

Grayling Creek



Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Assessment

2001 - Grayling Creek - North of US 20

STPHS 50-1(20)10

July 2008

Montana Department of Transportation



FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for

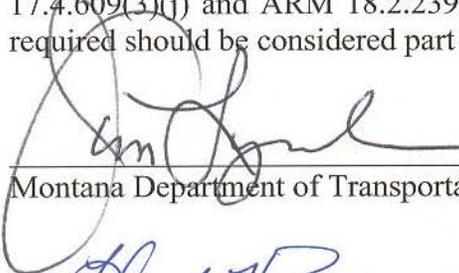
Project Number: STPHS 50-1(20)10
Project Name: 2001-Grayling Creek-North US 20
Control Number: 5026

in

Gallatin County, Montana

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have determined that the Preferred Alternative, as described in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) dated February 1, 2008, will have no significant impact on the human environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on the February 1, 2008 EA and information obtained during the public and agency review process. After independent evaluation of the EA, MDT and FHWA conclude that the EA adequately and accurately discusses the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. The EA provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. MDT and FHWA take full responsibility for the accuracy, scope and content of the attached February 1, 2008 Environmental Assessment.

For purposes of compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) (ARM 17.4.609(3)(j) and ARM 18.2.239(3)(j)), this FONSI and conclusion that an EIS is not required should be considered part of the EA.



Montana Department of Transportation

8/8/08

Date



Federal Highway Administration

8/25/8

Date

Project Abstract and Location:

The proposed action is a highway safety project that includes bridge replacement and minor roadway realignments. The project is located along US 191 approximately 16 kilometers (10± miles) north of West Yellowstone, Montana within the Gallatin National Forest. The purpose of the project is to address a crash trend located near the bridge crossing Grayling Creek on US 191.

MDT attempts to provide accommodations for any known disability that may interfere with a person participating in any service, program or activity of the Department. Alternative accessible formats of this information will be provided upon request. For further information call (406) 541-8132 or TTY (800) 335-7592, or Montana Relay at 711.

This document may be obtained electronically from the Montana Department of Transportation website at:
www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/eis_ea.shtml

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Appendix A – NEPA/MEPA Coordination Process

The proposed project fully detailed in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) has been coordinated with the appropriate federal, state, and local agencies in compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), as well as guidelines provided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A).

Availability of EA for Review and Comment

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved the EA for distribution in February 2008, and a Notice of Availability was published in area newspapers as follows:

- Bozeman Chronicle on March 10th
- West Yellowstone News on March 14th

An individual mailer was also sent out to 53 people who had either attended previous public meetings or expressed an interest in the project.

Copies of the EA were available for public review at the following locations:

- West Yellowstone Public Library
- Hebgen Lake Ranger Station
- MDT-Bozeman Area Office
- MDT- Butte District Office
- MDT-Environmental Services Office

Copies of the EA were also available upon request from MDT and the EA could be viewed on the MDT website at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/eis_ea.shtml.

The EA was mailed to all agencies contained on the Distribution List on pages 41 and 42 of the EA on February 29, 2008. The public review and comment period began on March 10, 2008 and ended on April 10, 2008.

Public Hearing

A formal Public Hearing was held to present the Preferred Alternative and take comments on the EA. The Hearing was held on March 26, 2008 at the West Yellowstone School. Five people were in attendance, and no written comments were received at the hearing. A transcript of the Hearing is provided in Appendix C, following.



Comments Received

Three verbal comments were received at the Hearing, and six were submitted in writing during the comment period. Those comments and the official response from MDT and FHWA are contained in Appendix B, following.

Appendix B – Comment and Response

The following pages contain a transcript of the Public Hearing comments, as well as copies of the comment letters received (on the left side of the page), and the FHWA/MDT response (on the right side of the page). Comment letters are presented in date-order, and each is numbered sequentially. The response to each letter is identified with the number corresponding to the comment.



The following comments have been transcribed from the Public Hearing held on the EA on March 26, 2008. Responses have been developed by MDT and FHWA subsequent to the Hearing.

Recorded Comment #1

(David Gladden)

1-A

I'm excited that you are still pursuing the project. I'm disappointed that it is taking as long as it is because it has been four years and it is still in the talking process. It is an accident waiting to happen and it has happened umpteen times.

1-B

The water quality is at major risk because sooner or later one of those trucks is going to go right into the river. We were talking earlier about the overall impact of the thing, I think consideration should be given for the snowmobile trail because it is not going to just disappear; it is still going to be there someplace. To minimize the impact to the creek, to the fisheries, with a snowmobile trail where it currently is – just some kind of thing for the snowmobiles near the existing bridge would be good for the fisheries because people wouldn't be going up and down the creek where the current trail is.

1-C

I hope that the design is adequate to prevent the accidents from happening. The numbers didn't look like they were a huge decrease in accidents. I'm glad you are pursuing the project; it is extremely important for the water quality. When we've talked about some of the zoning issues, the water quality is probably the biggest thing and what kept coming up was the danger of the something happening on this bridge. That could probably impact the water quality faster than anything else that could happen.

Response #1

1-A

A typical roadway reconstruction project can take 7 to 10 years from early planning and environmental compliance through final design and construction. Depending on availability of funding, MDT anticipates that this project would be ready for construction in 2011.

1-B

Snowmobiles are prohibited from using the highway shoulders or bridge; however, the proposed roadway and bridge improvements would not preclude snowmobile travel in or through the project area. Snowmobilers would be permitted to travel within the roadway right-of-way, and cross the river on a snow bridge or other bridge structure constructed by others.

1-C

The safety improvements are projected to decrease accidents by approximately 36 percent. Gentler curves and a superelevation on the roadway and bridge are anticipated to provide substantive safety improvements, and the wider shoulders and flatter side slopes provide more room for a driver to recover control of a vehicle with less danger of rollovers or hitting roadside obstacles. These safety improvements are intended to address all vehicles crossing the bridge from heavy trucks containing hazardous material to light passenger cars.

Recorded Comment #2

(Marysue Costello)

2-A

I'm with the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce. I just want to continue to say what I've said this evening and that is we would like consideration, in some way, assistance perhaps in seeing what can be done for a recreational trail. Not just for snowmobiling but certainly for bicycle riders and hikers and others who want to have access that way.

2-B

My other comment I have, and this is as a citizen now and I didn't see this in the document, is that the trucks would have a greater reduced speed on that curve more than the general 55 mph. I know it is tough to get up the hill and I understand that but there should be a difference between autos and trucks of a certain size.

