

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR



FEASIBILITY STUDY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is developing a feasibility study of the US Highway 93 (US 93) Ninepipe corridor. The study will be a collaborative process between MDT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), resource agencies, stakeholders, and the public.

In 1996, MDT completed a [Final Environmental Impact Statement \(FEIS\) and Section 4\(f\) Evaluation](#) to evaluate a proposed project for the portion of US 93 between Evaro and Polson, MT. The purpose of the proposed project was to improve traffic operations and the connectivity and safety of the transportation system. The Record of Decision (ROD) did not provide specific design details, so FHWA, MDT, and the CSKT agreed to prepare a supplemental environmental study to further explore possible alignments and study the effects of highway improvements on wetlands and wildlife in the corridor. In 2008, MDT, FHWA, and CSKT completed a [Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement \(SEIS\) and a Section 4\(f\) Evaluation](#) for the Ninepipe/Ronan section (Reference Point [RP] 37.1 to 48.3). The SEIS/ROD identified a preferred alternative for the corridor consisting of a two-lane roadway, wildlife crossing structures, and a separated bicycle/pedestrian path within the Ninepipe segment connecting to a divided four-lane segment north of Brooke Lane and a northbound passing lane segment south of Gunlock Road. This alternative was determined to best meet the purpose and need of the proposed project while minimizing costs and impacts to the area's natural resources.

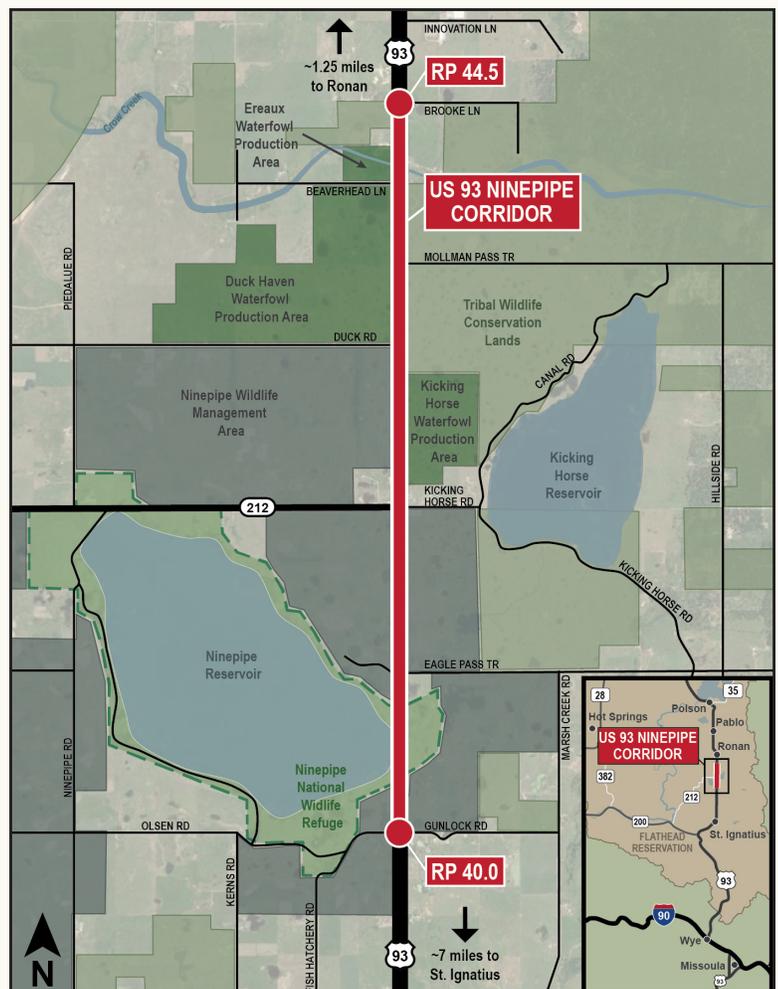
WHAT IS THE STUDY PURPOSE?

