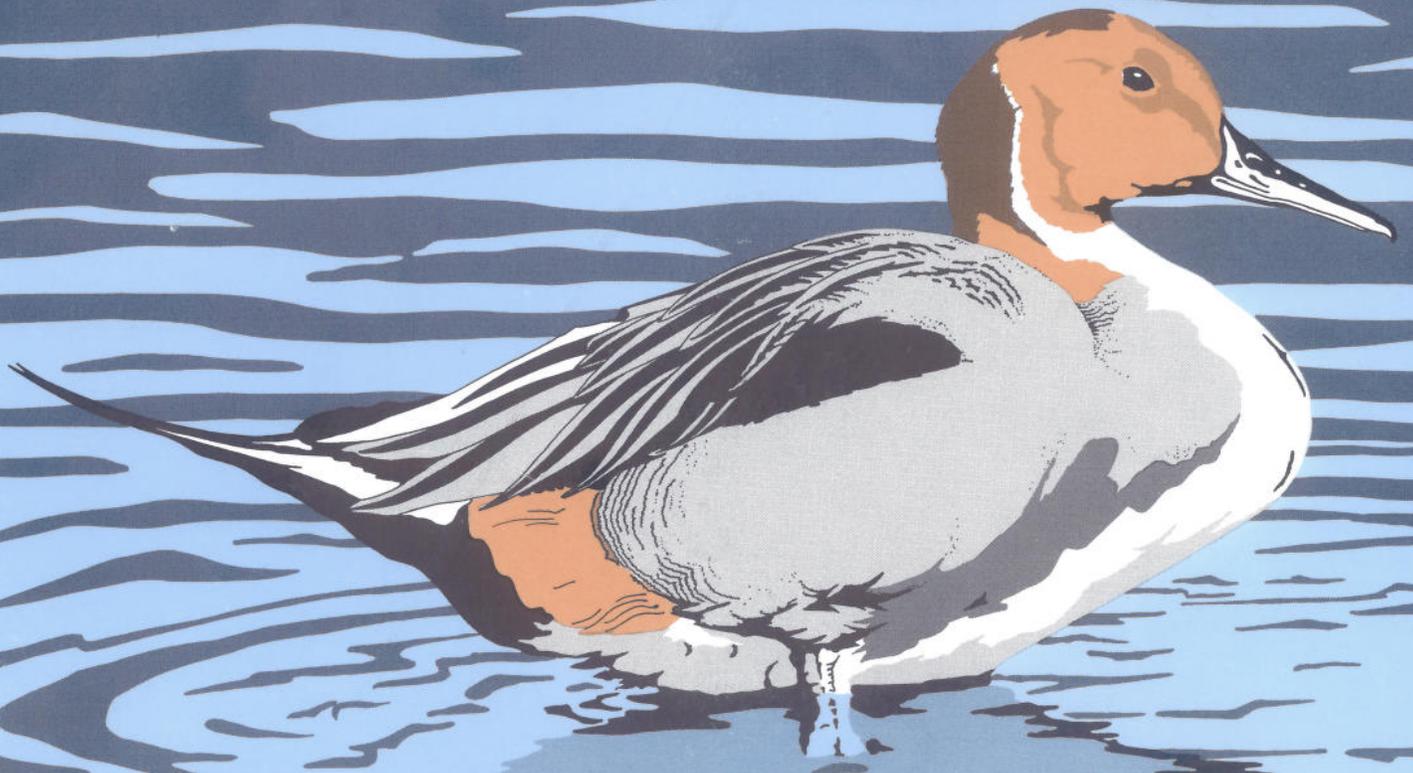


Final Section 4(f) Evaluation
Final Environmental Impact Statement

Project F 1-2 (39) 138
Reconstruction of U.S. Highway 2 between
Columbia Heights and Hungry Horse
Flathead County, Montana

State of Montana - Department of Transportation
and
U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration



**Project F 1-2 (39) 138
Reconstruction of U.S. Highway 2 between
Columbia Heights and Hungry Horse
Flathead County, Montana**

**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
FINAL SECTION 4(f) EVALUATION**

prepared by

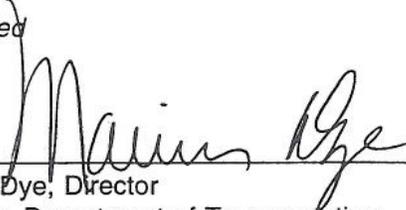
STATE OF MONTANA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
AND
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

in cooperation with

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE-FOREST SERVICE,
FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR-NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

Submitted pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 4332 (2) (c), 23 U.S.C. 138 and 49 U.S.C. 303. This action complies with Executive Order 11990, "Protection of Wetlands," Executive Order 11988, "Floodplain Management," and Sections 2-3-104 and 75-1-101, M.C.A.

