



U.S. Highway 93 Corridor Evaro to Polson

Issue 1 Spring 2001

US 93 Evaro to Polson

<http://www.ronan.net/~skilling>

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 for US 93 from Evaro to Polson. 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 lead 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 Landscape Architects and 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 and Ronan areas was excepted out, as part of the Agreement, and will require a separate 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 being sensitive to the environment, culture and Spirit of Place. A round of open houses beginning the week of April 30 (see article on page 2) will provide specific information regarding the US 93 re-evaluation. Maps demonstrating current typical sections of roadway and lane configurations will be available, and project members will be on hand to answer your questions.

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Farmland near Ronan

US 93 Evaro to Polson

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Upcoming Open Houses

A round of open houses to provide information on the status of the US 93 project will be held from April 30 - May 3. Current maps of the project area with the proposal for the section being re-evaluated will be on display so you can see first hand the current configuration.

The schedule for the open houses is as follows: Each open house will be held from 4:00 - 7:00 PM. The agenda for each open house will be the same, so please attend at whichever location is most convenient.

Monday	April 30, 2001	Polson	Elks Club
Tuesday	May 1, 2001	Ronan	Sacred Heart Parish Hall
Wednesday	May 2, 2001	St. Ignatius	Community Center
Thursday	May 3, 2001	Arlee	High School Library

All locations are ADA compliant. To arrange special accommodations for persons with disabilities, call MDT at (888) 231-5819, or TTY (800) 335-7592.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's happened so far?

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

What is the MOA?

The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is a document that was signed in December between the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The MOA lays out the three governments' preferred conceptual roadway improvements, including lane configurations, design features, and mitigation measures for 45.1 miles of US 93 (see re-evaluation map on page three.)

What's being re-evaluated?

The US 93 re-evaluation came about because several things have changed since the original EIS was released in 1996, and subsequently modified in 1998. Some of the changes that necessitate re-evaluation include: the listing of additional endangered species such as the Canada Lynx and Bull Trout, and a plant called Spalding's Catchfly. Additionally, the MOA identified elements not considered in the original EIS which include: couplet at Arlee, realignment at the top of Ravalli Hill,

realignments north of Ronan, realignment between Caffrey Road and MT 35 in the vicinity of Polson, and wildlife fencing.

Are there any other projects on US 93?

Yes. A Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is being prepared for the 11.2 mile area from the Red Horn Road / Dublin Gulch Road intersection to the Spring Creek Road / Baptiste Road intersection. This is a separate project from the US 93 re-evaluation, and will take approximately two years to complete. The SEIS will have its own public involvement process, which will begin shortly after the April / May open houses (see SEIS map on page three). There is also a Right-of-Way access management and corridor preservation project underway, as well as proposed improvements for signals in Ronan, and turn bays at Red Horn Road.

How will this project affect my property?

The impacts associated with the re-evaluation are at this point under study. There will be maps at the upcoming open houses demonstrating the potential impacts of the proposed actions.

What does the time line look like?

The re-evaluation is scheduled to take 7 months. It is anticipated that this project will be complete by Fall 2001.

Who is involved with this project?

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

US 93 Evaro to Polson

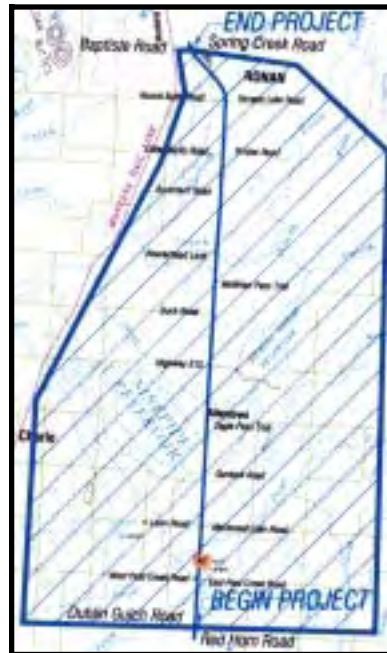
Corridor Maps

Right-of-Way Update

RE-EVALUATION



SEIS STUDY AREA



MAPS REPRESENT APPROXIMATE AREA OF STUDY

MDT has approved the Right-of-Way Plans for Segment 1 (Evaro to Dirty Corner), Segment 2 (Dirty Corner to Ravalli), Segment 3 (Ravalli to St. Ignatius), and Segment 5 (Ronan to Polson). The process of determining values on Segment 1 (Evaro to Dirty Corner) is underway. The values for the subject properties are being established using comparable data derived from property sales in the vicinity.

