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NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

APPENDIX 1A:

Public and Agency Involvement Plan

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Public and Agency Involvement Plan

Technical Memorandum

August 30, 2021

Prepared for:
Montana Department of Transportation

Prepared by:
Robert Peccia and Associates

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Public and Agency Involvement Plan (PAIP)

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is developing a feasibility study of the Ninepipe segment of US Highway 93 (US 93) between Reference Point (RP) 40.0 and RP 44.5. The existing road is narrow, lacks shoulders, is experiencing increasing traffic volumes, and has a history of severe crashes. Reconstruction of the corridor is needed to improve traffic operations, multimodal accommodations, system linkage, and safety of the transportation system.

The intent of the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* is to analyze the feasibility of the preferred alternative previously identified in the 2008 *Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (SEIS)[1]. The study will be a collaborative process between MDT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) Tribal council, resource agencies, and the public to identify potential constraints and determine the viability of the preferred alternative as outlined in the SEIS.

Early and sustained communication with the public and resource agencies will be important to share updates about the study, understand resource issues and constraints, discuss mitigation opportunities, and arrive at a determination of feasibility that is supported by the Tribal community and jurisdictional authorities. For this study, we propose multiple engagement strategies designed to reach a broad audience and elicit meaningful participation while minimizing cost and adhering to appropriate health and safety guidelines. The PAIP aligns with MDT's established processes as outlined in its *Public Involvement Plan*[2].

1.1. Purpose of the PAIP

The purpose of this PAIP is to outline ongoing opportunities for involvement by the public, stakeholders, and resource agency representatives throughout the feasibility study process. Providing accurate information, timely notices, and opportunities to comment, as well as ensuring full access to key decisions, will help achieve this goal. The planning team will provide information to the public and interested parties and will seek their input throughout the process. All materials will be approved for distribution by the Advisory Committee (AC), the group of key stakeholders guiding the study.

1.1.1. Study Area

The study area for the feasibility study includes the section of US 93 between Gunlock Road and Brooke Lane which is referred to as the Ninepipe corridor. US 93 is a National Highway System route that spans across Montana from the Idaho border to the Canadian border. The Ninepipe corridor of US 93 is located between St Ignatius and Ronan. The study area is shown in **Figure 1**.

[1] Montana Department of Transportation, *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation*, 2008, available at: https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/docs/eis_ea/eis_ninepipe.pdf/
[2] Montana Department of Transportation, *Public Involvement Plan*, available at: https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/manuals/pubinvhb.pdf

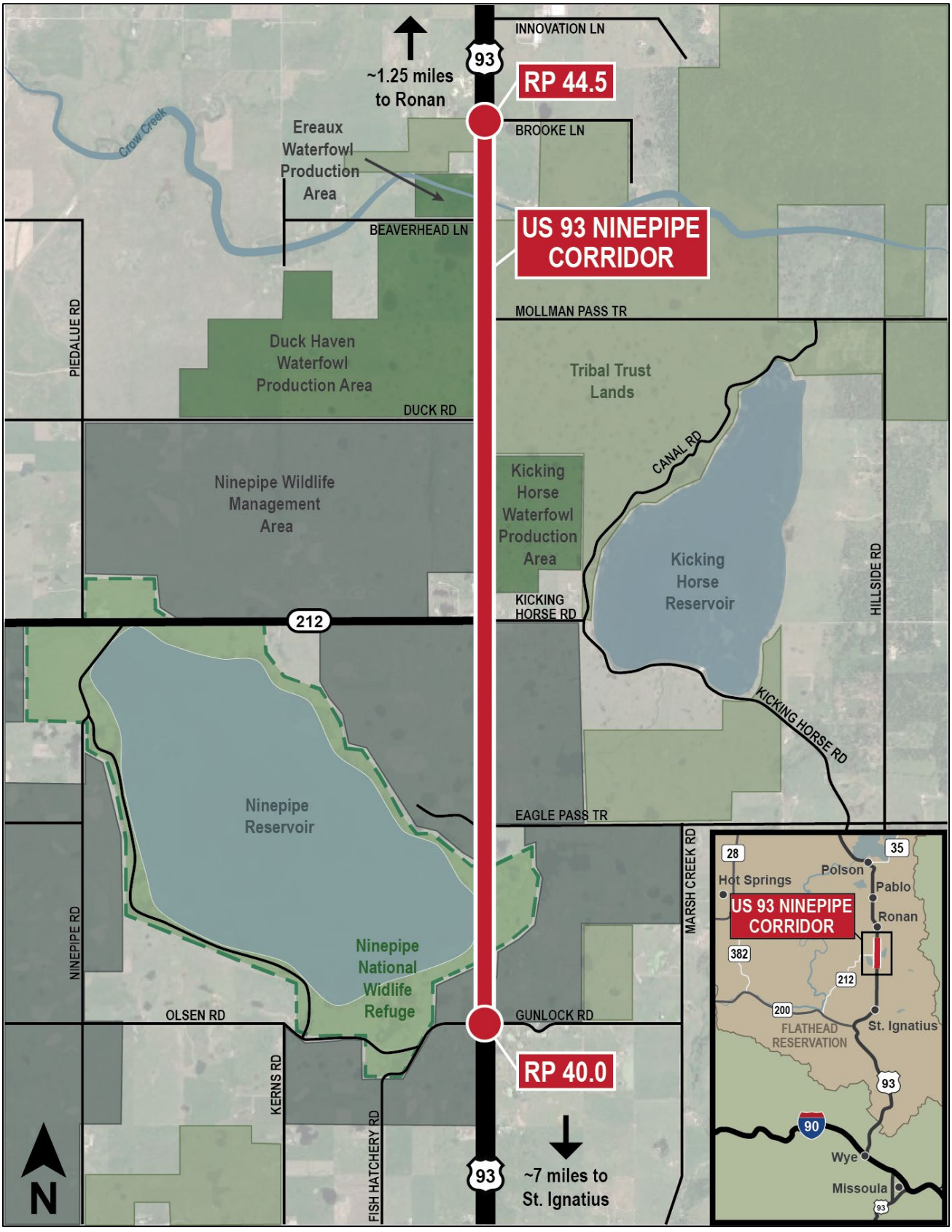

Figure 1: Study Area

2.0. AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES

Active participation and input will be encouraged at every stage of the planning process. Key audiences include both internal and external stakeholders. The AC will be tasked with providing direction and making decisions to guide the planning process. Stakeholders include everyone with interest or expertise related to the feasibility study. The following sections discuss the primary contacts for the study, anticipated key stakeholders, and other interested parties to be included in the planning process.

2.1. Study Contacts

Contact information for the MDT and Consultant project managers will be provided in all published information. These individuals will serve as primary points of contact for the study.

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2.2. Advisory Committee (AC)

An AC will be established to guide the study process and review deliverables produced by the planning team. Approximately nine AC meetings will be scheduled over the 18-month study period in coordination with planned deliverables. The meetings will track progress and address study development issues and questions. The meetings are important for the exchange of technical information and ideas during the development of the study.

RPA's project manager and other key team members will attend the AC meetings to make regular presentations covering the current work effort. During these meetings, issues, problems, and possible solutions will be identified and discussed. These meetings will provide the planning team with essential feedback and guidance and will also provide the AC with opportunities to guide the development of the study. The following topics are anticipated to be discussed at the AC meetings.

