

NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

"...to protect the natural resources that make the North Fork an unparalleled environment for wildlife and people."

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\$17 Million Short

Seventeen million dollars is approximately what is needed to complete the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Premier Gordon Campbell of British Columbia and Governor Brian Schweitzer of Montana on Friday, February 18, 2010, to protect the Flathead of British Columbia and the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley. This historic agreement involves no mining (except very small gravel operations) or oil/gas developments on both sides of the international border. The money would be used to compensate Cline Mining (coal) and Max Resources (gold) for lost revenues in their ventures in the Flathead of British Columbia. Unfortunately, the exact amount of compensation has not yet been determined. This lack of precise numbers makes it difficult to start the process of getting congressional approval for the necessary funds.

One of the facilitating reasons for the MOU was the determination by last year's UNESCO scientific mission that the proposed resource extraction activities in the Flathead of BC would harm Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, a UN-designated World Heritage Site.

British Columbia is losing millions of dollars in potential royalties by foregoing resource development in their section of the trans-boundary Flathead. Premier Gordon Campbell deserves kudos for that.

On the U.S. side of the border, Montana Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester have to date gotten voluntary release of oil and gas leases in the North Fork from Chevron and ConocoPhillips and their partners. Out of 200,000 leased acres, only 20,000 have not been released as of this writing. Baucus and Tester have also introduced a bill to allow no new leases in the North Fork of the Flathead.

It is unlikely that British Columbia would withdraw from the MOU if all the requirements are not complete by the July deadline. However, all of the leases need to be retired reasonably soon and the money for compensation appropriated or the agreement may ultimately go down the tubes.

Recently, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. President Barak Obama discussed the MOU. A four-sided discussion between Montana, British Columbia, Ottawa and Washington may result in more permanent protection for the Flathead drainage, beyond the provisions of the MOU – possibly a formal treaty between the U.S. and Canada.

Visit www.gravel.org for the latest information.

North Fork Road 486 Corridor Study Hearing July 27 at 6:30 pm at Discovery Square in Columbia Falls

PB Americas is contracted for \$125,000 by the Montana Department of Transportation to do a corridor study of the North Fork Road from Blankenship to Camas Road. The final hearing is 6:30 pm at Glacier Discovery Square in Columbia Falls on Tuesday, July 27.

Two letters are enclosed in this newsletter – the submission from the NFPA and some excellent commentary by Steve Gniadek – to give an idea of the issues involved. Another consideration not explicitly brought out in the letters is Section 4F of the Transportation Act of 1966 which states that “... protection of parkland be given paramount importance...” It is important that hearing attendees mention that Section 4F of the Transportation Act should be considered in the study – in essence, that paving will hurt Glacier Park due to greatly increased use and development.

Another way to make your feelings known is to submit comments via email or regular paper mail. The web site is at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/, the email address is mdtnffteam@mt.gov or send “snail mail” to Pam Murray, PB Americas, 488 East Winchester St #400, Murray, UT 84107. The study is expected to be completed in August of 2010. So, if you plan to do something, do it soon.

NFPA Comments to Members of the North Fork Road 486 Corridor Study

North Fork Preservation Association, 80 Beaver Drive, Polebridge, MT 59928

6 May 2010

To the Members of the North Fork Road 486 Corridor Study and Lani Eggertsen-Goff:

The North Fork Road north of Canyon Creek to Camas could benefit from more frequent maintenance. Dust coating would be welcome as well. Other than keeping it well maintained, leave it pretty much alone – no pavement please.

The dust on the North Fork is of heavy particles (PM 10 and larger) that settle relatively quickly compared to the super-fine particles (PM 2.5) from wood stoves and other sources that travel great distances causing regional haze. The smaller particles are particularly harmful to people not the larger ones. Few people are stupid enough to stand in the road on summer days when traffic and dust are the heaviest. Most are in cars with the windows closed and the air conditioning on.

For a multitude of reasons it should not be paved. Increasing numbers of people will start using the North Fork Road if paved to Camas Junction and spill further north at least as far as Polebridge which won't help Columbia Falls much if at all, but it will start the decline of wildlife as the number of cars on the road continue to fragment habitat. If you have not read Shannon Donahue's report on the effects of paving the North Fork Road which I sent earlier here is the link:

http://www.gravel.org/articles/NF_Road_Report-Donahue.pdf. Speeding and accidents are other obvious problems which will happen with a paved North Fork Road.

Also note that there is a jeopardy statement in place by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the North Fork Road for Endangered Species. This will need to be updated and that alone may take several years along with the Environmental Impact Statement which takes millions of dollars in addition to more time. It seems inappropriate to incur these additional costs to fund a road to nowhere for the comfort of a hundred or so year-round residents when many people living on the 700 miles of gravel roads in Flathead County are begging for pavement.

