

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
and
STATE OF MONTANA
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

STATE DOCUMENTS

DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

for

PROJECT S-434 (1)
CONRAD-WEST (Urban Section)

THIS HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT IS PROPOSED FOR FUNDING UNDER TITLE 23, U.S.C. THIS STATEMENT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT WAS DEVELOPED IN CONSULTATION WITH THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION AND IS SUBMITTED PURSUANT TO 42 U.S.C. 4332 (2) (C)



H.J. ANDERSON, DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS

BY Jack R. Babelt
ADMINISTRATOR
ENGINEERING DIVISION

DATE 3-22-73

APPROVED AND ADOPTED BY THE
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

Harold N. Stewart
HAROLD N. STEWART
DIVISION ENGINEER

DATE 4/3/73

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SUMMARY SHEET

I. TYPE OF ACTION

- (x) Administrative
- (x) Draft
- (x) Environmental Statement
- () Combination Environmental/Section 4 (f) Statement
- () Legislative
- () Final

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project begins within the city limits of Conrad, Montana, at the junction of FAS 534 and Virginia Street and extends westerly and northerly along FAS 534 for 1.65+ miles to end west of Conrad at the Cemetery Road intersection. The first 0.9+ miles will be built as a 2 lane curb and gutter urban facility that will provide 2-12 foot driving lanes, 2-12 foot parking lanes, a 1 foot painted median, and 5 foot sidewalks. The last 0.75+ miles will utilize a 28 foot roadway with 2-12 foot driving lanes and 2 foot shoulders.

III. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The long lasting impact of this project will be beneficial in nature as it will provide a fast, safe, and efficient transportation facility. The main adverse impact from this project will be on the narrow band adjacent to the highway. The usual, unavoidable, noise and air pollution will occur while the project is under construction and approximately 4.5 acres of new right-of-way will be required to provide adequate land for the new facility. In order to provide a highway of sufficient width, it will be necessary to remove about 90 ash and poplar trees in the existing right-of-way along 4th Ave. South in Conrad.

IV. ALTERNATIVES

Other alternate alignments were considered for this project, but were not studied in detail as it was determined that they were either unfeasible or would not provide proper service. One alternate would have passed along the northern edge of Conrad and would have more or less acted as a bypass. The other alternate considered would have come straight into Conrad from the west along Sunset Boulevard rather than turning down 4th Avenue South. The possibility of rebuilding 4th Ave. to a narrower than standard width, or eliminating the present on-street parking and using the existing width, both of which would have avoided removing the trees, were also considered. The only other alternate given any serious consideration at all was the do-nothing alternate.

V. FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS
FROM WHICH COMMENTS WERE REQUESTED

1. Governor's Office
Capitol Building
Helena, Montana 59601
2. Assistant Secretary - Program Policy
Attention: Director, Environmental Project Review
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240 (9 copies)
3. Director, Department of Natural Resources and
Conservation
Attention: Lawrence M. Jakob
Sam W. Mitchell Building
Helena, Montana 59601
4. Fletcher E. Newby, Executive Director
Environmental Quality Council
Capitol Station
Helena, Montana 59601 (2 copies)
5. Department of Intergovernmental Relations, Planning &
Economic Development Division
Capitol Post Office
Helena, Montana 59601
6. Environmental Protection Agency
Room 916, Lincoln Tower
1860 Lincoln Street
Denver, Colorado 80203 (5 copies)
7. United States Coast Guard
Commander (dpa)
Thirteenth Coast Guard District
618 Second Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104
8. Mr. Ralph Boland
Department of Fish and Game
Sam W. Mitchell Building
Helena, Montana 59601
9. Department of Health, Education and Welfare
9017 Federal Office Building
19th and Stout Streets
Denver, Colorado 80202
10. Student Environmental Research Center
Room 212, Venture Center
University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59801

