The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) recently issued a new load posting for the US 12 Horse Creek Bridge (#5504) which is 20 miles northwest of Forsyth. The posting is part of a multi-year effort to update load ratings and postings on bridges around Montana as mandated by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

In addition, MDT will be fixing another bridge on US 12, the US 12 Drainage Bridge (#5502) which is just five miles northwest of the US 12 Horse Creek Bridge (#5504). Repairs are scheduled on the US 12 Drainage Bridge to mitigate potentially highly impactful weight restrictions for all legal vehicles. After repairs are complete a SHV-only load posting is anticipated.

The US 12 Horse Creek Bridge (#5504) has been nominated for replacement with an anticipated construction year of 2025. The new structure will be designed per current FHWA requirements that incorporate SHVs, which will eliminate the need for the SHV load posting.

The FHWA mandate is in response to changes in the trucking industry over the last decade. Truck manufacturers are building specialized hauling vehicles (SHVs), which are capable of legally carrying heavier loads than typical vehicles have in the past. SHVs are single-unit, short-wheelbase, multiple-axle trucks commonly used in the construction, waste management, bulk cargo and commodities hauling industries. Often times one or more axles can be raised or lowered as needed to comply with statutory weight limitations.

These SHV configurations concentrate heavy loads over a short length, and they have been found to overstress bridges beyond what was previously modeled by standard commercial vehicles. To account for their increasing presence and ensure safe operation, FHWA has determined that all states must include these new, short, heavy vehicles when evaluating the safe limits of bridge capacity.

The new posting on the US 12 Horse Creek Bridge (#5504) applies to SHVs; it limits the maximum gross vehicle weight of single-unit vehicles with 6 or 7 axles to 19 tons.

The single silhouette sign posted on US 12 Horse Creek Bridge (#5504) applies to single-unit vehicles only, such as: box trucks, moving trucks, dump and concrete trucks, buses, etc. The maximum gross vehicle rate rating (GVW) is based on the single-unite vehicle’s number of axles.

For the posting on US 12 Horse Creek Bridge (#5504):
- Single-unit vehicles with 2-5 axles are not restricted;
- Single unit vehicles with 6-7 axles have a 19 ton max GVW; and
- Combination vehicles, like a truck plus a trailer or a truck with two trailers are not restricted.


Bridge weight restrictions are required when the engineering analysis of a bridge, known as a load rating, indicates that it cannot carry standard, legal loads. Load ratings provide information about how much distributed weight can safely pass over a bridge. Load posting signs show maximum weight limits for different vehicle types, depending on their axle configuration. A posted bridge is safe to use, but the weight of certain vehicles must be limited accordingly.

Questions? Comments?
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Learn more about Montana’s Bridge Load Posting Program: