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Project Development Process

The Fernan Lake Road Safety Improvement Project is following the development process used by Federal Highway Administration – Western Federal Lands Highway Division (FHWA). The major phases of the process are

- Planning and Programming.
- Conceptual Studies.
- Detailed Design.
- Construction and Postconstruction.

The chart at the bottom of this page shows the conceptual studies timeline and some of the milestones for Fernan Lake Road EIS. We have been in the conceptual studies phase longer than originally planned. The project is located in an especially sensitive environmental setting. Early ideas on how to improve the road generated substantial public concern. So the project team has been proceeding cautiously to ensure a full range of alternatives are considered.

Developing Alternatives

The NEPA public involvement and scoping process provides important information on environmental issues and concerns. This input and feedback can be consolidated into themes that guide development of specific alternatives.

For example, one alternative may focus on the least costly way to improve the road while still meeting all regulatory environmental requirements. Another alternative may focus on protecting or even enhancing a specific resource condition, even though it might be more costly or extend the overall schedule.

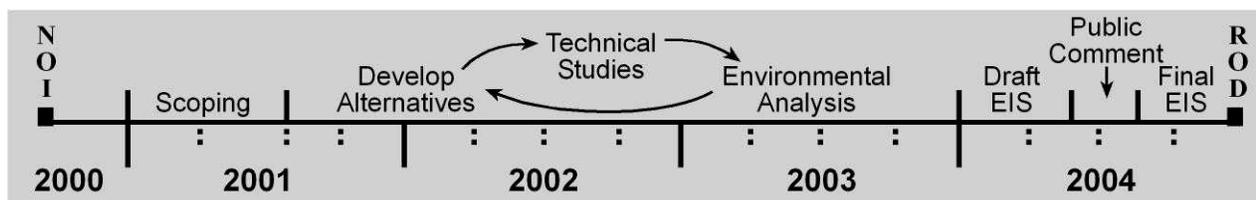


Public issues and concerns can provide themes for alternatives.

Alternatives for improvement projects typically use the general corridor where the existing road is located. New or extended roads usually explore multiple routes or corridors that would connect the project termini (ends). Although Fernan Lake Road is an improvement project, alternative routes/corridors are also being considered because of concerns like lake water quality.

Screening Alternatives

Alternatives development begins with brainstorming to generate a range of approaches to meet the project purpose and need within the general context of sound design and regulatory compliance. It is not cost-effective or appropriate to design and analyze every potential alternative formulated. A screening process is commonly used to identify which alternatives to carry forward and which to eliminate from detailed consideration.



The first level of screening for Fernan Lake Road focuses on the alternative routes/corridors that could connect I-90 and Coeur d'Alene to Fernan Saddle on Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF). The following screening criteria are being used to decide within which routes preliminary design of specific road alignments should be completed to allow more detailed environmental analysis:

Transportation Objectives

1. Improve access to IPNF Fernan Saddle from I-90 and Coeur d'Alene.
2. Improve safety for current and future travelers between Coeur d'Alene and Fernan Saddle.
3. Provide a roadway width and surface that will adequately and safely serve existing and future traffic.



Fernan Lake Road serves diverse transportation needs.

Maintenance Objectives

4. Provide roadway improvements that reduce road maintenance costs.
5. Repair existing roadway deficiencies to reduce maintenance costs and frequency.



The existing road is difficult to maintain.

Environmental Objectives

6. Repair unstable side slopes to reduce erosion and maintenance costs.
7. Avoid, minimize, or mitigate long- and short-term adverse environmental effects, and protect sensitive species and habitats.
8. Provide off-road parking for the safety of recreational users and protection of roadside environment.
9. Correct roadway drainage problems to extend the life of the roadway and protect adjacent water bodies, thereby improving/protecting the water quality of Fernan Lake and Fernan Creek.



Many opportunities exist for improving drainage and stormwater treatment.

Land Use and Planning Objectives

10. Provide off-road parking for the safety of recreational users.
11. Minimize right-of-way acquisition, particularly through private land.
12. Design improvements to be consistent Kootenai County ATP (1998) and IPNF Land and Management Plan (1987).



Providing off-road parking would improve safety for recreational users.

The second level of screening is applied to alternative alignments within the routes/corridors carried forward from the initial screening. Preliminary design data on these alignments allows the screening to be more quantitative. Screening criteria being used to decide which alternative alignments to analyze fully in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) include:

- Accident rates predicted by the Interactive Highway Safety Design Model (IHSDM, discussed in the September 2003 project update).
- Volume of waste rock and soil (difference between cut and fill volumes).
- Area of ground disturbance.
- Total area of new impervious surface.
- Length or area of lake encroachment (if any).
- Area of stream and wetland impacts.

November 2003 Agency Meetings

On November 17 the project team met with representatives of IPNF, Army Corps of Engineers (COE), Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ), Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), and Kootenai County Department of Parks and Waterways (KCPW). Discussion topics included:

- Stormwater treatment along existing roads (current and potential).
- Lake encroachment.
- Hillside alignments.
- Lilypad Bay crossing options.
- Fernan Creek impacts and mitigation.
- Culverts and fish passage.
- Recreational access.
- The NEPA EIS process.

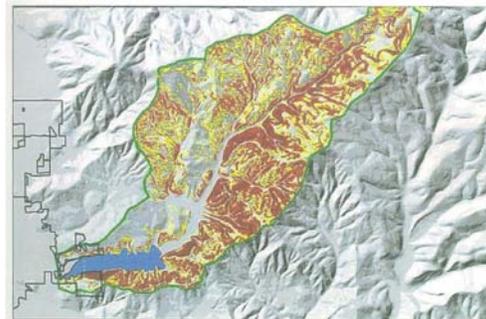
FHWA, IPNF, Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), and East Side Highway District (ESHD) met the following day. The agenda included:

- Visual simulations.
- Comparing alternatives.
- Screening alternatives.
- Analyzing alternatives.
- Right-of-way acquisition responsibilities.

Fernan Lake Watershed Management Plan

The draft Fernan Lake Watershed Management Plan was distributed by the City of Fernan Lake Village in November. There were no substantial changes in the preliminary water quality data for the lake, creek, and outlet that were previously provided to the project team.

The Fernan watershed plan includes several recommendations specific to the Fernan Road project. These recommendations are supported by the Fernan Lake Conservation and Recreation Association.



The Fernan Lake Watershed Management Plan identifies steep slopes where development should be avoided.

While in Coeur d'Alene during November, the project team met informally with representatives of the Association to discuss their recommendations. Some are design elements to consider when the project moves from Conceptual Studies and NEPA analysis into the Detailed Design phase after the Final EIS (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD).

What's Next?

Project activities currently planned for 2004 are:

- January Preliminary DEIS circulated among partner agencies for review, comment, and revision.
- February Project Update No. 5.
- April DEIS distributed to the public.
- May Public meeting in Coeur d'Alene.
- June Project Update No. 6.
- November ROD (Record of Decision).

Keeping You Informed

Many copies of the September and November project updates were returned undelivered by the postal service. Thanks to special efforts by ESHD staff, approximately 75 percent of these problem addresses have been resolved.

If you didn't receive the September or November project updates, copies can be requested from FHWA's project manager, Sajid Aftab, by phone (360-619-7700), email (fernancelake@wfl.fha.dot.gov), or regular mail to the return address on this newsletter.



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