

Fernan Lake Road

Vol. 4: September 2004

PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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Public Open House

Over 50 people braved the hot weather and CDA Ironman Triathlon crowd to participate in the public open house held for the Fernan Lake Road Safety Improvement Project at Fernan Elementary School on June 24, 2004. The primary objectives accomplished at the meeting were:

- Provide more project information,
- Answer questions from attendees, and
- Accept public comments on the Draft EIS.

Additional information was provided at stations that focused on:

- Project Overview,
- EIS Process,
- Draft EIS Alternatives,
- Issues and Solutions, and
- Construction Impacts / ROW Process.



The project team answered questions and explained the EIS process.

The display boards prepared for the meeting can be viewed on the internet at FHWA's Fernan project website:

www.wfl.fhwa.dot.gov/projects/fernan/



The virtual tours in the design simulations were popular with attendees of all ages.

The most popular displays were the narrated PowerPoint slide presentation, preliminary drawings and corresponding aerial photos that covered much of one wall in the gymnasium, and the computerized visual simulations showing a virtual tour of the existing road and Alternatives E, Fm, and G.

Many citizens at the open house live along Fernan Lake Road and had questions about the project relative to their property and driveway. Others had observations to share with the project team of engineers, scientists, right-of-way (ROW) representatives, and partner agencies on local conditions, road traffic, and wildlife. Some had suggestions for avoiding or mitigating environmental impacts.

Seven citizens took advantage of the stenographer that was present to provide verbal comments on the DEIS. Six more submitted written comments at the meeting.

Public Comments on the DEIS

Comments on the DEIS have been received from 35 individuals, families, agencies, and organizations. All of these comments will be considered by the project team in preparing the Final EIS (FEIS) this fall. Public comments on the DEIS will also be discussed at meetings in mid-September of the Social, Economic, and Environmental (SEE) Team and with permitting and regulatory agencies.



Project engineers used preliminary plans for all three build alternatives to answer questions at the public open house.

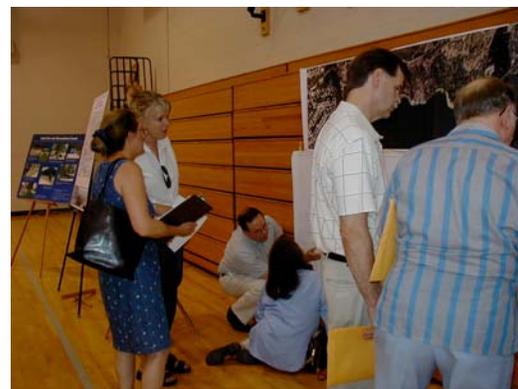
Most comments by citizens were from local residents. Some comments were very brief; others were quite lengthy and detailed. There isn't enough space in this newsletter to list every comment, but examples of the most common ones include:

- Minimize rock-cuts into the hillside.
- Add a bike/pedestrian lane.
- Return un-needed ROW to original landowners.
- Speed limit enforcement is critical.
- Rock-fall ditches are too wide.
- Make guardrails and rock-cuts look as natural as possible.
- Build Alternative E with a low-profile bridge.
- Avoid removing trees along the lake.
- More details are needed on wetland mitigation and stormwater treatment.

Some of these comments relate to details of final design if a build alternative is selected.

Comments from agencies and organizations often reflected their respective mission and/or regulatory responsibility. For example,

- Idaho Dept of Fish and Game (IDFG) wants to assist the project team in developing more specific information on parking areas for anglers, tree placement in the lake for fish habitat, creek relocation/restoration, and culvert replacements.
- CDA Audubon Society wants more specifics on past, current, and future road maintenance and related funding.
- Kootenai County Parks and Waterways would like the proposed parking at the East Fernan Boat Launch to provide for a better mix of single vehicles and those with trailers, instead of long RV stalls. They also want provisions for portable toilets.
- Fernan Lake Recreation and Conservation Association is concerned about the survival of Fernan Lake during road construction. They prefer a floating bridge on Alternative E.
- Several agencies provided concurrence with the Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation in the DEIS.



