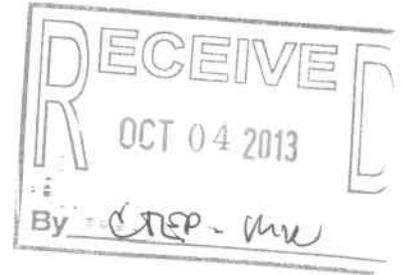


September 5, 2013

Operations Engineer
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
585 Shepard Way
Helena, MT 59601



Subject: **Categorical Exclusion Group (d) Action Letter**

Reference: Federal-aid Project Number: TBD
Federal-aid Project Name: Buffalo RD Signs – Sanders Co
MDT Uniform Project Number: 7866

This is a request for FHWA concurrence that the proposed project meets the criteria for classification as a Categorical Exclusion under the provisions of 23 *CFR* 771.117(d). This proposed action also qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion under the provisions of *ARM* 18.2.261 (*MCA* Sections 75-1-103 and 75-1-201).

This proposed project is titled Buffalo Rd Signs – Sanders County; and, it calls for the installation approximately 20 roadside informational signs as per the CTEP Project Agreement.

The location of the proposed project is at multiple locations along Montana Highway 200 (P-6), Montana Highway 28 (P-36), and Secondary Highway 382. A schematic map of the proposed sign locations is attached.

The intent of the proposed project is to identify an historic route through Sanders County that was initially developed and used by native peoples traveling east to the buffalo hunting grounds in central Montana and west for salmon from the Columbia River. In the early 1800s, this route became an important fur trade route for the Northwest Company and later the Hudson's Bay Company. The first written record about this route was recorded by David Thompson in 1809, who called it the Road to the Buffalo.

It is expected that these signs will be installed on 4" diameter posts, with the only area of disturbance being that which is necessary to install the individual posts.

The proposed project has been evaluated for, and does not have any adverse effect on the following environmental areas of concern:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stormwater Runoff | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Noise |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prime and Unique Farmlands | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Section 404 – <i>Clean Water Act</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Floodplains (EO 11988/FEMA) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Economic |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hazardous Waste | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stream Preservation/Water Quality |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Historical/Cultural Resources | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Threatened/Endangered Species |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Changes in Land Use | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wetlands (EO 11990) |

USDOT – 4(f)/NL&WCF – 6(f) Acts

PROJECT IMPACTS

The proposed project will have a minor effect on the following environmental area(s):

Historic/Cultural Resources – The proposed signage will be installed within existing, improved highway rights-of-way. No impact to historic or cultural resources is expected.

Threatened/Endangered Species – The proposed signage will be installed within existing, improved highway rights-of-way. No impact to threatened/endangered species; or, to fish or wildlife is expected.

Floodplains – The proposed signage will be installed within existing, improved highway rights-of-way. No impact to any floodplain is expected.

Air Quality – The proposed signage will be installed within existing, improved highway rights-of-way. No impact to air quality is expected.

Cumulative Impacts – The City of Thompson Falls currently has one (1) active project in the vicinity of the proposed project. This project is a CTEP funded landscaping and irrigation project (STPE 45(44), UPN 7663), is located within the city limits of the Thompson Falls, and is approximately 2 miles from the nearest proposed sign installation location.

None of the above projects, in conjunction with the proposed project, will have any significant cumulative environmental impacts.

PERMITS

Permits Required – A new ROW/construction permits from MDT – Missoula District will be needed for the proposed project. The Montana One-Call System will be utilized prior to construction to locate any utilities at the proposed sign locations. Sign posts locations will be adjusted as necessary to not interfere with existing utility lines.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public Involvement – The proposed project was presented to the Sanders County Commissioners at a public meeting on February 9, 2010. In the February, 2010 the plan was also presented to the David Thompson Days planning committee. A second public presentation was made to the Sanders County Commissioners at their August 21, 2010 meeting.

Sanders County Commissioners met with the Culture Committee of the Salish-Pend d'Oreille Tribe on June 11, 2012 and the Culture Committee of the Kootenai Tribe on October 12, 2012. Both are members of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). On March 12, 2013, the Commissioners conducted a round table meeting in Thompson Falls with CSKT members.

EROSION CONTROL PLAN – Given that the area of disturbance at each sign location is less than 1 square foot, no erosion control or vegetation control/management efforts will be necessary.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Americans with Disabilities Act – All signs will be installed in compliance with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (PL 101-336).

CONCLUSION

The project will not induce significant land use changes or promote unplanned growth. There will be no significant affects on access to adjacent properties or present traffic patterns. The project will not create disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations (EO 12898) and complies with Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (42 USC 2000d). In accordance with 23 CFR 771.117(a), this action will neither individually nor cumulatively, have any significant environmental impacts. Therefore, we are requesting FHWA's concurrence that the proposed project is properly classified as Categorical Exclusion.

"ALTERNATIVE ACCESSIBLE FORMATS OF THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE PROVIDED ON REQUEST"

Tony B. Cox 09-05-2013
Signature of Environmental Certifying Official or Chief Elected Official

Tony Cox, Presiding Officer, Sanders County Board Of Commissioners
Type Name and Title

Concur: *Heidy Bruner* 9/24/13
CTEP Section Supervisor ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING SECTION SUPERVISOR Date

Concur: *M. Halman* 9/30/13
Federal Highway Administration Date

Attachment: Project Location Map

- cc: Ed Toars, MDT, District Administrator – Missoula
- Ryan Dahlke, MDT, Consultant Design Engineer
- Tom Martin, MDT, Bureau Chief – Environmental Services Bureau
- Lisa Hurley, MDT, Fiscal Planning Administrator
- Mike Wierley, MDT, CTEP Section Supervisor
- Maureen Thorsen, Environmental Quality Council
- Tom Erving, MDT, Fiscal Planning
- Heidy Bruner, MDT, Section Supervisor, Environmental Engineering
- Susan Kilcrease, MDT, Missoula District Engineer, Environmental Engineering Section