



Montana Department of Transportation

2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena MT 59620-1001

Jim Lynch, Director
Brian Schweitzer, Governor

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TRANSPORTATION PLANNING



Janice W Brown, Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
585 Shepard Way
Helena Montana 59601-9785

**Subject: Re-evaluated Environmental Assessment/Finding of No Significant Impact
(EA/FONSI) Update Addendum
Swamp Creek – East
Project No. NH 1-1(29)45 F
Control No. 1027**

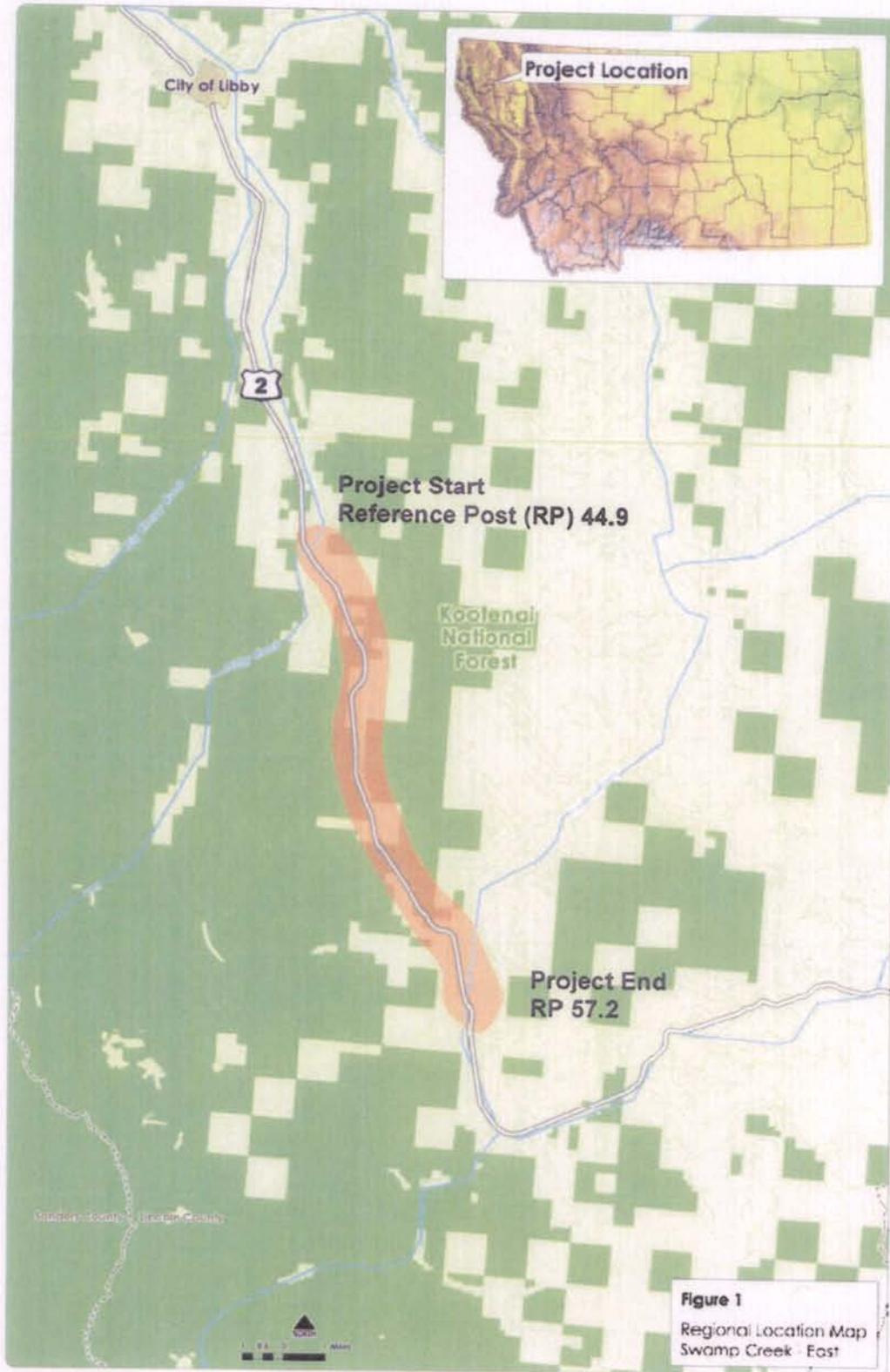
The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) re-evaluated the Finding of No Significant Impact / Environmental Assessment (FONSI/EA) for the referenced project and has prepared this Re-Evaluated EA/FONSI Update Addendum to comply with 23 CFR 771.129 and 40 CFR 1500 to 1508. Disclosure of new information or circumstances complies with 23 CFR 771.129(c). This proposed action also continues to qualify as an Environmental Assessment under the provisions of ARM 18.2.237(2) and 18.2.239 (Sections 2-3-104 and 75-1-201, M.C.A.).

