



US. Highway 93 Evaro to Polson Corridor

Issue 4 October 2003

US 93 SEIS and Design Management Newsletter

Preliminary Preferred Alternative Selected for Ronan

The US 93 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) project is the 11 mile segment of US 93 bounded by Red Horn Road on the south and Spring Creek Road on the north. This portion of US 93 is often referred to as the Ninepipe / Ronan section, and contains some of the more environmentally sensitive areas of US 93.

Over the last several months, project stake holders have worked diligently to analyze the impacts of a wide range of alternatives on this environmentally sensitive stretch of highway. In addition, public meetings and frequent discussions with residents and community members over the last two years have helped the project team narrow in on a preliminary preferred alternative.

The four governments (the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes [CSKT], the Montana Department of Transportation [MDT], the City of Ronan and the Federal Highway Administration [FHWA]) have identified a Preliminary Preferred Alternative for both the Ronan and Rural segments.

The preliminary preferred alternative for the Ronan area would be a couplet with the northbound roadway on the existing alignment, and the south bound roadway on First Avenue SW.



The southbound roadway on First Avenue SW would consist of a wider section which would include a 3 m / 10 ft planting area and a 3.6 m / 12 ft buffer on the west side of the street, and a 3 m / 10 ft planting area on the east side. Most of the right-of-way would be purchased from the east side of the street to provide the maximum buffer to the neighborhood on the west.

The Rural Preliminary Preferred Alternative includes two lanes undivided with the addition of a 2.9 km / 1.8 mile northbound passing lane from Post Creek Road to the top of Post Creek Hill, a 1.9 km / 1.2 mile southbound passing lane from the top of Post Creek Hill to Eagle Pass Trail, and four lanes divided from Innovation Lane to the south

Ronan City limits. This alternative also includes 12 culvert style animal crossings that will allow animals like the painted turtle to cross safely beneath the highway. In addition, this alternative includes 5 bridge areas intended to allow larger animals like moose and grizzly bear to cross safely. Designation of the Preliminary Preferred Alternatives will allow the project team to move forward with finalizing the Draft SEIS. This important document will be circulated for review and comment to the public as well as to the Cooperating Agencies.

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The Spirit of Place

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A public hearing will give community members and stake holders another opportunity to actively participate in the environmental process and provide their input to the project in a public forum.

Currently, the public hearing is scheduled to occur in early Spring 2004. A newsletter, press releases, and advertisements will be published prior to the hearing to notify all concerned of the date, time and location of the meeting, and where copies of the Draft SEIS may be obtained or reviewed.

Although the process on US 93 has been lengthy, the active participation of the community and commitment of all parties involved has brought us to this pivotal point. A successful environmental process lays the foundation for a project which will provide significant safety improvements for travelers, minimize impacts to precious environmental resources, create important wildlife passages, and help preserve the Spirit of Place for generations to come.

Design Process

Design on the US 93 Evaro to Polson projects is moving along very well. Five of the eight Design Firms have begun preparing final plan packages for completion by the end of the year. Two are awaiting review comments that will allow them to proceed into the final phase, and the remaining Design Firm is following closely behind with this intermediate review to occur in the next few months.

Throughout the design process, the design firms have worked together with the Design Management Team and the three governments to ensure that the goals outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) are reached. For many, the unique challenges of the MOA's context sensitive design elements such as wildlife crossings, wetland restoration, and bike paths have required a collaborative dedication to address the needs of the land and the users of the highway. In addition, the project team's commitment to no net loss of wetlands on the entire US 93 corridor has required careful planning and creative approaches to minimize the impact on the environment.

Design reviews with the three governments, Technical Design Committee meetings and one-on-one meetings between stake holders have provided forums for this information exchange.

As we move closer to finalizing each of the design projects, efforts are being made to coordinate the design schedule and the right-of-way acquisition process so that construction may proceed as needed.

US 93 SEIS and Design Management

Right-of-Way

Right-of-way acquisition for the US 93 Evaro to Polson project has been underway for quite some time. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), in an effort to reinforce its commitment to this unique highway project, began acquiring right-of-way prior to completion of design. This creative approach has allowed much of the necessary right-of-way to be acquired and in the end will allow construction to occur earlier than would have occurred in the normal MDT highway project development process. Unfortunately, for some property owners this has resulted in multiple visits from negotiators as changes have occurred as a result of the design process. Now that designs are being finalized and minor changes to right-of-way completed, final acquisition is at hand.

Negotiators are gearing up for the final push, prioritizing acquisitions based on the construction schedules for the various projects. Although construction on certain projects within the corridor is slated to begin in the spring of 2004, negotiations on other projects with later construction dates will also continue through 2004. Negotiators are working hard to acquire the right-of-way needed to make this project a success.

