CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Triangle Communication Blaine County Fiber
Proposed Implementation Date:	May-August 2025
Proponent:	Triangle Communications
Location:	33N 24E 3; 33N 24E 9; 33N 24E 10; 33N 24E 16
County:	Blaine
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The purpose of these easements is to expand the access to fiber optic broadband internet in Blaine County. All easements are along a county road and will provide access to internet to currently unserved people.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Northeastern Land Office (NELO) & Lewistown Unit Office
Proponent: Triangle Communications
Surface Lessees: Duane M Skoyen, Glenn Scott Friede
Other: Montana Sage Grouse Oversite Team (MSGOT), Patrick Rennie (DNRC Archaeologist)

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

The DNRC, and NELO have jurisdiction over this proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for acquiring all necessary permits for the proposed project and settling all surface damages with the surface lessees.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant easements for buried fiber optic cables.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does grant easements for buried fiber optic cables.

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.

85% of the soils in the area have slight risk for off-road erosion. However, since all of them are located near existing disturbances with established erosion control vegetation and the minimal ground disturbance caused by the trenchless installation method there should be no major erosion issues.

All soils affected were rated as either somewhat or severely limited for shallow excavations. This should not be an issue because a trenchless installation method will be used. This method involves using the ripper on the back of a bulldozer that drops the cable or conduit in as it goes. Therefore, there are no excavations that stay open and will not cause any safety issues, and the limitations of the soils should not come into effect.

All soils are rated as severe for soil rutting hazard. This is easily remedied by only doing work when the conditions are dry. This will be a requirement of the easements which will alleviate any rutting issues.

All applicable soil ratings can be seen in Appendix A. No significant cumulative impacts to geology or soil quality, stability, and moisture 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.

No significant impacts to local or regional 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.

No significant impacts 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.

All easements are located within the current Road ROWs that are already dominated by introduced species such as smooth brome and crested wheatgrass. Since the method of install with be a trenchless method there will be very little soil disturbance, and the introduced grasses will revegetate quickly. Any areas of disturbance that are larger than that normally produced by a trenchless installation method will be reseeded using the seed mix and rates detailed in Appendix B. No rare plants or cover types are present. No significant impacts 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.

No significant impacts to terrestrial, avian, or aquatic habitats 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.

Most of the species of concern in the project areas are small birds. The exceptions are the sage grouse, black tailed prairie dog, the swift fox, and burrowing owl. The latter two should not be directly affected because there are no active prairie dog towns in the easement areas, the observations were all outside the actual disturbance area.

To mitigate the effects on sage grouse the proponent must follow the recommendations laid out by MSGOT in the attached letter. These recommendations include no construction until after July 15th to avoid the breeding season. These recommendations should also significantly mitigate affects to the other affected birds.

All easement areas are adjacent to existing disturbances with frequent human use, mostly roads, as such the habitat is already degraded and the only affect for most of the species of concern will be temporary displacement if they are even present.

Species of concern reports with a one-mile buffer around the easement areas can be found in Appendix C.

No significant impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources are anticipated, though temporary displacement of local wildlife may occur during the project.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological 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 *Antiquities* have not been identified in the APE. One cairn and stone circle were noted near the project but would not be affected. 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.

No significant effects on historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources 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.

No significant impacts on the aesthetics of the area 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.

No limited environmental resources will be significantly impacted because of this project. This project will also not add any significant cumulative demands on environmental resources.

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.

The only risk to human health and safety would be during the construction of the project. It would be the responsibility of the proponent to mitigate any risks during construction. After construction there will be some health and safety benefits provided by increased internet access. The better internet will allow residents of the area to have better access to telehealth and phone service for better communication with emergency services.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The resulting broadband internet access from these easements could potentially provide recipients with the ability to use E-commerce for more profitable operations and better marketing of agricultural products. However, all benefits to industry, commerce, and agriculture are incidental and not a direct result of the easements.

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

These easements would not directly create any jobs but may indirectly create opportunities for employment for the end users of the internet access. With the current trend for more teleworking having high quality broadband internet would create possible opportunities for end users to access teleworking labor markets that are currently inaccessible.