- **AC Meeting 1** (June 2021): Kickoff, Work Tasks, Schedule
- **AC Meeting 2** (August 2021): Public & Agency Involvement Plan, Outreach #1 Preparation
- **AC Meeting 3** (October 2021): Initial Conditions Analysis, Outreach #1 Summary
- **AC Meeting 4** (December 2021): Draft Relevant Conditions Memo, Outreach #2 Preparation
- **AC Meeting 5** (February 2022): Final Relevant Conditions Memo, Outreach #2 Summary
- **AC Meeting 6** (April 2022): Initial Feasibility Evaluation, Outreach #3 Preparation
- **AC Meeting 7** (June 2022): Screening Matrix, Outreach #3 Summary
- **AC Meeting 8** (August 2022): Draft Feasibility Report, Public Review Period
- **AC Meeting 9** (October 2022): Public Comments, Final Feasibility Report

2.3. Tribal Council

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CKST) are governed by an elected Tribal Council and Tribal Chairperson. The Council is comprised of 10 members representing 8 districts of the Flathead Reservation. Each member is elected for a four-year staggered term. The Chair serves as the Chief

Executive Officer of the Tribes. MDT regularly meets with the Tribal Council to discuss transportation matters and ongoing projects within the Flathead Reservation. The planning process will build upon this longstanding relationship between MDT and the CSKT Tribal Council to facilitate productive discussions and build support for the feasibility study.

2.4. Resource Agencies

The planning team will coordinate with study team members, the AC, and MDT to develop a list of key resource agency contacts for this study. We anticipate involvement from state, federal and Tribal agencies such as DEQ, FWP, USACE, USFWS, the CSKT THPO, and CSKT Natural Resources Department. We will ask these agencies to help us confirm resources within the study corridor, define mitigation requirements, and identify opportunities to avoid or offset potential project impacts.

2.5. Other Stakeholders

A stakeholder contact list will be developed to include individuals or groups with interest in the study. Input from a diverse range of stakeholders is important to the planning process. Areas of concern will be identified through stakeholder outreach and may include safety, access, wetland and wildlife impacts, cultural resources, multimodal accommodations, right-of-way encroachment, and alignment with Tribal planning efforts. Specific stakeholder representatives will be identified in coordination with study team members, the AC, and MDT. Stakeholders may include Tribal community members and residents, Tribal government entities, local business owners, adjacent landowners, wildlife and conservation organizations, trucking and freight representatives, utilities, recreational groups, and other interested and knowledgeable individuals.

2.6. Public Comments and Input

Public comments and input will be collected and considered throughout the planning process. All comments and concerns received at meetings and through individual discussions will be considered by the AC throughout the planning process and comment themes will help establish critical areas of concern and consideration. Additionally, an official comment period will be provided after the release of the draft *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study.* All comments received during the official comment period will be included as an appendix to the final study.

3.0. OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Outreach strategies are intended to share information about the planning process, offer opportunities for dialogue, obtain meaningful input, and identify barriers and constraints that may influence the feasibility determination. The goal is to engage a diverse cross section of interests and perspectives. The following sections discuss anticipated outreach strategies.

3.1. Electronic Engagement

The study team recognizes that people lead increasingly busy lives. Allowing the public to access information and provide input on their own schedules has proven to increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of input. Electronic engagement allows expansive, on-demand outreach allowing the public to participate at their convenience to encourage meaningful feedback. Multiple electronic public engagement strategies will be used to solicit input and provide information, including a study webpage and monthly progress updates via email.

STUDY WEBSITE

A study website will be used to encourage public and agency participation and to provide study information. The website will be hosted by MDT and updated throughout the study process. Informational material to be posted to the website will include a description of the study, background information about previous planning efforts, study contact information, meeting announcements, and study materials available for public and agency review.

EMAIL UPDATES

RPA will provide informal monthly progress updates via email blasts to study contacts and stakeholders throughout the study duration. Interested parties can join the email list by contacting either the RPA or MDT project manager. These updates will be an easy way to maintain communication and keep interested parties aware of progress and key milestones throughout the study process.

3.2. Targeted Outreach and Meetings

Targeted outreach is intended to obtain meaningful input and dialogue about the study and share information during specific scheduled events. The goal will be to reach a diverse a cross section of interests. The following sections discuss the anticipated targeted outreach events and strategies.

INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

Depending on health and safety considerations, the study team will host either in-person meetings or virtual meetings using a platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Meeting announcements will be developed and advertised at least two weeks prior to informational meetings. The ads will announce the meeting location, time, and date; the format and purpose of the meeting; and the locations where documents may be reviewed (if applicable). The Char-Koosta News, Valley Journal, and Lake County Leader may carry the display ads. Meetings may also be announced on local radio and/or television stations, by email to the study contact list, and by mail to adjacent landowners.

In-person meetings would follow an open house format, enabling the public to drop in at their convenience to view exhibits and speak with study representatives. The study team would offer extended hours to facilitate access and to encourage higher attendance. Alternatively, virtual meetings would be held at mid-day and evening times to reach a broad audience and would involve a PowerPoint presentation, scripting, and a question-and-answer forum to address comments. Both live formats would enable participants to learn about the study, ask questions, and receive responses from the study team in real time. Participants unable to join at the scheduled time could view either a recording or informational summary posted to the website. For those without access to the internet, alternative access would be provided through mailed copies of printed materials and telephone accommodations.

Public informational meetings will take place at two key points during the planning study. The first informational meeting will be used to discuss the purpose of the study and to review initial findings and changed conditions. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss the study process, share preliminary issues and concerns within the study area, and explain how to stay involved. The meeting will allow members of the public to provide information about constraints and challenges within the corridor that may affect the feasibility determination.

The second informational meeting will focus on the feasibility evaluation, including screening criteria for constructability, cost, and impact considerations. Members of the public will be encouraged to provide feedback on the screening criteria and study findings.

A newsletter/flyer will be developed before each informational meeting. The newsletters will describe work in progress, preliminary findings and recommendations, and other relevant topics. Each newsletter/flyer will be delivered to Tribal representatives and select stakeholders for distribution and posting to their respective websites. Printed copies of newsletters will be available at in-person informational meetings.

RESOURCE AGENCY MEETINGS

Resource agency participation is vital to the success of the feasibility study. In addition to regular email communication, up to three (3) virtual resource agency meetings will be held using a platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The purpose of the meetings will be to present initial findings on changed resource conditions within the corridor, identify resource areas of particular concern, and discuss mitigation needs, opportunities, and costs. We anticipate heightened resource agency interest given the sensitive resources in the US 93 corridor, the need for specific mitigation discussions, and the potential for a future project to advance.

CSKT TRIBAL COUNCIL PRESENTATIONS

Keeping the CSKT Tribal Council apprised will be important to secure support for study findings and recommendations. The study team will provide up to three (3) presentations to the CSKT Tribal Council. The first presentation will be used to discuss the purpose of the study and the areas of focus. This will serve as a kickoff to announce our efforts and outline the anticipated schedule and study tasks. The second presentation will review initial findings based on our research and field reviews. We will highlight areas of changed conditions in comparison to the 2008 SEIS documentation. The third presentation will focus on the feasibility evaluation, including screening criteria for constructability, cost, and impact considerations. MDT participation in these presentations will be important to facilitate government-to-government communication.

CSKT HIGHWAY TEAM MEETINGS

The planning team will attend monthly meetings with the CSKT Highway Team to provide updates on the study process. It is anticipated that these meetings will be attended virtually.

TECHNICAL DESIGN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The planning team will attend up to four (4) meetings with the Technical Design Committee at key milestones. It is anticipated that these meetings will be held in-person as health guidelines allow.

THPO/CULTURE COMMITTEE COORDINATION

As the planning team conducts research and investigations to confirm cultural resources within the study corridor, ongoing and frequent coordination with the THPO Salish-Pend d'Oreille and Kootenai Culture Committees and Tribal elders will be important to understand important cultural and historic resources, identify potential impacts, and define avoidance or mitigation measures to eliminate or lessen potential project impacts.

This coordination will be critical to arrive at a feasibility determination for the study. Depending on health and safety requirements, coordination may involve telephone calls, emails, in-person meetings, and site visits to discuss resource concerns. MDT will participate in this coordination to facilitate government-to-government communication.