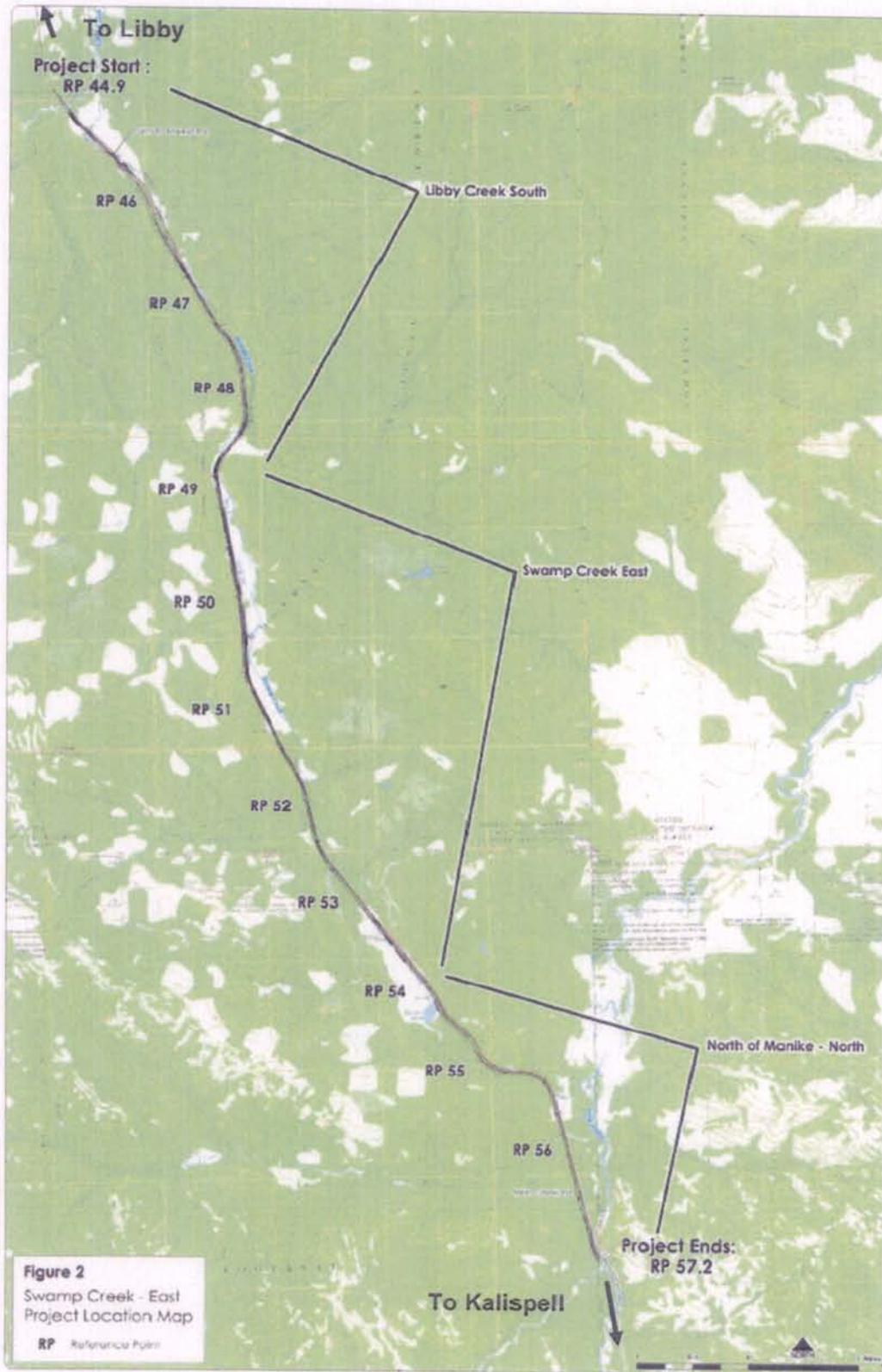
This letter provides (1) a summary of the project history, (2) a previous project description (prior to the 2006 design changes), (3) a summary of the proposed design changes and rationale, (4) updated environmental conditions and potential impacts, and (5) a conclusion/concurrence statement.

Project History

The proposed Swamp Creek - East project consists of reconstructing a 19.3-kilometer (12 mile) section of US Highway 2 (US 2), in Lincoln County, Montana (Figure 1). MDT proposed the project in the 1980s to update this section of highway to current design and safety standards. In 1990, an Environmental Assessment/Programmatic Section 4 (f) Evaluation and Finding of No Significant Impact (EA/FONSI) for the project was approved by FHWA. The alternative evaluated in the 1990 EA/FONSI included a 32-foot wide facility that could be expanded to 40-feet in the future and improved horizontal and vertical curves. The environmental document was re-evaluated four years later with the 1994 Re-Evaluated EA/FONSI that considered a 40-foot wide facility, additional traffic and environmental information, and evaluated three additional alignment alternatives for avoiding residences and relocating Swamp Creek back to its original channel. Finally, the Re-evaluated EA/FONSI was updated in 2001 (2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update) with additional biological information and revised designs for relocating Swamp Creek. There were no changes proposed to the roadway design or alignment in the 2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update.

