

A total of 77 special status plant species are associated with the alternative route links in the state of Montana. These include 55 BLM sensitive species, 35 USFS and 77 State of Montana sensitive species. There is no USFWS list plant species in Montana associated with the MSTI routes. Montana special plant species habitat and potential link associations are listed in Table 4.1-1. Additional special status plant information is included in Appendices B and C. *Special status species and their associated habitats are considered of great susceptibility to project-related impacts.*

Table 4.1-1 Montana Special Status Plant Species

| Common Name (Scientific Name) | Status ¹ | | | | | General Habitat Association | | | | | | | General habitat requirements | Link Association(s) |
|--|---------------------|-----|------|---------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| | USFWS ² | BLM | USFS | Montana | Idaho | Grass | Shrub | Sagebrush | Forest | Riparian Area & Wetland | Rock, Bare, Disturbed | | | |
| Austin knotweed (<i>Polygonum douglasii austina</i>) | | | X | X | | ✓ | | | | | | | Upland meadows. | 1, 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 3-1, 3-2,4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-4, 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, 7-41, 7-42, 7-43, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7, 7-8, 7-9, 8, 11-21, 11-22, 11-3, 11-4, 16, 18-1 |
| Beaked spikerush (<i>Eleocharis rostellata</i>) | | | X | X | | | | | | ✓ | | | Wet alkaline soils, associated w/warm springs or fens. | 1, 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 3-1, 4-2, 4-3, 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, 7-41, 7-43, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7, 7-8, 7-9, 8, 11-21, 11-22, 11-3, 11-4, 13, 16, 18-1 |
| Bitterroot milkvetch (<i>Astragalus scaphoides</i>) | | X | X | X | | | | ✓ | | | | | Sagebrush grasslands, silty soils, between rocky steep open slopes and level benches. | 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 3-1, 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, 7-41, 7-43, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7, 7-8, 7-9, 8, 11-21, 11-22, 11-3, 11-4, 13, 16, 18-1 |
| California false-hellebore (<i>Veratrum californicum</i>) | | | X | X | | | | | | ✓ | | | Wet meadows and streambanks in montane and subalpine zones. | 1, 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 3-1, 4-2, 4-3, 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, 7-41, 7-43, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7, 7-8, 7-9, 8, 11-21, 11-22, 11-3, 11-4, 13, 16, 18-1 |
| Dense-Leaved Antennaria (<i>Antennaria densifolia</i>) | | | X | X | | | | | | | ✓ | | Limestone talus. | 7-2, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7, 7-9, 16, 18-1 |
| Five-leaf Cinquefoil (<i>Potentilla quinquefolia</i>) | | | X | X | | | | | | | ✓ | | Dry gravelly soil exposed ridges and slopes montane to alpine. | 7-2, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7, 7-9, 16, 18-1 |
| Hiker's gentian (<i>Gentianopsis simplex</i>) | | | X | X | | | | | | ✓ | | | Fens, meadows, and seeps in montane and subalpine zones. | 1, 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 3-1, 4-2, 4-3, 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, 7-41, 7-43, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7, 7-8, 7-9, 8, 11-21, 11-22, 11-3, 11-4, 13, 16, 18-1 |

¹X = sensitive ²T= threatened, E = endangered, EXP = experimental, C = candidate

4.2.3 FEDERAL SPECIAL STATUS WILDLIFE SPECIES OF MONTANA

The following species have been identified by agencies as species protected under ESA, USFS, and/or BLM authority (see section 2.0) as special status species. Special status species under the authority of the ESA and/or are other species status species designated by agencies and have documented elemental occurrence according to Montana Natural Heritage have a brief description of the legal status, habitat requirements, and distribution located in Appendix C. *Special status species and their associated habitats are considered of great susceptibility to project-related impacts.*

4.2.4 IDAHO WILDLIFE

Link 18-2

Link 18-2 is dominated by big sagebrush and secondarily low sagebrush. Wildlife associated with these communities (see Section 4.3.1) would be prominent along this link. There is Canada lynx, and golden eagle occurrence near MPs 6-9. There is great gray owl occurrence near MP 10. Wolverine is known near MPs 16-19 and ferruginous hawk occurrence is known near MP 24.5 to the link terminus. Link 18-2 crosses 4.1 and 12.7 miles of bighorn sheep winter habitat and elk critical winter habitat respectively. There are 1.3 miles of summer elk habitat and 25.3 miles of summer elk habitat less than 0.5 miles from a road in the vicinity of Link 18-2. Link 18-2 cross 27 miles of habitat that is considered low density (< 200 pronghorn) pronghorn habitat. Link 18-2 crosses 25.3 miles of high quality (agency defined) sage grouse habitat and there is one sage grouse lek 4.0 miles from Link 18-2, and one lek 2.0 miles from Link 18-2.

