

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Northwest Energy Racetrack Line Location

Proposed Implementation Date: July 2014

Proponent: Northwest Energy

County: Deer Lodge

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Action:

The North Western Energy (NEW) has requested an easement across State Trust Lands to reroute an existing power line so it is closer to the county road. This move is being requested to facilitate future maintenance work. The project is located in the Northwest ¼ of section 28, Township 6 North, Range 9 West.

Beneficiary	Legal Description	Total Acres	Treated Acres
Common Schools- K-12 Education	N1/2 Sec. 28 T6N, R9W	320 ac.	

Objectives of the project include:

- Relocate a power line, closer to a county road in order to make maintenance easier for the proponent

Proposed activities include:

- The proposed action includes relocating approximately 1,320 ft. of electric distribution line in order to provide easier access for maintenance. This would also include the installation of new power poles to support the lines.
- An easement would be granted for the line once it is relocated
- A temporary license would be issued for removal of the existing line

The lands involved in this proposed project are held in trust by the State of Montana. (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11). The Board of Land Commissioners and the DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

The DNRC would manage lands involved in this project in accordance with:

- Administrative Rules for Forest Management (ARM 36.11.401 through 471), and all other applicable state and federal laws.

Project Development

SCOPING:

- DATE: 5-7-14
- PUBLIC SCOPED:
 - The scoping notice was posted on the DNRC Website:
<http://dnrc.mt.gov/PublicInterest/Notices/Default.asp>
 - The following individuals, groups and government agencies were scoped
 - Anaconda-Deer Lodge Board of County Commissioners
 - Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 2 Headquarters
 - Dry Cottonwood LLC, in care of Karen Knudsen
 - Larry Caddell, Warm Springs, Mt.
 - DJT Family LTD partnership, Missoula Mt.
 - AGENCIES SCOPED:
 - Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 2
- COMMENTS RECEIVED:
 - How many: One (FWP – in support)
 - Concerns: None
 - Results (how were concerns addressed): NA

Internal and external issues and concerns were considered during project planning and design. DNRC specialists were consulted, including: Soil Scientist, Hydrologist and Archeologist.

Internal and external issues and concerns were incorporated into project planning and design and will be implemented in associated contracts.

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED: (Conservation Easements, Army Corp of Engineers, road use permits, etc..)

None

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action: Under this alternative the power line would remain in the same location it is currently in. The present location involves rough terrain and maintenance for this segment has been difficult. This would hinder the maintenance efforts along this segment of line.

Action Alternative (Provide a brief description of all proposed activities): The attached aerial photograph indicates the current location of the power line along with the proposed relocation segment. Where needed access roads would be constructed

Details of Action Alternative: The action alternative requires less site disturbance than the existing line.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including **primary, secondary and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

Vegetation	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Noxious Weeds			X		Yes	
Rare Plants						
Vegetative community			X			
Old Growth	X					

Vegetation Mitigations: The proponent would be required to grass seed any areas which are disturbed with a certified weed free grass seed mixture approved by the DNRC Anaconda Unit Manager.

The mixture will include the following certified weed free seed mixture.

- Slender Wheatgrass 5# PLS/ac.
- Streambank Wheatgrass 5# PLS/ac.
- Bluebunch Wheatgrass 5# PLS/ac.
- Alsike Clover 1# PLS/ac.
16 PLS/ac.

Geology & Soil Quality and Moisture	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Nutrient Cycling	X					
Soil Productivity			X			
Slope Stability		X				
Erosion			X			
Compaction			X			

Comments:

No Action – This alternative would require additional disturbance to the soils in order to conduct maintenance on existing power lines.

Action – The line would be moved from its existing location to the new site. Power-lines, poles and other hardware would be removed from the site without constructing additional roads. A field inspection of the existing line location to identify any existing weed infestations or erosion problems would be conducted. If any resource problems are identified, the proponent would be responsible to repair or mitigate them.

Water Quality, Quantity and			
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Distribution	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Sediment Delivery	X					
Water Yield	X					

Comments: While there are no live streams within the project area there are several incised draws which conduct water for brief periods of time in the spring.

Water Quality, Quantity and Distribution Mitigations: None.