Recorded Comment #3

(Rob Platt)

I live here in West Yellowstone and I've been watching this project for a long time. I think it is really an important thing to do. My personal opinion, and I haven't really studied the assessment so I may be lacking some knowledge there, but I don't think the alternatives you have are doing enough. It appears to me that it's kind of a waste of money. I still think you ought to just run it straight and get that curve out of there like those other alternatives and if you can't do that, don't do it. That is my idea.

Response #2

2-A

The roadway and bridge design would provide eight (8) foot shoulders which would safely accommodate bicycle and pedestrian travel. Bicyclists and pedestrians traveling on the shoulder would be able to connect to adjacent trails. As with current conditions, snowmobilers will be permitted to cross the roadway, but will not be permitted to utilize the highway or bridge structure; however, the design does not preclude future improvements by others for a snowmobile bridge or trail adjacent to the highway or proposed structure.

2-B

Upon completion of the project, the curve and bridge will be evaluated in the field by our District Traffic Engineer to establish a safe and comfortable advisory speed for the curve. This will be the recommended advisory speed placed in conjunction with the Curve sign.

Response #3

A straight alignment would be exponentially more expensive and cause much greater impact due to the cut required through the hillside. The proposed design does provide substantive geometric improvements as compared to the existing facility through adjustments to the horizontal and vertical curves, as well as the super elevation of the roadway. These improvements are projected to reduce accidents by 36 percent through the Grayling Curve area.



Comment #4



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Gallatin National Forest

Hebgen Lake Ranger District
P.O. Box 520
West Yellowstone, MT 59758
Phone: 406-823-6961
Fax: 406-823-6990

File Code: 2100

Date: April 10, 2008

Comments to Montana Department of Transportation
Grayling Creek Environmental Assessment – STPHS 50-1(20)10

Tom S. Martin P.E.
Montanan Department of Transportation
2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

Dear Tom,

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Environmental Assessment for the Grayling Creek transportation project. We understand that the primary purpose of the project is to improve safety and reduce accidents at this site. We ask that you please consider the following social and environmental issues as they relate to this project.

Response #4

4-A

As noted previously, snowmobilers and other recreational users may be able to travel adjacent to the roadway either at the toe of slope or on a trail constructed by others. While a snowmobile bridge is not included in this proposed project, the design does not preclude construction of a recreational bridge by any other entity. The Environmental Assessment and hydraulic analysis will be provided to the U.S. Forest Service for use in pursuing a bridge at this location. MDT will continue to coordinate with the U.S. Forest Service during the final design of the project.

4-A

1. **Response to Social Issues Sec 3.2 p 15 2nd paragraph GCEA, (Grayling Creek Environmental Assessment).** We would like the road realignment and bridge design to be sensitive to co-locating a snowmobile trail within the same corridor, on the west side of the road. We understand that construction of the snowmobile trail and bridge is outside of the scope and primary purpose and need of this project, but some design considerations and allowances may be incorporated into your analysis without affecting the environmental planning effort of the project. Once the hydraulic design is established for the highway bridge then the same criteria and parameters could be utilized for a parallel snowmobile bridge. Funding through Montana State Off-Highway Vehicle Grant program and other Federal Highway monies could potentially be acquired for both the full design and construction of a snowmobile bridge. The Forest Service is committed to work with partners such as the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks to pursue the funding necessary to complete design and construction of a parallel snowmobile bridge. Cost savings and efficiencies could be gained from analyzing effects of both bridges in one Environmental Assessment and by using hydraulic criteria that MDT will use in its highway bridge design for a parallel snowmobile bridge.

4-B

Some other ideas to reduce costs and minimize ground disturbance include leaving portions of the old road prism (not including surfacing) for future use by a snowmobile trail. We anticipate the new highway design would open the horizontal and vertical site distance in that location as well as site distance improvement which may dovetail nicely with the snowmobile bridge location. The practicality of this could be determined during design.

The Forest Service is willing to have our Regional Bridge Engineer complete a preliminary snowmobile bridge design at the same time as the highway bridge design. As an example, we

4-B

Much of the existing roadway prism will be incorporated into the new, roadway. The toe of slope will be designed in a manner that would not preclude an adjacent unpaved trail. MDT will coordinate the removal of the existing bridge with the U.S. Forest Service.





as a group, could consider leaving one of the current highway bridge abutments in place for the snowmobile bridge, saving both project money and reducing short term impacts to Grayling Creek and its floodplain.

4-C

2. Response to Floodplains Sec 3.3 p 15 GCEA. We understand that the bridge and road alignment is only conceptually designed at this point and appreciate your willingness (as previously discussed) to involve our engineers, hydrologists, and fisheries biologists during the full design of the bridge. We would like to see floodplain function preserved at the crossing as much as possible while considering the balance between feasibility and cost. For example: a partial bench above bank full elevation between the new bridge abutments could be designed as could a multi-span bridge to accommodate floodplain flows and terrestrial wildlife passage. Floodplain relief culverts could also be designed into the fill of the new road prism on the north side of Grayling Creek to connect floodplain flows and connect water-tables of the existing wetlands at that location.

4-C

As stated in the EA (in section 3.3), MDT will consider these requests during final design. MDT is considering long spans for wildlife crossings which should address these concerns.

4-D

3. Wetlands Sec 3.4 p 18 GCAE. We understand that the sum of wetland impacts is calculated from the difference between 1. loss of wetlands from road fill associated with the new highway alignment, north of Grayling Creek, and 2. the gain of wetlands by removing the fill from the old highway prism just west of the new alignment. We support the restoration of wetlands as much as possible by removing old fill once the new alignment is established but as stated above in paragraph 2, we would like to potentially retain some old fill near the stream crossing to accommodate a parallel snowmobile bridge and trail. We envision the old fill staying in place very near the north side of the Grayling Creek then tapering off to the natural, pre-highway surface as you go north. Winter travel by snowmobiles on a groomed trail would not impact wetlands as this use typically occurs over several feet of snow and frozen ground conditions.

4-D

The wetland impacts in the Environmental Assessment are directly related to construction of the proposed project. The Montana Department of Transportation will be required to mitigate that level of impact in coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Any amount of impact resulting from a snowmobile bridge, or reduction in on-site mitigation potential, needs to be analyzed separately if a snowmobile bridge project proceeds under the direction of the USFS or others.

