



NEWSLINE

Montana Department of Transportation
mdt.mt.gov



September 2022

Moving Montana Forward After Flooding of 2022

Early summer brought heavy flooding to the western and southern areas of Montana. In particular, southern Montana and Yellowstone National Park experienced incredible damage from the flooding of the Yellowstone River and other waterways. These are just a sampling of photos taken by MDT crews assisting with clean-up and reconstruction/repair activities over the summer.

(Pictured clockwise from top to bottom: Flooding damage on US-89 near Gardiner; Crews work to clean debris from flooding in Red Lodge; Drone footage of repairs to the Beartooth Highway before reopening to traffic in late July)



MDT, Denton Celebrate “Bridging Our Way Back”

Less than a year after the devastating West Winds Fire, MDT and the community of Denton gathered on July 13, 2022, to celebrate the reconstruction of the Wolf Creek Bridge with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and BBQ.

This bridge served as an important point of access to Denton on Montana Highway 81 (MT-81), and was among several structures destroyed by the fire last December. MDT’s project team worked quickly to first establish a detour for temporary emergency vehicle access, and then began the expedited process of developing bridge replacement plans. Field crews worked to clean debris from the fire and prepared the site to meet environmental regulations. All of this expedited work culminated in breaking dirt on the bridge reconstruction project just three short months after the fire. Project crews constructed the substructure (base of the bridge) on-site, while concrete panels were simultaneously fabricated in Helena. The completed panels were then transported on-site and added to the substructure before concrete was poured to connect the panels and the superstructure (top portion of the bridge) was completed. Finishing touches on the project included bridge approaches, paving, and the installation of guardrail.

The original was a timber bridge, making the new bridge structurally superior — including the fireproof nature of concrete and an estimated lifespan of over 100 years. The new Wolf Creek Bridge will provide safe access to the community of Denton and travelers on MT-81 for generations to come. Learn more about the project at <https://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/westwindfire/>.

Did you know? MDT plans and facilitates projects through the Emergency Relief Program (ER). The ER Program allows for repairs to federal-aid highways that have suffered serious damage as a result of (1) natural disasters, or (2) catastrophic failures from an external cause. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will fully reimburse emergency repair costs (such as materials, labor and equipment) at eligible disaster sites. FHWA also allows for permanent restoration work, to be reimbursed at Montana’s standard federal rate (varies by highway system). The state provides matching funds for ER projects, which originate from the state highway special revenue account. Learn more about funding programs and related projects at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.aspx>.

MDT’s Director Long (pictured third from the right) performs the ribbon-cutting honors on July 13th in Denton, Mont.



Federal Surface Transportation Program Status

The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides approximately \$350 billion for Federal highway programs over a five-year period, starting in 2022 and running through 2026. A portion of this funding is distributed to States based on formulas specified in Federal law. The Act also provides funding, approximately \$150 billion, through a wide range of competitive grant programs. These grant programs give the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) an extraordinary opportunity to direct these new funds to projects that will advance safety, equity, and climate goals. For Montana, these grant programs give MDT, as well as cities, counties and Tribes, the opportunity to pursue funding for projects that have been out of reach. MDT monitors and reviews these opportunities as they are released by USDOT throughout the year, and the department has both submitted and supported discretionary grant applications seeking funds to benefit Montana’s transportation system. As more discretionary grant opportunities are released, MDT will continue to pursue these additional funds to keep Montana moving forward.



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MDT Awards Traffic Safety Grants to Support Vision Zero

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Grants

MDT awarded \$3.4 million in federal grant monies from NHTSA for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023. The grants will address impaired driving, occupant protection, and child passenger safety. The emphasis of this grant program is to improve traffic safety through education, enforcement, and emergency medical services training. Law enforcement agencies are funded for increased patrols to concentrate on seat belt, speeding, and impaired driving laws. Grants for DUI Courts, a Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor, a Traffic Safety Resource training officer, and the 24/7 Program address impaired driving. Traffic safety education programs continue with the Native American Safe On All Roads (SOAR), Buckle Up Montana coalitions, and the Teen Peer to Peer Traffic Safety programs. The NHTSA grant opportunity will open January 1, 2023, and close March 1, 2023, for FFY24 funds. Contact Janet Kenny at 444-7417 or jakenny@mt.gov for more information.