Since 2001, MDT has been conducting geotechnical testing of the proposed roadway alignment and preparing the designs and cost estimates for the construction project. Because of annual funding constraints, MDT plans to design and construct the project in three segments, beginning at the south end with the North of Manicke – North segment, at approximately RP 54 to 57 (see Figure 2). The other two segments, Swamp Creek East (approximately RP 49 to 54) and Libby Creek South (approximately RP 45 to 49), would be constructed at a later date as funding becomes available.





Previous Project Description

Provided below is a description of the entire Swamp Creek – East project as considered in the original 1990 EA/FONSI and subsequently modified through the re-evaluation in 1994 and updated again in 2001. Changes to the project that are the subject of this update are described in the next section, Proposed Design Changes October 2006.

The proposed Swamp Creek - East project consists of reconstructing a 19.3-kilometer (12 mile) section of US 2, south of Libby, Montana. The project begins southeast of Libby at Reference Post (RP) 44.9, just south of the Libby Creek Bridge (Figure 2). The project ends near RP 57.2, just north of the Fisher River Bridge. The purpose of the project is to update this section of highway to current design and safety standards.

Constructed in the 1930's, the existing highway consists of two less than 12-foot wide travel lanes without shoulders. The proposed reconstruction would widen the highway to 40 feet, including two 12-foot wide travel lanes with 8-foot wide shoulders. The proposed new alignment would generally follow the existing alignment, however, multiple minor alignment adjustments within the right-of-way were proposed as needed to flatten horizontal and vertical curves. Three additional alignment shifts outside the right-of-way were proposed in 1994 between RPs 44.8 and 45.5 (Alternative A), RPs 45.5 and 46.8 (Alternative B), and RPs 51.5 to 52.0 (Alternative D) to move the roadway away from Swamp Creek and a group of residences. Vertical grades would be less than 4 percent, except between RP 54.6 and 55.2 where the maximum grade would be greater than 4 percent. At this location, a truck climbing lane for westbound traffic was originally proposed.

The proposed reconstruction includes widening, grading, drainage, surfacing, signing, pavement markings, guardrails, top soiling, seeding, and utility relocation where necessary. Existing intersections and approaches would be improved and mailbox turnouts would be constructed where appropriate. The four existing timber bridges over Swamp Creek would be replaced with bridges. The bridge over Miller Creek was replaced in 1988 and no further work is planned for that bridge as a part of this project. Other existing culverts, including the culvert at Schrieber Creek, would be replaced. Culverts would be oversized and installed such that they would not create a fish barrier.

The project also includes modifications to portions of the Swamp Creek channel. Swamp Creek has been impacted by the current location of US 2, along with other factors such as irrigation, rural development, and flood control. Swamp Creek currently exists in a semi-stable, yet degraded condition. Reconstruction plans for Swamp Creek would be based on natural channel design, which incorporates native materials such as trees, rocks, and shrubs for channel stabilization. Natural channel design would aim to restore Swamp Creek's potential capacity to transport flows, sediment, and enhance fish habitat.

Proposed Design Changes October 2006

The specific design changes that are the subject of this Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update Addendum are summarized below. Evaluation of potential impacts from these changes is provided in the following section.

- 1. Reducing the Shoulder Width to 4-feet.** The original design evaluated in the 1990 EA/FONSI included 4-foot wide paved shoulders, with provisions for extending the shoulders to 8-feet. When the EA/FONSI was updated in 1994 and 2001, 8-foot wide paved shoulders were formally proposed. Since that time, however, additional geotechnical investigations discovered poor soil conditions along stretches of the project that necessitated designers to realign the roadway inward toward adjacent hillsides, away from areas with poor soil conditions. This in turn required designing an extensive system of retaining walls to contain the hillside slopes. After completing the design, the design team discovered that the retaining walls added approximately \$19.2 million to project costs. Because of fiscal constraints, MDT was unable to fund the additional costs for all of the retaining walls and considered design modifications to reduce costs while continuing to address the geotechnical issues. The solution proposed is to reduce the overall pavement width which would reduce the width of roadway traversing poor soil conditions and reduce the amount retaining walls needed. Travel lanes would remain 12-feet wide as previously proposed, but the paved shoulder width would be reduced from 8-feet to 4-feet. The overall pavement width would be reduced from 40-feet to 32-feet. Cost savings to the project for reducing the shoulder width to 4-feet throughout the entire project would be approximately \$9.3 million, and correspondingly, reducing the amount of retaining walls (many are still required) would save approximately \$4.6 million of the estimated \$19.2 million.
- 2. Eliminating the Truck Climbing Lane.** A truck climbing lane was originally proposed in 1990 for the North of Manicke – North segment between RP's 54.6 and 55.2 based on American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines currently available at that time. AASHTO guidelines have since been revised and according to current standards the average daily traffic does not meet the warrant for a truck climbing lane. Current standards justify truck climbing lanes for traffic flows in excess of 200 vehicles per hour and the design hourly volume for the facility is 154 vehicles per hour. Furthermore, a two-way capacity analysis reveals that the area where the climbing lane was proposed would operate at a level-of-service (LOS) C without the climbing lane. The entire roadway would operate at LOS B without the climbing lane. Furthermore, construction of the climbing lane would require construction of a substantial retaining wall to contain adjacent hillside slopes. Since the roadway would operate within satisfactory parameters without the climbing lane, MDT is proposing to not construct this feature, eliminating the need for additional retaining walls and further reducing project costs. Eliminating the truck climbing lane alone would save approximately \$300,000 plus the additional costs for the retaining walls mentioned above.
- 3. Constructing Retaining Walls and One New Minor Roadway Alignment Shift.** Ten or eleven retaining walls within the existing right-of-way are proposed to avoid poor soil conditions, minimize wetland impacts, and to minimize impacts to Swamp Creek (one proposed retaining wall at RP 47.6 may not be necessary pending final design). Also, one new alignment shift of 7 meters (22 feet) from the centerline at RP 49.2 is proposed to avoid poor soil conditions and would be entirely within the right-of-way currently acquired by MDT. The retaining walls are summarized in Table 1 and generally range from 1 to 10 meters (3 to 32 feet) in height, depending on the adjacent natural slope. The retaining walls would not be rectangular features, but shaped to match hillside topography. Maximum wall heights have been minimized where possible and represent the highest point of wall and grade downward to lower heights following the topography. This allows existing gullies and drainages to retain their natural features for water collection/discharge and wildlife access. The

