

Summary of North Fork Road Committee Meeting of March 10, 2009

The North Fork Landowners' Association's North Fork Road Committee met on March 10. In attendance were members Margaret Heaphy, Ed Heger, Steve Berg and Steve Weber, and invited guest Larry Wilson.

Larry briefed the committee on PILT and RAC. PILT, payment in lieu of taxes, is a federal funding program under the Secure Rural Schools Act. The funding was scheduled to terminate this year, but has been extended by Congress for four more years. RAC, the Resource Advisory Committee, comprises 15 members representing schools, timber, environmentalists, and the public at large. Larry is a public-at-large member of this group.

The RAC makes a recommendation to the county on how to spend PILT money. Approved projects receive matching federal funds. 2009 applications for PILT funds are currently being reviewed. The Flathead County Road & Bridge Department had requested \$175,000 to gravel the road from Camas Creek Road to Polebridge. \$360,000 is available to our RAC, half of which must be spent on roads or trails on U.S. Forest Service land. Larry reported that in 2008 \$60,000 was spent on Vance Hill, with additional funds spent on other North Fork projects.

Steve Weber reported on his meeting with Earl Applecamp, the head forest engineer for the Flathead National Forest and the former U.S. Forest Service road engineer for Montana, Idaho and the Dakotas.

Applecamp reviewed some of the history of our road from his perspective, and confirmed that the USFS paved the Home Ranch section south of Polebridge to eliminate a chronic problem with logging truck damage to the road in this low area. He reviewed engineering guidelines for rural road construction based on vehicles per day, approximations being: dirt surface for fewer than 50 VPD; gravel surface for 50-100 VPD; gravel with dust abatement for 100-200 VPD; pavement for more than 200 VPD, unless vehicle wear and tear was a lower consideration, which would adjust the threshold for paving up to 400 VPD.

He explained that the mandatory USFS royalty fee for use of resources (gravel) could be waived because of an existing exchange-of-resources agreement with the county. He stated that for purposes of maintenance and durability the most advantageous construction would be pavement, followed by good gravel base with crown and oil chip seal overlay, followed by good gravel base/crown with magnesium chloride, and the least-desirable improvement, good gravel without road-base improvement.

The chip seal over gravel would not hold up to logging truck traffic. He volunteered that a way to reduce maintenance problems on a gravel North Fork Road would be to re-engineer the layout to a road with more grade (incline and decline), avoiding flat areas that allow water to stand, crowning to improve drainage, and more turns and narrowing to reduce speed. The turns and narrowing would also have disadvantages including increased length of road, increased travel time, increased hazard under winter conditions. The cost of such a reconstruction of our road would exceed the cost of paving the road.

Margaret will provide Pat Cole with a short description of committee activity for inclusion in the spring North Fork Landowners' Association newsletter. It was agreed that dust abatement research material would be made available to the public via a link on the NFLA Web site. The committee will ask Betsy to prepare and post a summary of her National Environmental Policy Act research when she returns to Montana.

The North Fork Road Committee has scheduled or is in the process of scheduling meetings about North Fork Road issues with Chas Cartwright, superintendent of Glacier National Park; Jimmy DeHerrera, district ranger for the Glacier View Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest; Earl Applecamp of the Flathead National Forest's engineering and administrative staff office; Ben Conard, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Jim Lynch, director of the Montana Department of Transportation.

Lynch has had informal discussions with Steve Weber and has expressed interest in assisting our committee in our research. Also, he has suggested some possible DOT resources available for the improvement of the North Fork Road.

The committee reviewed its goal researching road-improvement issues and the preparation of a report to the NFLA board.

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