



U.S. Highway 93 Evaro to Polson Corridor

Winter 2001/2002

US 93 EVARO TO POLSON

<http://www.skillings.com/us93re-evaluation>

Final Environmental Re-evaluation and Record of Decision Signed and Published for US 93

Inside this issue:

The Federal Highway Administration, Montana Department of Transportation and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are proud to announce the signing of both the U.S. Highway 93 Final Environmental Re-evaluation of the 1996 Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Record of Decision.

Signing of the two documents marks the end of the environmental phase and the beginning of the design phase for a portion of the US 93 corridor project between Evaro and Polson, which has a groundbreaking focus on both safety and environmental concerns and cultural issues. The three governments have also agreed to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Ninepipe / Ronan segment, and they continue to work together to determine the appropriate improvement project through Polson.

"We're very excited about the collaboration on this project," Governor Judy Martz stated. "Completing the environmental phase is another significant step for the state of Montana, the local communities and the partners on this project – and a key step toward building a road that improves the public's safety, protects the environmental and cultural resources of the reservation, and infuses additional monies into our economy."

Now the process moves forward to design, right of way acquisition, and construction, based upon approval of

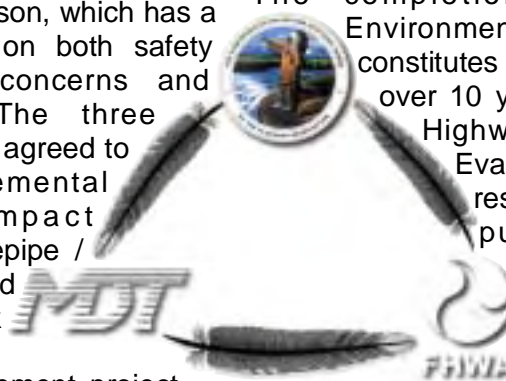
funding.

"Signing of the Final Environmental Re-evaluation and the Record of Decision reinforces the collaboration found in the Memorandum of Agreement," said Janice Weingart Brown, Montana Division Administrator for the Federal Highway Administration. "That is the source document for everything we're doing now, and it speaks to the unique history of this project."

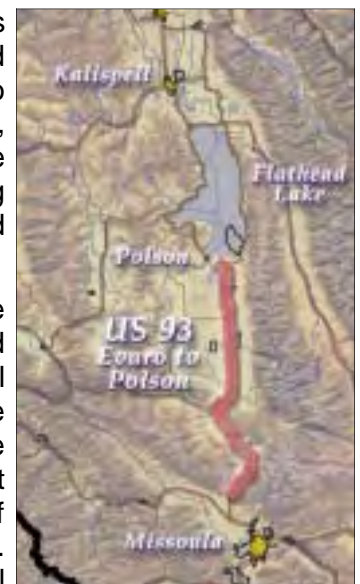
The completion of the Final Environmental Re-evaluation constitutes the culmination of over 10 years of work on US Highway 93 between Evaro and Polson. As a result of over 220 public comments, alignments, access, frontage roads, and many other features have been adjusted and modified to better accommodate the environment, the communities, the wildlife and the traveling public, all the while protecting the cultural resources of the Salish and Kootenai tribes.

Fred Matt, Chairman of the Tribal Council said, "MDT, FHWA, and the Tribes developed a conceptual design for reconstruction of US 93 in the Memorandum of Agreement which we believe addresses the issues left unresolved in the 1996 Record of Decision for this segment of the project. The findings of the Final Environmental

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The Spirit of Place



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Project Contacts

Final Re-evaluation and ROD (cont.)