retaining walls are proposed to be constructed of soil nails and shot-crete, with the shot-crete sculpted to resemble a natural rock surface.

Table 1: Retaining Wall Summary

Segment	Approximate Reference Post	Side of Roadway	Approximate Length meters (feet)	Highest Point meters (feet)
Libby Creek – South	47.6*	West*	10 to 50 (32 to 160)*	1 (3)*
Swamp Creek – East	48.9	West	130 (400)	5 (16)
	49.3	West	150 (500)	10 (32)
	49.6	West	300 (1000)	9 (30)
	49.9	West	180 (600)	5 (16)
	50.4	West	460 (1500)	9 (30)
	50.7	West	60 (200)	3 (10)
	50.8	West	60 (200)	7 (22)
	50.9	West	30 (100)	3 (10)
	53.3	East	120 (400)	6 (20)
	53.5	East	120 (400)	6 (20)

*May be eliminated pending final design.

Updated Conditions and Potential Environmental Impacts

This addendum to the 2001 Re-Evaluated EA/FONSI Update provides a focused evaluation to determine whether there are substantial new environmental impacts associated with the recent design changes to the Swamp Creek – East project and to provide updated environmental data.

A Biological Resources Report (BRR) and Biological Assessment (BA) Addendum were prepared during August and September 2005 to address recent biological information and potential impacts within the Swamp Creek – East project area. Biological evaluation of the Swamp Creek – East project began in the early 1990s with preparation of a BA, Biological & Sensitive Species Report, and Wetlands Evaluation by OEA Research. In 2001, an updated BRR was prepared by Western EcoSystems Technology, Inc. to update terrestrial, aquatic, and wetland biological resources and to address any design changes to the project. Later in 2003, a Wetland Delineation Report was prepared to update wetland resources for the project by Land & Water Consulting, Inc. Findings from the 2005 BRR and BA Addendum are summarized within the appropriate sections of this addendum.

There are **no changed conditions** nor would the proposed design changes impact the following environmental resources: social and economic, agricultural lands, irrigation, noise, air quality, water resources and floodplains, aquatic resources (fish), rare and sensitive species, vegetation, cultural resources, hazardous wastes, construction, or energy.

The following sections provide updated project information and a discussion of the project impacts.

(A) Traffic Operations and Safety

Reducing Shoulder Width to 4-feet. The existing roadway currently has less than 12-foot travel lanes, no shoulders, non-traversable side slopes, and limited clear zones. This is a narrow roadway in which there is no forgiveness for an errant vehicle leaving the roadway. During a five year period from 2000 to 2005 there were 57 crashes on this stretch of road. Approximately half of these crashes involved a single vehicle running off the road. The proposed widening would help to reduce these types of accidents. This is because the proposed improvements would widen the travel lanes to 12-feet, widen the shoulders from zero to 4-feet, improve the non-traversable side slopes to a traversable 6 to 1 and 4 to 1 slope, and provide clear zones. These improvements would provide over a 20-foot increase in roadway recovery distance. FHWA's publication, *Safety Effectiveness of Highway Design Features, Volume III: Cross Sections*, notes that 20-feet of increased roadway recovery distance could reduce single vehicle off-road accidents by up to 44%.

To evaluate the impacts caused to traffic from reducing the previously proposed 8-foot shoulder width to 4-feet, a Safety and Operational Crash model was used to predict the number of future accidents based on the roadway as it currently exists, and with a 4- and 8-foot shoulder. The model assumed a future 5-year period when the average daily traffic volume was 1,600 vehicles. Table 2 provides the model results and reveals that approximately 83 accidents could occur if no changes to the existing roadway are made. If the roadway is improved with 4-foot shoulders, the number of accidents could be reduced to 46 (a 45% reduction). If the roadway is improved with 8-foot shoulders, the number of accidents could be reduced to 37 (a 56% reduction). Therefore, reducing the proposed shoulder width from 8-feet to 4-feet could add another 11 accidents over a 5-year period (an 11% increase over 5 years).

