

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Amended Easement 15059

Proposed Implementation Date: June, 2025

Proponent: Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Location: SE ¼ NE ¼ and NE ¼ SE ¼ of S6, T30 North, R22 West

County: Flathead

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Action:

Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc. (LEC) is proposing to amend a current easement (#15059) of overhead powerline to an easement of underground electrical lines. The amended easement requires a width 10 ft wider than the original. The route would follow the existing overhead right of way through state trust lands. LEC will climb back up the pole at the edge of DNRC property and remain overhead across the hay field and the Stillwater River. No trees will be removed and there will be a small disturbance of existing vegetation. The estimated encumbered acreage will increase from 0.493 to 1.23 acres.

The lands involved in this proposed project are held in trust for Montana State University Eastern (50%) and University of Montana Western (50%) Trusts. The Board of Land Commissioners and 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).

Project Development

SCOPING:

No formal scoping outside of DNRC was initiated. DNRC Hydrologist, Tony Nelson, and DNRC Biologist, Vicki Forristal, were consulted during the writing of this Environmental Assessment Checklist. All DNRC Trust Lands Bureau Chiefs; Dan Rogers, Trevor Taylor, Kelly Motichka, and Deidra Klobberdanz, as well as DNRC Trust Lands Archaeologist Patrick Rennie were also consulted.

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

- Provide a list of any state, local, or federal agencies that have overlapping or additional jurisdiction or environmental review responsibility for the Proposed Action and the permits, licenses, and/or other authorizations required.

○ **NONE**

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative:

No-Action Alternative would recommend Land Board denial of the easement.

Action Alternative

Action Alternative would recommend Land Board approval of the easement.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

A minor amount of vegetation may be slightly disturbed from equipment during installation. No measurable impacts would be anticipated.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions: A review of the Flathead County, Montana, soil surveys did not identify any high-risk soils in the project area. The proposed project is for an easement on state lands to install approximately 2600 feet of buried electrical line.

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	x				x				x					S1
Erosion	x				x				x					S1
Nutrient Cycling	x				x				x					
Slope Stability	x				x				x					
Soil Productivity	x				x				x					
Action														

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	x				x				x					
Erosion	x				x				x					
Nutrient Cycling	x				x				x					
Slope Stability	x				x				x					
Soil Productivity	x				x				x					

Comments:

S-1: There will be minor physical disturbance and localized erosion along the path of the buried electrical line. However, no measurable long-term impacts would be expected, and the risk of potential impacts is extremely low.

Soil Mitigations:

- Limit equipment operations to periods when soils are relatively dry, (less than 20 percent), frozen, or snow-covered to minimize soil compaction and rutting and maintain drainage features. Check soil moisture conditions prior to equipment start-up.
- Compliance with Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP's), Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) laws, Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands HCP and applicable DNRC Forest Management Administrative Rules.
- Ensure prompt re-seeding of all disturbed ground with grass seed concurrent with operations to ensure erosion control and prevent establishment of invasive weeds

References:

DNRC, 1996. Forestry Best Management Practices: State Forest Management Plan. Montana DNRC, Forest management Bureau. Missoula, MT.

NRCS, United States Department of Agriculture. Web Soil Survey. Available online at https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/DSD/Download/AOI/d1rxkpopyxqjhrdp05vdjn/wss_aoi_2025-03-24_10-29-05.zip accessed [3-24-25]

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions: The proposed line will remain overhead on the portion that crosses the Stillwater River, the nearest surface water source. No measurable direct or indirect impacts on water quality or quantity are expected.

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Water Quality	x				x				x					
Water Quantity	x				x				x					
Action														
Water Quality	x				x				x					
Water Quantity	x				x				x					

Comments:

Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations:

- Best Management Practices for Forestry would be implemented and monitored for effectiveness concurrent with all forest management activities.
- Implementation of Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management and Streamside Management Zones.
- Implementing Montana DNRCs Habitat Conservation Plan commitments for Riparian Management Zones and Sediment Delivery.

References:

FISHERIES:

Fisheries Existing Conditions: The proposed line is located approximately 150 feet from the nearest surface water source and no measurable impacts are expected. As a result, no further analysis will be completed as direct, secondary, or cumulative impacts on fisheries resources.

No-Action: No direct or indirect impacts would occur to affected fish species or affected fisheries resources beyond those described in Fisheries Existing Conditions. Cumulative effects (other related past and present factors; other future, related actions; and any impacts described in Fisheries Existing Conditions) would continue to occur.