Overall, there are about 360 parcels to be purchased for this project. Around 70 have been purchased to date. Activities are currently underway on all segments with the exception of segment 4 (St. Ignatius to Ronan). A complete listing of individual parcels in each of the five segments will be on display at the open houses in April and May.

Sqelix Aq Ismaknik - "The People"

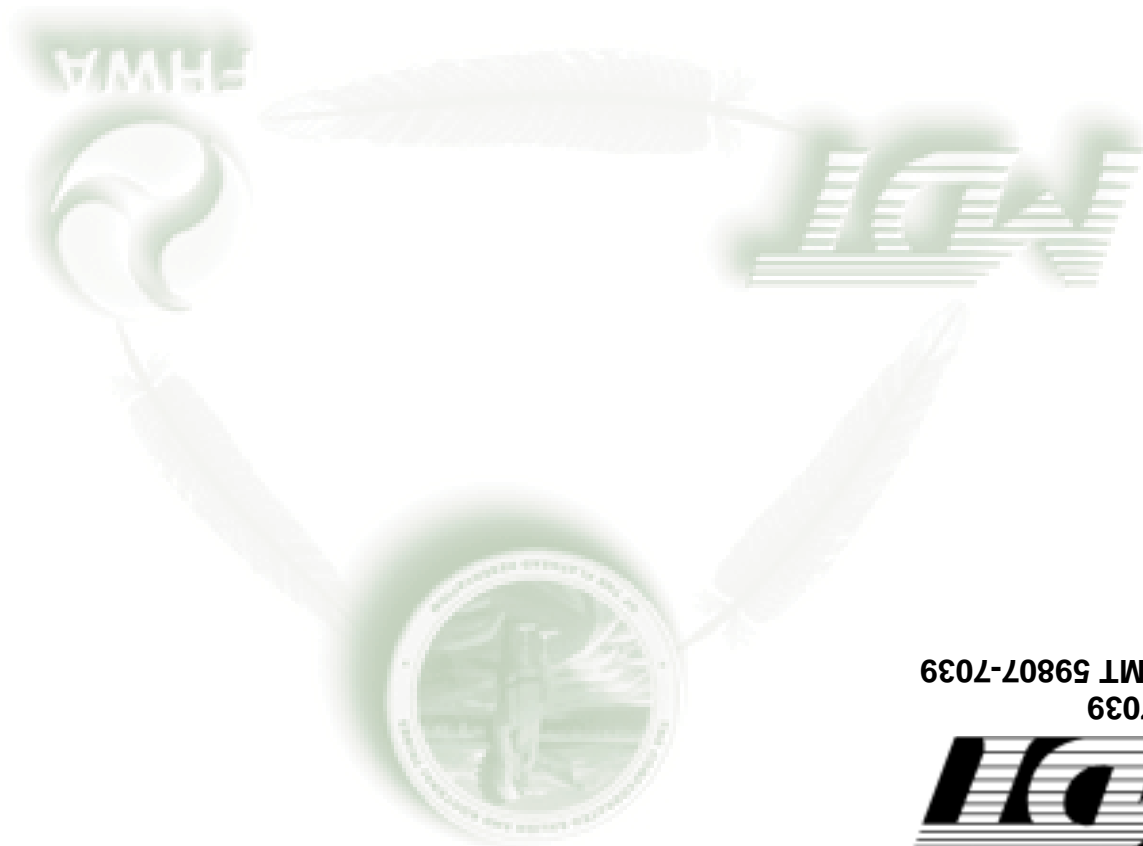
The design theme established for US Highway 93 on the Flathead Indian Reservation is "homeland of Sqelix Aq Ismaknik". The graphic logo to the right depicts the coyote, legendary hero of the Salish, Kootenai and Pend d'Oreille people. The coyote represents a link between people and the natural and spiritual 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 Skillings-Connolly, Inc. website at www.skillings.com to view the MOA electronically.