Approved



Marvin Dye, Director
Montana Department of Transportation

Date: 2/15/95



Federal Highway Administration

Date: 3/15/95

- Several digital photographic simulations have been provided to help readers better understand the impacts of the proposed action and to illustrate the likely appearance of the project corridor with the development of the preferred alternative. These simulations appear in Parts II, IV, and V.
- Part VI has been expanded to include comments on the Draft EIS/Section (4) Evaluation received from reviewing agencies and the public. Responses to both oral and written comments are provided where appropriate. A copy of the public hearing transcript can be found in this Part.
- Efforts were made throughout the document to make computer-generated preliminary design drawings and graphics more easily understood. In some instances, graphics based on aerial photographs were used instead of drawings to better illustrate the impacts of the proposed action.
- APPENDIX 13 identifies Best Management Practices (BMPs) for erosion control that were determined through a preliminary analysis using the *Highway Construction Standard Erosion Control Work Plan*. The appendix lists measures that may be appropriate for use in the project corridor during and immediately after construction of the new highway.
- APPENDIX 14 contains a Draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation which assesses the project's impacts on water quality and the aquatic ecosystem. This document provides much of the detailed information necessary to obtain a Section 404 permit for the proposed action. The text of Part IV has also been modified to elaborate on water quality impacts due to highway construction including the impacts that blasting associated with rock excavation may have on water quality. APPENDIX 5 has been expanded to include more extensive discussions of existing water quality and the aquatic ecosystem in the project area.

Notable Changes in the Project Area

Some aspects of the existing environment in the Columbia Heights-Hungry Horse area have changed and new information about the area became available since the circulation of the Draft EIS/Section 4(f) Evaluation. The following section briefly identifies notable changes in conditions and presents relevant new information on the project area.

Traffic Volumes and Level of Service. New traffic data for the project area became available after the publication of the Draft EIS. The data showed that the 1992 annual average daily traffic (AADT) at Station A-60 was 5,720, an increase of 11.8% over the 1991 AADT. Traffic volume increases were recorded for other count locations on US 2 in the project area.

During 1993, the AADT volume within the project corridor was 5,881. This traffic volume was 2.8% higher than the corresponding volume for 1992. Daily traffic volumes during July and August of 1993 averaged more than 10,600 vehicles per day. The AADT volume for 1993 was 23% higher than the AADT in 1989 when detailed planning and work on this project began.

Checks were made to determine if the use of more recent traffic data for the project corridor would change the results of the LOS analyses presented in the Draft EIS. The LOS analyses performed with newer traffic data reaffirmed the results and conclusions of the analyses in the EIS since traffic volumes in the corridor have continued to increase.

Accident History for the Corridor. The accident data presented in the Draft EIS was based on a study of accidents which occurred during the 1987 through 1990 period. Accident information for the 1991 through 1993 period was reviewed to determine if accident trends and rates in the project corridor have substantially changed since the four-year period examined in the Draft EIS.

Preface

Based on an analysis of the corridor's recent accident history, it was determined that:

- a total of 70 accidents occurred during the 1991-1993 period including 33 accidents occurred in 1991, 20 accidents occurred in 1992, and 17 accidents occurred in 1993.
- accidents in the project area included 1 fatal accident, 29 injury accidents, and 40 property damage only accidents.
- the overall accident rate for the 1991-1993 period was 2.61 accidents per million vehicle miles of travel (ACC/MVMT) which is less than the overall accident rate of 3.67 ACC/MVMT calculated for the 1987-1990 period.
- the accident rate for the months of November through March during the three-year study period was 4.82 ACC/MVMT as compared to the corresponding rate of 6.46 ACC/MVMT for the 1987-1990 period.
- the accident rate for the months of April through October during the three-year study period was 1.88 ACC/MVMT as compared to the corresponding rate of 3.16 ACC/MVMT for the 1987-1990 period.
- the accident rate the section of US 2 near Berne Memorial Park (MP 140.5 to 141.2) was 2.34 ACC/MVMT as compared to 4.74 ACC/MVMT for the 1987-1990 period.
- the accident rate for the South Fork bridge area (MP 142.0 to 142.6) was 2.18 ACC/MVMT as compared to 6.00 ACC/MVMT for the 1987-1990 period.
- the types of accidents, locations of accidents within the corridor, and the factors contributing to motor vehicle accidents in the project area are similar for the 1991-1993 and the 1987-1990 periods.