Action Alternative (see Fisheries table below):

Fisheries	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Sediment	x				x				x					
Flow Regimes	x				x				x					
Woody Debris	x				x				x					
Stream Shading	x				x				x					
Stream Temperature	x				x				x					
Connectivity	x				x				x					
Populations	x				x				x					
Action														

Fisheries	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Sediment	x				x				x					
Flow Regimes	x				x				x					
Woody Debris	x				x				x					
Stream Shading	x				x				x					
Stream Temperature	x				x				x					
Connectivity	x				x				x					
Populations	x				x				x					

No measurable direct or indirect impact on fisheries is expected.

WILDLIFE:

No-Action: The proposed activity would not occur. No wildlife habitat would be altered, and no additional disturbance would occur. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to terrestrial wildlife species would be anticipated.

Action Alternative: Lincoln Electric would amend a current easement (#9539) of overhead powerline to underground electrical lines. The proposed easement would be approximately 1600 feet long and 20 feet wide within the footprint of the existing easement. No trees would be removed and there would be a small disturbance to vegetation during construction. Construction would occur during the summer of 2025.

The attached table summarizes the anticipated effects of the proposed activities on each Threatened or Endangered species, sensitive species, or big game species.

	SPECIES/HABITAT	DETERMINATION – BASIS
Threatened and Endangered Species	Canada lynx (<i>Felis lynx</i>) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zones	Suitable lynx habitat occurs in the Project Area. However, proposed activities would not appreciably alter lynx habitat. Should lynx be present in the area, they could be temporarily disturbed or displaced by the proposed activities. Construction activities would be localized and of short duration. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Canada lynx would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.

	Grizzly bear (<i>Ursus arctos</i>) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	The Project Area is located outside of grizzly bear recovery zone and non-recovery occupied habitat (USFWS 1993, Wittinger 2002). Occasional use of the area by grizzly bears has been documented. The duration of proposed activities would be relatively short and would not affect preferred bear habitat (e.g. berry patches, riparian areas). Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo</i>) Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal and mountain coniferous forests, areas that maintain deep persistent snow into late spring	No potentially suitable wolverine habitat exists within the proposed project area. The project area does not maintain deep snow into late spring and does not contain high-elevation alpine habitat. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to wolverines would be expected to occur under the proposed action.
	Bald eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	No bald eagle nests occur in the vicinity of the Project Area (MNHP 2025). Appreciable use of the DNRC parcel by bald eagles would not be expected due to the lack of preferred habitat (e.g. lakes, rivers) and any eagles that use this area are likely habituated to high levels of human disturbance from nearby road activity. Considering the limited duration and scope of the proposed project, the existing level of disturbance, and that no trees would be removed, negligible adverse direct, secondary, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.
Sensitive Species	Black-backed woodpecker (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	No recently (less than 5 years) burned areas are in the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Common loon (<i>Gavia immer</i>) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	No suitable lakes occur within 500 feet of the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to common loons would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.

	Fisher (<i>Pekania pennanti</i>) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian areas	Potential fisher habitat occurs within the Project Area. However, the proposed project would not alter live tree, snag, or coarse wood debris abundance and access for trapping would not change. Appreciable use of the area by fishers is not likely and there are no records of fisher in the surrounding area (MNHP 2025). Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisher would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Flammulated owl (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	The Project Area does not contain suitable flammulated owl habitat and appreciable use of the Project Area by flammulated owls would not be expected. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be anticipated.
	Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	No known cliffs suitable for peregrine falcon nesting exist within the Project Area. Appreciable use of the Project Area by peregrine falcons would not be expected. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated as a result of either alternative.
	Pileated woodpecker (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	Pileated woodpecker habitat occurs within the Project Area. The proposed activities would not remove any trees or snags, therefore pileated woodpecker habitat would not be altered. Disturbance associated with the proposed activities would be localized and of short duration. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to pileated woodpeckers would be anticipated.
	Fringed myotis (<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>) Habitat: low elevation ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and riparian forest with diverse roost sites including outcrops, caves, mines	The Project Area does not contain any known rocky outcrops that could be used by roosting fringed myotis. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fringed myotis would be anticipated.
	Hoary bat (<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>) Habitat: coniferous and deciduous forests and roost on foliage in trees, under bark, in snags, bridges	Potential hoary bat habitat occurs in the Project Area; however, no trees or snags would be removed and habitat would not be altered. Should hoary bats be in the area, disturbance would be of short duration and localized. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to hoary bats would be anticipated.

