

OTHER ACTIVITIES ON THE BEARTOOTH HIGHWAY

In 2000, the FHWA completed a maintenance project to provide a driveable surface for 3 to 5 years on segment 4 until a decision on the proposed reconstruction project has been made. The road's existing alignment, grades, and width, as well as its underlying structural and drainage deficiencies were not changed.

Beginning in 2001, the FHWA will begin reconstructing the portion of the Highway in Montana between the Wyoming state line east of Cooke City and Yellowstone National Park. Tentative completion for this project is October 2004.

OCTOBER OPEN HOUSE PUBLIC MEETINGS

On October 2 and 3, the FHWA will host public meetings to gather input on the proposed alternatives. The meetings will be held in Red Lodge, Montana and Cody, Wyoming. FHWA and other agencies will be available to answer questions and address your comments.

Red Lodge, Montana

Monday, October 2

6:00 to 9:00 P.M.

Rock Creek Resort

**(W. of Red Lodge on
the Beartooth Highway)**

Cody, Wyoming

Tuesday, October 3

6:00 to 9:00 P.M.

Holiday Inn, Taggarts Room

1701 Sheridan Avenue

FOR MORE INFORMATION

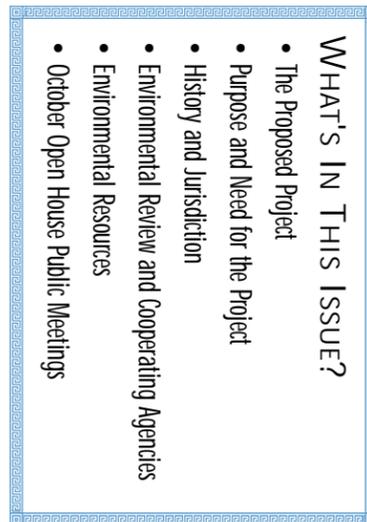
Additional information about the proposed project can be obtained from several sources. FHWA maintains a website for the project; the address is—<http://www.cflhd.gov/projects/wy/beartooth>.

Mark Taylor is FHWA's project manager for the project. Rick Cushing is directing the environmental efforts for FHWA. Mr. Taylor can be reached at 303-716-2124 and Mr. Cushing at 303-716-2138, or by writing to:

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
CFLHD, Environment (Attn HPD-16.5)
555 Zang Street, Suite 259
Lakewood, CO 80228



Area wetland



Federal Highway Administration
Central Federal Lands Highway Division (HPD-16.5)
555 Zang Street Ste 259
Lakewood, CO 80228



The Beartooth Highway

NEWSLETTER

September 2000

This Newsletter is designed to provide you with information about the proposed reconstruction project on a portion of the Beartooth Highway in Wyoming. This issue discusses the proposed project, purpose and need for the project, history of the highway, environmental issues, and upcoming public meetings on alternatives.

THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The Beartooth Highway is a 110.5-kilometer (68.7-mile) route that begins at the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park and ends in Red Lodge, Montana. The first 13.5 km (8.4 miles) and the last 38.1 km (23.7 miles) of the route lie within Montana, and the remaining 55.8 km (34.7 miles) lie within Wyoming. FHWA, in cooperation with the U. S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and Wyoming Department of Transportation, proposes to reconstruct a portion of the highway within Wyoming.

Under the proposed action, the FHWA would reconstruct a portion of the Beartooth Highway (U.S. 212) beginning 11.4 km (7.1 miles) east of its junction with WY 296 (Chief Joseph Highway) and proceeding east and north for 29.9 km (18.6 miles) to the Montana/Wyoming state line. This portion of the highway proposed for construction is designated segment 4. Reconstruction would



Looking west at the west summit

primarily be along the existing road corridor with an improved alignment, grade, and width to appropriate current practices. The reconstructed road surface would have a design life of 20 years, and subgrade structural elements such as culverts and bridges would have a design life of 75 years.

The project would include the following actions—

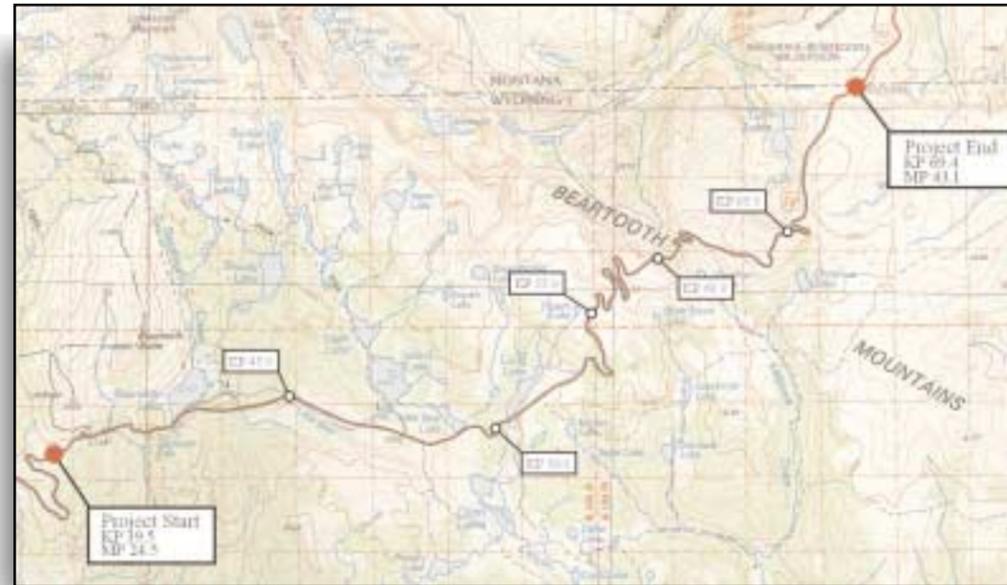
- Widen the highway to accommodate current and projected vehicular use and necessary maintenance activities.
- Upgrade existing drainage by developing wider ditches and installing drainage structures and culverts.
- Install sub-surface drainage features and subgrade stabilization measures.
- Replace four existing bridges.
- Construct a new road surface of crushed aggregate base and asphalt pavement.
- Improve adjacent parking areas and pullouts.
- Upgrade signs, striping, guardrails, and other safety-related features.
- Develop “borrow areas” or material sources for use in reconstruction and possible future maintenance.
- Use National Forest lands for storing materials and staging equipment.
- Use roads outside the project area for transporting materials.
- Use National Forest lands for work crew accommodations and offices near the project site.