Land Use in the Project Corridor. No substantial changes in land uses have occurred in the project corridor since the circulation of the Draft EIS.

Land Use Planning. New land use planning initiatives were undertaken in Flathead County since the publication of the Draft EIS. A land use plan for lands adjacent to US 2 between Badrock Canyon and Marias Pass was produced as a result of efforts by the Canyon Citizens Initiated Zoning Group. The group secured funding and other assistance from several agencies and hired a consulting land use planner to prepare a land use management plan. *The Canyon Plan* was adopted as an amendment to Flathead County's Master Plan in May, 1994.

The Flathead County Commissioners adopted a resolution of intent to implement land use regulations for the area covered by *The Canyon Plan* in November, 1994. The regulations, known as performance standards, differ from traditional zoning by allowing a wider range of land uses in different areas. However, the regulations impose development requirements to make new uses less intrusive and more compatible with existing land uses. Landowners in the Hungry Horse, Coram, and Martin City areas rejected the proposed land use rules in December, 1994. As a result, lands in the Badrock Canyon section of the project area remain unzoned. The new regulations were adopted for lands along US 2 between West Glacier and Marias Pass.

Flathead County is currently revising its county land use plan. In 1992, several community organizations offered to help the Flathead Regional Development Office facilitate community discussions and educational programs on growth in the county. At the suggestion of the Flathead Regional Development Office, representatives of these various groups ultimately came together and formed the Cooperative Planning

Coalition (CPC). The CPC led the planning effort and raised nearly \$600,000 in private funds to develop and implement a land use plan for the county. After extensive public involvement and work on the updated plan, meetings on the Draft Plan were held in the summer and fall of 1994. In December of 1994, the Flathead County Commissioners voted to approve the revised master plan and to hold a public vote on the plan as part of the June 1996 primary election.

Flathead Multi-Objective River Corridor (MORC) Plan. The National Park Service is helping eight agencies with management responsibilities for the Flathead River corridor develop the Flathead Multi-Objective River Corridor (MORC) Plan. The Plan covers the Flathead River corridor from the confluence of the South Fork near Hungry Horse to the north shore of Flathead Lake. The goal of the Flathead MORC Plan is to identify current and potential management concerns for the river corridor and recommend solutions. The Plan could ultimately be adopted as part of the county master plan and/or serve as a regulatory structure for involved agencies. The planning process was initiated in early 1993 and is expected to be completed in two years.

Demographic Conditions. Flathead County continues to experience rapid population growth. The 1990 U.S. Census showed that the county's population was 59,218, an increase of nearly 14% since 1980. Recent information from the U.S. Census estimated the 1992 population of Flathead County to be nearly 63,000 people. During the 1990 to 1992 period, the U.S. Census estimates that Flathead County grew 6.1% while the State of Montana only grew by 2.9%. Population projections based on historical growth trends show that the County's permanent population could range from about 72,200 to more than 97,000 by the year 2010.

The project corridor lies within two County Census Divisions established for the U.S. Census, the Badrock-Columbia Heights Census Division and the South Fork Census Division. The 1990 Census data indicated that the population of the Badrock-Columbia Heights Census Division increased by more than 15% while the population of the South Fork Census Division remained virtually unchanged between 1980 and 1990.

Summary

A. Project Description

This **Final** Environmental Impact Statement/Section 4(f) Evaluation examines a proposal to reconstruct some 4.4 miles of U.S. Highway 2, also known as Federal-Aid Primary Route 1 (FAP 1), in Flathead County, Montana. **Improvements** to the existing 24-foot-wide two-lane road **would occur** from Columbia Heights, a suburb of Columbia Falls, to Hungry Horse. Included with this action is the construction of a new bridge over the South Fork of the Flathead River. The purposes of and need for the proposed action are discussed in Part I of the EIS.