	Townsend's big-eared bat <i>(Plecotus townsendii)</i> Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	No suitable caves or mine tunnels are known to occur in the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Townsend's big-eared bats are anticipated as a result of either alternative.
Big Game Species	Elk (<i>Cervus canadensis</i>)	The Project Area provides year-round habitat for white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, and elk (DFWP 2008). No trees would be removed, therefore thermal cover/snow intercept and hiding cover would not be impacted. Disturbance associated with the proposed activities would be brief and localized. Thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game are anticipated.
	Moose (<i>Alces alces</i>)	
	Mule Deer <i>(Odocoileus hemionus)</i>	
	White-tailed Deer <i>(Odocoileus virginianus)</i>	

List of Mitigations:

- Cease all operations if a threatened or endangered species is encountered. Consult a DNRC biologist and develop additional mitigations that are consistent with the administrative rules for managing Threatened and Endangered Species (*ARM 36.11.428 through 36.11.435*). Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area contact a DNRC biologist.
- Prohibit contractors and purchasers conducting contract operations from carrying firearms while on duty as per *ARM 36.11.432(1)(c)*.
- Contractors will adhere to food storage and sanitation requirements as per *ARM 36.11.432(1)(d)*.

Conclusion:

Overall, given the existing habitat characteristics, short duration of activities, and mitigations to be implemented; negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to wildlife would be anticipated.

Literature Cited:

DFWP. 2008. Maps of moose, elk and mule deer distribution in Montana. Individual GIS data layers. August 12, 2008. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Helena, MT.
Available online at: <https://gis-mtfwp.hub.arcgis.com/>

MNHP. 2025. Natural Heritage Map Viewer. Montana Natural Heritage Program. Retrieved on March 24, 2025, from <http://mtnhp.org/MapView>.

USFWS. 1993. Grizzly bear recovery plan. Missoula, Montana. 181 pp.

Wittinger, W.T. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum on file at U.S. Forest Service, Region 1, Missoula, Montana.

AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

- NONE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

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 **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Human Population.

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.*

- NONE

Human Health and Safety:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

- NONE

Industrial, Commercial, and Agricultural Activities and Production:

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

- NONE

Quantity and Distribution of Employment

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

- NONE

Local and State Tax Base and Tax Revenues:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

- NONE

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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

- NONE

Social Structures and More

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

- NONE

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.

Basemap has the Value for this parcel at \$17,000/Acre, which is consistent with the Unit Office's consideration of value for this area. The easement corridor is 1.23 Acres x \$17,000 = \$20,910. Credit of \$12,401 previously paid, for a total easement value of \$8,509, which will benefit the Montana State University Eastern (50%) and University of Montana Western (50%) Trusts.

Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:

Name: Rachel Payne
Title: KU Real Estate Specialist
Date: March 24, 2025

Finding

Alternative Selected

Upon Review of the Checklist EA and attachments, I find the Action Alternative, as proposed, meets the intent of the project objectives as stated in Section I – Type and Purpose of Action. The lands involved in this project are held by the State of Montana in trust for the support of specific beneficiary institutions and DNRC is required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X Section 11; and, 77-1-212 MCA).

The Action Alternative complies with all pertinent environmental laws, the DNRC SFLMP and HCP, and is based upon a consensus of professional opinion on limits of acceptable environmental impact. This proposal did not receive any comment. For these reasons and on behalf of DNRC I have selected the Action Alternative to be implemented on this project.

Significance of Potential Impacts

After a review of the scoping documents and comments, project file, Forest Management Rules, SFLMP and HCP checklists, and Department policies, standards, and guidelines, I find that all the identified resource management concerns have been fully addressed in this Checklist EA and its attachments.

Specific project design features and various recommendations by the resource management specialists will be implemented to ensure that this project will fall within the limits of environmental change. Taken individually and cumulatively, the proposed activities are common practices, and no project activities are being conducted on important unique or fragile sites. I find there will be no significant impacts to the human environments as a result of implementing the Action Alternative. In summary, I find that the identified adverse impacts will be controlled, mitigated, or avoided by the design of the project to the extent that the impacts are not significant.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

Name: David M. Poukish

Title: Kalispell Unit

Date: 4/1/25

Signature: /s/ David M. Poukish

A-1: Project Vicinity Map