PURPOSE AND NEED

FHWA has three primary reasons to reconstruct segment 4—

- Maintain a safe roadway between Red Lodge, Montana and Yellowstone National Park suitable for accommodating projected traffic levels in 2025.
- Provide a roadway that can be reasonably maintained.
- Respond to the land management goals and objectives of the Shoshone National Forest for the Beartooth Scenic Highway.

The proposed project would address many deficiencies of the road. The roadway is about 5.5 meters (18 feet) wide and the four bridges on segment 4 are only slightly wider. The current width of the road and bridges does not accommodate buses, large recreational vehicles, or medium-size commercial vehicles presently using the road without encroachment into the oncoming lane. The bridges within the proposed project are narrow, structurally deficient, and do not meet current requirements. The current alignment of the highway is irregular and has many sharp curves and abrupt transitions. On some road segments, sharp curves are intermixed with sections of straight alignment. The superelevation (the cross-slope or bank of the road at curves) is excessive in many areas and insufficient in others. Several safety-related deficiencies exist such as lack of shoulders; narrow roadside recovery areas; substandard guardrail; and inadequate signing, pavement striping, signs, and markers.



Segment 4 proposed for reconstruction

HISTORY AND JURISDICTION

The Beartooth Highway was built between 1932 and 1935, primarily as a Park Approach Road. A 1932 Executive Order reserved a 150-meter (500-foot) wide strip paralleling the road for park approach road purposes. The route primarily serves Montana residents and visitors to Yellowstone National Park.

In 1968, segment 4 was resurfaced, restored, and rehabilitated. Since the original construction in the 1930s, segment 4 is the only segment of the highway that has not been reconstructed. In 1998, the Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriation Act authorized the funding for the rehabilitation of portions of the Beartooth Highway in Wyoming. With the passage of the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century later in 1998, reconstruction of segment 4 was identified as a high priority project and funding became available for reconstruction.

In its current condition, segment 4 is very difficult to maintain. Consequently, the Wyoming Department of Transportation has not endorsed requests to assume jurisdiction or maintenance responsibility for any portion of the highway within Wyoming. To the extent it has funding, the National Park Service currently maintains 69.5 kilometers (43.1 miles) of the highway from Yellowstone National Park to the Montana state line. The Forest Service was given short-term responsibilities and funding for snowplowing and other maintenance of segment 4. The Forest Service contracts with the National Park Service to meet the snowplowing responsibility, and with the Federal Highway Administration to perform interim pavement repairs.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND COOPERATING AGENCIES

Because the proposed reconstruction of segment 4 will require federal approvals and will receive federal funding, the FHWA must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In accordance with NEPA, the FHWA must prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of its environmental review process.

During the environmental review process, the FHWA consults and coordinates the review with various Federal, state, or local agencies tasked with some level of project involvement. The interagency team assists FHWA in identifying significant issues associated with the proposed project, developing alternatives, and assessing environmental impacts. The interagency team for this project is comprised of representatives from six agencies—

- FHWA
- U.S. Forest Service (Shoshone National Forest)
- National Park Service (Yellowstone National Park)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Wyoming Department of Transportation
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

The FHWA began environmental studies on the project in 1998 and completed most of them in 1999. Information in these studies combined with the comments from various agencies and the public revealed several resources that the proposed project could affect. Some of these environmental resources include wetlands and fens, grizzly bears, visual resources, and recreation.

Wetlands are found throughout the road corridor. Fens are a special type of wetland and are afforded special protection.

The Beartooth Highway traverses grizzly bear habitat. The Grizzly Recovery Plan, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, prohibits new developed recreation sites within the recovery zone.

On June 15, 2000, the Beartooth Highway was formally designated an All-American Highway in large part due to its high scenic quality. The Highway offers incredible views of the surrounding landscape.

The highway corridor is used for both developed and undeveloped recreation. Campgrounds are usually full on peak days, and hikers access the backcountry and surrounding Wilderness off the highway.