Fisheries	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Sediment		X				
Flow Regimes	X					
Woody Debris	X					
Stream Shading	X					
Stream Temperature	X					
Connectivity	X					
Populations	X					

Wildlife	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Threatened and Endangered Species						
Grizzly bear <i>(Ursus arctos)</i> Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	X					
Canada lynx <i>(Felix lynx)</i> Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zone	X					
Bull Trout (<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>) Habitat: clean cold water, streams, rivers, lakes	X					
Sensitive Species						
Bald eagle <i>(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional forest more than 1 mile from open water	X					
Black-backed woodpecker <i>(Picoides arcticus)</i> Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	X					
Black-tailed prairie dog <i>(Cynomys ludovicianus)</i> Habitat: grasslands, short-grass prairie, sagebrush semi-desert	X					
Coeur d'Alene salamander <i>(Plethodon idahoensis)</i> Habitat: Waterfall spray zones,	X					

talus near cascading streams						
Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (<i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i>) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture	X					
Common loon (<i>Gavia immer</i>) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	X					
Fisher (<i>Martes pennanti</i>) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	X					
Flammulated owl (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	X					
Gray Wolf (<i>Canis lupus</i>) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities	x					
Harlequin duck (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	X					
Northern bog lemming (<i>Synaptomys borealis</i>) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats	X					
Mountain plover (<i>Charadrius montanus</i>) Habitat: short-grass prairie, alkaline flats, prairie dog towns	X					
Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	X					
Pileated woodpecker (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	X					
Greater Sage grouse (<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>) Habitat: sagebrush semi-desert	x					
Townsend's big-eared bat (<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	X					
Montana Arctic Grayling (<i>Thymallus arctucus montanus</i>) Habitat: clean cold water, streams, rivers, lakes	X					
Westslope Cutthroat Trout (<i>Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi</i>) Habitat: clean cold water, streams, rivers, lakes	X					

Columbia Redband Trout (<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss gairdneri</i>) Habitat: clean cold water, streams, rivers	X					
Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo</i>) Habitat: Alpine tundra and high- elevation boreal and coniferous forests that maintain deep persistent snow into late spring	X					
Spotted Bat (<i>Euderma maculatum</i>) Habitat: rock outcrops, cliffs, caves, old mines	X					
White-tailed Prairie Dog (<i>Cynomys leucurus</i>) Habitat: mountain meadows, semi-desert grassland	X					
Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri</i>) Habitat: white-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	X					
Big Game Species	X					
Elk	X					
Whitetail	X					
Mule Deer	X					

Comments: Some potential for disturbance and displacement could occur that could affect those species in the vicinity; however proximity to an open road and other forms of human disturbance likely already affects those species. Negligible effects to habitats for terrestrial wildlife species would be anticipated, but would not be expected to appreciably alter present or future use of the project area or larger vicinity in the near-term or long-term. Thus negligible effects to terrestrial wildlife species would be anticipated from the proposed line relocation.

Wildlife Mitigations: None

Air Quality	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Smoke		x				
Dust		x				

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Historical or Archaeological sites		x				
Aesthetics		x				
Demands on Environmental		x				

Resources of Land, Water or Energy						
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Comments: There would be minor short term impacts to aesthetics.

Mitigations: None.

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.*

None.

Impacts on the Human Population

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including **primary, secondary and cumulative** impacts on the Human Population.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	IMPACT				Can Impact be mitigated?	Comment Index
	N/A	Negligible	Minor	High		
Health and Human Safety		X				The action alternative would have a small positive improvement to safety
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production						Maintenance on the line would be more efficient to implement
Quantity and Distribution of Employment		X				
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues		X				
Demand for Government Services		X				
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X					

Social Structures and Mores	X					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X					

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.*

- Anaconda-Deer Lode County Growth Policy

Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances:

Costs, revenues and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives. They are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return. The estimated stumpage is based on comparable sales analysis. This method compares recent sales to find a market value for stumpage. These sales have similar species, quality, average diameter, product mix, terrain, date of sale, distance from mills, road building and logging systems, terms of sale, or anything that could affect a buyer's willingness to pay for.

No Action: The No Action alternative would not generate revenues to the trust at this time.

Action: A onetime revenue payment to the common school trust account would occur for this easement

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

No

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

No

Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:

Name: Fred E. Staedler Jr.
Title: Anaconda Unit Manager
Date: May 19th, 2014

Finding

Alternative Selected

Action

Significance of Potential Impacts

Not Significant

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

Name: Dana Boruch

Title: Right of Way Specialist

Date: May 20, 2014

Signature: /s/ Dana M. Boruch