B. Major Actions Proposed by Other Agencies

The Bonneville Power Administration plans to reconstruct the existing electrical transmission line from Hungry Horse Dam to the Columbia Falls substation. Alternatives for the BPA's proposed reconstruction were evaluated in an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by the agency. The EA and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposal were approved in September, 1993. This proposed action would affect the electrical transmission lines located above Berne Memorial Park in Badrock Canyon. Work on the project began in 1994.

Efforts are underway to reconstruct and widen portions of U.S. Highway 93, a major north-south arterial, in other parts of the Flathead Valley. The FHWA has prepared an Environmental Impact Statement evaluating road design alternatives and examining the impacts of reconstructing the route from Somers (near the north end of Flathead Lake) to Kalispell and between Kalispell and Whitefish. Whitefish is located some 12 miles west of the Columbia Heights - Hungry Horse project area. The Final EIS for the Somers-Whitefish project was made available for public review in October, 1994.

There are no other major actions proposed by other governmental agencies within the project corridor.

C. Reasonable Alternatives Considered

The alternatives considered for evaluation in the EIS were developed through consultations with the FHWA, from designs used on adjacent projects, and from public comments on the proposed action. Various locations and numerous design features for the highway were initially considered for the proposed action. Transportation system management (TSM) activities and mass transit options also received consideration for the proposed action.

Reasonable alternatives, and ultimately the preferred alternative, were identified through an evaluation of each alternative's ability to address the purposes and needs for this action. Alternatives that did not address the stated purposes and needs of the proposed action were not considered to be reasonable and were eliminated from further study. Part II of the EIS describes the process used to develop reasonable alternatives.

The alternatives evaluated in the EIS include:

- No-action,
- An Improved Two-lane Highway,

- A Two-lane Highway with A Median/Left Turn Lane,
- An Undivided Four-lane Highway, and
- A Four-lane Highway with a Median/Left Turn Lane.

Part II of the EIS contains detailed descriptions of each alternative including its typical cross-section and design features. All build alternatives include similar design features in Columbia Heights and west of Hungry Horse where this project would join recently reconstructed sections of US 2. A new four-lane bridge over the South Fork would also be provided with each build alternative.

D. Preferred Alternative

A four-lane design, identified as Alternative 1 in Part II of the EIS, has been selected as the preferred alternative for the proposed action. This alternative was selected because the projected increases in traffic on US 2 will require a four-lane design to operate at an acceptable level of service (LOS B) in the design year. Level of service calculations predict that the two-lane designs would experience immediate operational problems during peak hours and as daily traffic volumes increase during the twenty year design life of the facility. Part II summarizes the capacity analyses conducted for each alternative examined by this document.

The preferred alternative would include a continuous median/left turn lane from the project's beginning in Columbia Heights to the Berne Road area where a new river access and exhibit site are proposed. A continuous median/left turn lane is proposed in this area due to the density of residential and commercial approaches on both sides of the highway. **An undivided four-lane road is proposed through Badrock Canyon from Berne Road to Hungry Horse.**

Part II provides additional discussion of the reasons that Alternative 1 was selected as the preferred alternative for this proposed action.

E. Tradeoffs Among Alternatives

The following section describes the tradeoffs between the alternatives evaluated for the proposed action. The tradeoffs include both adverse and beneficial considerations on the environment of the project area. The general tradeoffs between the build alternatives and no-action and the more specific tradeoffs between individual build alternatives are identified below.

TRADEOFFS BETWEEN BUILD ALTERNATIVES AND NO-ACTION

The major tradeoffs between implementing the build alternatives and doing nothing in the highway corridor are discussed in this section.

- All build alternatives would provide operational and safety benefits over the continued use of the existing facility.
- All build alternatives are expected to reduce accident rates for the corridor.
- All build alternatives would impact the Flathead River and riparian areas in Badrock Canyon by clearing right-of-way and placing fill in the river.
- The build alternatives have the potential to affect bald eagles by removing vegetation occasionally used for perching or roosting along the Flathead River.