The project will not create or eliminate any jobs, so no significant 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.

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

There will not be any significant increases in traffic, school attendance, or need for fire and police protection if this project is approved.

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 this project.

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 significant direct or cumulative effects on access to or quality of recreation and wilderness activities because of this project.

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 proposed project does not include any changes to housing or developments.

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 significantly 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 significant impact on any culturally 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.

These easements would provide a total of $3,740.00 to the trusts.

This project is part of a nationwide push by the federal government to provide broadband internet to rural areas. Increased broadband access provides more equitable access to goods and services that are increasingly only found online.

The proposed project will not have any significant cumulative economic or social effect.

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does grant easements for buried fiber optic cables.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined no significant impact to the environment because of this project.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

	EIS		More Detailed EA	X	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Josh Ricklefs
	Title:	Land Use Specialist
Signature:		**Date**:

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Josh Stoychoff
	Title:	Unit Manager, Northeastern Land Office
Signature:		**Date**:

Appendix A: Soil Ratings

33N 24E Section 3

Table — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	511.2	79.1%
Moderate	125.3	19.4%
Null or Not Rated	9.8	1.5%
Totals for Area of Interest	**646.3**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	511.2	79.1%
Very limited	125.3	19.4%
Null or Not Rated	9.8	1.5%
Totals for Area of Interest	**646.3**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	636.5	98.5%
Null or Not Rated	9.8	1.5%
Totals for Area of Interest	**646.3**	**100.0%**

33N 24E Section 9

Table — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	163.5	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**163.5**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	163.5	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**163.5**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	163.5	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**163.5**	**100.0%**

33N 24E Section 10

Table — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	456.0	100.0%
Moderate	0.1	0.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**456.1**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	456.0	100.0%
Very limited	0.1	0.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**456.1**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	456.1	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**456.1**	**100.0%**

33N 24E Section 16

Table — Erosion Hazard (Off-Road, Off-Trail) — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Slight	384.5	92.9%
Moderate	29.5	7.1%
Totals for Area of Interest	**414.0**	**100.0%**

Table — Shallow Excavations — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Somewhat limited	373.0	90.1%
Very limited	41.0	9.9%
Totals for Area of Interest	**414.0**	**100.0%**

Table — Soil Rutting Hazard — Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Summary by Rating Value

Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
Severe	414.0	100.0%
Totals for Area of Interest	**414.0**	**100.0%**

Appendix B: Seed Mix

Species	Percent
Sandberg Bluegrass	30%
slender wheatgrass	30%
Prairie Junegrass	20%
Needle and Thread	15%
Lewis blue flax or purple prairie clover	5 %

- Native Mix
- Certified Noxious Weed Seed Free
- Drill seeding rate of 6 lbs/acre Pure Live Seed (PLS)
- Seed poundage should be doubled and harrowed if the area is broadcast seeded
- Seeding shall occur in the fall (after September 15) or early spring (before May 1).

