



# U.S. Highway 93 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)

Summer / Fall 2001

US 93 SEIS

<http://www.skillings.com/US93seis>

## Memorandum of Agreement

People who are familiar with driving US 93 readily acknowledge that both the scenery, and motorists risking dangerous passing maneuvers, can take your breath away. The views of the Mission Range, the presence of bison, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, and a rich and varied landscape all contribute to breathtaking vistas. At the same time, most agree that you should keep your eyes on the road.

In 1990, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) initiated the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to begin identifying solutions to the growing accidents, and traffic congestion for US 93 from Evaro to Polson. In 1996, the Federal Highway Administration issued a Record of Decision (ROD) that selected the existing alignment of US 93 from Evaro (MP 6.5) to Polson (MP 62.8) for improvement. What made this ROD unique was that FHWA deferred making a decision on lane configurations until agreement was reached on a number of other issues including design features and mitigation measures. Due to the many challenges associated with coming to an agreement that could meet the needs of MDT, FHWA and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), this process was in a stalemate up until 1998. Skillings-Connolly was initially hired to implement an access control and corridor preservation plan, and this eventually led to the identification of solutions which enabled the stalemate to end.

The last two years have seen much progress toward coming to an agreement that meets the objectives of MDT, FHWA and CSKT. The addition of Jones & Jones

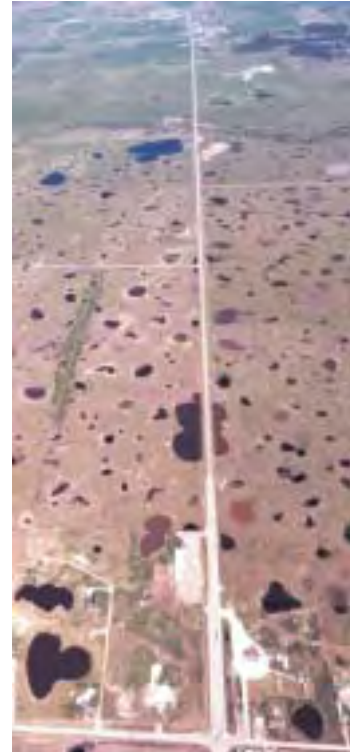
Architects and Landscape Architects and Midwest Research Institute (MRI conducted traffic and safety analysis) to the consultant team has been significant in helping meet these objectives. The culmination of this process is captured in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

On December 20, 2000, MDT, FHWA and CSKT signed the MOA providing for the completion of the environmental process as well as lane configuration and design concepts for a portion of the US 93 corridor between Evaro and Polson. A section through the Ninepipe / Ronan Segment was excepted out as part of the Agreement and will require a **Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement**. This report is not a conclusion but the beginning of a process dedicated to highway safety and improvements for the future. These improvements include measures that increase vehicular safety, reduce congestion, respect culturally significant areas, allow animals safe passage through the corridor, and maintain and nurture the Spirit of Place.

From here, the process will include environmental analysis, design, funding procurement, a public involvement process, resolution of Right-of-Way issues and construction of a safer, more efficient facility while maintaining sensitivity to the environment, culture and Spirit of Place. A **Public Scoping Workshop** on July 18th (see article on page 2) will provide specific information regarding the US 93 SEIS. Several interactive events will be on the Agenda, and project members will be on hand to answer your questions.

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**Existing US 93 Through  
The Ninepipe Glacial  
Pothole Wetland  
Complex**



# US 93 SEIS

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## Public Scoping Workshop

**When?** Wednesday, July 18<sup>th</sup>

**Where?** The Ronan Community Center—300 Third Avenue NW, Ronan

**Agenda:** 2:30 – 5:00 Afternoon Session

6:00 – 8:30 Evening Session—Agenda for both Sessions will be the same

We're excited to announce that we will be holding the first **Public Scoping Workshop** for the US Highway 93 Ninepipe / Ronan Segment SEIS on July 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **So, what is a Public Scoping Workshop?**

Well, it's an interactive event early in a project designed to encourage and collect public input. One of the goals of the Scoping Workshop is to help the project team (MDT, FHWA, CSKT) understand what kinds of issues are important to the community BEFORE decisions get made.

### **Do I need to be a highway expert to understand the issues?**

No. In fact, the kinds of issues that we're interested in hearing about are the ones that community members are often the experts on. Issues such as environmental concerns unique to different areas of the study region, concerns about wildlife and habitat, traffic and safety, area economics – these are examples of the kinds of things that you can help us better understand. So put on your thinking caps and join us for a brain storming session. Refreshments will be available.

The Ronan Community Center is ADA compliant. To arrange accommodations for persons with disabilities, call MDT at 888-231-5819, or TTY 800-335-7592.

## Corridor Maps



# US 93 SEIS

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What's happened so far?**

Access control and corridor preservation has been underway since late 1998. As a part of that process, and in furtherance of the safety specifications along US 93, approximately 50% of the existing accesses along the corridor will be eliminated, without land locking any properties.

### **What's the US 93 SEIS Project?**

The US 93 SEIS project is a Supplemental Environmental Impact statement, which means that it is a supplement to an existing Environmental Impact Statement. The original EIS was completed in 1996. This Supplemental EIS is needed due to the significant changes that have occurred in this area over the last several years.