VIRTUAL STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

To improve outreach and input, the study team will target key stakeholder groups who are familiar with the land uses and resources in the corridor. Before the first round of informational meetings, the planning team will reach out to interested stakeholders to schedule informal telephone/video calls. The purpose of these conversations will be collaborative and interactive to identify issues and concerns

within the corridor. The information gathered from the conversations will help the study team identify areas for special consideration throughout the planning process. At the time of the second informational meeting, the planning team will contact stakeholders to discuss screening criteria and the feasibility determination and encourage participant feedback.

PUBLIC AND AGENCY REVIEW PERIOD

The planning team will facilitate a public and agency review period for the draft *Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* to obtain input and feedback. This will be an important opportunity to demonstrate how the study incorporates background research and considers public and resource agency input to date to arrive at the study findings and determinations. Targeted emails will announce availability of the draft study, within specific focus on identified stakeholders and resource agencies to request their review and comment on the draft feasibility study.

3.3. Access and Visibility

The planning team will be available to all interested parties for the purposes of receiving comments and answering questions. All information published regarding the feasibility study will provide contact information for the project managers. Comments can be submitted throughout the planning process via the website.

INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

Technical and planning-level information related to the data or content used in the development of the study will be available in memorandums, study updates, graphics, and other miscellaneous materials. The materials will be made available on the study website.

CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC INPUT

Input and comments from stakeholders and the public will be considered by the AC throughout the planning process. Public comments received on the draft report will be documented and included as an appendix.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Additional efforts are necessary to involve traditionally underserved segments of the population, including disabled, minority, and low-income individuals, with specific focus on CSKT Tribal members and Flathead Reservation residents. The following steps will help with these efforts:

- Provide appropriate accommodations: Appropriate non-discrimination statements and alternative accommodation contacts will be provided on all printed materials. Accessibility accommodations will be offered for all public outreach activities, including virtual meetings. Upon request, alternative participation methods and materials will be made available.
- Seek help from community leaders and organizations: To facilitate involvement of traditionally underserved populations, consultation with Tribal community leaders will be used to determine the most effective times and ways to reach the Tribal community population.
- Be sensitive to diverse audiences: At meetings and in printed materials, the study team will attempt to communicate clearly and understandably and be sensitive to Tribal cultural concerns. Printed materials will be developed using easy-to-understand language.

4.0. OUTREACH SUMMARY AND SCHEDULE

This PAIP establishes guidelines and procedures for encouraging public and stakeholder participation. The following strategies will be used to share information and seek input.

- A study website will be developed to provide information about the planning process.
- A mailing list will be developed to contact interested stakeholders and members of the public.
- Newsletters and media announcements will be developed in advance of public informational meetings.
- Two public informational meetings will be held to learn about issues and concerns and to share study findings.
- Targeted outreach will occur with resource agencies, the Tribal council, CSKT Highway Team, TDC, and stakeholders.
- Public comments and input will be collected and considered throughout the study.
- Published materials will be sensitive to diverse audiences.

The anticipated schedule follows an 18-month time frame. A public draft of the *Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* is anticipated by August 31st, 2022. Following a 30-day public review and comment period, all work is anticipated to be completed by November 2022. **Figure 2** illustrates the anticipated schedule.

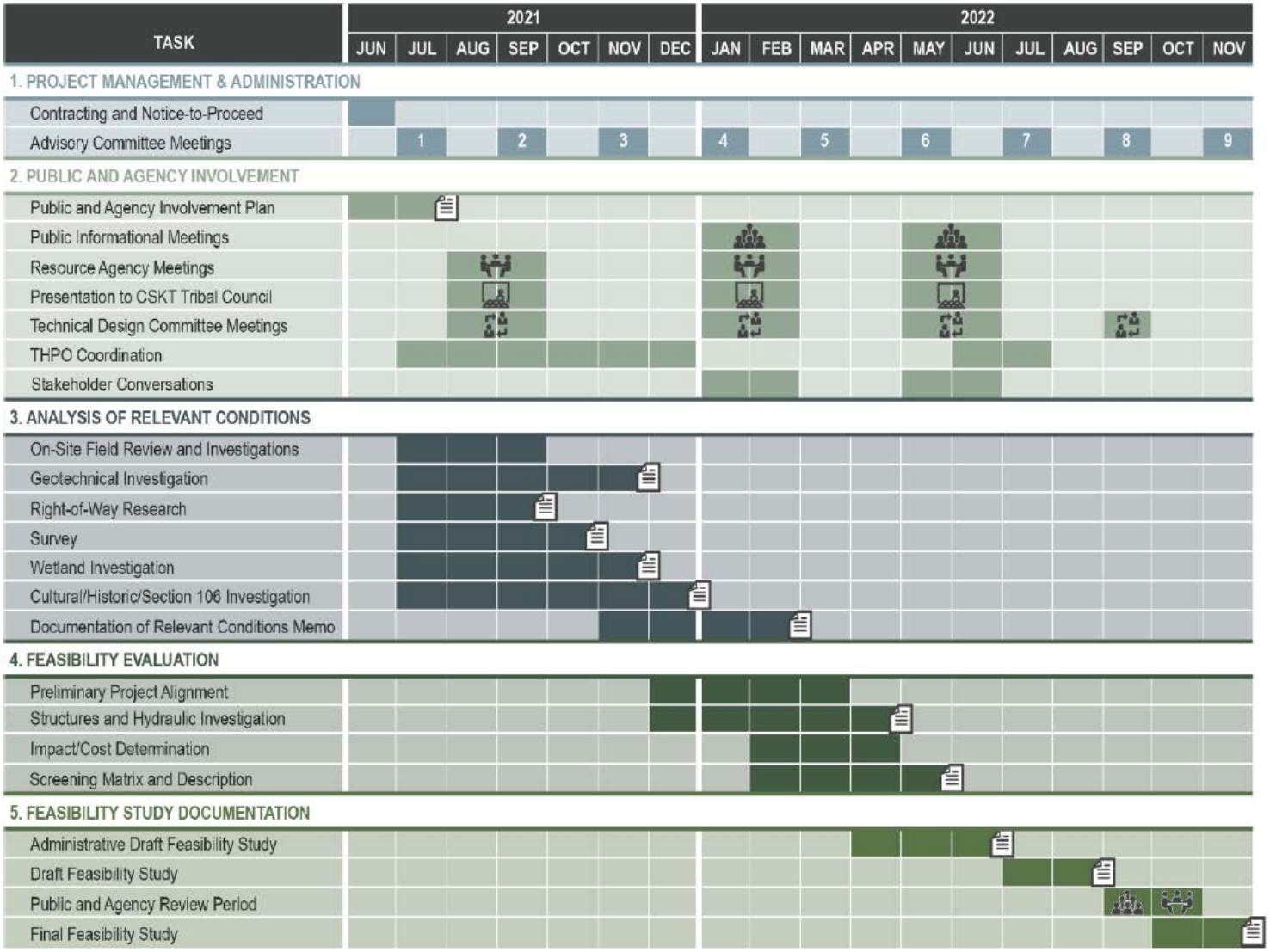


Figure 2: Study Schedule

APPENDIX 1B:

Newsletter #1

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Newsletter #1
August 2021

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is developing a feasibility study of the US Highway 93 (US 93) Ninepipe corridor. The existing road is narrow, lacks shoulders, is experiencing increasing traffic volumes, and has a history of severe crashes. Previous environmental documentation determined that reconstruction of the corridor is needed to improve traffic flow, bicycle/pedestrian accommodations, and the connectivity and safety of the transportation system. The study will be a collaborative process between MDT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), resource agencies, stakeholders, and the public.

In 1996, MDT completed a *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Section 4(f) Evaluation* for the portion of US 93 between Evaro and Polson, MT. The Record of Decision (ROD) did not provide specific design details, so FHWA, MDT, and the CSKT agreed to prepare a supplemental environmental study to further explore possible alignments and study the effects of highway improvements on wetlands and wildlife in the corridor. In 2008, MDT, FHWA, and CSKT completed a *Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and a Section 4(f) Evaluation* for the Ninepipe/Ronan section (Reference Point [RP] 37.1 to 48.3). The SEIS/ROD identified a preferred alternative for the corridor consisting of a two-lane roadway, wildlife crossing structures, and a separated bicycle/pedestrian path within the Ninepipe segment connecting to a divided four-lane segment north of Brooke Lane and a passing lane segment south of Gunlock Road.