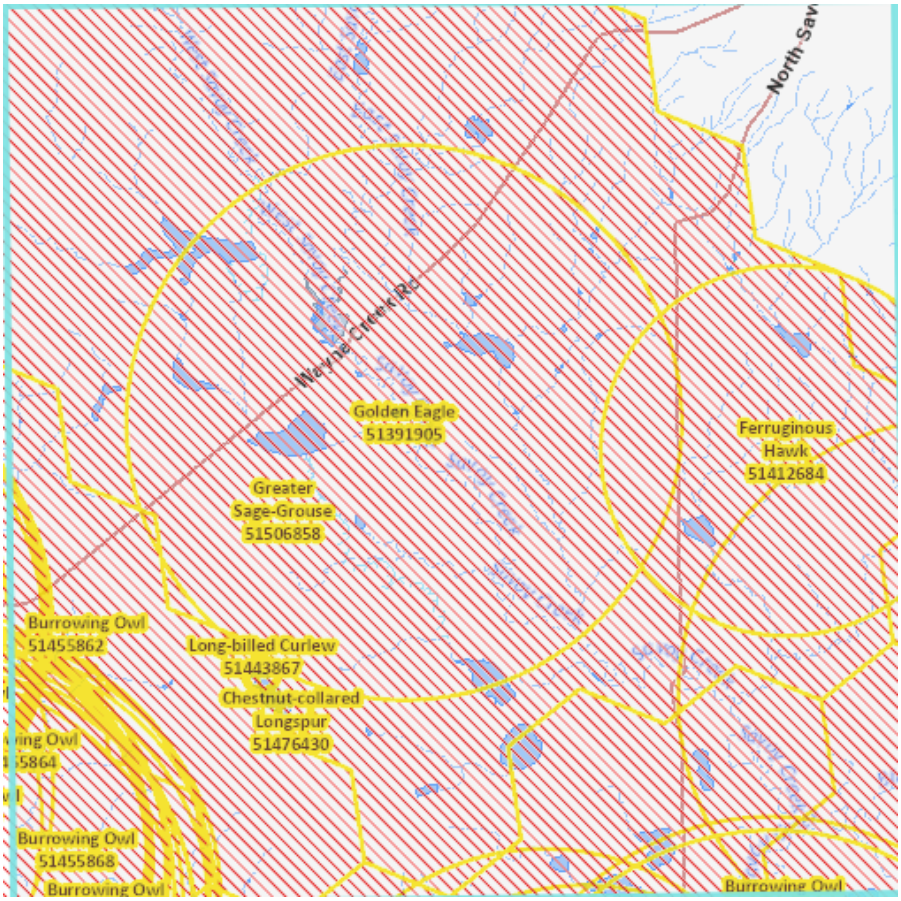
Appendix C: Species Occurrences

Species Occurrences

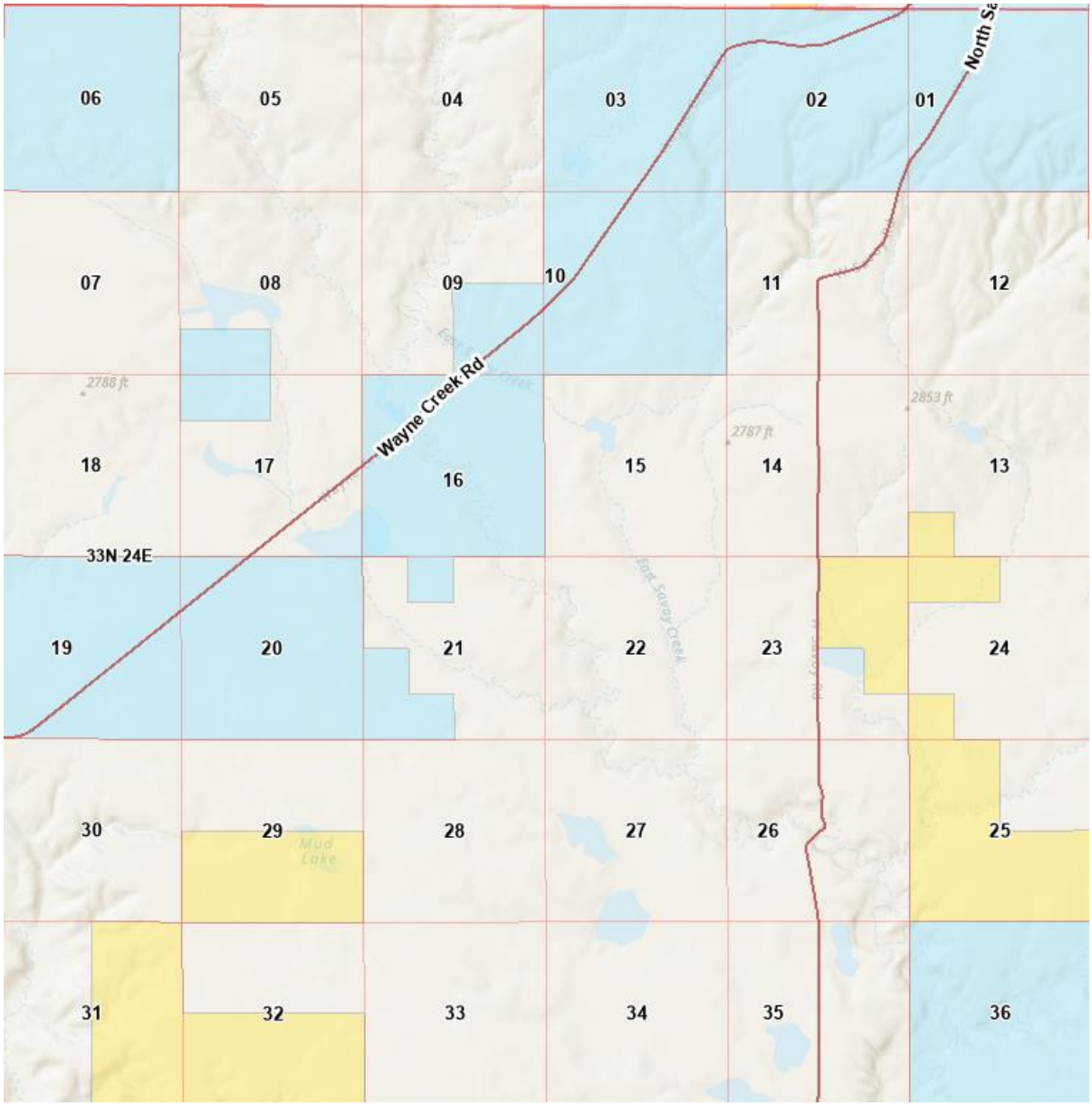
Species List | plus Occurrences | plus Obs (may take a while)