Table 2 – Estimated Number of Accidents Over Future 5 Year Period*

Accidents	Existing Roadway (no shoulders)	Roadway with 4-foot Wide Shoulder	Roadway with 8-foot Wide Shoulder
Due to Curves	28	19	16
Due to Tangents	55	27	21
Total	83	46	37
Reduction in Accidents Over Existing Conditions	0%	45%	56%

*Assumes design year average daily traffic volume of 1600 vehicles.

In summary, while 8-foot shoulders could provide an 11% increase in safety over a 4-foot shoulder over 5 years, the increase is proportionally small to the overall 45% increase in safety with a 4-foot shoulder. Factoring in the costs mentioned previously, the additional costs for an 8-foot shoulder which would also require an extensive system of retaining walls would add approximately \$19.2 million to the project. By reducing the shoulder width to 4-feet and thereby reducing the amount of retaining walls required, the roadway costs are reduced by \$9.3 million and the retaining wall costs are reduced by \$4.6 million (a \$13.9 million total savings over the 8-foot shoulder option). Considering the uncertainty and availability of limited funding, MDT believes that a 4-foot shoulder width option would provide a substantially enhanced level of safety over existing conditions and would have a greater chance of funding and being constructed in a timely manner.

Eliminating the Truck Climbing Lane. As previously noted, current AASHTO guidelines do not warrant the climbing lane. A two-way capacity analysis conducted by MDT reveals that the area where the climbing lane was proposed would operate at an acceptable LOS C without the climbing lane. The entire roadway would operate at LOS B without the climbing lane. Therefore, there would be no substantial impacts to traffic operations and safety by eliminating this feature from the project.

Retaining Walls and Minor Alignment Shift. The proposed retaining walls and alignment shift would have no impacts on traffic operations and safety. The retaining walls are off set from the traffic lanes and would not impede traffic flow or safety. The alignment shift would be made with the appropriate geometrics and clear zones allowing standardized traffic movements.

(B) Visual

Updated Conditions. The 2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update addressed the existing visual character of US 2 as it traverses private and Kootenai National Forest lands, south of Libby. The 2001 Update also referenced the 1987 Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Kootenai Forest Plan) regarding visual resources. The 2001 Update identified two Kootenai National Forest Management Areas (MAs 16 and 17) adjacent to the project corridor that were considered sensitive view sheds or that required a higher level of protection for the visual resource. MA 16 had a moderate viewing sensitivity area and MA17 had a high viewing sensitivity.

The Kootenai Forest Plan is currently being updated by the US Forest Service (USFS) in conjunction with the Idaho Panhandle National Forest Plan. While the 1987 version remains a valid document, USFS reports that there have been some changes to the MA boundaries and descriptions. The Kootenai Forest

Plan indicates that the project corridor traverses a small portion of MAs 11, 13, and 17. Of these MAs, only MA 17 is described as having a sensitive view shed:

MA 17: Productive forest lands located within sensitive view sheds. Timber harvest and visual resource management must be coordinated to provide a natural appearing landscape.

Lands designated as MA 17 are crossed by the project corridor along a small area between RP 46 and 47 and from RP 52 to 53.5.

Impacts. Visual impacts from widening the roadway in general were previously evaluated in the 1990 EA/FONSI, 1994 Re-evaluation, and 2001 Update. Recent design changes to reduce the paved shoulder width by 8-feet (4-feet on each shoulder) and eliminate the truck climbing lane would actually provide a benefit to the visual character of the roadway through the project corridor over the designs analyzed in 1994 and 2001. (A 32-foot wide section was evaluated in 1990 and a 40-foot wide section considered in 1994 and 2001). The existing visual quality of the project corridor is exemplified by the rural character of the narrow roadway as it traverses through agricultural and low density residential lands. A 32-foot wide paved roadway provides a more consistent unity between the landscape elements than a wider, more urban-like width.

While constructing retaining walls would create a new visual element along the project corridor, their construction would require less hillside cutbacks and disturb less overall land surface. Impacts to the visual character of the corridor at the retaining wall locations would occur, but would not be totally unexpected considering the character of today's rural US highway system that typically includes retaining walls and other engineered support features. Sculpting the walls to resemble natural rock face would provide more of a natural feel to the retaining walls. Photo simulations of the conceptual natural rock wall treatments were reviewed by the USFS in fall 2005 and by community members at a public meeting in October 2005 (see Figure 3). While USFS expressed some concern regarding the use of shot-crete for the retaining walls and the overall appearance of standard shot-crete walls, including the sculpted natural rock treatment was acceptable to USFS. There were no negative comments provided by community members. Finally, there are only two retaining walls located within USFS lands that are designated MA 17, at RPs 53.3 and 53.5. These two retaining walls are located at the very south end of the MA, adjacent to private lands.

Figure 3: Before and After Photo Simulation of Typical Retaining Walls



(C) Land Use

Updated Conditions. Land uses along the project corridor considered in the 2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update included logging, grazing, hay production, and home development. Private land uses in the vicinity of the Swamp Creek – East project area have not substantially changed since the 2001 Update was prepared.