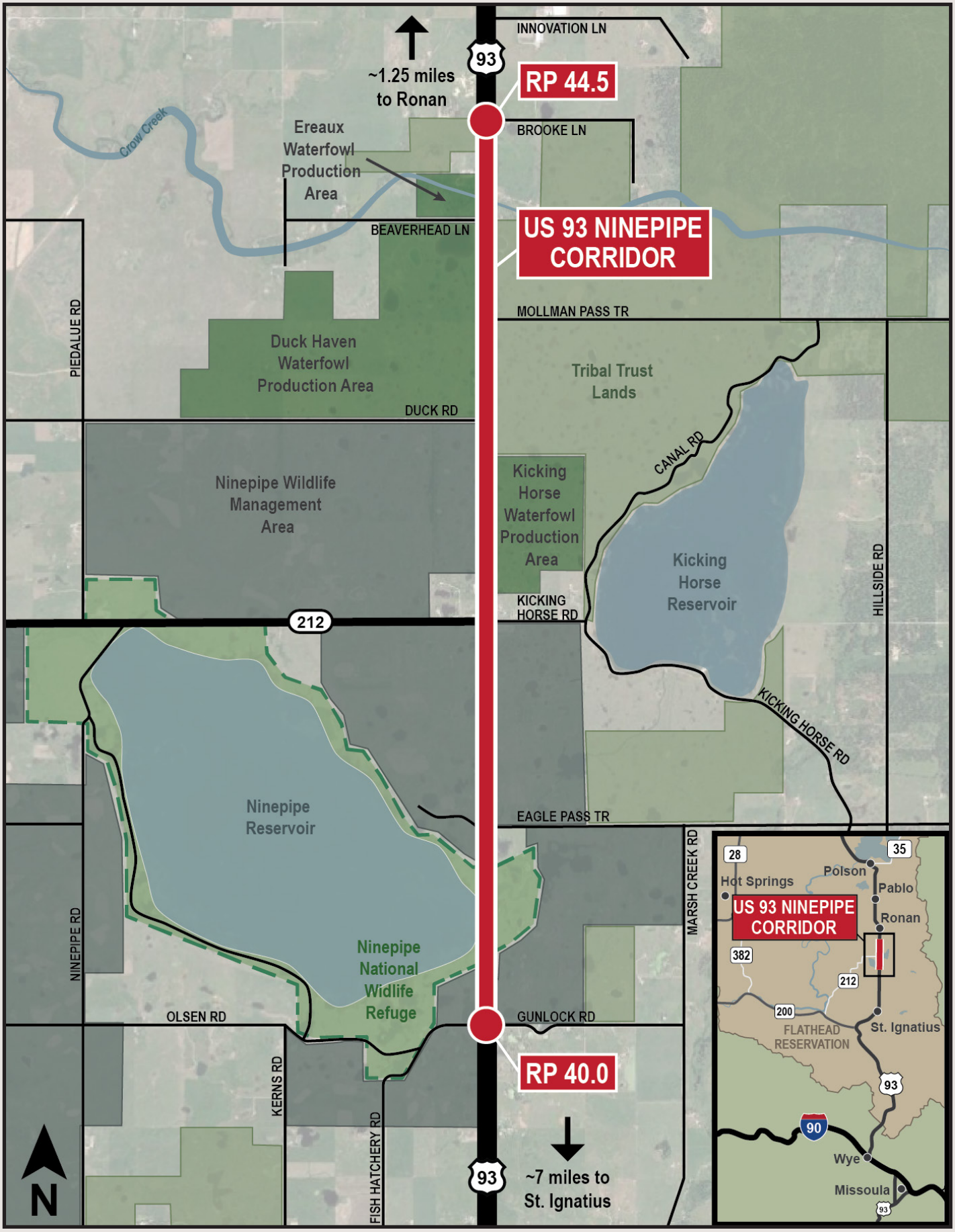
WHAT IS THE STUDY PURPOSE?

Since completion of these previous efforts, MDT has proceeded to develop projects in stretches of US 93 adjacent to the Ninepipe segment and has encountered multiple challenges relating to constructability, impacts, and costs.

The intent of the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* is to proactively address these challenges by identifying potential constraints and considering the viability of the preferred alternative previously identified in the 2008 SEIS before a project is nominated.

WHERE IS THE STUDY AREA?

The study is focused on the US 93 corridor between Gunlock Road (at RP 40.0) and Brooke Lane (at RP 44.5).



WHAT ARE THE CONSTRAINTS?

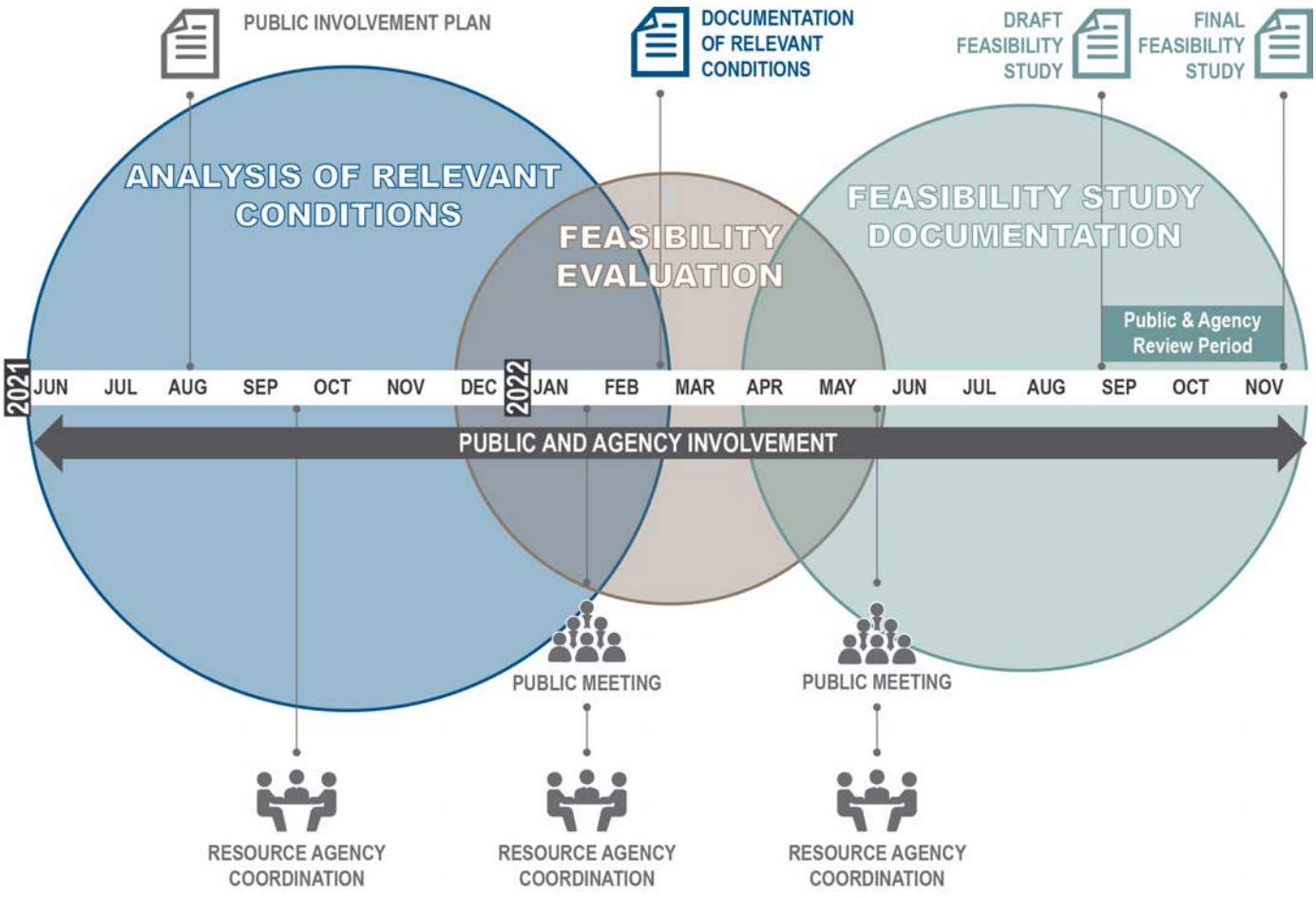
Multiple constraints within the Ninepipe corridor may affect the feasibility of a future reconstruction project.