<http://mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/grants/>

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Grant Program

Nearly \$1 million in grant funds is awarded annually through the state funded EMS Grant program. The grants are provided to agencies staffed by mostly volunteers, Medicare-level billing providers for ambulances, emergency vehicles, training, equipment, communication, or patient care. The program is awarded through a competitive grant process that opens May 1, annually. For State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023, about \$1 million in funding will be awarded to EMS providers.

Contact Spencer Harris at 444-0856 or sharris@mt.gov for more information.

http://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/grants_ems.shtml

November 1 Deadline Approaching for BaRSAA Funds

Cities, Towns, and Counties don't miss out on your allocated BaRSAA funds. Submit your request for your funds using Webgrants at <https://funding.mt.gov/index.do>.

The **request must include:**

- The amount of BaRSAA funding sought
- An adopted resolution to request and accept the funding including the source of the local matching funds
- A description of the road or bridge construction, reconstruction, maintenance, or repair project

More information is available on the MDT website: www.mdt.mt.gov/roadbridge/

Need help submitting your request? Call MDT at 444-9131.

Questions on the BaRSAA program can be directed to the Montana League of Cities and Towns or the Montana Association of Counties. Additional information is also available on the MLCT and MACO websites:

<https://mtleague.org/resources/>
<https://mtcounties.org/resources-data/barsaa/>

New Program & Policy Analysis Bureau Chief

Tammy Ross joins MDT as the new Program & Policy Analysis Bureau Chief in the Rail, Transit & Planning Division. She graduated from Montana Tech in Professional and Technical Communications and obtained a Master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Montana (UM). Tammy began her career as an Administrative Assistant; first for the Metallurgical Engineering Department at Montana Tech and later to the Superintendent at the Montana Developmental Center (MDC) in Boulder. While at MDC, she worked on her Master's degree, was promoted into several positions, and eventually became the Acting Superintendent. When this temporary position ended, she moved to Washington state to take a position as an Associate Superintendent at a Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. She then moved into a Regional Administrator position with the Adult Protective Services.



Tammy Ross, MDT Program & Policy Analysis Bureau Chief

In her new role, Tammy is looking forward to learning all about MDT, getting to know her staff, and helping empower them to reach their full potential in their professional lives while working side by side to fulfill MDT's Mission and provide excellent service to Montana's traveling public.

Fun Fact About Tammy: Tammy has traveled extensively across the US, visiting 49 states to-date. She's excited to fulfill her "bucket list" goal in 2023, when she'll visit her 50th state, Alaska.

Contact Tammy at 444-9240 or tross@mt.gov.

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**SAVE THE DATES
OCTOBER 11 & 12**

2022 Annual Transportation Safety Meeting

**Delta Hotels Helena Colonial
2310 Colonial Drive, Helena, MT**

This event brings together federal, state, tribal, and local safety partners to share implementation of Montana's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan emphasis areas, assess progress in reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries, and explore new opportunities to enhance traffic safety awareness.

Emphasis Areas:

- Roadway Departures & Intersection-related Crashes
- Impaired Driving Crashes
- Unrestrained Vehicle Occupants
- Emergency Response -After-Crash Care

The agenda is under development and will be posted at www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp-meetings.shtml.

For additional information, please contact Pam Langve-Davis at 444-7646 or plangvedavis@mt.gov.

New Policy Analysis Section Supervisor

LeRoy Wosoba recently joined the Rail, Transit & Planning Division as the Policy Analysis (System Impact) Section Supervisor. While LeRoy is new to the division, he's been one of MDT's own since 2000, when he graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering from Iowa State University, and landed his first role with the department in Construction in Kalispell. During a rotation in Helena, he applied to transfer into the Traffic and Safety Bureau of the Engineering Division and has worked at Headquarters ever since. Over the years, LeRoy's career involved working in MDT's Engineering Analysis Section, followed by a move to Consultant Design. He most recently held the role of Traffic Project Engineer (started in 2008), before making the move from Engineering to Planning in early August 2022. After a career in Engineering, it was a move he didn't take lightly, but one he (and Planning) are excited to see unfold.