The 2001 Update also considered the 1987 Kootenai Forest Plan regarding National Forest Service land use. USFS reports that there have been some changes to MA boundaries and descriptions of National Forest Service lands since 2001. . The Kootenai Forest Plan indicates that the project may impact a small portion of MAs 11, 13, and 17. Descriptions of these MAs include:

MA 11: Same as MA 10 except that productive forest lands are involved which can provide both wildlife and timber benefits. (MA 10: Areas generally below 4500' elevation on favorable solar exposures which are important for big game winter range. They are generally difficult to manage for timber because of low productivity or difficult environmental problems.)

MA 13: Small areas generally below 5500' elevation providing special habitat needs for old growth timber dependent species. Timber harvest is not permitted.

MA 17: Productive forest lands located within sensitive view sheds. Timber harvest and visual resource management must be coordinated to provide a natural appearing landscape.

Lands designated MA 11 are crossed by the project corridor in between RPs 47 and 48 and RPs 54 and 55. Lands designated MA 13 are crossed between RPs 51 and 52. Lands designated MA 17 are crossed between RPs 46 and 47 and from RPs 52 to 53.

Impacts. The recently proposed design changes are located entirely within right-of-way previously acquired for the project, no additional National Forest Service lands are required, and less overall land surface would be disturbed by the project than the previous design. Therefore, the design changes are not anticipated to have substantial new impacts on land use.

(D) Right-of-Way

Updated Conditions. The 2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update estimated that 83 hectares (204.9 acres) of right-of-way was needed for roadway improvements. Since the 2001 Update, some additional right-of-way was necessary to flatten horizontal and vertical curves (flattening curves was a design component considered in the 1990 EA/FONSI). The additional right-of-way is located entirely within one parcel, the Ott property, which was acquired by MDT in 2005.

Impacts. Recent design changes are proposed entirely within the existing right-of-way acquired by MDT and no additional land is required. Construction permits will be required.

(E) Relocations

Updated Conditions. The 2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update identified one new property relocation to flatten horizontal and vertical curves. The 2001 Update also identified the need for continued coordination with utility companies along the project corridor for utility relocations. Since the 2001

Update, MDT has purchased another property, the Ott property, to flatten horizontal and vertical curves. This property included one residential structure, an outbuilding, and associated improvements.

Impacts. No additional properties or relocations are required to construct the proposed design changes.

(F) Wetlands

Updated Conditions. The 2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update described updated wetland impacts from the proposed project. This document identified approximately 7.8 hectares (19.2 acres) of wetlands would be impacted by roadway construction and 0.6 hectares (1.4 acres) of wetlands would be impacted by channel reconstruction of Swamp Creek. Since then, the 2003 Wetland Delineation Report provided more recent wetland delineation information.

Impacts. The updated 2003 wetland delineations have been incorporated into MDT's designs and new impacts have been estimated for entire project, including the recent design changes. The proposed design changes have been designed to avoid and minimize disturbance and impacts to identified wetlands that could not be avoided have been minimized to the extent possible. Estimates indicate that current wetland impacts for roadway construction would be reduced to 6.2 hectares (15.3 acres). There would be no changes to wetland impacts for channel reconstruction of Swamp Creek based on the proposed design changes.

(G) Wildlife

Updated Conditions. Wildlife resources were evaluated in the 2001 BRR and there are no updated conditions to report.

Impacts. There would be no additional impacts to wildlife from reducing the roadway width and some benefit could be realized since less land area (and habitat) would be disturbed. Although, construction of the retaining walls would require foundation excavation and vegetation clearing in localized areas. However, the retaining walls would reduce the overall impacts from the original design by reducing hillside cutbacks and reducing the overall amount of vegetation disturbance.

Recent design changes to construct retaining walls along the project corridor may cause minor changes in wildlife behavior. Initially, there were some concerns raised by biologists from US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) regarding wall height, length, and placement as it relates to potential wildlife crossings on US 2. However, the agencies ultimately agreed that the walls would not have any substantial negative consequences on wildlife because the walls would (1) be placed on only one side of the roadway with stretches of open spaces in between, (2) vary in height along areas of naturally steep slope not normally used as a crossing point, and (3) be lower at existing gullies and drainages where existing crossings are located. It is believed that over time, wildlife would generally adapt to the wall locations and find other ways to cross US 2. Additionally, there would continue to be ample crossing opportunities for wildlife throughout the project area. Therefore, the design changes are not anticipated to have substantial new impacts on wildlife.

(H) Threatened, Endangered (T&E), Rare, and Sensitive Species

T&E Species Updated Conditions and Impacts. No additional T&E species were found to occur in the study area since the 2001 BRR based on conversations with USFWS and MFWP biologists and a

literature review in fall 2005. Potential effects of the proposed project, mitigation measures, and official determination of effects for the white sturgeon, bull trout, Canada lynx, and bald eagle were all identified in the previous 2001 BRR (no adverse affect from the project). There has been no change in species population, and there should be no change in the previously expressed determination of effect for the above-mentioned species as a result of the recently proposed design changes.

Since the 2001 BRR was prepared however, more information has become available on the gray wolf and grizzly bear activity within the project area. This updated information is summarized below.