11. Dr. T. C. Byerly
Office of Secretary of Agriculture
Washington, D. C. 98109
12. Mayor
City of Conrad
Conrad, Montana 59425
13. Pondera County Commissioners
Conrad, Montana 59425
14. Conrad School Board
Conrad, Montana 59425
15. Postmaster
Conrad, Montana 59425
16. Documents Librarian
Montana State University
Bozeman, Montana 59715

VI. DATE DRAFT STATEMENT MADE AVAILABLE TO CEO

April 13, 1973

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The proposed project is located in north-central Montana in southeastern Pondera County and involves the reconstruction of a 1.65+ mile segment of existing Federal Aid Secondary Route 534. Roughly the first half of the project is located within the city limits of Conrad with the other half extending west of town.

The area surrounding this project is relatively flat to rolling prairie land that is almost exclusively devoted to farming. Conrad itself is a typical, small farming community with the usual stores, churches, schools, etc.

The city serves as a trade and marketing center for quite a large farming and ranching area and has traditionally been a bustling and prosperous but stable community.

A few years ago it was announced that this area would become the home of a large ABM complex and Conrad began the transformation from a stable agricultural community to a boom town. Early in the summer of 1972, as the construction activity was nearing its peak, the ABM construction was abandoned. Conrad is still recovering.

The project as proposed begins at Sta. 3+80, or more particularly at the intersection of FAS 534 and Virginia Street in Conrad. Within the city limits, FAS 534 is also called 4th Avenue South. From that point, the alignment proceeds north-westerly along FAS 534 for about 0.85+ miles to the edge of Conrad and then turns due west and proceeds for another 0.8+ miles along FAS 534 to end at the intersection of the Cemetery Road and FAS 534 at Station 92+00+. Within the city limits, the alignment exactly follows that of 4th Ave. South and passes through a residential area. Outside of Conrad, the alignment parallels, but is 15 feet north of the existing road. This last 0.8+ mile section of the project passes by the Conrad Airport and the Pondera Golf Course which are both located to the south of the project. The land to the north is presently farmland. Since this project essentially follows the existing road, the difference in length between the new and old facilities will be negligible.

From the beginning of the project to Station 51+00+, approximately 0.9 miles, a 2 lane curb and gutter urban facility will be utilized that will provide 2-12 foot driving lanes, 2-12 foot parking lanes and a 1 foot painted median. A new 5 foot wide sidewalk on each side of the roadway will also be provided in conjunction with this typical section. The existing storm drain system will be revised and added to as necessary to handle the expected drainage. The additions will be located near the west edge of Conrad where several new inlets, manholes and connecting pipes will be provided. It also may be necessary to add a new line to connect to the present outfall system. Further study will be performed in regard to this, but if it is determined to be necessary, the new line will be placed in the alley running due north from Sta. 38+00+. Approximately 430' of pipe would be required to connect into the present outfall ditch located just north of Sunset Boulevard. The environmental consequences of digging a trench to lay the pipe and additional water in the outfall system will be insignificant. The remainder of the project will utilize a 28 foot rural section with 2-12 foot driving lanes and 2' shoulders. Drainage for this part of the project will be handled by ditches and culverts. All natural drainage patterns will be perpetuated. A plant mix bituminous pavement will be provided throughout the length of the project.

Between the beginning of the project and Sta. 47+00+, the existing Right-of-Way width is 80' with 40' on each side of the centerline. These existing Right-of-Way lines will be maintained as the new construction will fit within this 80' strip except for 2 small areas where 10' construction permits will be required. One of these permits is located on the left between Station 38+00 and Station 40+50 and the other is one the right from Station 38+25 to Station 45+54. These permits will allow the contractor to do some necessary work within these areas, and then they will be restored to as close to their original condition as possible and actual possession will be returned to the landowner. From Station 47+00+ ahead to the end of the project, the existing Right-of-Way width is 60'. The Right-of-Way line on the left through this area will be left as is except for one section between Station 52+00+ and Station 54+70+ where an extra 10+ will be needed. In the vicinity of the Pondera Golf Course, the existing Right-of-Way line bordering the golf course will be maintained and there will be no disturbance to the golf course during construction. On the right an extra 45' will be required.

