

Meeting with Flathead County Public Works Director Dave Prunty and Operations Manager Guy Foy

May 11, 2009, in Kalispell

1. What is the status of 2009 summer work?

The county has received \$90,000.00 from the RAC, Resource Advisory Committee, out of a total request of \$175,000.00 to put a lift of gravel on a portion of the North Fork Road. The project will start at the Camas road junction and go north for approximately 10 miles up to the Polebridge road junction. If total funding is not received the county will go as far as the money allows. The county has two years to complete the project. The county will get gravel from the Forest Service's Demer's gravel pit. The county plans to let a gravel crushing contract within the next month or two. The contractor will move in sometime this summer and crush gravel. That should take one month to 6 weeks. The gravel can sit until the county is ready to apply it to the road. The county plans to apply the gravel to the road mid September thru mid October depending on completion of other valley work. The project will include putting a layer of gravel down, wetting and rolling to arrive at an average 6 inch lift of new gravel on the road at a width of 22 to 24 feet. All applying will be done by county equipment. The cost to haul and place the material will be cost shared 50/50 between county funding and RAC funding. Initially the county will work on drainage features and ditches to prepare the road. This includes cutting the banks where needed, shaping the ditches and maintaining culverts. Without RAC money the county would not do this project.

2. What are the plans for the future work on the North Fork Road?

Currently the county engineers are developing a "County Wide Roadway Management Plan" that will prioritize county roads for treatments. The county is looking at both the gravel and paved roads. This will be the work plan for the road maintenance budget.

Over the past year, the county has rated the condition of almost all of their 1100 miles of roads. There are 700 miles of gravel roads and 400 miles of paved roads. This is called the Pazer road evaluation. The North Fork Road was rated a 2 out of a 5, 5 being an excellent road and 1 being a very poor road. The engineers are taking the Pazer score given to a road and looking at different criteria to come out with a new score to prioritize road treatments. The matrix includes such things as number of cars per day, connectivity, bus route, residential density, maintenance cost, safety etc. The average daily traffic counts is a huge factor in this process. Some valley paved roads have as many as 2 to 3,000 vehicles a day and high traffic count gravel roads are above 400 vehicles per day. This process will help them identify the roads that need repair and the associated costs. This new management plan should be out by the fall. Once the plan is completed, the commissioners need to approve it. The plan is set up for two year increments and will be revised at the beginning of each 2 year period. The county will continue to update the Pazer ratings annually because the status of roads can change annually. Also it will give a more accurate assessment of roads that initially were lumped as one road like the North Fork road. A better evaluation will be when all three segments of the road, (from pavement to Camas, from Camas to Polebridge and from Polebridge to the border) have their own Pazer rating. The county has 22 road counters and continues to try to get counts on heavily traveled roads. One

single road may take several counters to get accurate rates over the different sections of the entire road.

3. What are your reasons for considering narrowing the lower section of road from the pavement to Camas?

Narrowing the road would reduce maintenance costs and hopefully improve road conditions. The county spends an increased amount of time blading and snow plowing the entire 44 foot wide lower section of road. It takes four to six passes to blade and plow. The county's standard road width is twelve foot lanes with two foot shoulders for a total of 28 feet. The county believes there is material on the 44 foot road that can be brought onto a narrower road for better maintenance. This would not necessarily reduce dust. Increased speed reduces the life of the gravel and increases dust. With fines the road base lasts longer. The entire North Fork Road needs a six inch gravel lift. If the county feels it is valid, they will take the proposal of narrowing the road to the commissioners.

4. Reviewed the county road budget.

For the past 8 years the county has received on the average 1.3 million dollars annually in PILT (Payment in lieu of taxes) money. The two years prior to that it was approximately \$800,000.00 annually. The commissioners can do whatever they want with the money but they have always said the road department will get \$500,000.00 annually. The road department gets the largest cut out of the PILT money. The commissioners decide where the rest should go.

A second source of funding is the Secure Rural Schools Act, (SRSA). The county has been receiving close to \$900,000.00 for the past few years. There was an additional \$400,000.00 that got attached to the SRSA for this year and was authorized for 4 more years. SRSA is a portion of the road department's total budget.

The county gets 50% of it's funds from landowners taxes. The other 50% is made up of PILT, Secure Rural School Funds, vehicle taxes, gas taxes etc.

The additional \$400,000.00 of Secure Rural Schools Act money went to the road department this year. There is an additional \$800,000.00 of PILT money this year but the county commissioners have not made a decision yet on how it will be spent. The county will know in June how that additional money will be allocated. If PILT and SRSA go away the road department will lost a significant amount of their budget.

5. Additional comments.

The Dust deputy came back on patrol on May 4th. He spent a considerable amount of his time last year on the North Fork Road. The hiring of the deputy is part of the overall dust mitigation plan agreed upon between Montana Department of Environmental Quality, DEQ, and the county. DEQ wanted the county to commit \$10,000.00 annually to dust palliative treatments. This year the county will spend \$60 to \$70,000.00 on dust abatement. At this time there are no plans to put any dust abatement treatments on the North Fork Road.

The bridge department is going to widen the Teepee Creek bridge this summer. Plans are to make the road straighter and put in a two lane bridge. The bridge department, plans to start work on straightening the road in June and hopes to have the new bridge in by the end of August. The old bridge will be functional until the new one is completed. (Information confirmed via phone with Greg Iverson, County Bridge Foreman.) The bridge department plans to put in a two land bridge over Trail Creek next summer.