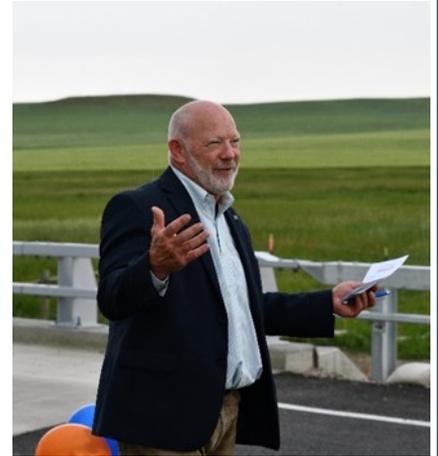
LeRoy Wosoba, MDT Policy Analysis Section Supervisor

Fun Facts About LeRoy: Outside of working for MDT, LeRoy and his wife Toni enjoy spending time with their kids (both high school students). He's very active in Boy Scouts, holding leadership roles at both the local Troop and District levels, and also volunteers with Great Divide Ski Patrol. He says "Most struggle with my last name, but I don't get offended by mispronunciation. The trick is pretend the "O's" are "A's" and you'll nail it."

Contact LeRoy at 444-9233 or lwosoba@mt.gov.

Stronger Together: A Special Message from Director Long

I'm fast-approaching almost two years at the helm of this department and can't help but reflect on recent events and what it means to be a part of Team MDT. I've had the privilege to see firsthand the tremendous impact MDT has in connecting our communities – including the hard, sometimes dangerous work it takes to preserve our state's transportation infrastructure in the face of natural disasters. Last year, the community of Denton tragically lost their bridge at the Wolf Creek crossing to a wildfire. Now, an outsider might be puzzled why the loss of one bridge could be so detrimental to a town. But, at MDT, we understand Montana's communities come in all sizes! Our connections and the strength to come together in times of need make our state resilient. So, Team MDT stepped up to fulfill our Mission and help restore this bridge – this point of access and connection – so Denton could continue to heal and rebuild their community.



Director Long addresses attendees at the ribbon cutting ceremony for Denton's new bridge on July 13, 2022.

Fast forward to June 2022, and the flooding that tore through southern Montana. Team MDT and our contractors joined local efforts to restore access, clean heavy debris left behind, and begin to rebuild what was lost in the catastrophic flooding. We know the hard work is far from over, but Team MDT has "rolled up our sleeves" and will continue to go to work for Montana. Whether it's returning highway access to the one daycare serving families in rural Gardiner, clearing massive boulders, trees, and other debris from the streets of Red Lodge so the town could move forward with its annual Fourth of July celebration, or the reopening of the Beartooth pass, we take great pride in restoring connections. After all, these are also our families, friends, neighbors, and communities.

The last few years have been far from easy for Montana, but I know I wouldn't trade my time leading this incredible group of "B.U.I.L.D.E.R.S." for anything. The phrase "All hands on deck" perfectly describes Team MDT, where our crews are often the first to arrive and the last to leave. It's an honor just to be a part of this hardworking, dedicated, talented (yet humble) group of folks as we serve our communities and the traveling public.

We are stronger together, and together, we'll keep Montana moving forward!

Malcolm "Mack" Long, Director

MDT's Director Appointed Chair of AASHTO Construction Committee

Director Malcolm "Mack" Long was recently named chair of the Committee on Construction, a national committee within the Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Before being confirmed to department head by the Montana State Legislature in January 2021, Director Long spent several decades in construction, building expertise in projects ranging from airports to highways and utilities. As committee chair, he looks forward to continuing to represent the transportation prowess of MDT and guiding discussions at a national level about repairing, rebuilding, and strengthening our nation's infrastructure. Congratulations, Director Long!



Make Sure Your Child is in the Right Seat!

Car seats and boosters provide protection for infants and children in a crash, yet car crashes are a leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 13. According to various reports from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and technicians in the field, car seat, booster seat, and seat belt misuse rates vary from 74% to 90%. That's why it is so important to choose and use the right car seat correctly every time your child is in the car.