Having preliminary drawings and corresponding aerial photos at similar scales let participants get down (literally) to details at the public meeting.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a unique agency responsibility to evaluate the adequacy of the analysis and documentation relative to requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Favorable statements by EPA on the Fernan Lake Road DEIS included:

- The three build alternatives evaluated in the DEIS appear to represent a reasonable range of alternatives for the project.
- The DEIS adequately describes the ten alternative routes that were considered but eliminated from detailed evaluation.
- Efforts to analyze safety of the design alternatives, rather than simply defer to AASHTO standards for width and curve design, are commendable because the narrower roadways carried forward for analysis in the DEIS would improve safety while at the same time reducing environmental impacts.

Major concerns raised by EPA (and others) related to the need for more specific details.

- Wetlands – Impacts to Fernan Creek and adjacent wetlands and the mitigation to offset these impacts should be discussed and developed with appropriate resource agencies. EPA recommends that the project be designed so that impacts to Wetland E (MP 4.4 to MP 4.8) are avoided fully.
- Water Quality and Stormwater Treatment – Provisions for upgrading stormwater treatment need to be specifically identified because all build alternatives would increase impervious surface and create more and larger hillside cuts, in an area with limited space for traditional treatments.
- Revegetation of Cut and Fill Slopes – Specific information on the treatment and revegetation of cut slopes is necessary to determine whether the impacts can be mitigated and whether such work can lead to the water quality improvements anticipated in the DEIS. Specific information is needed on the location and size of fill slope stabilization measures along the lake because some mature trees would be removed by all build alternatives.

Wetland Mitigation Opportunities

The project team will continue to investigate potential design changes to avoid or reduce wetland impacts. To date mitigation of wetland impacts has focused on 1) removing the existing roadway and fill across Lilypad Bay and 2) creating a more natural stream channel with meanders and adjacent riparian buffers where Fernan Creek requires realignment.

Other wetland mitigation opportunities identified from public comments on the DEIS include:

- An offer from a landowner in the watershed to have a pond and associated conservation agreement contribute to the wetland mitigation requirements for the project.
- Identification of an existing high quality wetland on the north shore of the lake that could be acquired and preserved.

The project team is interested in similar ideas for wetland mitigation in the watershed. We do not want to overlook any opportunities to work with willing landowners to ensure no net loss of wetlands occurs as a result of the project. Please contact Sajid Aftab, FHWA's project manager, at 360-619-7700 if you are aware of any such opportunities on your property or elsewhere in the watershed.

September 2004 Agency Meetings

In mid-September the SEE Team will meet to discuss public comments received on the DEIS and anticipated changes in the Final EIS (FEIS). Those discussions will include providing the specific details requested by regulatory and resource agencies.

The SEE Team is composed of the partner agencies and is led by the Western Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Other members include Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF), East Side Highway District (ESHD) and Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). David Evans and Associates (DEA) is the environmental and engineering consultant.

The day after the SEE Team meeting, the project team will meet with representatives of EPA, IPNF, Army Corps of Engineers (COE), IDFG, Idaho Dept of Environmental Quality (IDEQ), Idaho Dept of Lands (IDL), Kootenai County Dept of Parks and Waterways (KCPW), and other agencies. The primary purpose of this meeting is to resolve agency comments on the DEIS.

What's Next?

The 2004 schedule for project activities is:

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| October | Preliminary FEIS circulated within FHWA for review and revision. |
| November | Preliminary FEIS circulated to SEE Team for review and revision. |
| December | FEIS distributed to the public. |
| Jan-2005 | ROD (Record of Decision). |

Keeping You Informed

In early August the Coeur d'Alene Press carried two articles about the most recent accident in which a car plunged into the lake. In a KXLY interview, John Pankratz of ESHD emphasized the importance of keeping the road safety and maintenance improvements moving forward.

This is the final newsletter planned for the preliminary design and environmental phase of the Fernan Lake Road Safety Improvement Project. FHWA's Fernan project website

<http://www.wfl.fhwa.dot.gov/projects/fernan/>

will continue to provide updates as we transition into the final design phase, if the ROD selects one of the build alternatives.

Meanwhile if you have any questions or concerns, please contact FHWA's project manager, Sajid Aftab, by phone (360-619-7700), email (fernanlake@wfl.fha.dot.gov), or regular mail to the return address below.



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