Gray Wolf

Gray wolves may potentially occur on occasion within the project area. In Montana, gray wolves are currently listed as an endangered species in northwestern Montana. Primary habitat for the wolf is comprised of large wilderness tracts with little human disturbance and boreal forests, with den sites mainly occurring in dense coniferous forest or aspen stands. Part of the home range for the Fishtrap wolf pack is located near the southern boundary of the project area by Fisher River and McGinnis Creek, with the northernmost reach of home range extending slightly beyond US 2. Based on the 2004 Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Annual Report, there are approximately five wolves (3 adults and 2 pups) in the Fishtrap wolf pack. After a discussion with MFWP local wolf recovery biologist it was determined the Fishtrap pack had increased in number to approximately 8 or 9 wolves in February 2005, and the population number is expected to increase and decrease throughout the year based on number of new births and animal mortalities. The home range indicated in the annual wolf report serves as a minimum area for the Fishtrap pack, and can be much larger depending on pack activity.

Gray Wolf Determination

Gray wolves may potentially occur on occasion within the project area. Based on the conversation with MFWP wolf biologist, wolf sightings near the project area are rare. The most recent sightings have occurred near Fisher River and McGinnis Creek at the southern portion of the project. The wolves may cross US 2 when migrating, roaming, or following game trails. Since the project area crosses through an area of know wolf habitat the 2001 BRR noted that the originally proposed project would have direct effects resulting in a small loss of wolf habitat near Miller and Fisher Creek, however, the portion of habitat loss would be insignificant in size and would not have any negative effects on the wolf population. The originally proposed project is not expected to create any barriers that would inhibit or limit wolf movements throughout the region. Potential impacts, such as loss of natural corridors or vehicular strikes to wolves as a result of the proposed project are extremely unlikely to occur. Based on the current low population number of wolves in the Fishtrap wolf pack, amount of roaming area within their home range, insignificant size of habitat loss, and rare sightings within the project area, the proposed design changes are ***not likely to adversely affect*** gray wolves.

Grizzly Bear

The proposed project area is not considered grizzly bear habitat, however, grizzly bears may potentially exist in the project area on occasion. Grizzly bears are currently listed as threatened under the 1973 Endangered Species Act, but the USFWS issued a finding stating that grizzlies within the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear recovery zone as endangered, but precluded by other listing actions. The project area is located between the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Recovery Area and an area of USFWS designated occupied grizzly habitat. Because of the project location there is potential for bears to pass through the project area when traveling between different habitat areas. Based on the 2004 Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Area Research and Monitoring Progress Report issued by USFWS, and conversations with local USFWS bear biologists, the approximate number of grizzlies located south of the Kootenai River near the project

area is around 15 individuals. The most recent credible sightings of bears in the project area occurred in the late 1990's around Fisher River.

Grizzly Bear Determination

The project area is located between the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Recovery Area and an area of USFWS designated as occupied grizzly habitat, however, grizzly bears may potentially only exist in the project area on rare occasion. As with the wolves, any habitat loss resulting from the originally proposed project would be insignificant in size and not have any negative effects on the grizzly population. Additionally, habitat directly adjacent to the roadway does not specifically meet the criteria as optimal grizzly habitat. The proposed design changes are not expected to create any barriers that would inhibit or limit bear movements throughout the region. Based on the extremely rare sightings and occurrence of bear in the area, none to minimal impacts to the grizzly from vehicular incidents along US 2 are expected. Based on the low numbers of existing grizzly near the project area, insignificant size of habitat loss, and lack of any sightings within several years, the proposed design changes are *not likely to adversely affect* grizzly bear.

(I) Public Involvement

Public meetings were held on October 27, 2005 and August 29, 2006 to discuss the proposed design changes with members of the community. The meetings were held at the Libby City Hall and announced in advance by mailing and in the local newspapers. Comments were provided by attendees at the meeting in person and on comment forms.

The October 2005 meeting was attended by approximately 30 members of the community and provided an update of the project history and recent activities, funding, proposed project changes, and potential environmental impacts. Maps depicting the current roadway alignment, photo simulations of retaining walls, roadway cross sections, construction phasing, and schedules were provided. A majority of the comments provided at the meeting and from comment forms indicated a preference to move ahead with the project quickly. However, there were several comments about the desire to prioritize the phase of the project that upgrades or replaces bridges along the central portion of the project where a number of accidents have occurred in the past. Other comments included the need to improve overall safety, need for vehicle passing lanes or pullouts, the lack of visibility of turnoffs, need for wildlife crossings, and maintenance issues associated with deteriorating asphalt.

The August 2006 meeting was attended by approximately 37 people and provided an update of the project history, funding, schedule, project design, and test berms. Also discussed was the need to reduce the shoulder widths, make minor alignment shifts, add retaining walls, and eliminate the truck climbing lane. Maps depicting the current roadway alignment and roadway cross sections were provided. Nearly all of the comments provided by community members cited safety and tourism concerns about reducing the shoulder width from 8-feet to 4-feet. There were also comments citing concerns about eliminating the truck climbing lane and funding. Toward the end of the meeting a number of community members preferred to see the project advanced as proposed as opposed to further delays and uncertainty associated with additional costs for the wider shoulders.