Since completion of these previous efforts, MDT has proceeded to develop projects in stretches of US 93 adjacent to the Ninepipe segment and has encountered multiple challenges relating to constructability, impacts, and costs.

The intent of the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* is to proactively address these challenges by identifying potential constraints and considering the viability of the preferred alternative previously identified in the 2008 SEIS before a project is nominated.

WHERE IS THE STUDY AREA?

The study is focused on the US 93 corridor between Gunlock Road (at RP 40.0) and Brooke Lane (at RP 44.5) within the Flathead Indian Reservation.



ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

An analysis of relevant conditions was conducted in 2021 to review available research and gather field data relating to traffic and safety conditions, soils and groundwater, wetlands, wildlife, cultural resources, and traffic conditions. This information will be used to support the feasibility analysis, including development of costs and identification of impacts and constructability challenges associated with proposed improvements to the US 93 corridor.

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY



- The corridor currently operates at a poor operational level of service below the targeted level for similar facilities. Operational conditions are expected to remain the same or deteriorate in future years as traffic volumes increase.
- The corridor is not suited to accommodate nonmotorized users due to high speeds, high traffic volumes, and lack of dedicated facilities.
- Crash rates on the corridor have increased since the 2008 SEIS, but the severity of crashes has decreased.

LAND USE



- While the majority of the corridor is surrounded by public lands, 12 private landowners own parcels adjacent to the study corridor.
- The updated land use inventory shows similar usage as found in the 2008 SEIS inventory.
- The specified right-of-way width along the corridor is 160 feet for the preferred alternative. Generally, this minimum width is available along the corridor with narrower areas near Eagle Pass Trail and Brooke Lane.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS



- The 2008 SEIS identified 81 wetlands along the study corridor. Of these, minor boundary changes were identified for 26 wetlands, and 55 remained unchanged.
- A total of 3 new wetlands were identified in 2021 totaling 0.09 acre.
- Approximately 200 feet of US 93 at the Ninepipe Reservoir and 675 feet of US 93 at Crow Creek crosses the 100-year floodplain.

WILDLIFE



- Numerous species occur in the Ninepipe area including grizzly bears, deer, birds, turtles, and other wildlife.
- Wildlife species are known to cross throughout the US 93 corridor, with concentrated movements occurring near the Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek areas.
- Carcass and crash data indicate deer strikes throughout the corridor. These data sources are likely not representative of the full extent of wildlife mortality in the Ninepipe segment.

CULTURAL/HISTORIC RESOURCES



- Three previously identified cultural resources occur within the Ninepipe segment of the US 93 corridor, including the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project, Stagecoach Route, and the Ninepipe Cultural Property.
- Additional government-to-government consultation and coordination with CSKT Culture Committees is planned for 2022.