CPS technicians demonstrate safe car seat use and installation to parents and caregivers in Helena, Mont.

The Child Passenger Safety (CPS) program is fundamental in minimizing deaths and injuries to children on Montana's roads. National statistics show that child safety seats reduce the risk of fatal injuries by 71% for infants and 54% for toddlers in passenger cars. Booster seat use reduces the risk of serious injury by 45% for children aged 4-8 years when compared with seat belt use alone.

Parents and caregivers can visit a certified CPS technician, in locations throughout the state, to confirm car seats are properly installed. CPS technicians are car seat experts who have taken a national certification course with a curriculum written by NHTSA in collaboration with National CPS Board and Safe Kids Worldwide. They learn proper car seat installation options, vehicle differences, harnessing procedures, and more.

If you are interested in becoming a certified CPS technician, visit <https://cert.safekids.org/become-tech>.

To help keep children safe on our roads, NHTSA is sponsoring National Child Passenger Safety Week from September 18-24, 2022, with Saturday, September 24, 2022, being National Seat Check Saturday. Throughout the state, CPS Technicians will be holding car seat check-up events where parents and caregivers will receive education and hands-on assistance. To find a CPS technician year-round, visit <https://cert.safekids.org/> or www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats#installation-help-inspection.

For more information on the CPS program and occupant safety in Montana, contact Jennifer Wilson at 444-0809 or jwilson@mt.gov.

Teach Your Teen Driver the Importance of Safety

National Teen Driver Safety Week takes place October 16-22, 2022. This event, now in its 15th year, is dedicated to raising awareness of teen driving safety issues.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), motor vehicle crashes are the second leading cause of death for teens in the United States. In Montana, there have been 127 teen fatalities over the last five years. Of those fatalities, 62% were unrestrained. In addition, teens account for over 4,200 crashes each year on average.



Make sure your teen understands the importance of safety before they hit the road!

Parents and guardians play an important role in helping to ensure their teen drivers take smart steps to stay safe on the road. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) gives parents and guardians tips on how to talk about safe driving behaviors with teens, as well as how to address the most dangerous and deadly driving behaviors for teen drivers: alcohol, lack of seat belt use, distracted driving, speeding, and driving with passengers. Visit www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving to learn more.

MDT also partners* with the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). FCCLA is a student organization for young people in Family and Consumer Sciences education through grade 12. There are 65 chapters across Montana. Through this partnership, chapters are given an opportunity to apply for funding to develop peer-to-peer traffic safety campaigns in their schools and communities. The peer-to-peer and community projects target seat belt usage, speeding, distracted driving, drowsy driving, impaired driving or any risky driving behavior impacting teens in their community. Montana FCCLA has provided more traffic safety outreach to rural schools than any other project in the state.

For more information on safe teen driving efforts at MDT, please contact Sheila Cozzie at 444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.

**Read more about MDT's partnership with FCCLA and the recipients of 2021/2022 grant awards in the June 2022 issue of the Newsline: www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/newsletters/newsline/2022/newjun22.pdf*

Using Beacons to Improve Crossing Safety in Montana

Installation of pedestrian hybrid beacons (PHB) and rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFB) are becoming more common across Montana. While PHB and RRFB aren't new to national transportation systems, MDT understands they may be new or unfamiliar to Montana's motorized and nonmotorized travelers. These traffic safety technologies make crossing roadways safer for pedestrians and a quicker process for motorists. They are two of the many possible tools used by MDT to achieve multimodal safety and mobility.

How to Use:

A PHB functions as a traffic light for pedestrians and bicyclists, with the purpose of increasing motorists' awareness of pedestrian crossings at uncontrolled marked crosswalk locations. They are distinct from traffic signals and constant flash warning beacons because they are only activated by pedestrians when needed. View instructions for pedestrians and motorists when using or encountering PHBs in Montana:

www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/pedestrian-hybrid-beacons.aspx

A RRFB is intended to improve visibility at uncontrolled, marked crosswalks. They are placed under the pedestrian crossing sign on both sides of a crosswalk. If a pedestrian wishes to cross, they press a button and the RRFB flashes. As they cross, a motorist can easily see the flashing lights and yield to the pedestrian. RRFBs are being installed more and more around the state – particularly in urban areas. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)*, RRFBs can reduce crashes up to 47% and increase motorist yield rates up to 98% when installed appropriately and correctly.