Mammals - Black-tailed Prairie Dog *(Cynomys ludovicianus)*	SO Count: 7	Obs Count: 0	Earliest Obs:	Recent Obs:
Mammals - Swift Fox *(Vulpes velox)*	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 1	Earliest Obs: 2009	Recent Obs: 2009
Birds - Baird's Sparrow *(Centronyx bairdii)*	SO Count: 11	Obs Count: 14	Earliest Obs: 1990	Recent Obs: 2017
Birds - Bobolink *(Dolichonyx oryzivorus)*	SO Count: 6	Obs Count: 9	Earliest Obs: 1998	Recent Obs: 2007
Birds - Brewer's Sparrow *(Spizella breweri)*	SO Count: 4	Obs Count: 11	Earliest Obs: 1997	Recent Obs: 2007
Birds - Burrowing Owl *(Athene cunicularia)*	SO Count: 69	Obs Count: 70	Earliest Obs: 1980	Recent Obs: 2018
Birds - Chestnut-collared Longspur *(Calcarius ornatus)*	SO Count: 14	Obs Count: 52	Earliest Obs: 1997	Recent Obs: 2017
Birds - Ferruginous Hawk *(Buteo regalis)*	SO Count: 2	Obs Count: 3	Earliest Obs: 2005	Recent Obs: 2006
Birds - Golden Eagle *(Aquila chrysaetos)*	SO Count: 8	Obs Count: 8	Earliest Obs: 1980	Recent Obs: 2006
Birds - Greater Sage-Grouse *(Centrocercus urophasianus)*	SO Count: 13	Obs Count: 52	Earliest Obs: 1980	Recent Obs: 2022
Birds - Loggerhead Shrike *(Lanius ludovicianus)*	SO Count: 3	Obs Count: 5	Earliest Obs: 1997	Recent Obs: 2006
Birds - Long-billed Curlew *(Numenius americanus)*	SO Count: 11	Obs Count: 13	Earliest Obs: 1999	Recent Obs: 2008
Birds - Mountain Plover *(Anarhynchus montanus)*	SO Count: 1	Obs Count: 23	Earliest Obs: 2006	Recent Obs: 2018
Birds - Sprague's Pipit *(Anthus spragueii)*	SO Count: 10	Obs Count: 10	Earliest Obs: 1999	Recent Obs: 2017
Birds - Thick-billed Longspur *(Rhynchophanes mccownii)*	SO Count: 6	Obs Count: 7	Earliest Obs: 1997	Recent Obs: 2007

Species occurrences across the entire township of the project location



Appendix D: Map of Project Area



Project area will include sections 16, 9, 10, and 3 along Wayne Creek Rd.