If the concept of some of the old road prism staying in place increases the sum of wetland impacts, compensatory mitigation at an off-site location could be identified by the Forest Service and its partners such as Montana PPL and Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks. For example a project on lower Grayling Creek 2.5 miles downstream from the Grayling Creek, Highway 191 project is currently in its planning stage. Wetland restoration and fish habitat improvement is the primary purpose of the project. The potential for off site compensatory wetland mitigation at this particular site is very good and this project is located on the same stream very close by. This off site mitigation would be preferable compared to the suggested mitigation on Jack Creek as stated on p18, GCEA.

4-E

4. Fisheries and Aquatic Habitat p 20-21 GCEA. As MDT develops a final bridge design in accordance with its design frequency guidelines, we ask that you consider and incorporate, to the extent practicable, Forest Service Design Guidelines for Aquatic Organism Passage (Enclosed) as well as recommendations from the Grayling Creek Stream Channel Morphology and Fisheries Habitat Evaluation study (Enclosed) funded by your agency (FS Agreement No. 04-CO-11011107-010).

4-E

MDT will consider U.S. Forest Service Design Guidelines for Aquatic Organism Passage as well as recommendations from the Grayling Creek Stream Channel Morphology and Fisheries Habitat Evaluation study to the extent practicable.

Forest Service Aquatic Organism Passage Guidelines pertaining to bridges include:

1. All aquatic habitat stream crossings, regardless of the design option used, shall be designed to withstand the 100-year return frequency peak flood flow, plus large woody debris and bedload without structural damage to the crossing or diversion of the stream.



2. Structure opening width, as a minimum, should not constrict the stream or accelerate velocity at 2-year return frequency high flow (bankfull width) to allow for overall channel stability.
3. Stream form and substrate within the structure should provide a thalweg for low flow conditions and avoid continuous stream flow along the structure wall (bridge pilings, piers, or abutments should be placed outside of the bankfull channel).
4. The natural stream gradient (longitudinal profile) and substrate material, above and below the structure, should be simulated through the structure.
5. Consider the need for terrestrial organism passage in the bridge span and design of materials placed in and around structures. If possible, the bridge span should extend beyond both sides of the bankfull channel to a distance favorable to grizzly bears and ungulates.
6. Geomorphic and hydrologic assessment will be conducted to determine design parameters, feasibility, and watershed risk.
7. All structures should be evaluated for appropriate regrading and grade control measures employed to avoid headcutting conditions through and above the structure.
8. Hydraulic analysis designs should ensure bed and bedform stability. It should also evaluate ecological process (large woody debris transport) and associated failure risk (flood history).

Additional recommendations related to the Grayling Creek Stream Channel Morphology and Fisheries Habitat Evaluation include:

4-F

Fish Habitat: The existing Grayling Creek Bridge does not have a major impact on fish habitat. However, channel constriction associated with the bridge likely facilitated some scouring beneath the bridge and deposition of a relatively high proportion of fine sediment (21%) downstream of the bridge over potential spawning habitat. Because relatively high levels of fine sediment can cause mortality of incubating fish eggs, the new Grayling Creek bridge should be designed such that it does not promote the deposition of fine sediment.

4-G

Channel Morphology: Bankfull width was measured at 12 cross sections located above and below the existing Grayling Creek Bridge. These data indicate that a bridge which spans a bankfull width of 75 feet should have no effect on velocity at bankfull flow. In addition, the bridge alignment should also be compatible with stream channel morphology.

Other Comments: The Forest Service has carefully considered the long-term parking for snowmobiles in the area. To date, three parking alternatives have been considered:

4-H

1. Continue to plow the existing highway pullout near the Park line just north of the project,
2. Construct a new parking lot near the Tepee Creek road junction, and
3. Plow the existing Fir Ridge Trailhead on the south end of the project.

We feel that both parking alternatives 1 and 3 present a safety disadvantage by requiring the snowmobiler to cross the highway from the parking lot onto the snowmobile trail on the west

4-F

The new bridge will span the active channel and will maintain bed mobility through the crossing.

4-G

Active and bankfull widths will be verified in final design.



side of the highway. It seems prudent to minimize the number of snow machine crossings in this vicinity, particularly in this area of vertical and horizontal curves, winter road conditions, and diminished stopping site distances. From that standpoint we would encourage you to consider parking alternative 2, constructing a parking area on the west side of the highway in the vicinity of the Tepee Creek road. This location requires no snow machine highway crossings, has adequate site distances, and could be designed onto the abandoned portion of the highway on the south side of the road junction. We are willing to provide a conceptual design of the approach and parking, including any additional approach signing for this winter parking and the road during summer season parking area.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. We look forward to working with MDT and interested parties on further project design and as you move forward with overall project implementation.

Sincerely,

/s/ William R. Zucca
DISTRICT RANGER

Copy to:

Mary Erickson
Forest Supervisor
Gallatin National Forest
PO Box 130
Bozeman., MT 59758

Marysue Costello
West Yellowstone
Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 458
West Yellowstone, MT
59758

Clint Blackwood
Montana Fish Wildlife &
Parks
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Enclosures:

**Guidance for Aquatic Species Passage Design, Forest Service Northern & Intermountain Region
Grayling Creek Stream Channel Morphology and Fisheries Habitat Evaluation study**

4-11

The purpose and need of the proposed project is to address the identified safety concerns on the curve and the creek crossing. There is no data to suggest that the snowmobile crossings are currently a safety concern to the extent that this project would be required to include construction of a parking area on U.S. Forest Service property to address any safety concerns. The project would not preclude U.S. Forest Service from constructing such a parking area on U.S. Forest Service property.



Comment #5



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, OMAHA DISTRICT
HELENA REGULATORY OFFICE
10 WEST 15TH STREET, SUITE 2200
HELENA MT 59626

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

April 4, 2008

Helena Regulatory Office
(406) 441-1375 Phone
(406) 441-1380 Fax

RE: **Corps File No.** 2006-9-0562
Comments to STPHS 50-1(20)10
CN 5026

Montana Department of Transportation
Attn: Mr. Thomas Martin
P.O. Box 201001
Helena, Montana 59620-1001

Dear Mr. Martin:

We reviewed the information submitted on the above referenced proposed project located on Grayling Creek. The proposed project is located in Section 10, Township 12 South, Range 5 East, Gallatin County, Montana.

Under the authority of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, Department of the Army permits are required for the discharge of fill material into waters of the United States. Waters of the U. S. include the area below the ordinary high water mark of stream channels and lakes or ponds connected to the tributary system, and wetlands adjacent to these waters. Isolated waters and wetlands, as well as man-made channels and ditches, may be waters of the U. S. in certain circumstances, which must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Grayling Creek is a Water of the U.S. A Preliminary Jurisdictional Determination was completed on September 12, 2006 and Corps comments submitted to MDT in a letter dated September 15, 2006. (copy enclosed).