An example of an RRFB installed and in-use in Helena, Mont.

**<https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/>*

Montana Traffic Safety Dates

⇒ **September 18-24, 2022**

Child Passenger Safety Week (National Seat Check Saturday is September 24, 2022)

⇒ **September 19-25, 2022**

Rail Safety Week (Operation Lifesaver)

⇒ **October 1-31, 2022**

National Pedestrian Safety Month (National Walk & Roll to School Day is October 12, 2022: <https://walkbiketoschool.org>)

⇒ **October 11-12, 2022 (See p. 3 for more info)**

Annual Transportation Safety Meeting (CHSP)

⇒ **October 16-22, 2022**

National Teen Driver Safety Week

⇒ **October 31, 2022**

Halloween Holiday—Drive Sober, Watch for Pedestrians!

⇒ **November 8-14, 2022**

Crash Responder Safety Week (CRSW)

⇒ **November 23-27, 2022**

Thanksgiving & Holiday Travel—Buckle Up & Drive Sober

⇒ **December 17, 2022—January 2, 2023***

Winter-Holiday Drive Sober Enforcement

Note: A total 421 hours were worked during the 2021 Holiday/Winter Mobilization by 14 participating Agencies. A total of 819 citations and warnings were issued during this mobilization. For more information, contact Spencer Harris at or 444-0856 or sharris@mt.gov.

*Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP) Mobilization Periods

Safety is Always in Session

It's that time of year! Montana's schools are back in session for 2022-2023, which means many children walking, bicycling, or riding a school bus to and from their destination. Safety is always in session, so let's ring in the school year by refreshing our knowledge about traffic safety and teaching our kids the same.

MDT would like to remind everyone to be attentive, share the road, slow down, and obey all traffic laws, as school days bring school buses and increased traffic during school start and end times. Together, we can keep our students safe!

Motorists should:

- Always avoid distractions while driving.
- Watch for children walking or bicycling when backing out of driveways and garages, and when exiting alleyways (particularly in the morning and afternoon and as daylight hours decrease).
- Watch for children in school zones and be aware of nearby school routes.
- Slow down and watch for children at corners and bus stops.
- Be aware of school bus laws: yellow flashing lights indicate children are preparing to load or unload and drivers should be prepared to stop. Red flashing lights indicate children are loading or unloading and motorists MUST stop at least 30 feet from the school bus and wait until red lights are no longer flashing.

It is also important for **bicyclists and pedestrians** of all ages to:

- Pay attention and listen to their surroundings.
- Avoid cell phone use while walking and biking.
- Make eye contact with drivers before crossing, and cross only at crosswalks and intersections.

Are you a parent or guardian of a child? There's no better time to teach them about pedestrian and bicycle safety! MDT has a wealth of safety and educational resources available online at www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/ or by contacting MDT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator at 444-9273 or MDTBikePed@mt.gov.

October is National Pedestrian Safety Month

In 2020, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) designated October as National Pedestrian Safety Month, making pedestrian safety the focus of the month as part of its continuing efforts to improve safety for vulnerable road users. October 2022 is the third year for this important safety period and is a great opportunity for Montanans to remember that at some point in our day, "we are all pedestrians." Watch for more messaging promoting National Pedestrian Safety Month this October on MDT's website (www.mdt.mt.gov) and social channels. You can also find safety tips and resources for non-motorized travel and transportation year-round online: www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/



Whether it's a fitness routine, mode of travel to a destination or simply picking up the mail, we are all pedestrians at some point during our days!

Safe Driving Around School Buses

➔ You should allow a *minimum* of 30 feet between your vehicle and a school bus making a passenger stop. But what might 30 feet look like?

