

Road Committee Meeting with USFS, April 23, 2009

In attendance from the USFS were Jim DeHerrera, District Ranger and Earl Applekamp, Road Engineer for the Flathead National Forest. Road Committee members were Holycross, Heaphy, Heger and Weber. Summary represents discussions during the meeting and clarifications following it. Meeting took place at the Hungry Horse Ranger Station.

The objective of the meeting was to determine if the United States Forest Service (USFS) had any continuing involvement in or control over actions taken on the North Fork Road and learn more about road maintenance from the Forest Service road engineer. During the meeting and through subsequent conversations, we learned:

1. The Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) approved a proposal to gravel the road from Camas to Polebridge and the USFS has agreed to provide the gravel from Demer's pit. (This is the only way the USFS can make a contribution; see #4 below.) The role of the RAC is to review projects proposed under title Title II of the Act and select projects for funding. The RAC consists of 15 members who represent the interests of three different categories - 1) forest business/industry or commercial recreation interests, 2) environmental organizations or dispersed recreation interests, or 3) local/county or state elected officials, American Indian tribes, school teachers, or public at large. Member selection is made by the Forest Supervisor.
2. The North Fork road is NOT a USFS road. The North Fork road is a county road with a forest highway designation. This is a special designation for public roads that provide important access to government lands such as Forest, Park and Refuge areas. The Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD), part of the Federal Highway Administration, may provide engineering for these roads, although the public road agency is expected to operate and maintain them. WFLHD's program is administered in close coordination with the USFS and MDT and in coordination with Counties as well. The WFLHD is responsibility for upgrading to an acceptable level roads which provide significant access to public lands. After that, the county must maintain them. In Flathead, such roads include NF, Star Meadow and parts of 93 and 2. What is now the WFLHD was the proponent agency for the proposed paving project in the early '80's which was determined not to be feasible.
3. USFS has no say in what goes on with the North Fork road and cannot contribute \$\$\$ specifically to it.
4. The USFS contributes to the County coffers in two primary ways:
 - a. PILT (Payment in lieu of taxes) which are \$\$\$ the county receives from Congress on a per-acre basis for all USFS acreage in county. (about 2 million acres in Flathead

County) This money is not earmarked. Congress determines what the PILT allocation will be.

b. Receipts. When money is earned through extraction of Forest products, such as lumber, the County receives a percentage of the receipts. These are earmarked for schools and county roads. However, because receipts have gone down so much, Congress gave counties the option of either continuing to receive \$\$\$ based on annual receipts or they could accept the RAC process which averages receipts over three years. Flathead County opted for RAC.

Secondarily, the USFS and all the public and contract users, such as timber haulers, also contribute by buying public gas and paying gasoline taxes.

5. For dust abatement on Forest Service roads, it mixes calcium chloride or magnesium chloride with their gravel. This lasts longer than other abatements but is still short-lived (max = 3 yrs). Also, it's a sloppy mess, slimy, and the salt concentrations may create winter maintenance problems when the road is plowed. It may also affect vegetation (no evidence that it affects fisheries at these low concentrations).

6. A Big problem on the NF road for ANY dust palliative is that it only lasts until the next grading. So once you've got potholes and the road is bladed; it's gone.

7. Chip and seal is a type of paving solution. Asphalt and "clean chips" of gravel (no sand) are laid down, then another layer of each. It requires a very good road base. Its longevity is highly variable, 2 – 7 years and costs about \$15K/mile after the road is prepped. It is basically a paved surface but is readily potholed especially if the road has heavy truck traffic. The North Fork road is not a good candidate for chip and seal because of the road base and the way its used. The road base in most of Flathead County consists of glacial till soil that has rounded rocks with silt. This irregular density and moisture capacity will often "bust apart" a chip seal if it doesn't have an extremely good crushed aggregate base.

8. Road design is a problem. On its own roads, the USFS tries to maintain a crown and a 1 ½% grade to facilitate drainage so they build undulations into the road. Generally, if a road is going to carry an average of over 200 vehicles /day (year round), then the lowest long term cost would be paving because its so expensive to maintain a heavily travelled unpaved road.

9. As a county road, the North Fork road could be nominated for improvements (as it was in 1980) and the tri-party would decide if it would get the Forest Highway funds. That tri-party is the USFS, FHWA and MDOT

10. USFS has no say in what goes on on the NF road and is not going to take a position on road issues.

11. Commercial rafters are the minority. Most rafters are private and non-commercial. There is a fixed maximum for commercial rafting permits which they don't meet. The commercial rafters say they would like to have more NF trips but the road is a deterrent.

The following information was provided to us by the Forest Service:

“The number of service days the permitted outfitters use in the upper North Fork which is the section of river from the Border to Camas Bridge, is limited to 814 total service days a year. As you can see from the Table below, they have never used the total permitted amount. A service day is one client on the River for any portion of a day. A person on the River for two hours counts as one service day, and a person on the River for an entire day also counts as one service day. The section of the North Fork below Camas Bridge is not limited, and we do not require detailed reporting from the outfitters for that River segment. We do know that the lower North Fork receives more public outfitted use than the upper portion of the River.”

Upper North Fork	Total Service Days Approved	Actual Service Days Used	
2008	814	606	
2007	814	713	
2006	814	534	
2005	814	710	
2004	814	646	
2003	814	210	Fires

Service Day = Any portion of a day spent on NF land

Border to Camas Creek Bridge is considered the Upper North Fork