I cannot help but comment that the \$125,000 for this study would pay for a lot of maintenance on the North Fork Road

Sincerely,

John Frederick, President

Comments from Steve Gniadek to the North Fork Road 486 Corridor Study Team

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the North Fork Road Corridor Study. I attended the public meeting at the Columbia Falls council chambers on April 20, and made a few comments at that time, but would like to offer additional comments here.

I am still uncertain why this study is needed and if this is the best use of limited state funding. The salient issues have been identified over the past 30+ years. The most significant changes have been improvements to the road, such as the work at Fool Hen Hill. Surely there are county roads with higher traffic volumes in greater need of improvements.

While you are required to collect and weigh public comments, this should not be a "vote" on whether or not to pave Secondary 486, also known as the North Fork Flathead Road (NFFR) or Forest Highway 61, from the Blankenship Road to the Camas Road. Opinions expressed need to be weighed against the facts. For example, claims that paving the road is needed to provide emergency services to the people living north of the Camas Road have no merit; paving and even increasing the speed limit on the segment under review will have no significant effect on travel time to areas near the Canadian border. Furthermore, medical emergencies are routinely addressed not with ground-based ambulance but with the Alert medical helicopter; this is true for traffic accidents on the major (paved) highways in the county, such as US 2 in Hungry Horse or US 93 within a few miles of a hospital. It is unlikely an ambulance dependent on road access would be dispatched to the North Fork, regardless of road conditions. Please don't allow spurious arguments to inform decisions about this project.

By now, you should have gathered some basic facts about traffic volume and how it varies by season and road segment (e.g. how many vehicles go only as far as Glacier Rim or Big Creek), and traffic accident rates and locations. This should be the foundation for further analysis. Then consider how road conditions contribute to accident rate and location. Also consider how improved road conditions may lead to increased speeds that contribute to a higher accident rate.

A significant concern regarding any improvements will be impacts to wildlife. Increased traffic volume will displace some wildlife and fragment habitat effectiveness for many species, including for grizzly

bears. This has been demonstrated by research in the South Fork of the Flathead, in the Highway 2 corridor, and elsewhere in North America. Literature citations are available on request. Thresholds for displacement are graduated; any increase will have concomitant impacts. Even if the grizzly bear is removed from the list of federally threatened species, efforts to minimize or reduce impacts will be required by state and federal agencies. Concerns about NFFR improvements expressed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service 25 years ago, regarding grizzly bears, are still pertinent today. Traffic volume has documented impacts on other species of wildlife, such as elk and small mammals. Increased traffic volume and speed as a result of road improvements can result in increased mortality to wildlife, and increased risk to humans, as a result of collision. This must be considered in any analysis of human safety.

The road dust issue must be placed in the context of all other concerns. Investigate all solutions including reduced speed (highly effective in my experience), bentonite, or other treatments. Compare road dust concerns on this road segment to concerns on other county roads; most other gravel roads in the county receive higher traffic volumes and have more residents living along and using those roads. The perceived effects of road dust must also be considered in the context of other health hazards. Is road dust along this section of road a significant hazard to anyone using the road?

In considering the option of paving, evaluate not only the initial cost of paving, but the cost of annual maintenance of paved segments. The worst section of the road to Polebridge is the section of paved road in the Home Ranch Bottoms, where deep potholes can break axles. This section may have been paved to a lesser standard than contemplated for the section under review, but it illustrates that without routine maintenance paved roads can deteriorate into hazardous conditions.

Finally, consider the aesthetic issue, for lack of a better term. I grew up along a gravel road that has long since been paved. Gravel roads are becoming relics of the past. Gravel roads into the more remote areas of the county are what help make those areas unique. The condition of the NFFR contributes to the unique character of the North Fork. People who live there, and especially people who have recently moved there from elsewhere, who want the road paved lack appreciation for what makes the area unique. If they are so unhappy with life in the North Fork, maybe they should move to an area with paved roads and local WalMarts, and leave the North Fork to people who appreciate it for what it is. MDOT builds and maintains roads, so is unlikely to care about aesthetic qualities. But please don't trash this area in the name of "progress".

Steve Gniadek, Certified Wildlife Biologist

A Gentle Reminder: Time to Pay Your Dues!

If you have not yet paid your NFPA membership dues for 2010, it's time!

Regular membership dues are \$20/year; \$25/year for the whole family.

"Living lightly" (students and such like) dues are only \$10/year.

Border Patrol agents on North Fork to increase from four to 50-plus

By Richard Wackrow

(Note: Due to space constraints, this is a slightly abbreviated version of the original article. See the NFPA website at www.gravel.org for the full-length version.)