2 Car Lengths

2.5 Snow Plows

3 Bison Lengths

22.5 Road Cones

Approved Research Projects for FFY 2023

Each spring, MDT's Research Program seeks new research ideas by reaching out to its employees and interested researchers. The topics that are submitted cover all areas associated with transportation facilities and include bike/pedestrian safety, bridge decks, roadway surfacing, and environmental aspects. MDT's Research Review Committee reviews the project ideas to determine those that are of value and benefit to MDT and the people we serve. Following is a summary of the four research projects that have been approved for funding in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023.

Significant Factors of Bridge Deterioration (23-001) – The objectives of the research are to: (1) identify significant factors affecting bridge deterioration in Montana; (2) determine refinements, based on the identified significant factors, to the recently established deterioration curves from the Development of Deterioration Curves for Bridge Elements in Montana research project; and (3) establish effective data collection, processing, and future research opportunities for improving the accuracy and consistency of Montana's ability to forecast bridge deterioration. For more information: <https://rip.trb.org/view/1983704>

Implementation of Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure and Its Economic Benefits in Small Urban and Rural Communities (23-002) – This research will include challenges and best practices in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure implementation; an examination of current EV charging infrastructure in Montana (what level of charger they are, where they are sited, and what amenities are nearby, and distance to MT's proposed EV corridors); and the economic impacts of providing EV charging infrastructure in small urban and rural communities. The proposed research project will not duplicate efforts of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) EV Infrastructure Prioritization Study, or the EV planning process recently completed by DEQ/MDT. For more information: <https://rip.trb.org/view/1983705>

Use of Fiber-Reinforced Polymer Composites for Bridge Repairs in Montana (23-006) - The proposed research will (1) conduct an updated and thorough literature review to investigate the feasibility of using FRPs in various bridge applications in Montana, (2) identify the most promising applications of this technology for use in the state, (3) fill any minor research gaps with laboratory testing that may affect/limit the successful application in Montana's unique climate, (4) assist in implementing the application(s) of this material in a bridge demonstration project in the state, and (5) monitor the performance of this bridge after the demonstration project. For more information: <https://rip.trb.org/view/1983706>

Drone-enabled Subgrade and Embankment Assessment (23-017) - Drone-enabled platforms and sensors have sufficiently advanced that they can now provide useful information on geotechnical issues such as unstable soils in pavement subgrades and within embankment fills. This research would deploy multiple sensors to assess dispersive soils and frozen ground at regional and corridor scales for Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) managed roadways. This research project is designed to help MDT improve the prediction of adverse subgrade impacts from ground conditions, enabling proactive mitigation efforts to occur before more disruptive rehabilitation and reconstruction projects are required. For more information: <https://rip.trb.org/view/1983707>

In addition to the above four newly approved projects, MDT is actively managing several other research projects. For more information on other projects, please visit the Research Program website: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/>

NEW Look & URL Unveiled for the Yellowstone Airport (WYS) Website

MDT has refreshed the design and layout of the Yellowstone Airport website. The site also has a **NEW** URL: <https://yellowstoneairport.mdt.mt.gov>

The site's new interface incorporates a modern, responsive design for ease of use on mobile devices. It also provides live flight data for the airport (WYS) on the home page and up-to-date flight schedules on the Flights page.

Check out the updates and new look using the URL above, or by using your mobile device to **scan the QR code to the right**.



Summer Intern Program

MDT recently celebrated the success of another summer internship program. Interns that participated in 2022 were able to learn firsthand about their chosen career area of the department, ranging from research to engineering. This program starts in May and runs through mid-August, and typically expects a 40-hour work week, Monday-Friday. Internships are paid and available in a number of areas/divisions at MDT. Specific locations and roles vary annually, depending on department needs and upcoming projects. To be eligible to participate, students must:



MDT interns enjoy spectacular "office views" when working in the field!

- be enrolled in a college, university, or technical school; or be within 6 months of graduation date;
- have completed at least 60 academic credits (or 30 credits if enrolled in technical school); and
- be in good academic standing.

WATCH: Andy's Journey From Intern to Permanent Member of Team MDT

Interns who have successfully completed the program are highly encouraged to apply for permanent positions to continue their work with the department. Hear from one of MDT's own, Andy Merkel, in his testimonial about the internship program and why he chose to become a permanent member of Team MDT. **Scan the QR code to the right with your mobile device to watch now!**



Interested in being an intern at MDT? Check out MDT's Current Openings (www.mdt.mt.gov/jobs/current-openings.aspx) for future postings and more information, or contact MDT's Recruiter, Angela Murolo at amurolo@mt.gov. At MDT, you'll find more than just a job. You'll find a career!

