

Fernan Lake Road

Newsletter



**U.S. Department Federal Highway
of Transportation Administration**

Western Federal Lands Highway Division

Volume 2

Introduction

Welcome to the Fernan Lake Road Project. Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has completed the first segment of public involvement meetings. We thank each of you who have provided us with verbal or written comments and hope that you will continue to be involved in this project.

This project is focused on the current Fernan Lake Road access route which is designated as Idaho Forest Highway 80. It begins at the north-eastern boundary of Fernan Lake Village, parallels the northern edge of Fernan Lake, then goes northeast through private land and enters the Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF) ending at the Fernan/Huckleberry Mountain saddle.

Fernan Lake Road is the primary recreational access to Fernan Lake. It also provides access to residences, an established shooting range, and the IPNF lands, which includes campgrounds, picnic areas, and snowmobiling and hiking trails.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of the project as listed in the Project Checklist is being reviewed and revised. This revision is based on information that has been gathered to-date, prior public input, and future scoping as required by law.

The FHWA, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and United States Code (USC) Title 23, is required to balance transportation needs, safety, costs, environmental resources, and public input in order to arrive at objective, responsible transportation decisions. This Statement of Purpose and Need is being developed by the FHWA and cooperating agencies from the viewpoint of defining transportation needs and safety for this project. The proposed project is a transportation project. As such, the Statement of Purpose and Need focuses on the known and reasonably predictable future deficiencies and uses of the existing roadway which ultimately define the project purpose.

NEPA Documentation

FHWA initially proposed to conduct an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project. An EA constitutes a level of environmental review under federal environmental regulations that focus on a preferred alternative. Based on discussions with Federal, State, and local agencies with the FHWA, the requests and comments from the public, and the potential impacts that have been noted during the initial public process, FHWA reassessed the environmental review process. The decision has been made to proceed with an En-



(NEPA Cont.)

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project. An EIS represents a more intense review of environmental factors on multiple alternative solutions. NEPA requires that all proposed federal actions be evaluated to determine the impacts they will have on the environment, and how these impacts can be avoided or mitigated.

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Public Involvement

There has been a lot of confusion when it comes to public involvement. We hope to clear that up a little. There are a variety of ways that the public can be involved. Not every method is best in every situation or for every individual.

No matter how they are gathered, comments are always accepted and needed during the environmental and project development. Comments should not be considered a "vote". It is true that if we hear a concern more than once it may tell us that something may be more important to the public than we originally thought. However, receiving just one comment can make us pay attention to something that may otherwise have been overlooked.

The environmental process was not set up to allow individuals to substitute their decisions or judgment for those of the Government. The environmental process requires government officials to make decisions by following a specific process that requires the careful consideration of many factors. This includes the public's comments on those factors. There are multiple steps in the process and therefore multiple opportunities that allow for public comment. Once a step

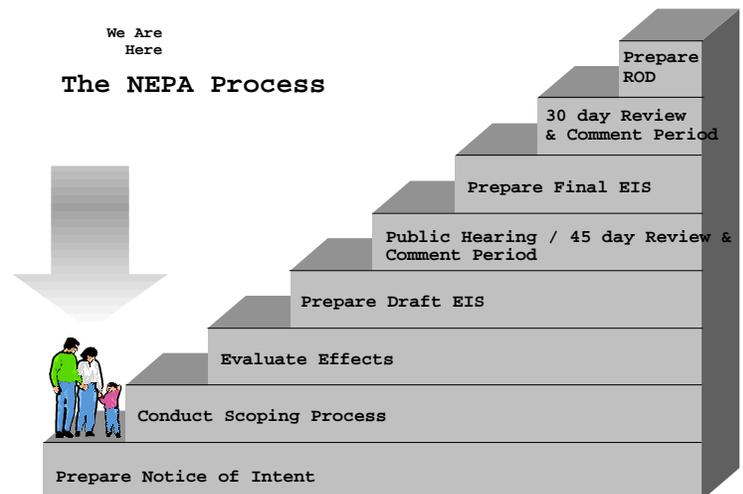
is completed, it generally will not be revisited.

The first step after issuing a Notice of Intent (NOI) involves a continuation of the scoping process. After this, step two will be to identify and consider a limited number of alternatives that are selected from the information developed in the scoping process.

The third and fourth steps identify the potential impacts of the identified alternatives and results in a Draft EIS (DEIS). It is important to realize that this step does not limit the ultimate actions that an agency may take, but rather serves to ensure that the deciding official can not make a decision without considering the impacts. The public at step five can tell the Government that there are impacts that need more attention or identify impacts that may not have been considered.