Please be advised that if any fill material is to be placed either temporarily or permanently in a water of the United States, a Department of the Army permit is required for this project. You may also be required to obtain other applicable federal, state, tribal and local permits.

The Corps notes that on page 6 of the initial Field Review Report, MDT did a good job of identifying issues of interest to us. The Corps is available to review designs and discuss issues as MDT develops this project.

If you have any questions, please call this office at (406) 441-1375. Any and all future submittals and inquiries must reference Corps File No. 2006-9-0562.

Sincerely,

Vicki Sullivan
Vicki Sullivan
Project Manager

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Response #5

The Montana Department of Transportation will coordinate with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during final design and permitting to identify wetland mitigation requirements.



Comment #6

~~gabe~~ please share w/ HKM/ganda. Thanks!

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DATE TO: 4/11/08 APR 14 2008

United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ECOLOGICAL SERVICES
MONTANA FIELD OFFICE
585 SHEPARD WAY
HELENA, MONTANA 59601
PHONE (406) 449-5225, FAX (406) 449-5339

ENVIRONMENTAL	
Consultant Design	
DATE	INITIALS
4/15/08	
Routing	
Bureau Chief	
Consultant plans Eng	
Design Supervisor	
CIEP Engineer	
Deibel	
✓ K. Barnes	
✓ P. Ferry	
✓ M. Goodman	
✓ J. Gatowski	
✓ B. Brosten	
✓ B. Steg	
✓ D. Warmbach	

M.17 FHWA Grayling Creek Bridge

April 10, 2008

Tom S. Martin
Environmental Services
Montana Department of Transportation
2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena, Montana 59620-1001

cc: J. Ebert (Butte)
G. Priebe (Consultant Design)
P. Ferry (Highways)
M. Goodman (Hydraulics)
K. Barnes (Bridge)
J. Gatowski (6/Endive Road Design)
B. Brosten
B. Steg
D. Warmbach

Dear Mr. Martin:

G-A

This is in response to your letter dated February 29, 2008, in which you provided a copy of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for Montana Department of Transportation's (Department) proposed 2001 - Grayling Creek - North of US 20 project (STPHS 50-1(20)10; Control No. 5026) and requested US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) comments. The Service appreciates the opportunity to review this document and offers the following comments which have been prepared under the authority of, and in accordance with, the provisions of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

G-B

The EA correctly states that of the species present in the project area that were federally-listed as threatened or endangered (T/E) at the outset of the environmental investigations for this proposed project, bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and the Yellowstone population of grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) have been removed from the Federal T/E species list. Consequently, these species no longer receive protection under the ESA. In addition, the Northern Rocky Mountain population of gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) has also more recently been delisted (effective March 28, 2008) and thus no longer requires ESA Section 7 consultation. Another development relative to T/E species in the project area that has occurred since this EA was completed is that revised critical habitat for Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) has recently been proposed (February 28, 2008). While critical habitat has not been proposed for the project site itself, it occurs immediately adjacent to this site within the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park. The Service does not believe additional consultation is necessary at this time. We would, however, recommend that subsequent documents relative to this project reflect these recent changes.

This proposed project lies within an area providing tremendously valuable habitat for a large variety of fish and wildlife species. The Grayling Creek corridor and habitats adjacent to the highway have been documented receiving high levels of use by many sensitive species and

Response #6

G-A

As an appendix to the FONSI, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service comments regarding the change in status for the Canada Lynx and Gray Wolves are incorporated into the official record for this proposed project.

G-B

MDT will consider fish and wildlife passage during final design.

Any relevant, subsequent documentation will reflect these changes.



species of special concern. We realize that the Department does not yet have detailed design work completed for this proposed project. As we've stated in previous correspondence pertaining to this project, given the location of this site along Yellowstone National Park's boundary and the need for many species with high levels of management concern to cross the highway corridor, the Service strongly urges the Department's bridge design to include enough height and length to effectively accommodate passage of the fish and wildlife species known to utilize the project area.

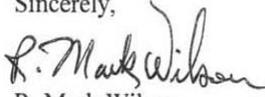
6-C

Although section 7 consultation is no longer required for grizzly bears, the Service continues to recommend that construction contract provisions be included that would require contractors to keep food, garbage, petroleum products, and other attractants unavailable to bears during construction as a means of minimizing impacts to this species.

6-D

Page 35 of the EA incorrectly refers to a Biological Opinion that would be issued by the Service for this project. Because this project is not anticipated to adversely affect any currently listed T/E species, formal Section 7 consultation will not be required and no Biological Opinion will be issued. Informal consultation for this project, including the Service's concurrence with the Department's determination of no adverse effects for listed species, has been completed. Additional consultation would be necessary if new information reveals effects of the action that may affect T/E species or critical habitat, or if the project is modified in a manner that causes an effect not considered in this consultation.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this EA. If you have questions about this letter, please contact Scott Jackson at (406)449-5225, extension 201.

Sincerely,

R. Mark Wilson
Field Supervisor

6-C

Special provisions will be included in the construction documents regarding food storage, garbage, petroleum products, and other attractants in accordance with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service requirements.

6-D

Montana Department of Transportation concurs that consultation requirements have been met and appreciates U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service participation in the proposed project.



Comment #7

RECEIVED
APR - 7 2008
ENVIRONMENTAL

RECEIVED
APR - 4 2008
MT. DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

from the desk of John H. Costello

March 27, 2008

Montana Department of Transportation
2701 Prospect Avenue – Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

RE: STPHS 50-1920010 – Grayling Creek

To Whom It May Concern:

The public hearing on the above referenced project was held last evening at the West Yellowstone School. I was in attendance at this meeting but, because of a business commitment, I had to leave prior to the "public comment" period. Seeing that this was my situation, please accept this letter in substitution of personal testimony at last evening's hearing.

I downloaded your Environmental Assessment for the Grayling Creek project and have read it thoroughly from beginning to end. My first reaction in reading this document was of total disappointment. Please allow me a few paragraphs in explanation.

I moved to West Yellowstone in 1975 and have lived here ever since. My business takes me to Bozeman on a regular basis so I travel Highway #191 and across the Grayling Creek Bridge often, both winter and summer. I have been a volunteer in the West Yellowstone EMS Department and the West Yellowstone Fire Department for over 25 years so, in the course of my volunteering, I experienced first hand the treatment of the accident victims of the many accidents on or near this bridge. Needless to say, I know this section of highway and its hazards as well as most.