Loran Frazier
Montana
Dept of Transportation
PO Box 7039
Missoula, MT 59807-7039
Phone: (406) 523-5800

Joel Marshik
Montana
Dept of Transportation
2701 Prospect Ave
Helena, MT 59820
Phone: (406) 444-7632

Dale Paulson
Federal Highway
Administration
2880 Skyway Drive
Helena, MT 59602
Phone: (406) 449-5303

Lewis Yellowrobe
Confederated Salish and
Kootenai Tribes
PO Box 278
Pablo, MT 59855
Phone: (406) 675-2700

Skillings-Connolly, Inc.
Public Involvement Office
1317 US 93 South, Ste. A
Ronan, MT 59864
Phone: (406) 676-2500

Missoula Office
2685 Palmer Street Suite C
Missoula, MT 59808
Phone: (406) 541-7877
Phone: (800) 454-7545

Gerry Smith
Skillings-Connolly, Inc.
Project Manager
Phone: (800) 454-7545

Ron Moeckel
Skillings-Connolly, Inc.
Project Engineer
rmoeckel@skillings.com
Phone: (800) 454-7545

Thad Dickson
Skillings-Connolly, Inc.
Public Involvement
tdickson@skillings.com
Phone: (800) 454-7545

TTY: (800) 335-7592
MDT: (888) 231-5819

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Re-evaluation reinforce our belief in the soundness of that conceptual design. We look forward to continuing to work diligently and innovatively with MDT and FHWA during the design and construction phases of the project in order to reconstruct US 93 in a way that best serves the people and protects the landscape of the Flathead Reservation."

All of the modifications, as well as responses to the comments received on the Draft Re-evaluation, are detailed in the Final Environmental Re-evaluation. The documents have been distributed to those who commented on the project, as well as to the many others who have shown interest or participated in the project. The Final Re-evaluation and Record of Decision are currently available in community libraries, local county and city government offices, community centers, and schools. Electronic versions of the Final Environmental Re-evaluation and Record of Decision are available on-line at:

www.skillings.com/us93re-evaluation

"The state of Montana extends its appreciation to both the people of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the countless individuals and agencies who have contributed to this process. Montana is definitely making history with this project," Martz stated.

How Have My Comments Affected the US 93 Project?

It's a good question, and one that most anyone who has taken time to participate in a public event, talk to an engineer, send an email, or fill out a comment card, stops to ask. So, if you've ever wondered what happens after you tell us what you think, please read on.

EVARO

Following input from the citizens of Evaro, FHWA, MDT, and CSKT considered several improvement options to better meet the needs of the community. The three governments decided to retain a frontage road concept. The railroad will be shifted to the east approximately 20 meters, which allows a shift of the frontage road away from the properties in town. The north access was shifted from the present location at Boggess Lane to Mercer Lane.

DIRTY CORNER

After reconsideration, the FHWA, MDT, and CSKT agreed to flatten the curve at Dirty Corner and relocate the existing access to US 93 away from the vicinity of the intersection of Coldwater Lane and Agency Road. Two options were looked at: moving the access to the vicinity of Blackhawk Loop, or moving the access to the vicinity of South Couture Loop. Blackhawk Loop is a privately owned road, and the members of the community were strongly against the use of it as a busy county road. They cited safety and quality of life issues. South Couture Loop currently intersects US 93 on the west near the beginning of Dirty Corner. Coldwater Lane and Agency Road currently intersect US 93 near the middle of that curve. The option selected was a frontage/access road from the intersection of Coldwater and Agency southerly along the east side of US 93 to South Couture Loop. There are some concerns regarding noise and light impacts in that area, and landscaping options are being pursued to lessen these impacts.

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Comments (cont.)

ARLEE

Following a large amount of input from the citizens of Arlee, FHWA, MDT, and CSKT reconsidered the selected option of a couplet for Arlee. Input from the townspeople was mixed, some in favor of the couplet, and some in favor of keeping both directions of US 93 on the existing alignment. Residents of the town presented proposals for both a 3-lane and a 4-lane facility through town. The three governments decided to retain the couplet, however several changes to the couplet were made, including those described below.

