

Summary of Meeting with Chas Cartwright, Superintendent of Glacier National Park on April 6, 2009

In attendance were: North Fork Road Committee members Margaret Heaphy, Steve Berg, Ed Heger and Betsy Holycross.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Park's position on, or view of, various North Fork road issues. It was a very fruitful meeting; Superintendent Cartwright was generous with his time and candid about Park policy and preferences.

1. Air and Water Quality Monitoring

Cartwright pointed out that the Park is a Class 1 airshed and, therefore air quality is a matter of considerable concern to the Park. (A Class 1 airshed requires the highest level of protection under the federal Clean Air Act passed in 1963 [PL 91-604] as amended in 1977 [PL 95-9] and reaffirmed in 1990 amendments. The intent of the Clean Air Act Class 1 areas is to "preserve, protect, and enhance the air quality in national parks, national wilderness areas, national monuments, national seashores, and other areas of special national or regional natural, recreational, scenic, or historic value.") Dust from the North Fork road (PM 10, particulate matter of less than 10 microns) is not considered to be serious issue impacting air quality in the Park. Vehicle emissions, power plants, wood stoves, and industrial sources (PM-2.5) are of the greatest concern. The Park has successfully used "Road Oyl" on the road to the West Glacier wastewater treatment plant in order to reduce dust problems.

The Park's view is similar with respect to the impact of road dust on water quality. Ongoing water-quality monitoring (not specifically related to the North Fork Road dust issue) occurs in several places along the Flathead's North, Middle and South Forks, and the conclusion is that there are no discernible impacts to water quality from road dust. The Park continues to focus limited dollars on funding research that addresses significant management issues. Road dust along the outside North Fork Road does not meet that basic threshold of concern, especially given the numerous other priorities. The Park does not anticipate this situation will change since road dust generally dissipates within 50 to 100 meters and there are not many places where the road is that close to the river.

2. Park Perspective on the North Fork Road

First and foremost, Cartwright pointed out that in the Park's General Management Plan and 1992 North Fork Plan, the primary management "driver" is to retain the area's primitive character. According to Cartwright, the local and general public weighed in during both planning processes and reached consensus on the need to preserve and protect the primitive values inherent in the North Fork portion of the Park. Further, this management imperative is part of the Park's overall mission. Cartwright made clear the connection between road improvements, especially paving, and an increase in adverse impacts on the primitive values of the North Fork portion of the Park.

The Park strongly recommends that the outside North Fork Road not be paved, including the nine mile stretch down stream from Camas. Cartwright stated it is obvious and inevitable that significant road improvement would significantly increase traffic, development, and demand for power, and significantly degrade the primitive values of the North Fork portion of the Park. The goal of managing the North Fork portion of the Park to safeguard its primitive values does not, however, preclude dust mitigation. See below.

3. Park Perspective on Possible Improvements to the North Fork Road.

The overall quality of the visitor experience is important to the Park, and certainly part of that involves visitors traveling along the outside North Fork Road. Environmentally sensitive dust palliative measures are acceptable to the Park. Other acceptable improvements include basic crown and ditch work, gravelling, and selective road narrowing. The Park recommends lowering the speed limit, and more aggressive enforcement.

4. Park Perspective on Funding Dust Mitigation.

The Park has no responsibility for funding road improvements, including dust mitigation, on the outside North Fork Road.

5. Rafting

The Park does not issue permits for rafting on the North Fork. Rather, the Forest Service retains that responsibility.

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