

Fernan Lake Road

Vol. 1: September 2001

Project Update

This is the first in a series of status reports that you will receive as we proceed with the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Fernan Lake Road Safety Improvement Project. The purpose of the EIS is to evaluate potential impacts, identify mitigation measures, and select a route or improvement alternative.

The project partners are the East Side Highway District (ESHD), the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), the Idaho Panhandle National Forest (FS), and the Western Federal Lands Highway division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

This project update will tell you about recent activities and the schedule over the next few months.

Project Scoping

As required by law, the first step in the preparation of an EIS is scoping, in which all of the issues and concerns that should be addressed in the EIS are identified. Scoping began with the publication of the "Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS" in the *Federal Register* in October 2000. Letters were sent to interested agencies and individuals in May 2001, and a scoping meeting was held on June 20, 2001. Comments on the scope and contents of the EIS were accepted until July 19, 2001.

We received 28 comments at the meeting; other comments have arrived via e-mail and regular mail. All of the comments and input from earlier phases of the project will be addressed in the EIS.

Project Alternatives

FHWA and the partner agencies have explored a wide range of alternatives to meet the project objectives. In addition to the No-Build Alternative (in which no improvements would be made), three alternatives for improving Fernan Lake Road and seven alternative routes have been identified. Representatives of all the partner agencies have walked or driven each route to assess each alternative.

Narrowing the Range of Alternatives

People who attended the public scoping meeting on June 20, 2001, were asked to rate the alternative routes in terms of how well they met the project objectives. FHWA and the partner agencies will complete a similar exercise. The goal is to identify a reasonable range of alternatives that meet the project objectives, which will then be evaluated more fully in the EIS. You can expect to hear about the results of this effort in the near future.

Research and Field Surveys

By the fall of 2001, the consultant team will have finished their research and field surveys of the Fernan Lake Road area to identify sensitive resources that might be affected by any road improvements. Property owners and residents along the route are informed in advance of the survey work.

This is what has been completed so far and what is still underway:

- Noise monitoring, completed in early July, has established baseline noise levels for use in estimating the impacts of constructing the improvements.
- The team revisited wetland areas and determined that wetland boundaries and functions have not changed since last year.
- Archaeologists and historians surveyed the road corridor and found rock retaining walls associated with the construction of the road by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Forest Service in the 1930s. They also found remnants of two homesteads in the right-of-way in the valley and on National Forest land.
- Traffic was counted at four locations along the road in July, and traffic engineers are updating traffic projections.
- Landscape architects and recreation specialists have visited the area to document existing recreational use and visual resources.



Examining a map of Fernan Lake Road at the scoping meeting on June 20, 2001.

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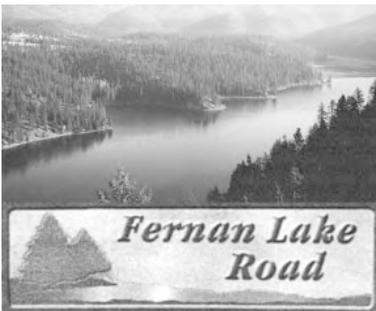
- Botanists are completing surveys for two plants listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Habitat suitable for both is found along the road and we must try to determine whether the plants are in the area.
- Planners are gathering information on existing and planned land uses in the area.
- Geotechnical engineers will review historical records and survey the corridor for evidence of contamination with hazardous materials.

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Adding more concerns about Fernan Lake Road at the scoping meeting on June 20, 2001.

Notice of Intent	Scoping	Technical Analysis	Draft EIS	Public Comment	Final EIS	Decision
2000	2001	2002	2003			



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