Summary

- All build alternatives would directly **and indirectly** convert minor amounts of locally important farmland for right-of-way.
- The build alternatives would affect the features of Berne Memorial Park and affect the use of some facilities at the park. As mitigation for impacts to Berne Memorial Park, **a new roadside exhibit area and river access on the Flathead River would be jointly developed with U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Flathead National Forest. This action would** enhance recreational opportunities in the region. Additionally, incompatible land uses would be controlled in Badrock Canyon through the proposed acquisition of private landholdings.
- The build alternatives would displace several households and businesses along the corridor.
- **Reconstructing the highway and improving access could contribute to additional development in the corridor and at other locations in Flathead County east of Hungry Horse.**
- The build alternatives would adversely affect the visual resources in Badrock Canyon by removing **areas of riparian vegetation** and excavating a **rock outcrop**.
- The build alternatives would require major commitments of money and other resources to construct the new facilities. No-action requires lesser, but continued commitments of these resources for maintenance activities.

TRADEOFFS AMONG BUILD ALTERNATIVES

Analyses performed for the EIS have shown that there would be little difference between the environmental effects and costs of the build alternatives. All designs affect the same features of the corridor and have similar environmental impacts when constructed along the proposed alignment. In sensitive portions of the corridor, the probable construction limits for the four-lane designs are typically 10 feet wider to each side of the highway than those of the two-lane designs. The costs associated with the build alternatives vary by less than 10%. The primary tradeoffs between the build alternatives are related to the operation as indicated below.

- The level of service provided by two-lane alternatives over the next twenty years would be only incrementally better than no-action.
- The four-lane alternatives would provide substantial improvements in the level of service for the facility over the two-lane designs and would minimize or alleviate congestion and delays expected to occur with new two-lane roads.

F. Major Environmental Impacts

The proposed action has the potential to produce both beneficial and adverse environmental effects on the project area. The impacts identified below do not include the short-term effects on the environment that would be experienced during construction.

BENEFICIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

- **Operational efficiency and the ability** to accommodate projected **traffic growth** over the next 20 years would be increased.

- **Driver** comfort and convenience **would be improved** for users of the facility.
- **Traffic safety would be improved** for users of the facility.
- **Conflicts between through and turning traffic would be reduced** by limiting access and providing turn lanes where appropriate.
- **Recreational opportunities for the public would be expanded** with a new river access on the Flathead River to be developed jointly with the USFS.
- **Land near the House of Mystery would be developed** to mitigate impacts to Berne Memorial Park. The replacement parkland would provide a safe and controlled area for users of the facility to stop and view interpretive exhibits relocated from the existing roadside park.
- **Reconstruction of the US 2/FAS 206 intersection would give preference** to traffic on US 2 rather than traffic on FAS 206 by eliminating the present stop and left turn requirement for eastbound motorists on US 2.
- **Bicycle facilities in the corridor would be improved** by providing a wide shoulder on the roadway.
- **Pedestrian facilities would be improved** by providing sidewalks at suitable locations in Columbia Heights and at the west edge of Hungry Horse.
- **Acquisition of private lands adjacent to the roadway would help control** of future land uses and would provide visual protection in Badrock Canyon.
- **A park-and-ride lot in Columbia Heights for those who commute to and from work destinations in Canyon communities or in the Flathead Valley would reduce the number vehicle trips on US 2 and help conserve energy.**

Of these items, the major beneficial impacts include: improved operations and increased capacity for future traffic, improvements in traffic safety, control of access within the corridor, and the acquisition of private lands in Badrock Canyon. Increasing the capacity and improving the operation and safety of the highway address essential needs for the proposed action. The accident history for the corridor and its high accident rate are discussed in Part I of the EIS. Controlling access and acquiring private lands in Badrock Canyon provides are measures that will implement needed land use control for the US 2 corridor.

ADVERSE IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

- **Construction of the highway and a new bridge on a new alignment would require that fill be placed** in the main stem and South Fork of the Flathead River.
- **Some riparian vegetation between US 2 and the Flathead River near Berne Memorial Park which provides screening for foraging bald eagles and perching opportunities would be lost.**
- **Excavation of the west outcrop at Berne Memorial Park would produce visual impacts and affect a spring that surfaces on the outcrop.**
- **Some activities and parkland at Berne Memorial Park would be lost.**

- **Excavation near the west outcrop at Berne Memorial Park would eliminate a portion of the "tote" road, a supply road built through Badrock Canyon by the Great Northern Railroad in the early 1890's.**
- **Conflicting utilities in the corridor would be relocated.**
- **Expansion of the highway right-of-way and road construction would displace or adversely affect some residents and businesses along the highway.**
- **Minor amounts of yards and parking areas would be lost to right-of-way at several residences and businesses located along US 2.**
- **Highway expansion could potentially stimulate additional development in corridor.**
- **Minor amounts of "locally important" farmland would be lost to highway construction.**
- **Minor amounts of wetlands would be impacted or lost to highway construction.**