MDT's NEW Public Speed Study Map

Have you ever wondered what goes into changing the speed limit outside of the limit dictated by Montana law on a particular stretch of roadway? Did you know that MDT doesn't actually have the authority to change the speed limit? How are speed limits set, anyway? If these questions sound intriguing, you'll be interested to know that MDT has a public-facing website explaining speed limits, where you'll find answers to these questions, process information and more: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/speed-limits.aspx>

Very recently, MDT launched a companion resource to the website in the form of an interactive map. This map allows the public and local authorities to quickly identify which segments are under consideration for a speed limit change, including their current status in the process as well as important dates. Check it out: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/8995b56fcac04914a171c3f63b85b85f/>

A Costly Piece of Work: The Prickly Pear Canyon (Part 1)

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

Roads have been critical to Montana since the gold rush days of the 1860s. Except for the Mullan Road, most were built by private entrepreneurs with licenses from the territorial legislature to charge tolls for their use. The territorial toll road system functioned from 1865 to 1872. For a few years afterward, a few counties chartered toll roads before the practice was abandoned by 1890. Toll roads provided the basis for today's highway system in Montana.

One of the most treacherous stretches of the road between Fort Benton on the upper Missouri River and the mining camps in southwestern Montana was the Prickly Pear Canyon. Now called Wolf Creek Canyon, the roads through the defile challenged roadbuilders for nearly a century. In 1860, John Mullan established a wagon road that avoided the southern end of the canyon by building to the west of it. The route descended Lyon Creek into the canyon and then proceeded north to today's Wolf Creek where it angled to the northeast. The road, though, was not suited for the heavy freight traffic that came after the discovery of gold on Last Chance Gulch in July 1864. On the last day of January 1865, the first Montana territorial legislature granted a license to ranchers Malcolm Clark and Ed Lewis to construct a 6-mile road between the head of the canyon at Clark's ranch to the Mullan Road on Lyons Creek. The Little Prickly Pear Wagon Road Company maintained toll gates at Clark's ranch on today's Sieben Flats and at Lyons Creek.

The first road had no bridges and nearly thirty fords (crossings) of the creek. Despite that, the road was relatively easy to navigate, except during high water events. It quickly became a heavily used freight and stage route between Fort Benton and Helena as part of the famed Benton Road. In February 1866, Clark and Lewis sold their toll road license to James King and Warren Gillette of Helena. Both men had been involved in the freighting business in the territory and were no strangers to the road. According to local lore, the men spent \$40,000 improving the road in 1866. The upgraded road included two miles of log crib retaining walls and nine bridges, thereby avoiding all the fords.

In July 1866, the *Helena Tri-Weekly Republican* reported that "thanks to the energy of Messrs. King and Gillette ..., a wagon road had been built through a place, which it was supposed by many would forever remain impassable." With King and Gillette's improvements to the route, traffic through the canyon on Benton Road substantially increased. One newspaper reported that at least 2,500 wagon teams, 20,000 oxen, and 3,000 men would shortly use the road, making King and Gillette's improvements to it a "profitable investment." Indeed, the toll road operators were able to recoup their \$40,000 investment within two years.