F-A First and foremost and very simply, your choice of Alternative E is laughable. Why spend \$2.45M and do so little while at the same time causing all of the disruption that this project will cause? My opinion, very simply, is, either do something that is actually going to fix this problem or stay plumb hell away.

F-B My suggestions as to making this section of highway much safer are two:

- 1) Signing and control - - - Keep the speed limit where it is now (at 55 mph) and install flashing yellow lights at the top and the bottom of the hill giving adequate warning of the upcoming corner and the bridge itself.
- 2) Surface treatment - - - For the past few years, the local MDOT employees have resurfaced this section of road using homemade asphalt, dump trucks and a road grader. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that creating a road surface in this manner is a recipe for disaster. Since the surface of the road is always bumpy and pitted, cleaning it adequately during the wintertime is impossible. Consequently, this section of road is always the roughest and iciest of any road in this district and, according to your own figures, roughly 83% of the documented accidents occur during this time of the year. It's no wonder. I believe that the solution to this problem is pretty simple: spend some of the tax payer's dollars in grinding up the road surface one-half mile in each direction from the bridge and lay down a professionally constructed surface that the local guys can keep clean and free of ice and snow.

F-C I truly believe that keeping the speed limit to 55, flashing yellow lights, and (especially) a new road surface will solve most all of the issues for many years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my input.

Sincerely,

John H. Costello

Response #7

F-A

The proposed action (Alternative E) is projected to provide a substantial reduction in crashes and at a much lower cost as compared to other alternatives.

F-B

As noted on page 10 of the EA, warning signs and flashers as a stand-alone measure on the existing alignment do not meet the Purpose and Need for safety improvement in the corridor as shown in the Environmental Assessment.

F-C

Between major roadway upgrades, MDT performs routine maintenance in order to fix temporary problems (such as patching pot holes) until a rehabilitation or reconstruction project can be developed and funded to provide a new driving surface. This project will include complete resurfacing of the roadway on either side of the bridge that will tie into other ongoing pavement resurfacing projects.



Comment #8

RECEIVED
APR - 9 2008
ENVIRONMENTAL

April 8, 2008

Mr. Ken Davis
P.O. Box 927
West Yellowstone, Montana 59758

Mr. Tom Martin
MDT Environmental Services
P.O. Box 201001
Helena, Montana 59620

Re: Project ID: STPH 50-1 (20) 10 Grayling Creek N.

Dear Mr. Martin:
I am writing in regard to the EA for the above referenced project.

8-A Having reviewed the documentation it is my opinion that the public would be better served by Alternative B.

While I realize that the preferred alternative will serve the purpose of widening the bridge and perhaps remove some of the shading that occurs on that road due to the road cuts and the trees in the area, the bottom line appears to be the driving process.

Having driven on that road for 35 years and having responded to that area numerous times as a firefighter/EMT - B, it appears that the public would be better served by making that curve is less sharp as depicted by Alternative B as shown in the EA.

One of the issues that contribute to the crashes at that location will always be speed. Despite varying levels of enforcement at that end of the Gallatin, drivers will always approach that curve at greater than design speeds. Additionally, it needs to be recognized that, as in other areas of the Gallatin, when there is an accident there there are few areas for people to turn around to get to an alternative route to get them on their way north.

8-B The D.O.T. should consider spending the extra money on Alternative B which will serve the traveling public better with a straighter, safer, road

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Ken Davis

Response #8

8-A

While Alternative B could provide a higher safety advantage than Alternative E over the entire project area, the safety benefits at the crossing, which is the focus of the improvements, is virtually the same at 36 percent. When you also consider the amount of additional construction footprint documented in Table 2.2 of the EA (16 acres with Alternative B and 4.6 acres with Alternative E) and the cost differences (\$6.2 million for Alternative B and \$2.5 million for Alternative E) it is hard to justify the additional impact and cost to achieve a marginal difference in safety improvements.

8-B

The most desirable designs are not always the most practical or cost-effective. Given the limited funding levels for transportation improvements and growing needs for infrastructure investment across the state, MDT and FHWA need to identify cost-effective solutions to address safety and operational concerns on each individual project. In this case, the proposed improvements adequately address the identified safety concerns on the Grayling Curve.



Comment #9

March 27, 2008

Tom Martin
Montana DOT
2701 Prospect Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-1001

Dear Tom:

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Grayling Creek Bridge Project.

9-A The quick completion of this project is necessary, simply because the bridge and curve are a very dangerous highway situation. As you know, trucks often do not negotiate the corner and end up in a heap, very near Grayling Creek. People have been killed; wild animals, including grizzly bears have been killed. Anyone who knows the situation goes through a brief moment of terror as they approach the bridge, wondering what is coming, and where they are going to be.

9-B The project could be called an Environmental Benefit Study. In our Hebgen Lake Zoning discussions, we felt the largest danger to water quality in the entire basin was this bridge. It has happened before and is only a matter of time when a semi, hauling "who knows what", is upside down in Grayling Creek or very near it. The Forest Service and PPL are doing a project to improve the fishery in the stream. Their work will be for nothing in a matter of seconds, if, no when, something happens on that corner.

9-C The project will make it possible to allow snowmobile traffic in the vicinity. The cumulative benefit of the project, environmentally, will be further increased. The current snowmobile trail, downstream about a 1/2 mile, was put in the wrong place. It is in an area that had been used as wildlife habitat, for moose, elk and to a small degree, deer, especially for the winter. That winter range has almost totally been lost. It will again become available to the animals.

I have seen ATV tracks going right up the streambed, through the spawning gravel, so much for the fishery and the water quality. If the trail can be near the highway right of way the footprint of both the highway and the trail will be a far smaller area.

Please expedite this "much needed" project.

Sincerely, *David C. Klatt*
David C. Klatt
935 Grayling Creek Road
West Yellowstone, MT 59758

Response #9

9-A A typical roadway reconstruction project can take 7 to 10 years from early planning and environmental compliance through final design and construction. Depending on availability of funding, MDT anticipates that this project would be ready for construction in 2011.

9-B Substantial safety improvements are anticipated with the proposed project.

9-C The proposed project would not preclude construction of a trail in the vicinity of the roadway.



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Appendix C - Hearing Transcript

The following pages contain a transcript of the Public Hearing.



TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC HEARING

**CN 5026
2001 GRAYLING CREEK NORTH OF US 20
NEAR WEST YELLOWSTONE
IN GALLATIN COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
3/26/08
West Yellowstone, MT**

OPENING

Joe Olsen: Good evening everybody. I would like to welcome you to tonight's public hearing for the Grayling Creek crossing about 10 miles north of town. I would like to make a couple of introductions: Paul Grant is our Public Involvement Coordinator, Gabe Priebe is the Consultant Project Supervisor, Bryan Miller is the Bridge Area Engineer for the Butte District, Deb Wambach is the Butte District Biologist, Jerry Gutowsky and Phil Seivers are two of the designers working on the roadway. Also we have Darryl James, Project Manager, with HKM Engineering who is the consultant on this project and Robyn Boyle is in the back.

This project was originally nominated in 2002 so it has been quite a while; it took a while to get it going. The first public meeting was in April 2004 and maybe some of you were in attendance. That's been four years ago. In November it was decided that an Environmental Assessment was appropriate and HKM Engineering was selected to complete the EA for this project. Right now the planned construction for this project is 2011. That is dependent on final design and availability of funds. The target date right now is 2011 subject to some adjustment. I will turn this over to Paul Grant right now and after that Darryl will fill you in on some of the project details.

Paul Grant: Thank you for being here tonight. I'm Paul Grant, the Public Involvement Coordinator with MDT. On behalf of MDT we would like to welcome you here tonight; we appreciate you coming out and being present. As Joe mentioned you were here in 2004 for a public meeting and tonight you are here for the Public Hearing. The protocol will be a little different from the public meeting; more structured so I ask for your indulgence while I will go through some of the ground rules and the sequence of what will happen tonight.

This is the Public Hearing for the Environmental Assessment for the project known as 2001 Grayling Creek North of US 20 Near West Yellowstone in Gallatin County.

We are here for many reasons: we are here to explain the National Environmental Policy Act, a/k/a the NEPA process; we are here to briefly summarize the preferred alternative

in the Grayling Creek North of US 20 Environmental Assessment (EA), which includes replacing the bridge approximately at milepost 10 on US 191 near West Yellowstone; we are here to explain the elements of the Preferred Alternative and the potential impacts of the Preferred Alternative; and we are here to get public comment from you because we want to meet the needs of the community and the only way we can do that is to hear how this is going to work for you. There are sign-in sheets at the entrance as you came in and we request everyone sign in so we have a public record of who was here tonight. There are six pamphlets on the table regarding MDT's policy on non-discrimination which you are welcome to take and review. As the Title VI Representative for the Department, if there are any questions about Title VI and discrimination issues please see me after the hearing. The locations where the EA is available for public review are up on the screen (referring to graphic). If you haven't had a chance to look at the EA, these are the locations where it can be seen and will be available until April 10th.

Tonight's meeting will be in two parts. First there will be a presentation period and the EA clarification period given by Darryl James of HKM Engineering, Inc., from Helena. His presentation will go through the history and the project development process; he will describe and summarize the National Environmental Policy Act also known as the NEPA process; the purpose of the proposed project; and the potential impacts and mitigation. After the presentation we will go into the EA clarification period where you will be able to ask specific questions about the study. Please keep in mind that this a time for questions about the study. If the questions fall outside the parameters of the Environmental Assessment, Darryl may ask you to return during the public hearing portion which will follow and state your question or comment at that time. We are not trying to avoid your questions; it is simply a formality that we must follow. We want to make sure everybody gets a chance to ask their questions, so please ask your question and hand the microphone back to me. If you have further questions, I will come back to you. After the EA clarification period, we will go into the formal hearing period. This portion of the hearing is the formal process of collecting comments and testimony. This is not a question/answer period time; it is an opportunity for you to let us know what you think about what it contained in the particular Environmental Assessment document.

If you are not prepared to make comments tonight, the comment period is open until April 10th. You can submit your comments in writing and leave them in the comment box at the back; or we also have a station where you can record your comment and Robin will record those comments for you after the hearing tonight. You can take the comment sheets home and submit your comments by mail or email. All that information is on the comment sheets. All comments received by April 10th will be considered by the Montana Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. Based on the public comments received, the proposed improvements and mitigation presented in the EA may be refined in the decision document. If significant impacts are identified, the Montana Department of Transportation would need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in order to proceed with this project. If no significant impacts are identified, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) document will be completed and signed by the Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration.



The public will be notified of the final decision document, the final design, and the right-of-way acquisition.

To reiterate again, we will have a presentation by Darryl, the EA clarification session where you can present your questions regarding the study, and finally we will have the formal hearing session where you can give your comments about the Environmental Assessment. Again no questions will be answered during that portion of the hearing; this is a time for you to give comment or testimony regarding the EA and the Montana Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration will just hear your comments at the formal hearing portion tonight. Now I will turn this over to Darryl who will begin the formal presentation.

PRESENTATION: Darryl James, HKM Engineering, Inc.

Joe gave you a little bit of a brief history on the project. You may have been involved in previous meetings and are well aware of what's been going on. Again we are about 10 miles north of West Yellowstone. The bridge and roadway in that area were built around 1932. It was widened in 1963 and in 1992 a portion of the S curve at the bridge structure was identified as a crash cluster location. So this whole process of looking at some sort of safety improvements within this area started well over a decade ago. As with all these projects, it is highly dependent on funding and when funding becomes available and that largely determines the scope of the project. In 1993 there were curve signs and chevrons installed out there. In 1998 the first phase of the safety improvements were completed which was the signing and installation of the guardrails. In 2001, as Joe mentioned, a crash cluster location for trucks was identified and really spawned this particular project.

NEPA / MEPA

What is NEPA/ MEPA? The National Environmental Policy Act and the Montana Environmental Policy Act are really just intended as an opportunity to talk to the public and the agencies and provide a full and fair disclosure of all social, economic, and environmental impacts. It is an opportunity for you guys to play a role in project development.

There are three typically levels of environmental documentation. (1) a Categorical Exclusion for a very minor project, i.e., shoulder widening or small safety improvement type projects; (2) an Environmental Assessment where we really aren't sure what types of impacts might be imposed by a project; and (3) an Environmental Impact Statement where you know going in that you probably have some pretty significant impacts.

This project initially started out as a Categorical Exclusion. We weren't sure what we were going to run into. It was elevated to an Environmental Assessment by the Federal Highway Administration and we've produced a relatively brief document. We do have some threatened and endangered species issues, some fisheries issues, and some floodplain issues but we've not identified any fatal flaws.

Critical pieces of the NEPA/MEPA Decision Making Process

The Purpose and Need Statement. Why are we proposing to spend federal taxpayer dollars on a roadway improvement project? So it really establishes the problem you are trying to address and why we are going to spend the money.

Alternatives Investigation. What range of alternatives are available to address that specific identified purpose and need? We've gone through several of those in this Environmental Assessment.