Traffic counts on this project vary considerably due to the fact that part of the project is in town and part of it is outside of town. The maximum present average daily traffic is found near the beginning of the project and amounts to about 2000 vehicles per day while the minimum is found near the end of the project and is about 450 vehicles per day. 1993 estimated traffic varies from 4000 to 860 vehicles per day at the above noted locations.

Access to the new highway will be very similar to that which now exists on the present road.

It should be noted that a full environmental statement was prepared and approved by the FHWA on September 24, 1971, for another portion of this same route. That statement covered the segment beginning at the cemetery road and extending approximately 14 miles west and north toward Dupuyer. At the time that statement was prepared, it was the general consensus that the 1.65 miles now under consideration did not have to be rebuilt. However, after the location public hearing covering the 14 mile segment, the Pondera County Commissioners and Conrad City officials requested that the 1.65 mile section extending into town be added to the S-434 (1) project and be scheduled for reconstruction. Therefore, this was done and this statement is being prepared to cover only the 1.65 mile addition to the original project.

II. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

A. BROAD IMPACTS

In light of the fact that this project is a reconstruction of an existing county road and follows the same alignment, the broad impacts on the area are not expected to be of much consequence.

Existing traffic patterns will remain essentially the same as they are now although the wider section being provided will allow traffic to move more freely. There will be no effect on any other existing traffic systems.

We do not expect the project to cause any more urbanization of the area outside of town than would have resulted if the project were not built. There should be no significant effect on adjacent land use since we are taking only a small amount of right-of-way and are not changing existing travel patterns.

This project will greatly improve access into Conrad for the farmers and ranchers living to the west and north. We have been told that sections of this 1.65+ mile segment become almost impassable at certain times of the year due to breakups and chuckholes and this project will certainly correct that situation.

The natural resources required for use in the construction of this project are not of sufficient quantity to be significant.

The project is not expected to have any adverse effect on the economic activity of the area. If anything, the impact will be beneficial due to the improved access to Conrad. Also, there could be an increase in employment in the area while the project is under construction.

B. IMPACTS ON THE NARROW BAND ADJACENT TO THE HIGHWAY

This project will have a considerable effect on the area immediately adjacent to the highway. The majority of this impact will occur during the construction process; however, some of it will be of a longer lasting nature.

During the construction period, the basic impact will be due to the noise and air pollution that will occur due to the large machines and other activity in the construction area. However, the contractor will be required to adhere to all applicable state and national laws pertaining to these matters. Also, the Montana Department of Highways Standard Specifications define certain methods that the contractor is to follow to keep pollution to a minimum. As far as water pollution is concerned, there should be no significant effect as the project does not cross any streams or rivers.

Approximately 4.5 acres of new right-of-way will be required to construct this project. This is all located outside of the city limits of Conrad and consists almost entirely of farmland.

Some utility adjustment will be required to clear the construction zone, and although there may be some short periods of disruption, all existing utilities will be perpetuated throughout the project.

The major impact from this project, and the reason for preparing this environmental statement, is because of a number of trees, presently located between the existing curb and sidewalk, that will have to be removed to provide a wider street. Approximately 90 ash and poplar trees will be involved. The effect of removing these trees has been discussed with the Pondera County Commissioners and Conrad city officials and several citizens have written to us concerning this matter. The commissioners and city officials seem to agree that removing the trees and providing the wider street would be the most beneficial to all concerned, however, the citizens that have written in do not agree. Included in Section IV is all the correspondence we have received against the proposed tree removal. The situation has become somewhat of a controversial matter and will be discussed further at the public hearing which will be held in the near future.

In regard to the possibility of this project causing future noise pollution, an analysis was made to assure that the highway noise levels would be compatible with the different land uses along the proposed route. Within the city limits of Conrad, the adjacent land use is residential in nature and therefore fits into land use category B which has an allowable design noise level of 70 decibels. Outside of town, much of the land along the project can be considered to be undeveloped; however, certain areas such as the golf course and farm home will also be in land use category B. Through the use of a Federal Highway Administration approved noise prediction program, future noise levels were determined for comparison with the allowable. Within town, the maximum future L10 level came out to be 66DB while outside of town it was less than 60DB. Although these are slightly higher than the present noise levels, they are still within the allowable standards and noise abatement measures are not required.

The long-lasting impact of the project will be beneficial as it will provide a fast, safe and efficient facility. This type of highway is becoming more and more necessary for emergency and commercial vehicles, as well as for the general traveling public. It will provide better access to religious, educational, cultural, recreational and employment opportunities.

C. PROBABLE ADVERSE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS WHICH CANNOT BE AVOIDED

The air and noise pollution that will occur during the construction period cannot be avoided; however, it will be minimized as much as possible by requiring the contractor to adhere to all applicable laws and the Montana Department of Highways Standard Specifications.

The commitment of right-of-way for the road will remove about 4.5 acres of land from its present use and will preclude its being used for other purposes as long as the roadway exists.

As mentioned previously, the main environmental impact of this project is going to be caused by the removal of a number of trees in the existing right-of-way. This removal is necessary in order to provide a roadway that will be of adequate width to handle the expected future traffic and also provide sufficient parking. The existing street is 30' wide and the new street will be 50' back of curb to back of curb; therefore, 10' of widening on each side will be required. This 10' is presently a grassy strip and therein are located the trees that will have to be removed. There are some trees located back of the sidewalk which will remain as they are and not be disturbed.

The possibility of relocating some of the mature trees along 4th Avenue, instead of just removing them, is presently being considered as a method of reducing the impact caused by this project. The majority of trees which might be considered for relocation are green ash. There are numerous poplar trees along the project, but because they are generally very old and large and of low vigor, they should not be considered for relocation. Since the best and most economical way to relocate mature trees is with a tree moving machine, this is the method that we would propose to use if it is determined that it is feasible and the city and county are desirous of having it done. Generally, trees with a trunk diameter of 8" or less can be relocated with a moving machine and, therefore, taking this into account along with the type of trees, there seem to be about 25 trees that could be considered for relocation. An 8 inch diameter green ash tree relocated with a tree mover will have approximately an 80% chance of surviving. Generally speaking, the less the trunk diameter, the greater the chance of survival. Relocating an 8" diameter tree in the vicinity of the project would cost about \$225. Trying to relocate larger trees runs into considerable more time and work since a tree mover cannot be used and would cost in the neighborhood of \$800 for a 12" tree. There would be ample space behind the new sidewalk in which to relocate the 25 trees, however, the final decision on what trees, if any, and where to relocate them would be left up to the city officials and county commissioners.

III. ALTERNATIVES

Other alternate locations were considered for this project before it was finally decided to follow the existing FAS route. These alternates were not actually studied in detail and the costs, engineering factors, and overall impacts of each were not determined because after taking a look at the different possible routes and discussing them with the County Commissioners and City officials, it was felt that they would not be feasible.

One of the alternate locations considered would have passed along the northern edge of Conrad and tied into U. S. 91 near the present Conrad Interchange. Consideration of this alternate was dropped because it was felt that it would not provide proper service to the residents of the area since most of the people using this road are desirous of getting into and out of town rather than bypassing it. Also, much of this area was recently developed in anticipation of the now defunct ABM system and would have involved the displacement of numerous residents.

Another alternate considered would have come straight into Conrad from the west along Sunset Boulevard rather than turning down 4th Avenue. This alternative was discarded for several reasons including the following: 1) It would pass in front of the Pondera County Hospital and the Pioneer Rest Home and would therefore increase the noise and activity near these facilities. 2) Existing traffic patterns would have to be revised to follow the new route 3) Depending on where the connection to U. S. 91 would be made, there could be a considerable amount of residential displacement.

Since the major impact of following FAS 534 is going to be the removal of the trees along the boulevard and no residential displacements or change in traffic pattern will be required, it was decided by all concerned that this would be the most logical route to follow.

The possibility of rebuilding 4th Avenue South at a width that would not involve removal of the trees in the boulevard was also considered as an alternate. This would mean that the maximum width of street that could be provided would be about 36 feet. According to the design year traffic counts and the Montana Department of Highways Standards for roadway width, the very minimum width that should be used is 40 feet. Since it was felt that it would not be in the best public interest to build a sub-standard highway and also due to the hazards that would be involved with the narrower street, this alternate was also eliminated.

Parking is presently allowed along 4th Avenue on the left side only between Stations 5+80+ and 22+50+. Elimination of this parking in lieu of widening the street and removing the trees was also considered as another alternative. Although this would improve the flow of traffic in this 4½ block section, the highway would still be sub-standard in width with the many safety hazards inherent with a too narrow highway. Also, several of the residents in this area have no other place to park their vehicles and therefore depend upon on-street parking. Because of these reasons, it was decided that this alternative would not be feasible.

The "Do-Nothing" alternate was considered; however, it would not fulfill the basic responsibility of providing safer and more efficient transportation for the traveling public.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL SHORT-TERM USES OF MAN'S ENVIRONMENT AND THE MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY.

The construction phase of this project will probably extend through two construction seasons, although work may not be in progress all this time as most of the construction work will be shut down during the winter months. On a calendar day basis, it

will probably take about one year. During the construction period the surrounding area will undergo a short time of general disruption due to the construction process. There will be an increase in noise and air pollution, the construction limits will be cleared and detours may be necessary to route traffic around construction areas. However, upon completion of the project, the area will return to normal and adjust to the changes that have taken place. Therefore, the short-term uses will have little lasting effect on the environment.

In regard to the long-term productivity of the area, the small amount of adverse effects from the short-term use of the environment is certainly justified as this project will provide a fast, safe and efficient transportation facility for the traveling public that will benefit and serve the area. The major land use in the area of this project is for agricultural purposes outside of town and residential use within town, and we do not expect this to change as a result of this project.

V. IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

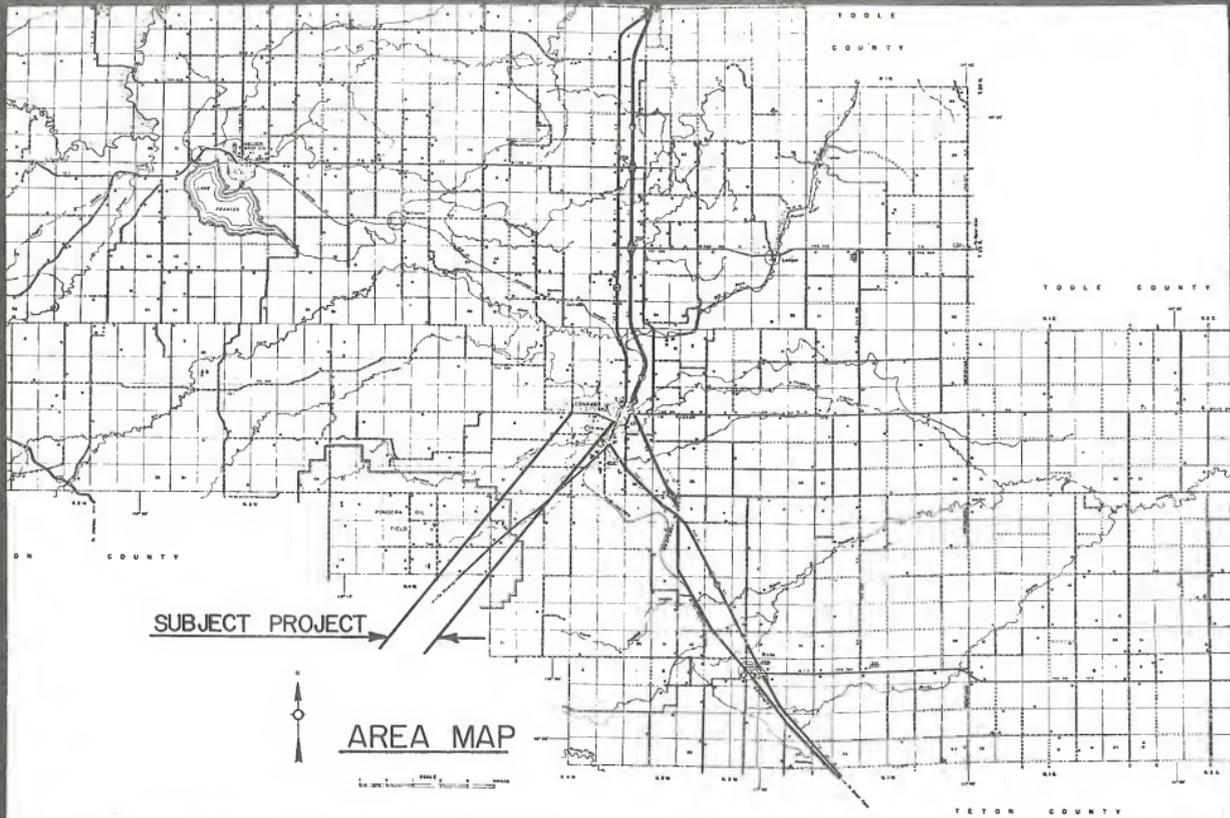
The land acquired for right-of-way will no longer be available for farmland and home development. This acreage, however, is not of sufficient quantity to be significant.

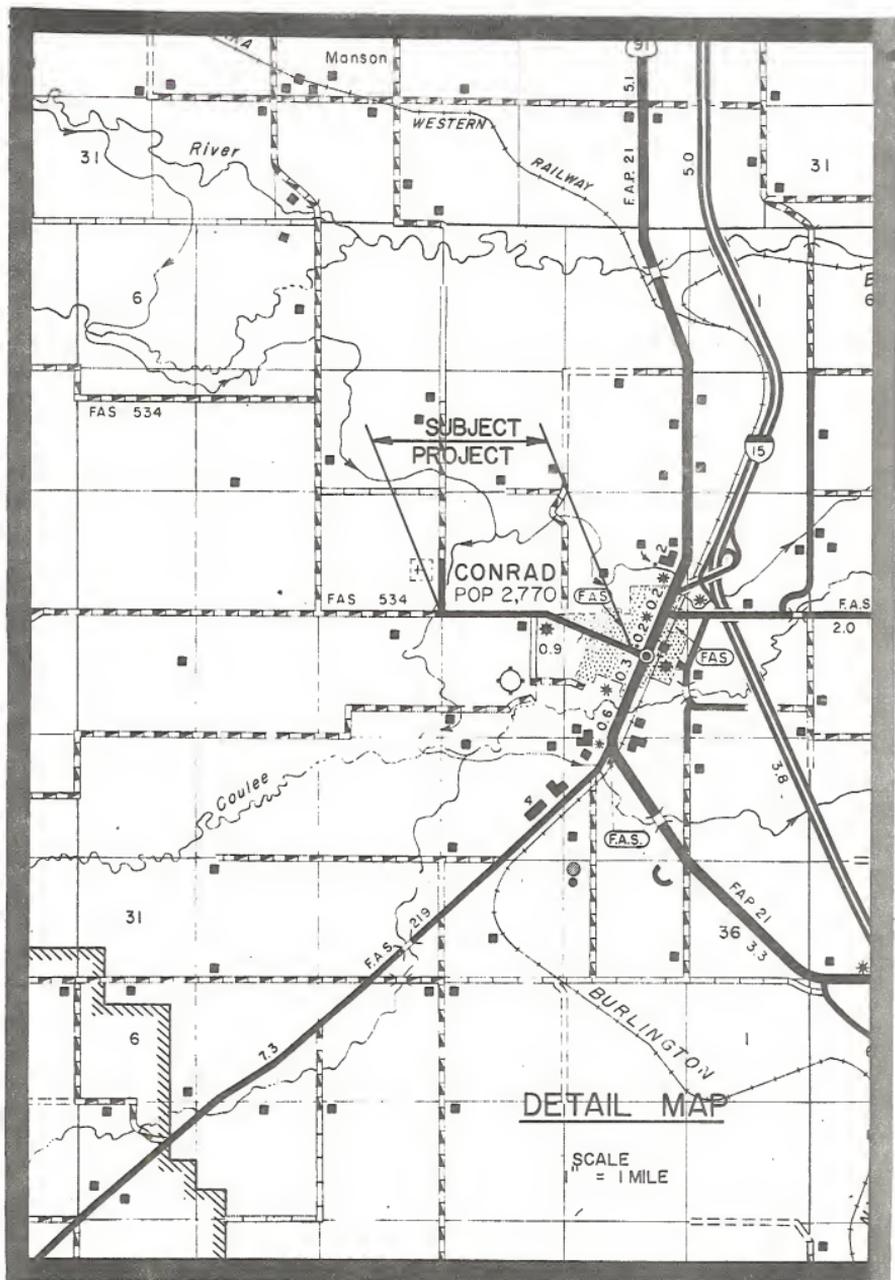
Also, the gravel used in the roadway surfacing will be irretrievable, but here again the quantities involved are not significant.