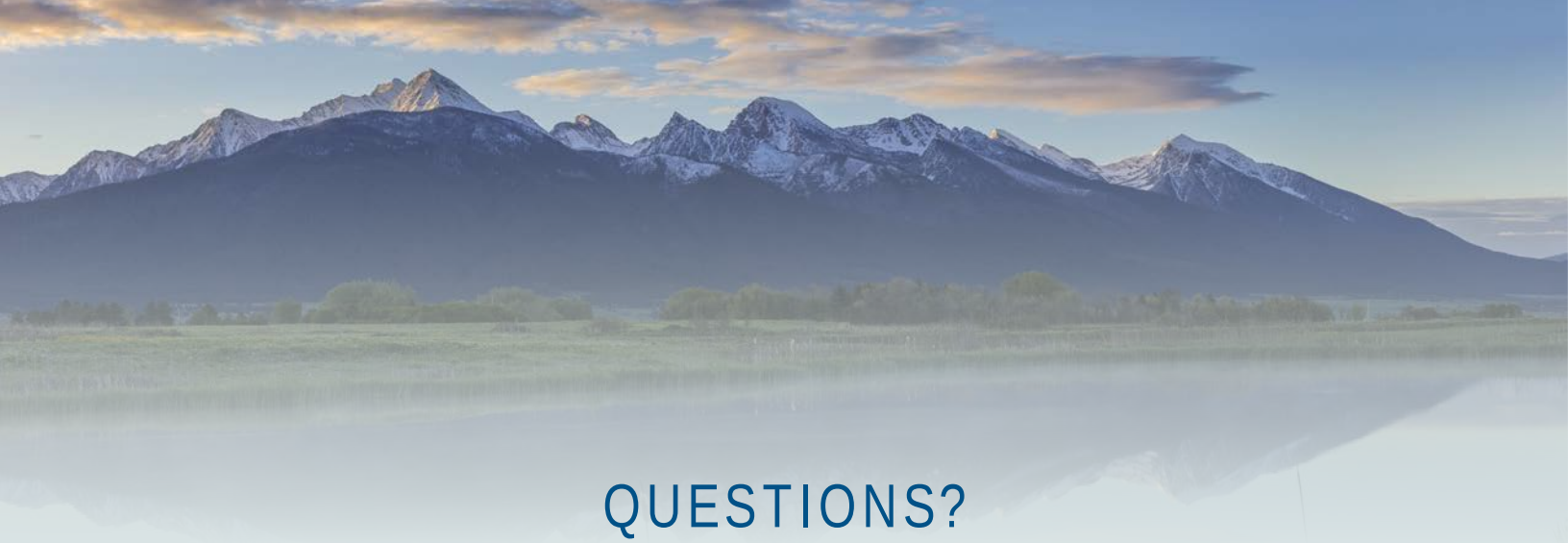
- Cultural/Historic Resources
- Wetlands and Surface Water Bodies
- Soils, Groundwater Levels, and Geotechnical Conditions
- Wildlife Activity
- Construction Costs
- Right-of-Way and Adjacent Property Boundaries

SCHEDULE

The *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* will involve three primary phases.

- PHASE 1: Analysis of relevant conditions is currently underway to conduct research and gather field data relating to geotechnical constraints, hydraulic considerations, wetland impacts, wildlife movements, cultural influences, and traffic conditions.
- PHASE 2: The feasibility evaluation will occur in early 2022 to consider costs, impacts, and construction feasibility relating to roadway and bicycle/pedestrian path alignments and wildlife crossings.
- PHASE 3: Feasibility study documentation will be developed in late 2022, with a final report anticipated by November 2022.
- THROUGHOUT: Public, stakeholder, and resource agency outreach will be conducted during the entire process.





QUESTIONS?

CONTACT

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EMAIL: josterloh@mt.gov

VISIT

https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/US93Ninepipe/

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APPENDIX 1C:

Public Outreach #1

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Meeting Summary

Virtual Informational Meetings – February 2022

MEETING OVERVIEW

MDT hosted a set of virtual informational meetings on February 7, 2022. To better serve the public, the meetings were held at two times on the same date. The purpose of the meetings was to provide an overview of the study process, summarize initial findings, and offer an opportunity for the public to ask questions and share feedback. The meetings began with a brief presentation followed by a question-and-answer period. Attendees with internet access could view presentation slides and submit written questions using the Zoom platform. Attendees without internet access could call into the meeting and listen to the presentation and responses.

MEETING DETAILS

Date: February 7, 2022

Time: 11:00 AM and 5:00 PM

OUTREACH AND PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided in multiple formats in advance of the virtual informational meetings. A news release was issued to regional media outlets, advertisements were placed in the *Charkoosta* and *Missoulian* newspapers, and the *Missoulian* posted an article about the meetings. Direct invitations were mailed to 59 adjacent landowners. Electronic invitations were sent to 22 identified stakeholders and study contacts. Electronic notice was also posted to the study website.

ATTENDEES

Approximately 17 people attended the morning meeting, and approximately 8 people attended the afternoon meeting (not including advisory committee representatives listed below). An additional 9 people registered for the meetings but did not attend.

The following study advisory committee representatives participated in the meetings:

- Parker Osterloh MDT
- Katie Potts MDT
- Vicki Crnich MDT
- Jacquelyn Smith MDT
- Miki Lloyd MDT
- Whisper Means CSKT
- Scott Randall RPA
- Sarah Nicolai RPA

MEETING MATERIALS

A PowerPoint presentation was provided during each meeting. A copy of the slides and meeting recordings were posted to the website. Additionally, informational sheets were posted to the website summarizing key findings and recommendations from the study.

AGENDA ITEMS

I. **Introductions**
II. **Background**
III. **Analysis of Relevant Conditions**
IV. **Next Steps**
V. **Open Discussion**

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The table below lists comments provided by attendees at both virtual informational meetings. Attendees submitted written comments through the Zoom Q&A and chat portals, and responses were provided live during the meeting. Topics are listed alphabetically and may reflect multiple individual comments.

Table 1: Summary of Public Comments

Topic	Comment
2008 SEIS	Is the Preferred alternative you are referring to is the one articulated in the 2008 SEIS? Your supplemental EIS was done in 2008, 14 years ago. Is it still valid? What did the SEIS identify as the purpose and need? Won't that constrain the best alternative?
Eagle Pass Trail Project	The Eagle Pass new turn off, is this a separate, stand alone project? Eagle Pass Trail is the greatest area of concern in terms of safe left-turns. Is the Eagle Pass project posted anywhere that I can read about the details and timelines for that?
Lane Configuration	Everything north of this project is 4 lane. The traffic flow from spring till mid fall is such that you cannot make a left turn onto the highway. Why no 4 lane road. if not 4 lane it will not handle the traffic as soon as it is done. Isn't this about the safety of the people. What will it take to consider a four lane road? There is a need. Just ask anyone who drives this road.
Impacts	How will you weigh impacts on aesthetics?
Ninepipes Lodge and Museum	Do you have any idea of how the Ninepipes Lodge and Museum will be affected in terms of turn lanes and pathway?
Parking Demand	If you are likely to create new demand for non-motorized access, are we thinking more parking is likely?
Project Costs & Funding	What's the ballpark budget for this project and does it qualify for recent federal infrastructure support?