Of these potential adverse impacts, the loss of bald eagle habitat, the impacts to Berne Memorial Park, and the effects of encroachment on the main stem of the Flathead River are judged to be the major impacts. Separately, these effects may not be significant in context or intensity according to **guidance provided in the Code of Federal Regulations (40 CFR 1508.27)** and the **Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM 18.2.238)**. However, when considered collectively, these major concerns would produce a major adverse impact on the local environment of Badrock Canyon.

Whenever possible, appropriate measures will be implemented prior to or during the construction of the project to minimize or eliminate adverse impacts.

G. Areas of Controversy

Scoping activities helped to determine the major issues and concerns about this proposed action. These project issues are summarized in Part VI of the EIS. Several major issues identified through the public involvement activities have been the source of controversy during the preparation of the EIS. These concerns are described below.

Impacts on Berne Memorial Park - Public comments were received that called for the preservation of Berne Memorial Park and all of its features. The project's impacts on the spring at the park is of particular concern because local residents rely on it as a source of domestic water. The park's location and uncontrolled access poses numerous traffic safety and recreational use problems. Visitors to the roadside park **wishing to access the Flathead River for recreation must cross US 2**. Concern was expressed about the extent of rock excavation and visual impacts resulting from the construction of a four-lane highway through the Canyon.

Need for a Four-Lane Highway - Comments on the project questioned the need for a four-lane highway through the corridor. A local environmental group, the Coalition for Canyon Preservation (CCP), proposed a two-lane road with turnouts for slow moving vehicles as an alternative to a four-lane facility. The CCP suggested that the highway be designed to preserve or enhance the scenery of the area instead of increasing the size of the facility. Other scoping comments suggested that reductions in travel speeds on US 2 will enhance traffic safety and increase the enjoyment for motorists using the facility.

Design for a Lower Level of Service - The CCP requested that the new highway **be designed** for a level of service lower than that typically used for rural arterials. The group **asserted** that the permanent traffic

counter for the corridor is located in an "urban" area of Columbia Heights. CCP further **contended** that volume data from this counter overstates the use of the facility and the proposed highway would be "**over designed**" if these figures serve as the basis for design.

The permanent **traffic** counter (located near the House of Mystery) does not lie in an area with numerous approaches and dense commercial development adjacent to the highway. **Data has been** collected at the permanent counter since 1986 and periodic "spot" counts **have been conducted** at various locations in and adjacent to the corridor each year. **These counts are believed to** accurately reflect traffic conditions in the project area and provide a sound basis for assuming that traffic volumes on this section of US 2 will continue to increase in the future.

Consideration of a design based on the 50th to 600th highest hour of the year was suggested by the CCP. Common practice is to base designs for rural arterial highways on the 30th highest hour of the year (30HV). Proponents of a lower level of service maintain that significant cost savings and less environmental impact can be realized. The 30HV is an appropriate design value for the proposed action **and is used for the design of rural arterials in Montana.**

Impacts to Threatened or Endangered Species - The project area lies within the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem (NCDE) and also provides habitat suitable for gray wolves, peregrine falcons, and bald eagles. Comments suggest that the proposed action will adversely affect habitat for these species.

H. Unresolved Issues with Other Agencies

During the review of the Draft EIS/Section 4(f) Evaluation, the USFS discovered that an easement for US 2 across a small portion of land in the Middle Fork of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River Corridor may not exist. Uncertainties exist about this issue because "as built" and right-of-way plans for a previous improvement project on this section of US 2 show the affected portion of the Wild and Scenic River Corridor to be within existing highway right-of-way. Documentation also exists showing the road has been in the same general location since 1916. Subsequent investigations have failed to produce an easement or deed for this property. If no easement exists for the highway through the Wild and Scenic River Corridor, an application for an easement from the USFS must be made.

The only **other** unresolved issues with agencies involve satisfying **State and local** permit requirements prior to construction. These permit requirements are discussed at length in the construction impacts section in Part IV of the EIS.

I. Other Federal Actions Required

Actions by several other Federal agencies with interests in the proposed project must be completed prior to construction. Many of these actions are permitting requirements. Necessary Federal actions are identified in the following paragraphs.