The sixth step is to identify a preferred alternative in the Final EIS (FEIS) based on the effectiveness of the considered alternatives to deal with the problem identified by the proposed project and on the impacts identified. This requires a balance process. If all alternatives are 'equal' then we choose the one with the least impacts. If some alternatives would have more impacts, it is logical to delete those alternatives from consideration. The decision is made by the Government. Public comment at this step should reflect the validity of the balancing process. The Government determines if the potential impacts of the preferred alternative can be mitigated.

The last step is the selection of the alternative. In an EIS, this is also known as the Record of Decision (ROD).



Current Project Highlights

Geotechnical Drilling Operations.

Some of the additional studies and investigations that have been occurring within the last few months, have included preliminary geotechnical reconnaissance/investigation along the existing route to determine the actual condition of the existing roadway. This has included drilling over 30 borings in the roadway and along the shoreline of the lake. Information that has been obtained tells us about the constructed roadway as it is today, the native subgrade, and the pavement thickness. It also provides information regarding the roadway near the shoreline, in shallow water, in the marshy area, and in Lilypad Bay.

Environmental Studies

Field investigations for wetlands and sensitive species studies have also been completed within the existing corridor. A summary of the current findings follows:

Wetland Delineation

The wetland specialists examined and identified vegetation and dug small soil test pits to see if the soils were wet below the surface. The biologists confirmed the type and extent of the wetlands along the existing road, and determined that wetlands are located between Mile Post 3.0 and MP 4.63. Fernan Lake and the area around Lilypad Bay are considered "waters of the U.S." and are not counted as wetlands.



It is important to identify wetlands along the road corridor because they are considered valuable natural resources. Disturbances to wetlands are monitored and regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under the Clean Water Act. A permit from the Corps ("404 permit") will be neces-

sary if the project involves any fill in a designated wetland area.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

Biologists have also been in the field looking for specific plant, animal, fish and bird species along the road corridor. Although work on ESA species is not completed as yet, we can say that there are no known plants listed under the ESA in the project corridor. DEA and Forest Service botanists surveyed the road corridor (especially the wetland areas) for two plants listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, water howellia and Ute ladies'-tresses.

Final reports on the findings for the geotechnical and biological studies will be presented during the NEPA process.

"Behind the Scenes" at WFLHD

With the change in environmental documentation, there will be a minor delay in the project. Therefore, the next public meeting will probably not be held until after the first of the year. This will allow for sufficient time to provide information to the public on the new process and the alternatives that will be considered in the EIS. When a date has been set for this next meeting, a notice will be mailed to all who are on the current mailing list.



Project Schedule

With the environmental documentation process changing to an EIS, the project schedule will be altered to allow for the requirements of an EIS. The proposed dates for the project schedule will be provided as soon as they are available.

The next newsletter will further explain the FHWA regulations and guidelines on the environmental evaluation process for an EIS. The steps in the EIS process and relevant time frames will be provided.

Q. Where can I find information on this project?

A. Volume 1 of the Newsletter and a project checklist have been developed for this project. Copies are available at the Fernan Lake Ranger station of the IPNF, the East Side Highway District, or WFLHD. Additional information, mailers and newspaper advertisements will be provided for future meeting places and times. If you have additional questions or if you know of people who would like to be on the mailing list, please contact **Christy Darden, WFLHD at 360-696-7700 or e-mail at fern anlake@wfl.fha.dot.gov**



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Notice of Intent

The Notice of Intent (NOI) is a requirement of the EIS process. The NOI is a document placed in the Federal Register that tells the public that it is the intent of an agency to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a specific project. A copy the NOI for the Fernan Lake Road Project follows as it was presented in the Federal Register.

[Federal Register: October 3, 2000 (Volume 65, Number 192)]

[Notices]

[Page 59043-59044]

From the Federal Register Online via GPO Access

[wais.access.gpo.gov]

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

Environmental Impact Statement: Kootenai County, Idaho

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of Intent.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4321; 40 CFR 1508.22; 23 CFR 771.123(a), the FHWA is issuing this notice to advise the public that an environmental impact statement will be prepared for a proposed highway project in Kootenai County, Idaho near the city of Coeur d'Alene.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Victoria Peters, Design Operations Engineer or Christy Darden, Project Manager, Federal Highway Administration, 610 East Fifth Street, Vancouver, Washington 98661, telephone 360-696-7700.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The FHWA, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, East Side Highway District, and Idaho Department of Transportation, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to improve Fernan Lake Road also known as Idaho Forest Highway 80. The section proposed for improvement begins at Fernan Village, outside of Coeur d'Alene, and ends at Fernan Saddle for a distance of approximately 17.2 kilometers (10.7 miles).