SOILS, GROUNDWATER LEVELS, AND GEOTECHNICAL CONDITIONS

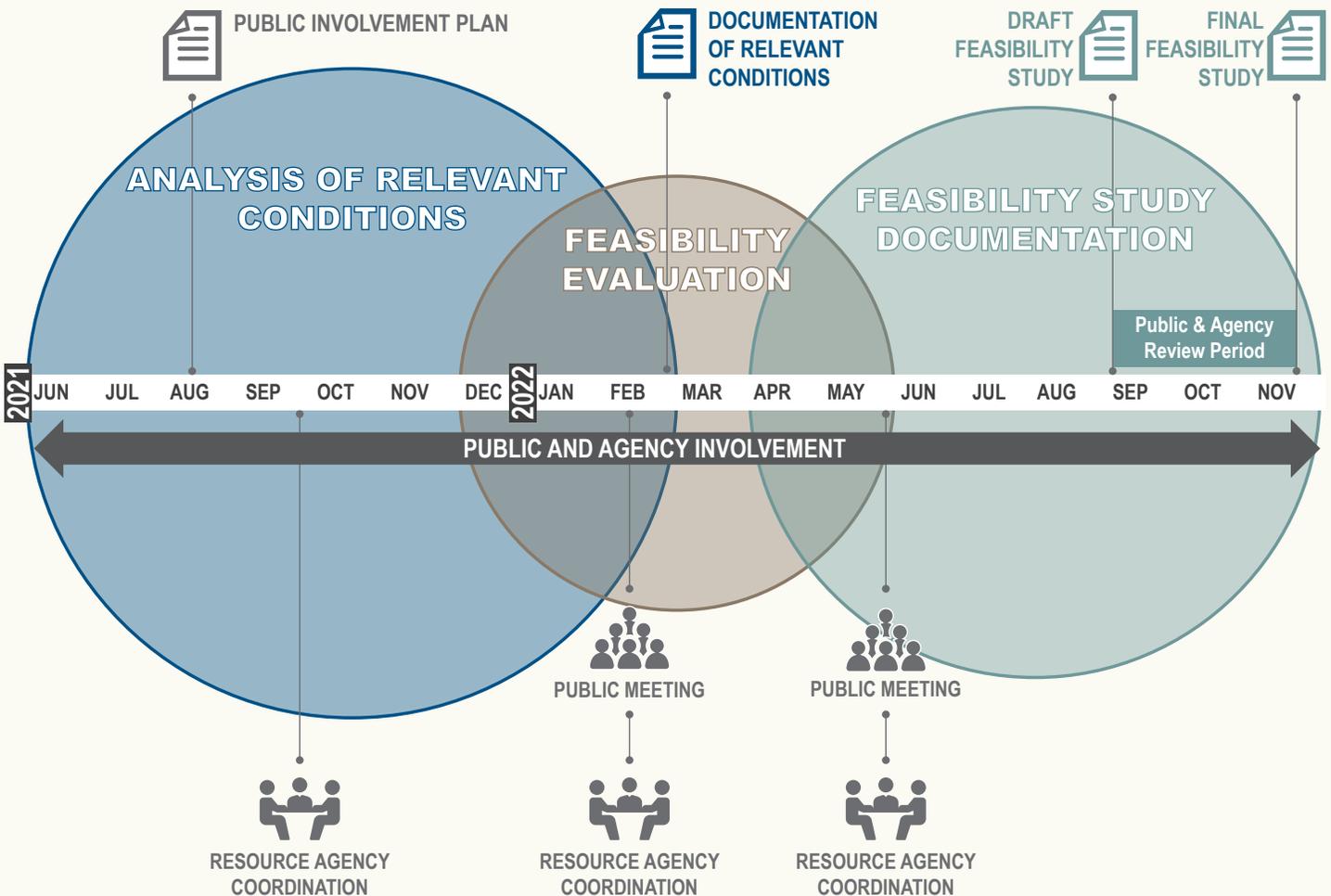


- Soil textures in the study corridor were confirmed to be soft clays, silts, and sands.
- Soil liquefaction (or the possibility to temporarily behave like a liquid during an earthquake) is expected throughout the corridor.
- No evidence of artesian (or pressurized groundwater) conditions was found.

SCHEDULE

The US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study involves three primary phases.

- **PHASE 1:** An analysis of relevant conditions was completed in late 2021. The analysis involved conducting research and gathering field data relating to traffic and safety conditions, land ownership and corridor right-of-way, wetland areas, wildlife presence and movements, cultural influences, and soil and groundwater constraints.
- **PHASE 2:** The feasibility evaluation will occur in early 2022 to consider costs, impacts, and construction feasibility relating to roadway and bicycle/pedestrian preferred path alignments and wildlife crossings.
- **PHASE 3:** Feasibility study documentation will be developed in late 2022, with a final report anticipated by November 2022.
- **THROUGHOUT:** Public, stakeholder, and resource agency outreach will be conducted during the entire process.



QUESTIONS?

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VISIT

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