Formal Consultation with USFWS - A Biological Assessment outlining the probable impacts to threatened and endangered species in the project area **was submitted** to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in October, 1991. The USFWS disagreed with **the** conclusion that the project is not likely to adversely affect bald eagles or critical habitat used by eagles. Therefore, formal consultation with the agency regarding **potential impacts to the species and its habitat was required to comply with the provisions of the Endangered Species Act.** FHWA requested that formal consultation be initiated in correspondence to the USFWS dated December 20, 1991. **Formal consultation was concluded when the agency issued a "No Jeopardy" opinion on March 24, 1992.**

Granting a Section 404 Permit - If the proposed action advances to the design stage, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must issue the appropriate Section 404 permit before there is any placement of fill in the Flathead River system or any wetlands in the project area. The permitting process requires a review of the final design plans for the highway and bridge construction, an evaluation of the proposal according to the EPA's Section 404(b)(1) guidelines, public notification, and formal processing of a Section 404 permit application. **The Corps of Engineers recommended that a permit application be submitted when the Final EIS/Section 4(f) Evaluation is filed.**

Transfer of Forest Service Land - Flathead National Forest lands required for right-of-way must be transferred to the State of Montana. **The USFS must prepare a Letter of Consent before an easement across forest lands, including those located within the Wild and Scenic River Corridor, can be granted. The transfer of land must be completed prior to beginning construction on the project.**

Actions to secure an easement for crossing land in the Wild and Scenic River Corridor or to obtain right-of-way through other Flathead National Forest lands affected by the proposed project have not yet been initiated. Right-of-way plans, specifying the amounts of National Forest land needed for this project, have not been developed.

The acquisition of right-of-way and subsequent use of Flathead National Forest lands for highway purposes would be accomplished in accordance with the provisions specified in the *Memorandum of Understanding on Procedures Related to State Highways Over National Forest System Lands*. This Memorandum of Understanding between the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), FHWA, and the USFS was approved on January 27, 1993.

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Introduction

A. The EIS

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and **Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)** have elected to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to assess the effects of the proposed reconstruction of US 2 on the local environment. The general provisions governing the preparation and content of EISs are outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Specific requirements for EISs prepared by FHWA and MDT are contained in 23 CFR 771.111,.115,.123,.127, and .135 and ARM 18.2.237, .238, and .241 through .246, respectively.

FHWA and MDT are the lead agencies responsible for this document. The agencies must follow detailed procedures during the preparation of the EIS including:

- an extensive public involvement process,
- issuance of a draft EIS and a subsequent public hearing,
- review of and responses to all comments on the EIS,
- release of a Final EIS containing corrections or clarification of subject matter and responses to all substantive comments, and
- a 30-day review period prior to the Record of Decision (**ROD**).

The EIS must analyze reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, the existing conditions of the project area, and the potential impacts of the alternatives on the local environment. This document will:

- ensure that the proposal is well planned,
- identify and mitigate environmental impacts, and
- consider the concerns of all agencies, organizations, and the public before decisions implementing the action are made.

B. Scope of Analysis

Based upon a review of project files and meetings with involved agencies and the public, a number of concerns were identified. The EIS will attempt to provide answers to the following questions.

What alternatives will be considered as reasonable alternatives for the proposed action? Which of them will be identified as the "preferred alternative" for this action? When will the project be constructed? How much will it cost to construct each alternative? What benefits will be provided by this proposal?

What impacts will each alternative have on the project area? How much right-of-way will be needed? Will residential or commercial relocations be necessary? To what extent will utilities in the project corridor be affected? Are alternate alignments for the highway or bridge possible?

How will the alternatives impact Berne Memorial Park and Badrock Canyon? Will the wildlife habitat of the area be disrupted by the proposed action? What will the proposal's impacts on threatened or endangered species be? How will the Flathead River and its riparian areas be affected?

What type and how much traffic does the corridor have? What will the future traffic be like on this facility? What provisions will be included in the design that will ensure that traffic flows smoothly and in a safe manner? What provisions will be included for pedestrians and bicyclists? Will access be restricted along the highway?

How will the proposed action affect cultural, historic, visual, and recreational resources in the project corridor?

These questions along with many others will be addressed in the following parts of this document.