Fernan Lake Road provides access to Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF). Because it is located close to the population in Coeur d'Alene and has direct access to I-90, Fernan Lake Road has a high vehicle usage. The recreational usage creates a dangerous mix of users including bicyclists, pedestrians, cars, recreational vehicles, timber haulers, trucks and school buses along this substandard paved road.

The existing Fernan Lake Road is narrow, has numerous sharp curves, a failing subgrade, a deteriorating road surface, and a substandard horizontal alignment which limits sight distance ("blind curves"). There are no developed recreational parking areas and very few turnouts along Fernan Lake, so users park along the road, creating a safety hazard. Safety hazards are created by a narrow road with sharp curves and a surface that is in poor condition. The reported accidents over a period of approximately five years (January 1994 to

December 1998) are two to three times higher than typical for this type of road. Solutions are needed to reduce the rate and severity of accidents and to provide for the current and projected traffic demand.

The overall purpose of the project is to cost effectively improve the physical conditions and safety features of Fernan Lake Road, while minimizing adverse impacts to sensitive environmental resources.

Project objectives will be based on the needs developed during the scoping process. All improvements must be consistent with the applicable guidelines from the IPNF Forest Plan, Kootenai County plans and ordinances, Idaho state regulations, and federal regulations.

Alternatives under consideration include (1) taking no action; (2) improving the existing road to meet the appropriate Idaho state design crite-

ria; (3) improving the existing road to meet the appropriate American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) design criteria; (4) other alternatives that may be developed during the NEPA process.

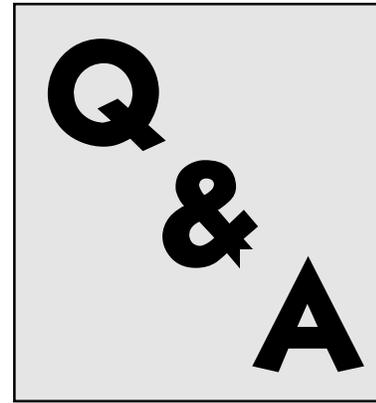
Notices describing the proposed action and soliciting comments will be sent to appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies, and to private organizations and citizens who have previously expressed interest in this proposal. Two public scoping meetings were held during 2000 in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Based in part on data collected and comments received, FHWA has determined that it will prepare an EIS on the project. Comments previously received will be utilized during the EIS. Additional interagency and public scoping activities will be conducted. The time and place of the public scoping activities will be provided in the local news media and by notice to individuals and agencies that have expressed interest in the proposal. The draft EIS will be available for public and agency review and comment. Schedules for these activities will be distributed when available this winter.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addresses and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Previous comments received by FHWA have identified a number of issues such as impacts to private landowners, water quality, wetlands, and wildlife, as well as, hillside stability, placement of fill in the lake, tree removal, and parking along the roadway. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action and the EIS should be directed to the FHWA at the address provided above.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Number 20.205, Highway Research, Planning and Construction. The regulations implementing Executive Order 12372 regarding intergovernmental consultation on Federal programs and activities apply to this program.)

Issued on: September 27, 2000.
Ronald W. Carmichael,
Division Engineer, Federal Highway Administration.

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Q. What makes the Fernan Lake Road substandard?

A. Fernan Lake Road is narrow, has numerous sharp curves, a failing subgrade, a deteriorating road surface, and a substandard horizontal alignment which limits sight distance ("blind curves"). There are no developed recreational parking areas and very few turnouts along Fernan Lake, so users park along the road. This creates a safety hazard, especially when combined with the high vehicle usage and the variety of recreational usage. Fernan Lake Road has a dangerous mix of users including bicyclists, pedestrians, cars, recreational vehicles, timber haulers, trucks recreational traffic, logging truck traffic, and snow plowing efforts that are needed. The primary purpose and need for the project is to provide for a safer roadway.

Q. What are the plans for the road regarding width, excavation of hillside, lake fill, tree removal, speed limit, marking turns and home egress, and roadside parking?

A. These items are unknown at this time. Options regarding each of these issues will be developed during preliminary design and scoping. As this information is developed it will be presented to the public.