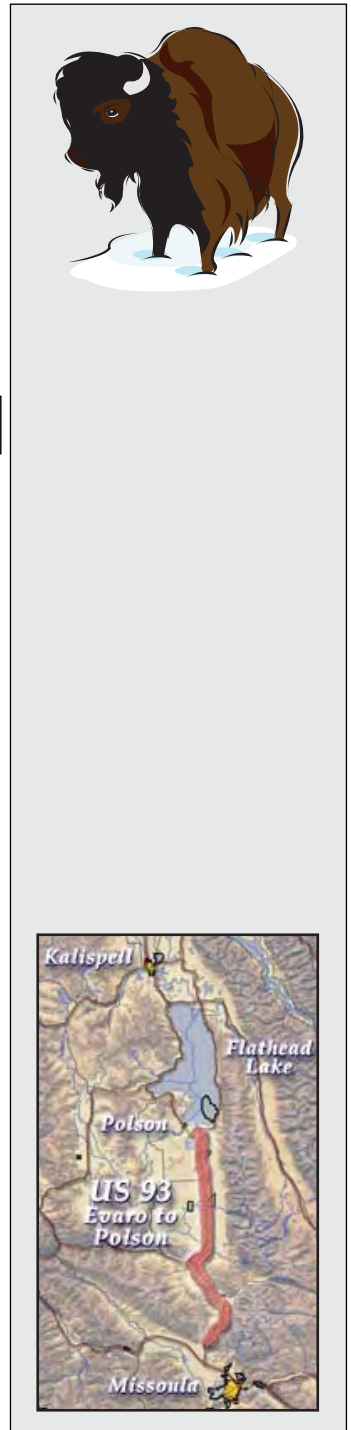
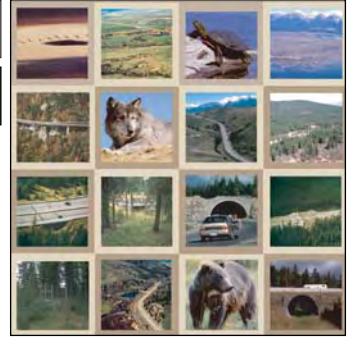
Construction

Construction is scheduled to begin along the US 93 corridor in spring of 2004. White Coyote Road, also known as the Jocko Hollow project, is planned to be the first project constructed. Although one of the shorter of the eight segments between Evaro and Polson, this project contains a significant bridge across the Jocko River.

Design of this project includes restoring wetlands and natural stream channels. The new bridge will be larger than the existing to help accomplish these goals and to provide better wildlife crossing opportunities. The Jocko Hollow project is a classic example of context sensitive solutions in that it simultaneously advances the objectives of safety, mobility, enhancement of the natural environment, and preservation of community values.

The Evaro to McClure Road, Spring Creek Road to Minesinger Trail, and Minesinger Trail to MT 35 projects are also scheduled for construction in 2004. Exact sequencing and construction dates have yet to be determined but will be finalized by the end of this year.

Although the US 93 project has been years in the making, the end result is proving well worth the wait. An unprecedented level of collaboration has led the project team to this significant point in the process with construction just around the corner on the Jocko Hollow project, and the environmental process on the Ninepipe/Ronan segment making important strides every day. Throughout this long process, the parties and stake holders involved have remained dedicated to realizing the goal of creating a safer, more aesthetically pleasing and environmentally friendly transportation solution.

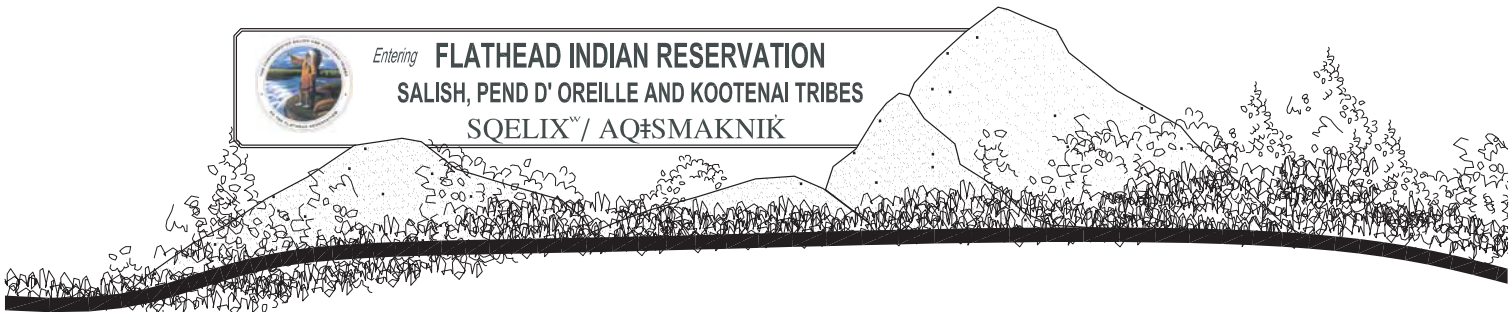




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US 93 Corridor Conceptual Gateway Signs



A new portal boundary sign located at the Flathead Indian Reservation's southern boundary in Evaro will welcome visitors traveling northbound on US 93. The entry sign will be constructed of natural stone and wood materials, and the text will be in Kootenai and Salish as well as English.

The south bound sign, which will be located opposite the north bound sign, will be created on a wood plank measuring 3 x 14 ft, with letters approximately 8 inches high. The north bound sign will measure 4 x 28 ft with main the main text standing 10 inches high, and will also be of wood plank construction, mounted on natural stone blocks.

The portal boundary sign will serve as a gateway to this extraordinary stretch of US 93, alerting travelers that they are entering a unique and significant place.