Topic	Comment
Post Creek Project	Understanding that it's been separated off into a different project, are you able to provide any updates on the long-suffering Post Ck wildlife crossing bridge project, just south of this area?
Stakeholders & Advocacy Groups	I'm curious to know what advocacy groups are working w MDT on this project as I'm finding in Missoula that advocacy is key for prioritizing projects and funding.
Staying Involved	Where can we download these maps? Is there a list we can get on to be informed of the next step?
Turn Lanes	Would the preferred alternative include any dedicated left turn lanes? Is there any special consideration to the access to Fort Conah turn off?

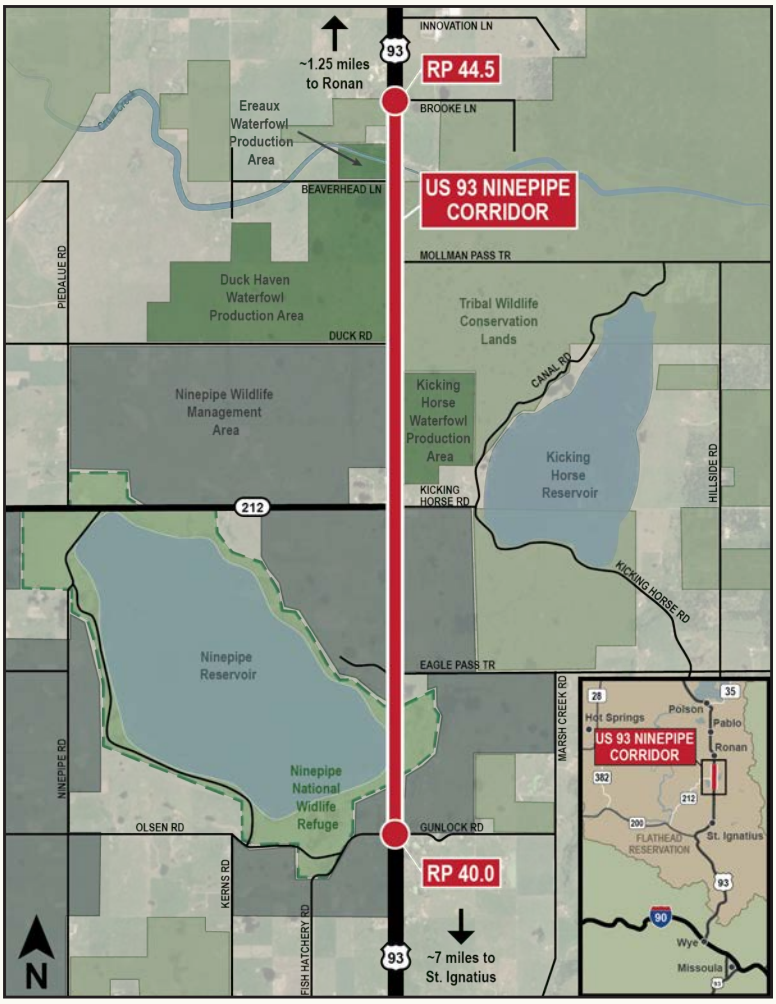
Newsletter #2
February 2022

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is developing a feasibility study of the US Highway 93 (US 93) Ninepipe corridor. The study will be a collaborative process between MDT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), resource agencies, stakeholders, and the public.

In 1996, MDT completed a *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Section 4(f) Evaluation* to evaluate a proposed project for the portion of US 93 between Evaro and Polson, MT. The purpose of the proposed project was to improve traffic operations and the connectivity and safety of the transportation system. The Record of Decision (ROD) did not provide specific design details, so FHWA, MDT, and the CSKT agreed to prepare a supplemental environmental study to further explore possible alignments and study the effects of highway improvements on wetlands and wildlife in the corridor. In 2008, MDT, FHWA, and CSKT completed a *Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and a Section 4(f) Evaluation* for the Ninepipe/Ronan section (Reference Point [RP] 37.1 to 48.3). The SEIS/ROD identified a preferred alternative for the corridor consisting of a two-lane roadway, wildlife crossing structures, and a separated bicycle/pedestrian path within the Ninepipe segment connecting to a divided four-lane segment north of Brooke Lane and a northbound passing lane segment south of Gunlock Road. This alternative was determined to best meet the purpose and need of the proposed project while minimizing costs and impacts to the area's natural resources.



WHAT IS THE STUDY PURPOSE?

Since completion of these previous efforts, MDT has proceeded to develop projects in stretches of US 93 adjacent to the Ninepipe segment and has encountered multiple challenges relating to constructability, impacts, and costs.

The intent of the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* is to proactively address these challenges by identifying potential constraints and considering the viability of the preferred alternative previously identified in the 2008 SEIS before a project is nominated.

WHERE IS THE STUDY AREA?

The study is focused on the US 93 corridor between Gunlock Road (at RP 40.0) and Brooke Lane (at RP 44.5) within the Flathead Indian Reservation.

ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

An analysis of relevant conditions was conducted in 2021 to review available research and gather field data relating to traffic and safety conditions, soils and groundwater, wetlands, wildlife, cultural resources, and traffic conditions. This information will be used to support the feasibility analysis, including development of costs and identification of impacts and constructability challenges associated with proposed improvements to the US 93 corridor.

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY

- The corridor currently operates at a poor operational level of service below the targeted level for similar facilities. Operational conditions are expected to remain the same or deteriorate in future years as traffic volumes increase.
- The corridor is not suited to accommodate nonmotorized users due to high speeds, high traffic volumes, and lack of dedicated facilities.
- Crash rates on the corridor have increased since the 2008 SEIS, but the severity of crashes has decreased.

LAND USE

- While the majority of the corridor is surrounded by public lands, 12 private landowners own parcels adjacent to the study corridor.
- The updated land use inventory shows similar usage as found in the 2008 SEIS inventory.
- The specified right-of-way width along the corridor is 160 feet for the preferred alternative. Generally, this minimum width is available along the corridor with narrower areas near Eagle Pass Trail and Brooke Lane.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

- The 2008 SEIS identified 81 wetlands along the study corridor. Of these, minor boundary changes were identified for 26 wetlands, and 55 remained unchanged.
- A total of 3 new wetlands were identified in 2021 totaling 0.09 acre.
- Approximately 200 feet of US 93 at the Ninepipe Reservoir and 675 feet of US 93 at Crow Creek crosses the 100-year floodplain.

WILDLIFE

- Numerous species occur in the Ninepipe area including grizzly bears, deer, birds, turtles, and other wildlife.
- Wildlife species are known to cross throughout the US 93 corridor, with concentrated movements occurring near the Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek areas.
- Carcass and crash data indicate deer strikes throughout the corridor. These data sources are likely not representative of the full extent of wildlife mortality in the Ninepipe segment.

CULTURAL/HISTORIC RESOURCES

- Three previously identified cultural resources occur within the Ninepipe segment of the US 93 corridor, including the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project, Stagecoach Route, and the Ninepipe Cultural Property.
- Additional government-to-government consultation and coordination with CSKT Culture Committees is planned for 2022.