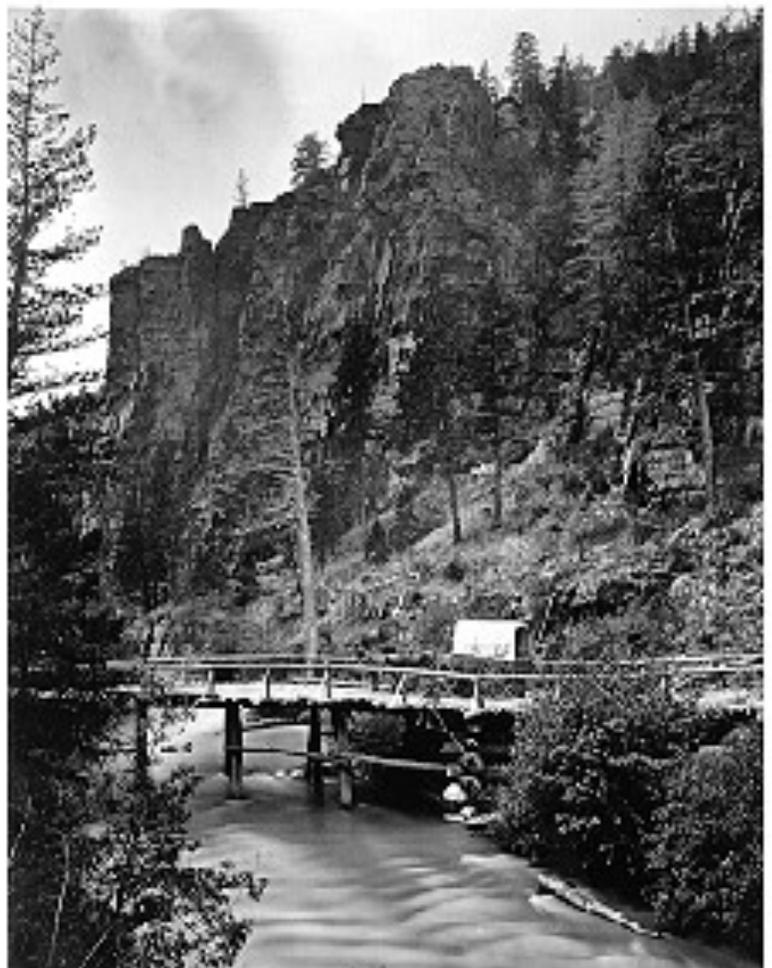
The road segment through the canyon was often described in diaries, journals, and newspaper accounts of the time. James Knox Polk Miller described the road in 1867 "as quite a considerable piece of work Its entire length was made by excavations, embankments, wedging, and grading." In 1866, Andrew Fisk wrote, "Here the road leads right into a canyon – where the bluffs are so high in some places that you can hardly see the sky. Some of the most beautiful and romantic scenery I ever saw. The road was splendid."

In 1872, the territorial legislature canceled all the toll road charters in the territory because of high tolls and poorly maintained roads. Consequently, the Benton Road segment through the Prickly Pear Canyon came under the jurisdiction of Lewis and Clark County, which contracted with King and Gillette to keep operating it as a toll road. In 1875, however, the county canceled the contract with the men. The road had fallen

into disrepair and the partners had become bitter enemies. In 1876, the county commissioners hired a local rancher to realign the road, construct new grades, and bypass as many of the bridges as possible. The road was difficult and expensive for the county to maintain and was often blocked by snow in the winter and flooding in the spring. The public often made suggestions about a new and better route that avoided the canyon. It involved an alternate route to the east of the canyon. Ironically, the same debate about that same route would resurface eighty years later when planning began for Interstate 15.

In 1887, the Montana Central Railroad built its line from Great Falls to Helena through the Prickly Pear canyon. The railroad mostly obliterated the wagon road, forcing Lewis and Clark County to construct a new county road through the canyon to replace the old road. The new road closely paralleled the railroad and was able to incorporate some remaining short sections of the old Benton Road into it. That was the road travelers utilized at the dawn of the automobile age.

To be continued... Stay tuned for Part 2 in the next issue of the Newsline!



Wolf Creek Canyon (1867) at the southern end, as captured by E.H. Train, a photographer from Helena, Mont. in the 1860s.

Courtesy of the Montana Historical Society (MHS)

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MDT Wants Your Comments on New Projects

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, please visit www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/proposed_proj.pdf, www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.shtml, or call (800) 714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT Project Analysis Manager, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or email them to mdtstip@mt.gov.

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This document printed at state expense. Information on the cost of publication may be obtained by contacting the Department of Administration.

Newsline is a quarterly publication of the Rail, Transit, and Planning Division, Montana Department of Transportation

MDT's mission is to plan, build, operate, and maintain a safe and resilient transportation infrastructure to move Montana forward.

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