At the south end of town, the design shifted the southbound leg of the couplet away from a private burial site, reducing the impact to the site. Powwow Road and North Couture Loop were straightened at the intersection with the northbound leg of the couplet improving sight distance at that location. Connections to North Couture were designed to provide southbound traffic with the option to turn around and head north. Finley Creek Road was used to provide similar options for northbound traffic at the north end of town. The crossroads were modified to reduce the skew angles and improve sight distance. Whitworth Street was selected in addition to Wessinger Street to provide crossroads between the legs of the couplet. The crossroads will be improved and paved as a part of this project.

US 93 Ninepipe / Ronan SEIS News

Work continues on defining impacts of both an eastern and western alternative, as well as improving the existing corridor and do nothing alternative through the Ninepipe wetlands complex. A town meeting was held in Charlo on November 1 where the local residents expressed their opposition to the western alternative and presented a well thought out and carefully constructed human impact statement. The data gathered through a citizen prepared survey is very useful. The effort made by a few citizens is impressive and appreciated.

A summary of all public input to date clearly indicates a preference for improving the existing alignment over any other option. All of this input is being considered as impacts for the alternatives are evaluated. The plan is to identify impacts of each alternative and place the data side by side so that an informed decision can be made on the best alternative for the environment and the people.

A meeting was held with a small group of people in Ronan to discuss alternatives for US 93 through their town. It is clearly understood that the city does not want to be by-passed, and the by-pass alternates discussed during the 1996 EIS have been taken off the table. Ideas discussed at the meeting are being developed into maps and pictures for sharing at a future meeting with Ronan citizens.

For more information and project updates, visit the SEIS website at www.skillings.com/us93seis You can also comment on the project, request information, or sign up for the mailing list on the website by clicking on the *Mailing List* button.

The consultant group continues to work with the three governments, the public, and local, state, and federal agencies to develop alternatives for the SEIS.



Project Design Schedule



DECEMBER 2001

DESIGN FIRMS
UNDER CONTRACT

JANUARY 2002

SITE INVESTIGATION
BY DESIGN FIRMS

JAN/FEB/MARCH 2002

SURVEY WORK
(WEATHER
DEPENDENT)

OCT/NOV 2002

COMPLETE VISITOR
CENTER DESIGN

DECEMBER 2002

COMPLETE
RIGHT-OF-WAY
ACQUISITION

NOV/MAY 2002 - 2003

FINAL DESIGN

JULY 2003

MDT
DESIGN APPROVAL

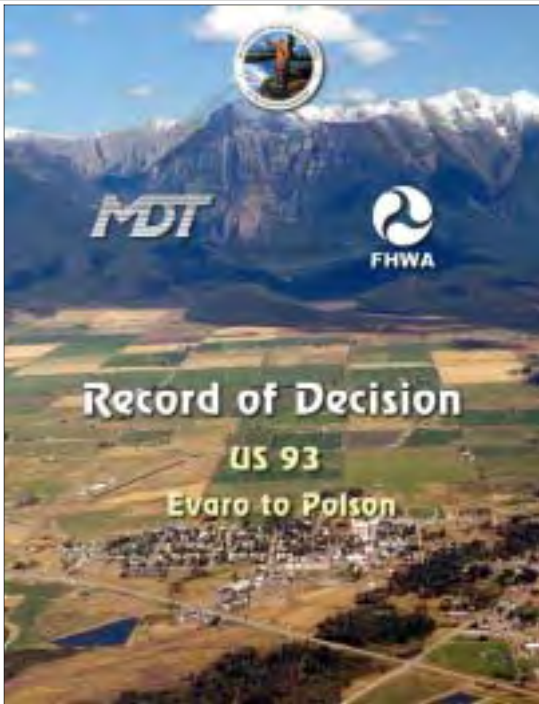


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See feature article on page 1 for details regarding the release of the Final Environmental Re-evaluation and Record of Decision for US Highway 93



Please visit your local library, school, fire department, community center, city hall, or courthouse to read the Final Environmental Re-evaluation, or visit the project website at www.skillings.com/us93re-evaluation to view the document electronically.