(J) Cumulative and Secondary Effects

Updated Conditions. Cumulative impacts are defined as impacts that “*result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency undertakes such other actions*”. Known projects in the vicinity of the Swamp

Creek – East project that were not described in the 2001 Re-Evaluated EA/FONSI Update are summarized below.

Montana Department of Transportation Planned Projects. MDT has a number of planned projects in the vicinity of the Swamp Creek – East project area including:

- US 2 (RP 38 to RP 44.7) - widen overlay
- US 2 (RP 27) – rock scaling west of Libby
- US 2 (RP 30 +/-) – traffic channelizing in Libby
- Schrieber Meadow Wetland Development (RP 54)

Montanore Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Kootenai National Forest, in conjunction with Montana Department of Environmental Quality, is preparing an EIS to document the analysis and disclose the environmental impacts of the proposed action to permit the construction, operation and reclamation of the Montanore silver/copper mine project and associated power transmission line. The project as proposed by Mines Management, Inc. is located on public and private lands approximately 18 miles south of Libby, Montana on the east side of the Cabinet Mountains. The permit would include about 3,000 acres of National Forest System lands and about 200 acres of private land. The mine site is located approximately 4 to 5 miles west of the central portion of the Swamp Creek – East project. The proposed power transmission line route is generally east-west and would cross US 2 at the south end of the Swamp Creek – East project area near the Fisher River.

Snowshoe Mine, Snowshoe Creek, and Big Cherry Millsite Reclamation Project. The Kootenai National Forest, Libby Ranger District is in the planning phase I of a reclamation project at the Big Cherry Mill site, which is located along the Big Cherry Creek, approximately 10 miles south of Libby, Montana. The reclamation site is located approximately 5 to 6 miles west of the north end of the Swamp Creek – East project area.

Alder Creek Environmental Assessment (EA). The Kootenai National Forest, Libby Ranger District recently completed an EA for timber harvest, prescribed fire, access changes, road Best Management Practices (BMPs), new road construction, and trail improvements. The area covered by this EA is located approximately 8 miles northeast of the north end of the Swamp Creek – East project area.

Smoked Fish EA. The Kootenai National Forest, Libby Ranger District recently began preparation of an EA for timber harvest, prescribed fire, natural fuel reduction, road access changes, and BMPs for existing roads. The area covered by this EA is located approximately 1 to 5 miles northeast of the south end of the Swamp Creek – East project area, along the Fisher River drainage.

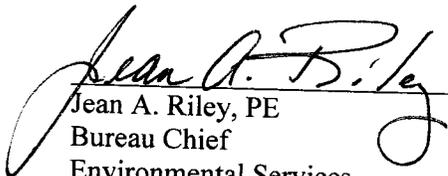
Impacts. Cumulative and secondary effects from the entire project were evaluated in the 2001 Re-Evaluated EA/FONSI Update. There are no indications that the reducing the roadway width and constructing retaining walls would contribute to substantial new cumulative and secondary effects when considered in conjunction with the projects listed above since the roadway is already in place and is only being improved for safety, not capacity. In combination with the above-referenced projects, the roadway will not substantially contribute to changes in land use nor will it have secondary affects on wildlife habitat, water resources, or other environmental resources. Although, there may be a small secondary economic benefit by providing an improved facility that better accommodates recreational vehicles and tourists.

Conclusion

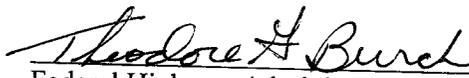
Based on the studies performed for this Addendum to the 1994 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI and 2001 Re-evaluated EA/FONSI Update, no substantive changes have occurred since the documents were signed. All social, economic, and environmental impacts resulting from the design changes to reduce the shoulder width, eliminate a previously proposed truck climbing lane, and include retaining walls and minor alignment shifts have been reviewed and no information was revealed that changes the determination that the project would no significant environmental impacts. All other aspects of the EA/FONSI remain unchanged.

This is to request FHWA concurrence that a supplemental environmental assessment for the referenced project will not be necessary. MDT has found that in accordance with 23 CFR 771.119, this action would neither individually or cumulatively, have any new significant environmental impacts.

Concurrence


Jean A. Riley, PE
Bureau Chief
Environmental Services

Date 12/5/06


Theodore H. Burch
Federal Highway Administration

Date 12/07/2006

Cc: Dwane Kailey, MDT Missoula District Administrator
Paul Ferry, MDT Highway Engineer
John Horton, MDT Right-of-Way Bureau Chief
Ray Harbin, MDT Right-of-Way
David W. Jensen, MDT Supervisor Fiscal Programming Section
Mark Studt, MDT Consultant Design
Suzy Price, MDT Contract Plans Bureau Chief
Jean Riley, MDT Environmental Services Bureau Chief
Susan Kilcrease, MDT Civil Engineer Specialist
Tom Grabinski, USFS Supervisor Kootenai National Forest
Scott Jackson, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Rita Windom, Lincoln County Commissioner
Craig Genzlinger, FHWA