C. Research and Documentation

Data used for the EIS analyses is drawn from a number of sources and is the most current information available in most instances. Where necessary information is unavailable, dated, or not project specific, field data was collected. The field investigations conducted for this EIS included: traffic counts at various locations in the corridor, a cultural resource survey, a wildlife and vegetation survey, a wetlands inventory, a land use inventory, and socio-economic studies. Existing reports were used to determine many of the existing physical and socio-economic conditions of the project area. These sources are referenced in the text of the EIS.

Mathematical formulas and computer modeling techniques which are widely used to assess impacts have been employed in the EIS. Such procedures are commonly used to identify air quality, noise, traffic, and water quality impacts. Where appropriate, these techniques have been identified and referenced in the document.

D. Participants and Responsibilities

Numerous agencies, groups and individuals participated in the writing and review of the EIS. Others were responsible for regulating activities associated with the implementation of each project. The following text identifies the major participants and briefly describes their responsibilities as they relate to the EIS.

1. LEAD AGENCIES

Lead agencies are the Federal and/or State agencies preparing the EIS. The lead agencies for this EIS are identified below.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): The FHWA is the lead federal agency for this EIS and must ensure that it meets the provisions of NEPA. The FHWA provided guidance during the preparation of the EIS and reviewed it for content and conformance with agency policies. FHWA also administers funding for the Federal-Aid road system.

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) - MDT is the lead state agency for the preparation of the EIS and must ensure that it complies with all MEPA requirements. The agency provided technical assistance, background information, legal reviews, and other supplemental studies used in the document. MDT allocates Federal-Aid funds for Montana's road system. The agency was responsible for the selection of the EIS consultant and the administration of the contract.

2. COOPERATING AGENCIES

Several Federal agencies have jurisdiction by law or special expertise concerning a number of environmental impacts that may result from the proposed action. The agencies listed below agreed to become cooperating agencies for this EIS.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE): The COE regulates the placement of fill in wetlands or other water bodies and monitors activities in floodplains. The COE provided technical assistance as needed and reviews of the EIS.

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Forest Service (USFS): The USFS, Flathead National Forest manages public land within the project corridor. Flathead National Forest personnel provided technical reviews of the document and contributed to the preliminary design process for the proposed action.

U.S. Department of the Interior - National Park Service (NPS): The NPS, Glacier National Park has an interest in the proposed action because US 2 serves as the primary route for accessing the park. The NPS supplied technical reviews of the EIS and provided information about visual protection and enhancement possibilities for the corridor.

Two other Federal agencies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, declined **opportunities to serve as** cooperating agencies.

3. OTHER FEDERAL AND STATE AGENCIES

Numerous other agencies were involved in the EIS by their contributions of pertinent data, reviews of the EIS, and as the parties responsible for regulating the activities included in the proposed action. These agencies and their responsibilities are highlighted below.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): - Wetlands and air and water quality protection

U.S. Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Preservation of threatened or endangered species

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP): Wetlands and stream protection, fish and wildlife habitat preservation

Montana Department of Health & Environmental Sciences (MDHES): Air and water quality protection

Montana Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO): Protection of historical, archaeological and cultural resources

4. THE PUBLIC

The NEPA and MEPA processes are intended to ensure that environmental information is available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made. These processes allow for participation early in the preparation of the EIS so that the scope of the document can be focused on important issues. Numerous opportunities have been provided for oral and written comments on the proposed action. **All comments were considered during the development of the EIS.**

5. THE EIS CONSULTANT

Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA), a consulting civil engineering firm from Helena, Montana was selected to prepare the EIS for the proposed action. The firm has the responsibility to perform research, conduct technical studies, present materials at public meetings, and coordinate and prepare the document. RPA employed subcontractors to provide expertise and prepare specialized studies for the EIS.

E. Project Funding

The continued planning, design, and construction of the proposed action will be accomplished through funds allotted for the development of the National Highway System in Montana. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 authorized in December, 1991, restructured the Federal-aid highway system to provide funds for the National Highway System (including interstates and important highway connectors) and for all other roads on the new system. Funding for the program is derived from federal highway user taxes and fees. **Based on current allocations of these funds, about 87% of the cost of this proposed project would be paid for with Federal funds.** State funds are also needed to match the federal contribution. Matching funds are generated through motor vehicle registration fees, vehicle fuel taxes, and from gross vehicle weight taxes. Federal monies and state matching funds were used to prepare the EIS.