



Targhee Pass Environmental Assessment Overview – June 2018

The Idaho Transportation Department's (ITD) Environmental Assessment (EA) for future improvements on U.S. 20 at Targhee Pass has garnered much attention in the recent months. At its core, this project is about fixing an aged infrastructure and improving safety and mobility for the traveling public. Our goal is to find a solution that will extend the life of the roadway and, most importantly, help Idaho's motorists SAFELY reach their destinations.

Throughout the ongoing public involvement process, a number of frequently asked questions have emerged. We have assembled the following list and corresponding responses to help build a mutual understanding of the project and its complexities. Your feedback, as always, is encouraged and appreciated.

What happened before the Targhee Pass Environmental Assessment?

Since 2004, ITD has engaged in an extensive corridor planning effort for U.S. 20 from Chester to the Montana state line – Idaho's gateway to Yellowstone National Park. Planning is separate from and often occurs before environmental study. The purpose of the corridor plan is to assess the condition of the U.S. 20 corridor and to identify the necessary improvements to meet the corridor's system and user needs for the next 20 years. As described in the corridor plan, U.S. 20 must accommodate local traffic, heavy tourist traffic, and the majority of the truck freight moved between West Yellowstone, southern Montana, and the communities of the Snake River Plain. However, traffic is seasonally variable. In general, from Ashton to the Montana state line, projected traffic volumes and the corridor plan call for increased opportunities for safer passing.

The corridor plan is combined with other plans and studies to lead an agency into environmental studies for individual projects along the corridor. These environmental studies ensure that residents near each segment have the opportunity to be engaged and that any potential needs that may have been missed in planning are included.

Why Targhee Pass? Why now?

October 2016, the ITD board approved use of federal funds for moving forward with improvements to the Targhee Pass segment. After corridor planning, the next step in developing a project is to look at the project from an environmental perspective. In late 2016, ITD initiated (and is still working on) an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate risks, benefits, opportunities and costs associated with reconstruction of Targhee Pass. This study is being completed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

How will a future project be funded?

Right now, the \$22.2 million project budget is cost shared with Federal Aid Highway Funds at the rate of 92.66% Federal Aid with 7.34% matching State funds (typical for Idaho).

What is an Environmental Assessment?

For Targhee Pass, the NEPA process began when it was determined that federal funds would be utilized to implement a project. By deciding to prepare an EA, ITD and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are evaluating whether a proposed action or other alternatives would cause significant environmental effects. If it is determined that there are no significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) will be drafted. On the other hand, if it is determined that the alternative selected does have significant impacts, then the EA will move to a more significant NEPA study called an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Why is wildlife being addressed?

Wildlife are important to the economy of the area and a reason for tourists and new residents to come to the area. During this EA process, ITD has received several public regarding wildlife issues in the corridor. The NEPA process also mandates that ITD evaluate potential impacts a project might have to wildlife. Also, wildlife were identified as an



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important planning issue in the corridor plan, and subsequent additional data evaluation and studies were completed between the 2006 Corridor Plan document and the present. As a result of these factors, a range of design elements to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions to save human lives and damage, and effects of the roadway on wildlife are being evaluated in the EA.

What has been decided?

No decision has been made on a preferred solution for Targhee Pass. ITD has had three public meetings since October 2016, had one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, and received email comments, letters and phone calls on the study.

The EA is currently evaluating five alternatives, including a no-build option. This range of alternatives was developed by ITD and FHWA after months of agency coordination, engineering analysis, and hundreds of public comments.

All of the alternatives (except the no-build option) include:

- A climbing lane in the uphill direction, from SH 87 to the Montana State line to provide safer passing opportunities, especially when slower-moving vehicles are traveling up the pass.
- Wider shoulders to meet safety standards and enhance safety for both motorists and cyclists.
- Left and right turn lanes into Big Horn Hills Estates entrances to provide safer turning opportunities.
- Road subsurface reconstruction and drainage improvements to extend the life of the roadway.
- Vegetation clearing to reduce shade, increase visibility, and prevent icing on the roadway for enhanced safety.

Alternatives differ by types of design elements that are included for reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.

- Alternative 1: No-Build
- Alternative 2: Three wildlife overpasses & fencing (with roadway improvements)
- Alternative 3: Animal detection system (with roadway improvements)
- Alternative 4: One wildlife overpass, animal detection system & fencing (with roadway improvements)
- Alternative 5: Operational Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Strategies (with roadway improvements) –
EXAMPLE: Variable message signs that can be moved with migration seasons.

It is important to note that for alternatives involving wildlife fence, ITD would preserve access to public and private lands by providing appropriate vehicle and pedestrian passage. ITD would work with landowners, the U.S. Forest Service, Fremont County, and Idaho Department of Fish & Game to finalize access locations upon selection of any alternative that would involve installation of wildlife fence. The Forest Service has indicated that they do not see any reason or need to change the Forest Management Plan or current travel management plan based on any of the EA alternatives.

What's Next?

Currently, an impact analysis for all five alternatives is being prepared and is evaluating issues that the public has identified and issues required by law to evaluate. :

When ITD has completed the impact analysis, results will be shared with the public. At that time, ITD will be looking for the public's additional feedback and will have a public meeting in Island Park as well as a public comment period before a decision document is finalized. This is currently expected to occur in summer 2018. A decision is made by ITD and FHWA based on everything in the EA document, including the public comments received.

ITD encourages the public to stay updated on the EA by sending an email to targheepass@langdongroupinc.com with "Join the Contact List" in the subject line. You can also visit www.islandparkUS20.com to learn more.