills and plains being used primarily for general farming and/or ranching operations. The lines would be buried and the access pedestals are small enough to not interfere with the area's aesthetics. Increases of noise would occur during construction; these impacts would cease as soon as the project is completed.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics would 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>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 would 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 would 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>The proposed project would create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation and maintenance of the communications line.</p> <p>Action: The employer and employee identify the risks associated with the installation of the line as an occupational hazard. The risk would only be present during installation and maintenance of the proposed line.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks would occur.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	Nearby activities consist primarily of general farming and/or ranching operations. Commercial and industrial activities are increasing within the project area as a result of the Bakken oil field boom expanding westward.

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	<p>Action: The surface owner and/or lessee may experience damages in the form of temporarily decreased revenues/use of the State land due to surface disturbances from the proposed action. The decrease in revenues would be mitigated by compensation received from Nemont Telephone Cooperative to the surface owner/lessee through the Settlement of Surface Damages Form.</p> <p>No Action: No action would 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>The project would be completed in a relatively short time frame and it would not create permanent jobs; however, it is likely temporary jobs would be available during the installation of the line.</p> <p>Action: No lasting impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment would 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 would 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>Action: Increases in traffic levels would occur during installation of the line. The increased traffic would not occur at a substantial level. No impacts to government services are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the level of demand for road use or government services would 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>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 would 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>All of the tracts of State land in this proposed project are legally accessible and provide recreational opportunities. The limited and temporary impact of the installation of the buried fiber optic telecommunication line would not permanently affect recreational opportunities. No wilderness areas are located within a close proximity to the proposed project area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the access to and quality of recreational and wilderness activities are anticipated.</p>

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	No Action: No impacts to the access to and quality of recreational and wilderness activities would occur.
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	The service provided by the new telecommunications line may or may not increase the likelihood of future rural development in this area.  Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing are anticipated to occur.  No Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	Action: No impacts to the areas social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities are anticipated to occur.  No Action: No impacts social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities would occur.
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated to occur.  No Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity would occur.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	Action: The School trust would receive \$6,525.00 as compensation for granting these 4 ROW easements to Nemont. Residents within the project area would benefit from the ability to obtain high speed internet from Nemont.  No Action: The School trust would not receive \$6,525.00 as compensation for granting the 4 ROW easements. No impacts to the social and economic circumstances would occur.

EA Checklist Prepared By: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: April 1, 2014

Marc Kloker (Land Use Specialist)

## IV. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action alternative.
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	No significant impacts are anticipated.