There does not appear to be any major irreversible commitment of resources that would affect the beneficial uses of the environment in the area.

VI. MAPS, AERIAL PHOTO AND LETTERS

01





BEGIN S 434(I)
STATION 31+80.0

CONRAD

CONRAD AIRPORT

PONDERA
GOLF
COURSE

CITY LIMITS

SUNSET BOULEVARD

FAS 534

END PROJECT
STATION 92+00

HOSPITAL

CEMETERY ROAD

S-434(I)
CONRAD WEST
SCALE: 1"=1000' 1

N



Comad, Mont.

July 15, 1972

State Highway Department
Helena, Mont.

Gentlemen:

I am writing to protest
the destruction of our beautiful
trees on Sacreth Avenue.

Enclosed is Mrs. Anderson's letter
which fully expresses my feelings
Yours truly

Mrs. Mary Buell

MONTANA HIGHWAY COMMISSION
RECEIVED
JUL 19 1972
HELENA, MONTANA

RETURN TO M. & E.	
MAY BE RETAINED	
DIRECTOR	
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REGION BUREAU	
PROJECT	
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PERSONNEL	
RIGHT-OF-WAY	
TRANS. VEHICLE WEIGHT	
TITLES	
MAINTENANCE	
MAIL ROOM	
RECORDS	
OTHER	



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

When walking or driving down Conrad avenues and streets, most everyone is pleased and impressed with the beautiful trees which form canopies over the middle of the thoroughfares.

Perhaps most people do not know that all of the trees on both sides of Fourth Avenue are slated for extinction. The highway department has decided that the avenue must be wider to make way for the highway number 534 extending east and west.

Interstate highway 15 was routed so that it by-passes our city; and yet the highway department has decided to destroy one of our most beautiful avenues so that the proposed highway can come directly through Conrad from the west.

If this occurs, all of Fourth Avenue will be asphalt and cement just like any downtown area which has an absence of the beauty of trees. It looks as if there are some people in authority who haven't heard of the need of ecology and the preservation of our natural resources and beautiful streets.

Our town is beautiful be-

cause our forefathers were farsighted enough to plant trees and plan attractive yards. Surely there must be a stretch of land in our adjoining vast prairie area where a highway can be built that will accommodate the traffic trucks from the west to the Conrad elevators. This seems to be the purpose: a direct route from the west of town to Conrad elevators. Fourth Avenue, a residential avenue, has been chosen for this traffic.

I believe every citizen should write immediately to our county commissioners and to the state highway department in protest of this destruction.

Do so before it is too late!

Sincerely,

Mrs. LeRoy Anderson