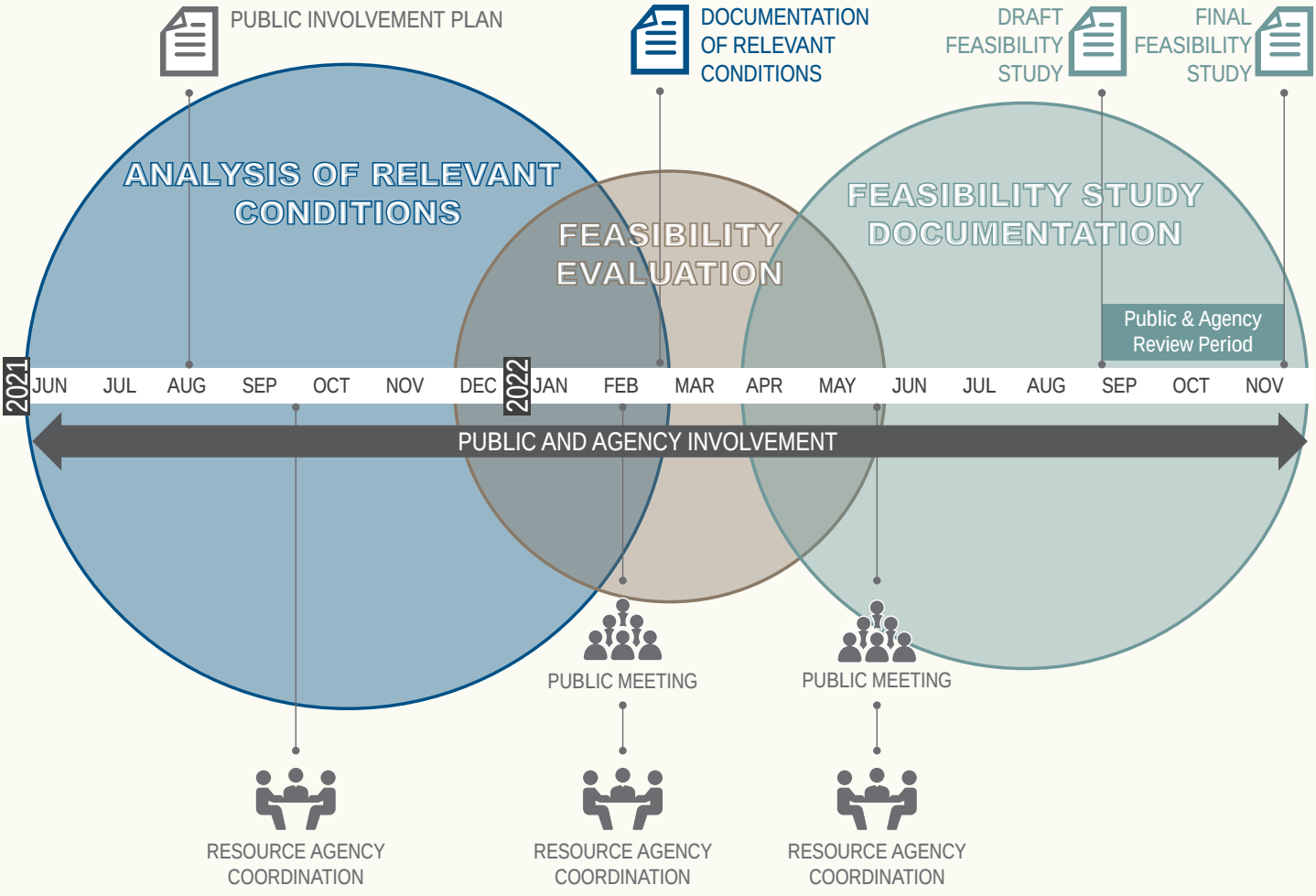
SOILS, GROUNDWATER LEVELS, AND GEOTECHNICAL CONDITIONS

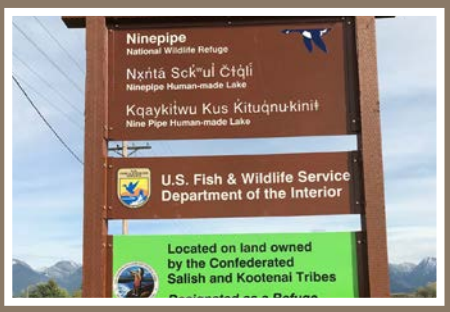
- Soil textures in the study corridor were confirmed to be soft clays, silts, and sands.
- Soil liquefaction (or the possibility to temporarily behave like a liquid during an earthquake) is expected throughout the corridor.
- No evidence of artesian (or pressurized groundwater) conditions was found.

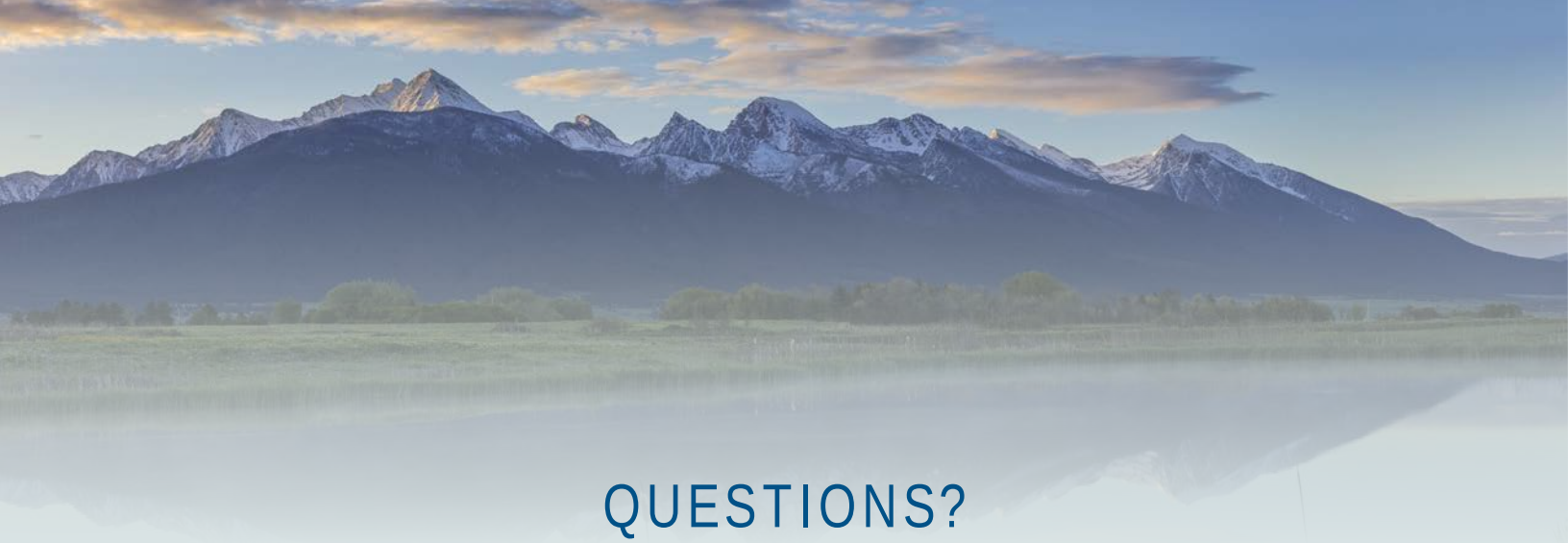
SCHEDULE

The *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* involves three primary phases.

- PHASE 1: An analysis of relevant conditions was completed in late 2021. The analysis involved conducting research and gathering field data relating to traffic and safety conditions, land ownership and corridor right-of-way, wetland areas, wildlife presence and movements, cultural influences, and soil and groundwater constraints.
- PHASE 2: The feasibility evaluation will occur in early 2022 to consider costs, impacts, and construction feasibility relating to roadway and bicycle/pedestrian preferred path alignments and wildlife crossings.
- PHASE 3: Feasibility study documentation will be developed in late 2022, with a final report anticipated by November 2022.
- THROUGHOUT: Public, stakeholder, and resource agency outreach will be conducted during the entire process.







QUESTIONS?

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is developing a feasibility study of the US Highway 93 (US 93) Ninepipe segment of US Highway 93 (US 93) between Gunlock Road (Reference Point [RP] 40.0) and Brooke Lane (RP 44.5). US 93 is a National Highway System route that is important to the local, state, and nationwide transportation system. US 93 provides linkage between other highway routes and serves as an access route to Flathead Lake and Glacier National Park, two popular destinations in northwest Montana.