Some of the changes that have occurred include: the listing of additional endangered species, an increase in traffic, and a heightened awareness regarding the need to address the extensive cultural and environmental conditions unique to this area. The SEIS will specifically explore alternatives to the current alignment that could skirt the most densely populated pothole portion of the Ninepipe glacial pothole wetland complex.

### **Are there any other projects on US 93?**

Yes. An Environmental Re-evaluation project is currently underway on the section of US 93 extending from Evaro to Polson, with the exception of the Ninepipe segment. There is also a Right-of Way acquisition project underway, as well as improvements for signals in Ronan, bus turnouts between Evaro and Polson, turn lanes at Red Horn Road, and guard rails south of Ravalli.

### **What does the time line look like?**

The SEIS is scheduled to take about two years. It is anticipated that this project will be complete around Spring 2003.

### **Who is involved with this project?**

Local city and county governments and agencies will be working closely with MDT, CSKT, and FHWA, as well as additional state and federal agencies to complete this project. The consultant team includes Skillings-Connolly, Jones & Jones Architects and Landscape Architects, and Herrera Environmental.

## Sqelix Aq Ismaknik - "The People"

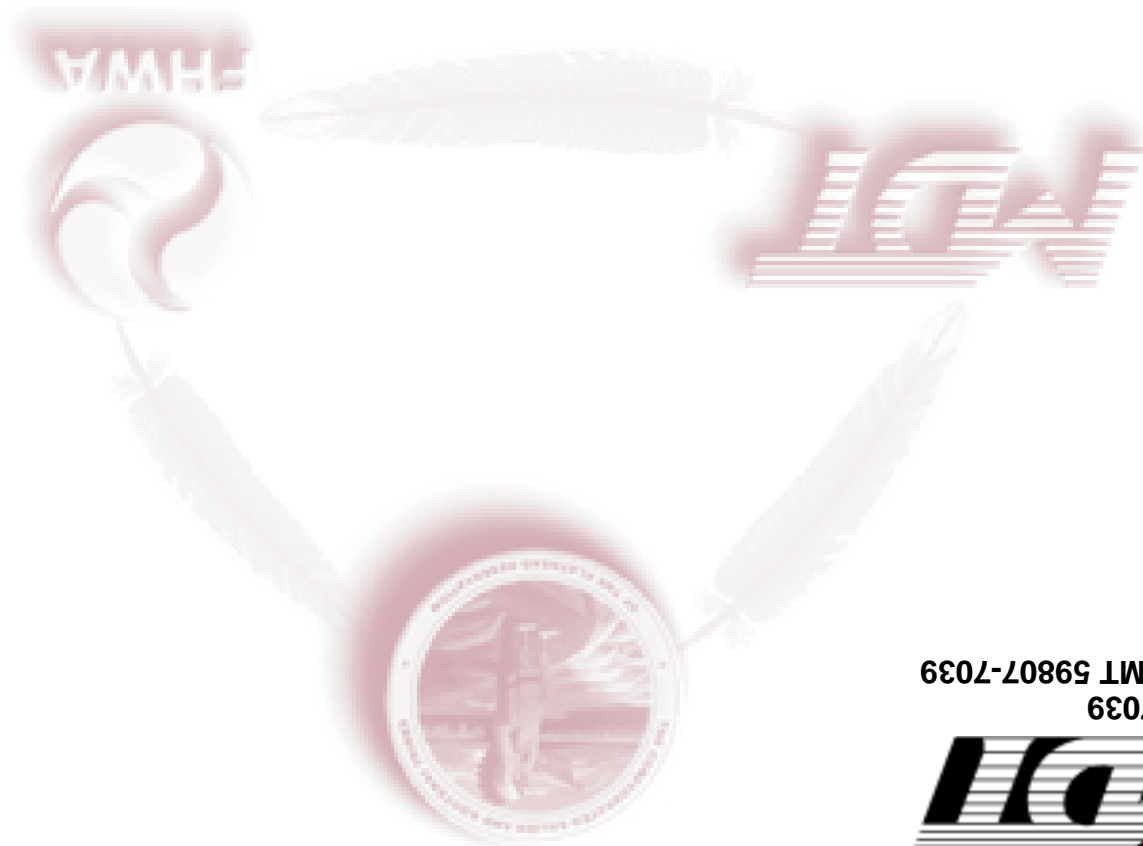
The design theme established for US Highway 93 on the Flathead Indian Reservation is "homeland of Sqelix Aq Ismaknik." The graphic logo to the right depicts the coyote, legendary hero of the Salish, Kootenai and Pend d'Oreille people. The coyote represents a link between people and the natural and spiritual worlds in which this highway is being constructed.



The Flathead Cultural Committee has expressed the tribes' spiritual and cultural ties to the land in the following way: "They are lands where our people walked and lived; lands and landmarks carved into the minds of our ancestors through Coyote stories and actual experiences; lands, landmarks, trees, mountain tops, crevices that we should look up to with respect." - Quoted from a highway information sign on US 93.



*"The design of the reconstructed highway is premised on the idea that the road is a visitor and that it should respond to and be respectful of the land and Spirit of Place." - MOA*



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*See feature article on page 1 for details regarding the US 93 Memorandum of Agreement.*



*Please visit your local library, school, fire department, community center, city hall, or courthouse to read the entire Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), or visit the project website at [www.skillings.com/us93seis](http://www.skillings.com/us93seis) to view the MOA electronically.*