Link 20

Link 20 is dominated by low sagebrush and secondarily mixed shrub habitat. Wildlife associated with these communities (see Section 4.3.1) would be prominent along this link. There is northern goshawk and great gray owl occurrence near MPs 7, 8-9, and 11. There is great gray owl occurrence near MP 10. Wolverine is known near MPs 16-19 and ferruginous hawk occurrence is known near MP 24.5 to the link terminus. There is one special status plant known: Idaho sedge, near MPs 8, 10, and 11. Link 20 cross 9.4 miles of habitat that is considered low density (< 200 pronghorn) pronghorn habitat. Link 20 crosses 4.2 miles of high quality (agency defined) sage grouse habitat and there are three sage grouse leks 4.0 miles from Link 20, and one lek 2.0 miles from Link 20.

Link 21

Link 21 is dominated by big and low sagebrush habitat. Wildlife associated with these communities (see Section 4.3.1) would be prominent along this link. There is ferruginous hawk occurrence near MPS 27-28, 29-32.5, 37.5, 50.3, 52-54, 57.5-61, and 80-82. There is golden eagle occurrence near MP 45. Idaho dunes tiger beetle, loggerhead shrike, and long-billed curlew are known near MPs 25-26. American white pelican, black tern, Franklin's gull, long-billed curlew, marbled godwit, mountain plover, trumpeter swan, white-face ibis, Wilson's phalarope, willet, yellow rail, and yellow-billed cuckoo occurrence is known near MPs 33.5-37. There is one special status plant known: blue grama, near MPs 3.5-5.5. There is 30.8 miles of winter elk habitat along Link 21. There are 28.2 miles of summer elk habitat and 45.5 miles of summer elk habitat less than 0.5 miles from a road in the vicinity of Link 21. Link 21 crosses 51.2 miles of habitat that is considered low density (< 200 pronghorn) pronghorn habitat and 45.2 miles of moderate density habitat (200-500 pronghorn). Link 20 crosses 51.8 miles of high quality (agency defined) sage grouse habitat and there are seven sage

the transmission line would result in some habitat loss and fragmentation. While a portion of disturbed areas would be reclaimed upon completion of construction activities, permanent habitat loss would occur within the footprints of support structures, and access roads.

Construction activities would result in disturbance and behavioral interference. Noise, fugitive dust, and activities associated with site clearing and grading, installation of support structures, construction of access roads and support facilities, and associated equipment could disturb and displace wildlife within and adjacent to impact areas. All wildlife species within or near impact areas would be susceptible to disturbance. Disturbance would have the greatest impact during migration and breeding seasons. Some species with small home ranges or limited dispersal ability might experience a greater impact. These disturbances would be short term (6 to 7 months) and concentrated within the activity area.

The construction activities could also result in accidental exposure to contaminants or fire or increased legal and illegal killing of wildlife. Accidental spills during equipment maintenance or refueling could result in temporary exposure to hazardous contaminants. Because spill prevention plans would be in place and impacted areas would be immediately reclaimed, and exposure would be temporary and restricted to the site of spill, impacts to wildlife would be unlikely. Accidental fires associated with construction and maintenance vehicles would result in the temporary loss of habitat.

The increased public access as a result of increased access roads may result in additional legal hunting and fishing, and poaching.

Direct impacts to avian species could occur as a result of collisions with the proposed transmission line. Operation of the proposed transmission line would have the greatest potential impact on bird species, due to the collision threat posed by structures, transmission lines, guy wires, and ground wires. Most other wildlife would not be as impacted, since the presence of the transmission line, structures, and access roads generally does not present a barrier to migration, create excessive noise, or otherwise cause major behavior changes.

A variety of factors influence avian transmission line collisions: configuration and location of transmission lines; specific avian species and their tendency to collide with transmission lines; and the environment, such as weather, topography, and habitat (APLIC 1994, 2006). Line placement with respect to other structures and topography can influence the collision rate. Collisions usually occur near water or migration corridors and more often during inclement weather. Less agile birds, such as heavy-bodied birds or birds within flocks, are more likely to collide with overhead lines as they lack the ability to quickly negotiate obstacles. Some bird species, usually waterfowl, are prone to collisions with power lines, especially the grounding wires located at the top of the structures (MTDEQ 2008) though collisions with guy wires also occur. Raptor species are less likely to collide with power lines, perhaps due to their excellent eyesight and tendency to not fly at dusk or in low visibility weather conditions (MTDEQ 2008). Smaller migratory birds are at risk, but generally not as prone to collision because of their small size, ability to quickly maneuver away from obstacles, and because they often migrate high enough above the ground to avoid transmission lines. Permanent-resident birds that fly in tight flocks, particularly those in and near wetland areas, may be at higher risk than other species.

Areas of high avian collision risk include the Missouri River corridor (Links 1 and 2-1), Red Rock Lakes NWR (Links 16 1-4), and Clark Canon Reservoir (Links 16 1-4).