North Forkers will experience an ever-increasing number of U.S. Border Patrol vehicles and agents in this and coming years, as the agency implements Operation Stone Garden, a federal program mandating an increase in the patrolling of both U.S. borders with the involvement of local law enforcement agencies.

David Jet Abegglen, patrol agent in charge at the Whitefish Border Patrol office, says that now there are approximately 25 agents in his charge, and that current plans are to increase the number to 50. There were four agents working the North Fork on Sept. 11, 2001.

The 36.2 miles of Canadian border from the Continental Divide to the Lincoln County line are patrolled out of the Whitefish office. There is no official border crossing on the North Fork Road, the only road in this jurisdiction leading to the Canadian border.

According to a story in the Jan. 14 Hungry Horse News, agents are patrolling our section of the border in motor vehicles, on foot, and on horseback, snowmobiles, ATVs and watercraft.

“There is no maximum number of agents that may be assigned to any one station,” Abegglen told us in an e-mail. “The current threat analysis for the Whitefish Station calls for 50 agents to mitigate current threats. Threat analysis is always ongoing. As the threat evolves, our projection for manpower and other resources will continue to change,” he wrote.

Currently, the Flathead County Sheriff’s department is receiving a six-figure-per-year grant from the federal government to ride along with Border Patrol agents. In earlier meetings with Abegglen and Patrol Lieutenant Brad Stahlberg of the Flathead County Sheriff’s Office, we learned that deputies would be “running radar” and performing other duties on the North Fork. In addition, the Border Patrol has delegated authority from the Drug Enforcement Administration to look for illegal drugs.

“The 2010 Operation Stone Garden order was recently submitted to Border Patrol Headquarters in Washington D.C.,” Abegglen wrote. “In this most recent request, I asked for more funding and solicited for additional participating agencies. This will be the largest effort for Flathead County since the inception of Operation Stone Garden,” Abegglen told us in an e-mail. “I expect Operation Stone Garden will be funded at a record level in the Flathead and will continue through at least 12/31/2012,” Abegglen wrote.

According to the Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia, the number of agents on the Canadian border was 340 in 2001, and was to increase to 1,845 by the end of 2009, numbers Abegglen confirmed. Currently, he told us, there are more than 20,000 Border Patrol agents nationwide.

“Congress has mandated the Border Patrol to reach 2,212 agents on the Northern Border by the end of Fiscal Year 2010,” Abegglen stated in his e-mail. “With this mandate and current pending personnel changes, the number of agents at the Whitefish Station will change several times this summer. I believe that the general trend will be that we will continue to increase in numbers.”

NFPA Sends Money to NFLA

The North Fork Preservation Association sent \$300 to the Landowners' Association for its Weed Committee, which has a large monetary grant, but not enough to cover everything they need. NFPA challenged NFLA to match their donation. The First Weed Roundup is at Sondreson Hall on Monday, July 26, starting at 9:30 am. Food for lunch paid for by NFPA.

North Fork Preservation Association Summer Events — 2010

Sunday, July 25, 11:00 a.m. Work on Thompson-Seton. Thompson-Seton Trail up Inuya Creek to top, down Seemo Pass to Ninko Cabin. Questions: Call John at 888-5084 or Frank (evenings) at 752-2909.

Saturday, July 31. North Fork Preservation Association annual meeting at Sondreson Hall. Pot luck at 5:00pm. Business meeting and elections at about 6:30 p.m. 7:30pm program features Chuck Jonkel speaking on "Bears I Have Known" and "Old-Time North Forkers". All are welcome.

Other Activities

These events are sponsored by the North Fork Landowners' Association. See their web site (<http://www.nflandowners.com>) for further details and listings of more activities.

Saturday, July 24, 11:00 a.m. Community Float from Ford to Polebridge. Meet at Ford. Bring watercraft, life jacket, water, lunch, sun block. Easy Class I and II float.

Monday, July 26, 9:30 a.m. Sondreson Hall. First annual weed roundup.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

IF YOU HAVEN'T PAID YOUR DUES YET, IT'S TIME!

If you have paid your dues for 2010. ***Thank you!***

I want to help protect the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley at the western edge of Glacier National Park.

_____	New	Name	_____
_____	Renewal	Address	_____

		Phone	_____
		Email	_____

I want to join the NFPA. Here is my membership fee of \$20.00/year _____
family membership of \$25.00/year _____
living lightly membership of \$10.00/year _____

I want to help. Here is my donation of _____ for _____

Please remove me from your mailing list. _____

NFPA is a 501(c)(3) organization. Your contribution is tax deductible.

Mail check or cash to: North Fork Preservation Association
c/o Ellen Horowitz
880 Blackmer Lane
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
(406) 752-2909

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Officers are elected for a one-year term; board members for two. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact a board member.

Don't forget to keep an eye on our web site! – www.gravel.org

North Fork Preservation Association

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