Affected Environment. What are the general conditions out there within the general project area, i.e., wetland issues, wildlife habitat, and community impacts – what is out there in the built-in natural environment?

Impacts and Mitigation. Which of these alternatives avoids or minimizes impacts? If you do have impacts, can they be mitigated to the point where they are acceptable to agencies and to the public?

Public Input and Agency Coordination. Two of the most critical pieces of the NEPA and MEPA processes are public input and agency coordination. That is why we are holding the hearing tonight to literally hear from you whether you believe the proposed project addresses the needs of the community. If you have questions, I would encourage you to restate some of those so we can get them on the public record tonight.

Purpose of Project. The purpose of the project that has been identified in the EA is to improve safety within the identified crash cluster area. Again we are aware there are a number of concerns within this corridor, but this specific project is really to address an identified crash cluster at the bridge crossing.

Accident History. We did look at the accident history within this area and it is more than seven times the average severity crash rate as compared to similar routes throughout the state and four times the average rate. So the severity rate and the average rate of accidents are much higher than the state-wide averages.

Alternatives. We looked at a No Build Alternative which would mean just general maintenance on this road, i.e., MDT would fill potholes, resurface the road but there wouldn't be any widening, there wouldn't be any bridge replacement, it would just be routine maintenance throughout the foreseeable future.

Alignment. We also developed five different alignment options (referring to graphic). I will briefly describe each of those.

Alternative A is generally along the existing alignment and is intended to improve grades and straighten curves as much as possible while remaining on the existing centerline. It is basically just an upgrade of the existing alignment.



Alignment B straightens out the curve as much as possible. That really cuts on the inside and takes out as much of that curve as possible.

Alignment C was intended to try and minimize the vertical grade. It has a little bit of a drop as you get down the creek and it rises back up – that was intended to try and keep the vertical grade as flat as possible.

Alignment D also minimizes the vertical grade and alignments but also provided some safety benefits. What we did here is to actually provide a split alignment that uses *Alignment C* as the northbound travel lanes and *D* would be the southbound travel lanes on two separate facilities. So you would have two separate bridge facilities and two separate lanes of travel just to try and avoid any head-on collisions as you are coming through that curve.

Alignment E is actually our Preferred Alternative and is just a minor offset off the existing. It has a very minimal footprint and addresses all the safety and crash concerns with a much smaller footprint and a much lower cost than the other alternatives.

So through this process we've actually identified Alternative E as the Preferred Alternative – very close to the existing alignment inside the curve so it does provide both vertical and horizontal curve improvements but at a much lower cost than any of the other alternatives.

At the last public meeting in 2004, some of you were asking about a new alignment completely out of this bottom. MDT did look at two alignments that would cut across the knob there. They were both relatively expensive and you would have huge cuts to try and let sunlight in to try and keep it from icing up and keeping snow in there. So they were dismissed early on just because of the prohibitive cost when we were looking at some pretty minor safety improvements in this corridor. Any questions on what I just went over?

Q: (Rob Davies) I'm with the Forest Service. With the Preferred Alternative what is the difference in the vertical grade compared to the existing road? I'm talking about the grade of the road as it comes into the bridge, how much does that change? I'm assuming it is higher off the creek so it would be less vertical grade coming in and going out of the curve. What is the difference on the Proposed Alternative vs. what is existing? What is the height difference between the planned bridges on the proposed?

A: (Darryl James) It is all detailed on the chart over here. The maximum vertical grade on Alternative E is just under 6% -- and I think it is a flatter grade but higher than the existing.

- A: (Joe Olsen) We haven't really set the vertical grade over the bridge because we want to determine the horizontal alignment first and then we want to adjust that vertical grade and balance out some of the issues with the bridge, i.e., wildlife crossing, spanning the active floodplain, etc. That is something we will determine after we've determine our horizontal alignment. We intend to raise it so it will be higher.
- A: (Darryl James) Part of what you need to understand is that during the NEPA process we go to about a 30% design level, so they are still pretty conceptual. They are not final but the intent is to try to flatten out that grade as much as possible and provide some additional vertical clearance.
- Q: (David Klatt) Is the Preferred Alternative with the sharp corner adequate to prevent the crashes that happen on that corner? It still seems to be awful sharp to me.
- A: (Darryl James) It is a very constrained corridor. MDT actually ran some safety analysis on all these alternatives and it does provide a substantial decrease in accident rates. So it is a marked improvement but given the restraints of the corridor, it is not a straight road but it does provide marked improvements.

Again Alternative E was identified as the Preferred Alternative just based on its ability to satisfy the purpose and need and based on its ability to minimize impacts to the surrounding environment.

Proposed Mitigation

I'm going to try and go through these relatively quickly and have more of a conversation before we get to the Hearing. I heard some great questions over here at the boards and I want to make sure that if you have strong concerns that you want on the record, with a question and answer we do that in this portion before we move to the formal Hearing.

Floodplains. We looked at the floodplain in this area. Obviously the floodplain in this area is pretty broad so we will have to make sure we don't constrain that floodplain and that we work with the Floodplain Administrator to get the necessary permits. It is not a substantial issue and not a deal breaker for the project.

Wetland Impact. We do have about ½ acre of wetland impact mostly in the bottom land adjacent to the northern part of this project corridor. We will have to work with the Corps of Engineers to obtain a 404 Permit. Again with less than a ½ acre, that is probably just a nationwide permit and is a pretty easy permitting process.

Threatened and Endangered Species. There are threatened and endangered species within the project area, i.e., Gray Wolf and Canada Lynx. The Gray Wolf is actually an experimental population and the project is not likely to jeopardize their continued existence. That is technical terminology to say we don't think they will be harmed by the



project. Canada Lynx—our project is not likely to adversely affect that population either. So again, from the Fish and Wildlife Service perspective we are not anticipating any impacts on threatened and endangered species.

Land Use and Right-of-Way Issues. Again with Alternative E we were really able to minimize the new right-of-way required from the Forest Service so we are not anticipating any major issues here.

Social and Economic Impacts. Outside some of the concerns expressed from snowmobilers and recreationists that we want to hear about, we are not anticipating major impacts that couldn't be mitigated.

Water Quality, Water bodies, Wildlife Resources, Habitat Issues. Again with the small footprint that was chosen, steepening side slopes and those kinds of things, there will be fairly minor impacts. Reclamation of the existing alignment would virtually offset those impacts. So we are not seeing any of those being a substantial issue in the corridor.

Public Input. What we are trying to do through this formal hearing is to try and answer four questions:

Does the proposed project meet the purpose and need? Does Alternative E satisfy the purpose and need to improve safety at this bridge crossing?

