

**Environmental Assessment
(Tuesday, August 27, 2002)**

A Proposal by
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Wildlife Division

**Installation of Montana Highway Patrol Communications Equipment
on the Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area**

Prepared by
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
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59711

*Deer Lodge
Misc*

Installation of Montana Highway Patrol communications equipment on the Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area

I. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to comply with the requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act by preparing an Environmental Assessment on the proposed installation of two microwave dishes and one VHF repeater at the existing antenna tower site on Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area near Anaconda, in Deer Lodge County. This communications equipment is to assist in the completion of the Montana Highway Patrol communications network from Butte to Helena.

II. Authority and Direction

Under the proposed action, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) would allow the Montana Highway Patrol to install two microwave dishes and one VHF repeater at the existing communications site on Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area. This action would not alter FWP's responsibility under 87-1-201, MCA to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future. FWP Commission approval is necessary before the proposed action is initiated.

III. Location of Project

The existing communications site on Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area is located in Section 11 of T5N, R11W (Figure 1), and approximately four miles north of Anaconda, MT.

IV. Description of Proposed Action

FWP proposes to allow the Montana Highway Patrol to install two microwave dishes and one VHF repeater at the existing communications site on Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area in Deer Lodge County. A communications building and tower currently exist on the site. The Montana Highway Patrol would install the two microwave dishes and VHF repeater on the tower and electronic equipment in the building. The building is supplied with electricity by way of overhead power lines already on the site. The installation of the communication equipment would take approximately five days to complete. Thereafter annual maintenance will be completed in a time span of one day during the summer months.

V. Purpose and Need For The Purposed Action

The site on the Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area provides a critical link in the network of microwave dishes being installed by Montana Highway Patrol between Butte and Helena. It would provide necessary communications for Montana Highway Patrol and other emergency units year-round. The purpose of the proposed action is to assist in providing emergency communications for state agencies, while maintaining protection of critical wildlife habitat and human recreational values on the Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area.

VI. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency)

Montana Highway Patrol
c/o C.R. Larson
Communications Technician Supervisor
2550 Prospect Ave.
Helena, MT 59620
(406) 444-4274

VII. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

Deer Lodge County Planning Board will be provided an opportunity to review for compatibility with the Deer Lodge County Comprehensive Plan.

VIII. Description of Reasonable Alternatives To the Proposed Action

1. No Action Alternative:

The "No Action" alternative would result in the Montana Highway Patrol locating an alternative site for the communication equipment.

2. Alternatives Considered but Dropped from Further Evaluation

Montana Highway Patrol hired a consultant to assess possible locations for the communications equipment and found that the Lost Creek site was the only location that met the criteria for a direct contact point connecting the network from Butte to MacDonald Pass to Helena. Plus with the existing building, electricity hook-up and antenna tower, the Lost Creek site was deemed the most cost affective site available.

IX. Evaluation Of Impacts On The Physical Environment

1. Land Resources

Impact of Proposed Action: No long term negative impact would occur as a result of this proposal. The proposed action would only amount to above ground additions (microwave dishes and VHF repeater) ensuring that the productivity and nature of the land would be maintained in the future. Annual maintenance and inspection visits by vehicle would use the exiting road, which would create no additional impact.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

2. Air Resources

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no long term impact

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

3. Water Resources

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact due to the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact due to the proposed action.

4. Vegetation

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact due to the proposed action. The property would continue under its current management.

No Action Alternative: The property would continue under its current management.

5. Fish/Wildlife

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact due to the proposed action. The property will continue to provide valuable habitat for a variety of species. No adverse effects are expected on the diversity or abundance of game species, non-game species or threatened and endangered species. There would be no introduction of non-native species in the area. There would be no need for access to the site from December 1 to May 15, which would follow current management practices to avoid disturbance to wintering wildlife. The exception to this would be in case of emergency, in this case access would be supervised by FWP personnel.

No Action Alternative: The property would continue under its current management.

X. Evaluation Of Impacts On The Human Environment

1. Noise/Electrical Effects

Impact of Proposed Action: Noise impacts would be limited to the 5 day time frame for installation of the equipment, which would be minimal. Electrical power to the site exists currently and no additional impacts should take place due to the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

2. Land Use

Impact of Proposed Action: No impact. The proposed action would not change the current human use of the property. There may be a minor increase in use, which would be limited to initial installation and annual maintenance.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

3. Risk/Health Hazards

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

4. Community Impacts

Impact of Proposed Action: No anticipated long-term negative impacts to the community are anticipated. There would be positive impacts to the community with quicker response times of emergency vehicles.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

5. Public Services/Taxes/Utilities

Impact of Proposed Action: The proposed action would not affect local or state tax bases or revenues, nor existing utility systems. Any additional energy consumption would be absorbed by the Montana Highway Patrol. Public services would be heightened by the advanced communications system.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

6. Aesthetics/Recreation

Impact of Proposed Action: The proposed action may reduce the aesthetics of the immediate site with the addition of two microwave dishes and one VHF repeater on the existing tower. The site currently has a communications building and tower on it. The additions would have minimal aesthetic impact. Continued public recreational opportunities would still be available.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

7. Cultural/Historic

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no known impact. While no cultural survey has been conducted, there are no known cultural or historic sites on the property.

No Action Alternative: There would be no known impact.

8. Administrative/Management costs

Impact of Proposed Action: The cost of administering and managing the proposed action would be the responsibility of the Montana Highway Patrol.

No Action Alternative: No additional cost.

XI. Evaluation of Significance

The proposed action should have no cumulative negative effect.

XII. Evaluation For Need For an EIS

Based on the above assessment, which has not identified any significant negative impacts from the proposed action, an EIS is not required and an EA is the appropriate level of review. The over-all impact from the successful completion of the proposed action would provide long-term benefits to the Montana Highway Patrol and the citizens they serve.

XIII. Public Involvement

A public hearing will be conducted on this document at the local community level. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Commission and Deer Lodge County Planning Board approval are necessary before the project is initiated.

Public Hearing:
September 23, 2002
County Court House

Anaconda, Montana

The public comment period will be until:

September 27, 2002

Comments on this proposal should be addressed to:

Dept FWP

3201 Spurgin Road

Missoula, Mt 59804

XIV. EA Preparation

The EA was prepared by: Bill Semmens, FWP

Review by: John Firebaugh, FWP