Are the alternatives fairly considered? We looked at these five different build alternatives and the no build alternative. Do the agencies and the public think that we've fairly considered each one of those alternatives?

Are the impacts significant, are they substantial, and at what point do the impacts totally outweigh any benefit from this proposed project?

If you do think so, can they be mitigated? What can be done to offset those impacts or repair the damage done by those impacts?

Those are the questions that the Department of Transportation's and the Federal Highway Administration will have to consider before issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact. If the impacts are significant and can't be mitigated, we would have to move into an Environmental Impact Statement or the Federal Highway Administration would issue a FONSI with the No Build Alternative, which means we would just do routine maintenance and overlays. If the impacts are not significant or we determine the impacts can be mitigated, then the Federal Highway Administration and the Department of Transportation would issue a FONSI which would allow you to move forward with final design, right-of-way acquisition, and hopefully construction of the project.

At this point I want to open it up to any questions, clarifications on anything we've talked about. How many people have had a chance to look at the EA? If you've got specific questions on the EA or on the proposed project, I invite you to ask for any kind of

clarification at this point. After we are done with this we will move to the formal Hearing and just accept your comments.

QUESTION/CLARIFICATION PERIOD:

Q: (Marysue Costello) At the original meeting some of the same things were brought up about recreational use and our concern there. How much was that considered? Was it even on the radar?

A: (Darryl James) Absolutely. Part of what we are really constrained by is funding. What can we actually afford to do? Deb pointed out earlier some of the environmental constraints we have to work with and just the physical and geographical constraints and the permitting requirements that make it difficult to do some things particularly when it is within Forest Service property and is not MDT property or state lands. You also have to back up and look at the basic purpose and need for the project. It is not a corridor reconstruct to provide capacity; the project didn't come from a recreational user conflict type of need. It was a specific crash concentration at the bridge structure. So when you start looking for funding sources for a proposed project, you have to get safety monies to address that problem and that somewhat limits your ability to go out and do other types of enhancements on projects. It is not that they were ignored. We had several discussions with the Forest Service about leaving that bridge in place, providing a snow bridge at several different locations, providing a trail heads, as well as looking at providing additional parking opportunities elsewhere. So they've been considered but MDT and Federal Highways are somewhat constrained and limited by funding on what they can actually do within this project corridor. With the purpose and need of this particular project that was identified something like building an additional bridge structure did not fit within the confines of what this project was about.

Q: (Marysue Costello) So I can understand this a little bit better, when you went out to look for money it has to fit into some category – is that what you are saying? Was a category looked at that could have addressed our concerns for the recreation corridor as well as the safety or was the safety of such a high concern that the other part fell by the way-side?

A: (Darryl James) MDT is not out driving the highways trying to find projects. So the impetus for the project was that safety concern; it was the accident history. So that is what initially drove identification or nomination of the project for some type of rehabilitation.

A: (Joe Olsen) The funding source identified for this project is safety funds. But there are some other funding sources that are available but we have to use those funds wisely and a lot of them are dedicated to other projects at this time. As far



as the other funding sources, for recreation I don't know if CTEP could be considered.

- A: (Unidentified) CTEP has to be more of a commuter-type activity and can't be purely recreational, but there are other additional funding sources.
- A: (Joe Olsen) The funding source for this project is safety. It is on the National Highway System so there could be funds from that but we are still trying to address several other projects.
- A: (Darryl James) We should stress this was a topic of great discussion with the Department and with the Forest Service and the way it is outlined in the EA doesn't preclude the opportunity to put in another bridge structure at some point in the future to provide usage off the shoulders of the roadway and down in the bottom area. So we are trying to provide provisions for that but they are saying we can't afford to build the structure at this point but we are certainly not going to preclude you from doing that in the future. We just flat don't have the money to build another structure. The other agencies that have been involved in discussions, i.e., Fish and Wildlife Service, Fish Wildlife and Parks, Corps of Engineers, have all said there are enough concerns about the existing structure constraining the river and potentially having an impact on fisheries.
- Q: (Rob Davies) Forest Service. I wonder if you can in simple terms describe the safety benefit. I know you have safety ratings in the EA, but can you relate that to how many crashes per year you are getting now vs. how many you predict may occur? Can you give us some knowledge that helps us understand the safety gains with this alternative?
- A: (Darryl James) Page 9 of the Environmental Assessment has a table that gives a comparison. It is a percent reduction for the entire project area. The crash forecast under a No Build Alternative is about 22 accidents; under Alternative E it is 19 accidents and a 16% reduction in overall crashes. Other alternatives could potentially reduce those accidents by a larger percentage but at a much higher cost. The cost comparison is 27-28 percent decrease in accidents was anywhere from \$5.1 to \$6.2 million for a 16% decrease in crash rates. Alternative E is \$2.5 million. So for roughly half the cost you're getting the same reduction in crashes.

If there are no more questions, we will move to the formal Hearing portion to hear your comments. Again, if there are no significant impacts or no significant controversy, MDT and Federal Highways will issue a FONSI. As an attachment to that FONSI, we will provide a transcript of the meeting, all of your questions will be included, along with a formal response. If you provide a comment this evening, we won't respond tonight but there will be a formal written response from MDT and Federal Highways appended to the FONSI

PUBLIC HEARING

This is the portion of the hearing where you can make comment on the EA. There will be a written response as an attachment to the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), but the comments will not be answered this evening. There will be a formal response in the record as part of the FONSI. If you do not want to comment tonight, there will still be opportunity to comment; just take a comment sheet and send it into us either on the internet or to the mailing address. We also have a station to make written comment or a verbal comment to Heidi who will record your comment. We encourage you to get your comments to us by April 10th. At this time I'll come around with the microphone for you to make your comment as part of the official record.

Public Hearing comments are contained in Appendix B of this document, with a formal response from Montana Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration.



2001-Grayling Creek-North of US 20
STPHS 50-1(20)10



Public Hearing

**March 26, 2008
West Yellowstone
School**

Please Sign In:

	Name and/or Agency	Address:	Phone:	E-mail:
1	John Costello	Box 548	646-9523	jcostello@wyellowstone.com
2	Marysue Costello	Box 548	646-7844	marysuec@q.com
3	Rob Klatt	Box 215	646-7804	WYBROKER@AOL.com
4	DAVID KLATT	935 Grayling Creek Rd.	646-7853	montanafasthorses@yahoo.com
5	Robert Davies	P.O. Box 520	823-6971	rotdavies@fs.fed.us
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Appendix D – Environmental Assessment



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