The intent of the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* is to analyze the feasibility of the preferred alternative previously identified in the 2008 *Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (SEIS). The purpose of the action proposed in the SEIS was to improve traffic flow and the connectivity and safety of the transportation system. The study is a collaborative process between MDT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), resource agencies, and the public to identify potential constraints and determine the viability of the preferred alternative as outlined in the SEIS.

WHAT IS A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE?

During previous environmental studies, a range of corridor alternatives were considered with various lane configurations. The preferred alternative for the Ninepipe corridor was identified based on its ability to best meet the purpose and need for the project to improve highway safety and operations, while minimizing cost and impacts to sensitive resources including wetlands and wildlife.

MONTANA Department of Transportation

U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration

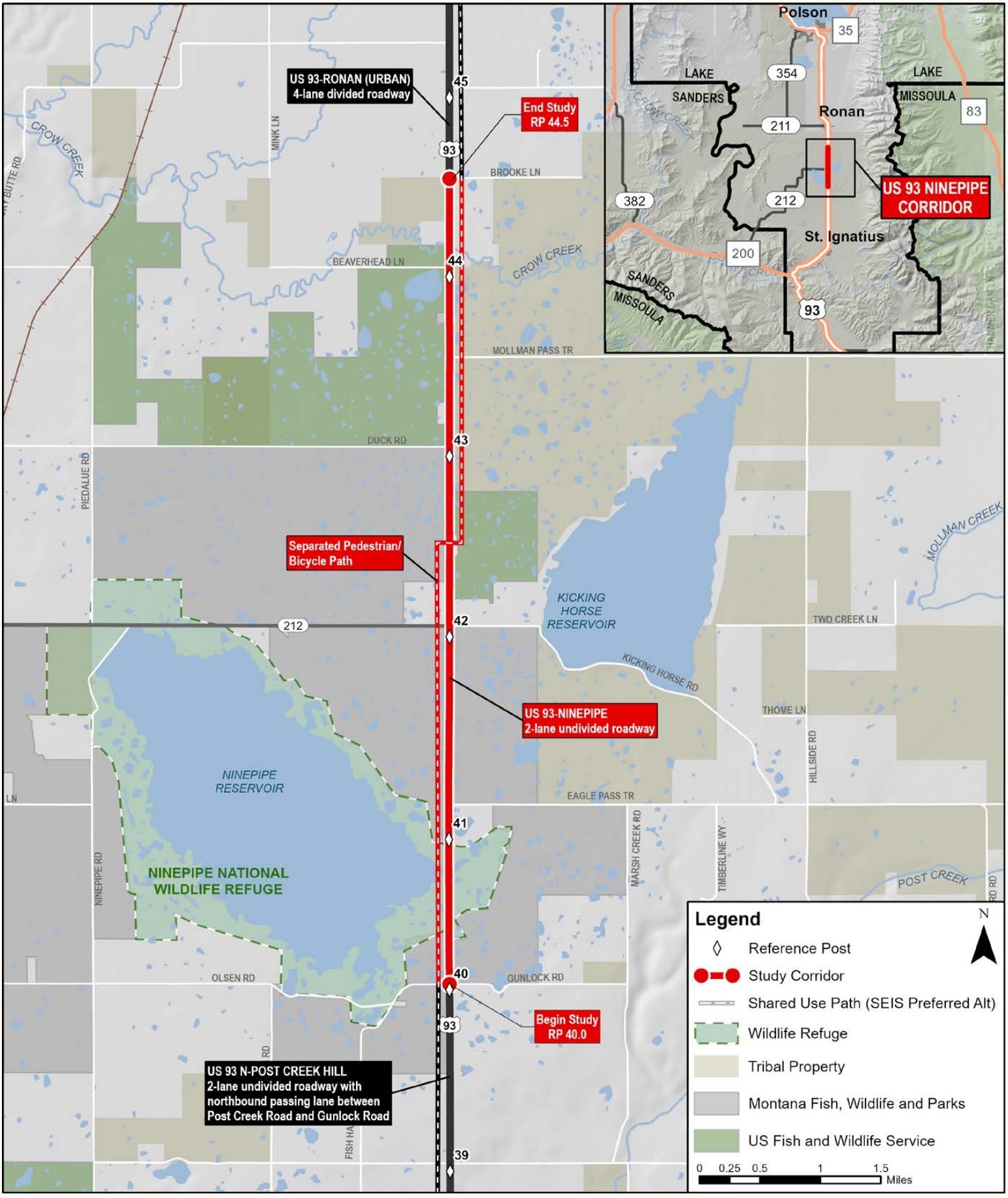
PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

In 1996, MDT completed a *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Section 4(f) Evaluation* for the portion of US 93 between Evaro and Polson, MT. The Record of Decision (ROD) did not provide specific design details, so FHWA, MDT, and the CSKT agreed to prepare a supplemental environmental study to further explore possible alignments and study the effects of highway improvements on wetlands and wildlife in the corridor.

In 2008, MDT, FHWA, and CSKT completed a *Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and a Section 4(f) Evaluation* for the Ninepipe/Ronan section (RP 37.1 to 48.3). The SEIS/ROD identified a preferred alternative for the corridor consisting of a two-lane roadway, widened shoulders, wildlife crossing structures, and a separated bicycle/pedestrian path within the Ninepipe segment connecting to a divided four-lane segment north of Brooke Lane and a northbound passing lane segment south of Gunlock Road.

STUDY AREA

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY



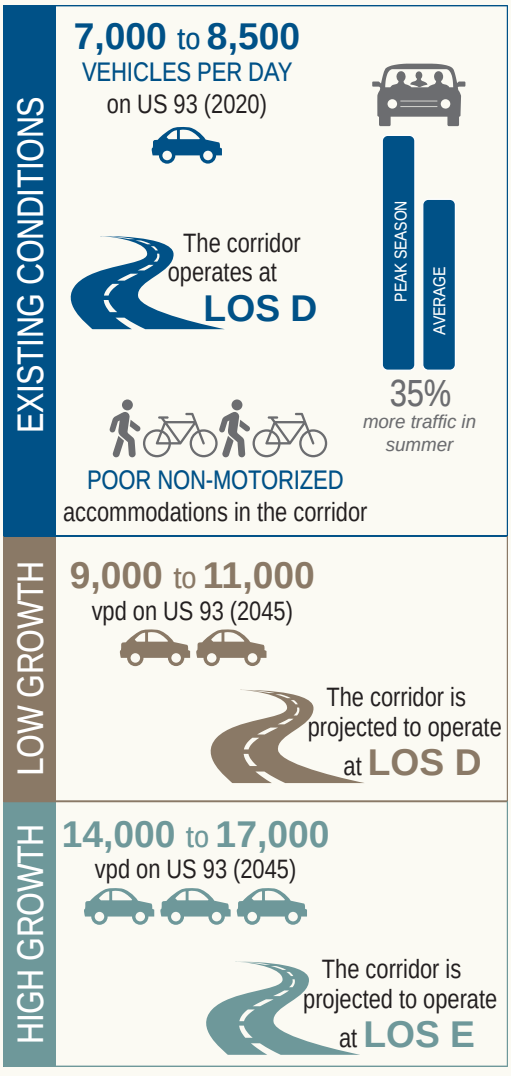
ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

The first phase of the feasibility study reviewed relevant resources within the study area to identify any changed conditions that have occurred since development of the 2008 SEIS.

TRAFFIC

The Ninepipe corridor currently consists of one travel lane in each direction and shoulders of varying widths. For this study, updated traffic conditions were evaluated to help determine if new information might influence development of the preferred alternative. The updated analysis was completed using existing MDT count data as well as supplemental data collected for this feasibility study.

- 2020 annual average daily traffic (AADT) ranged from approximately 7,000 vehicles per day (vpd) south of MT 212 (RP 42.05) to just over 8,500 vpd to the north.
- Summer average daily traffic (ADT) volumes were approximately 35% higher than the average annual volumes.
- An operational analysis was conducted for the study corridor to determine highway level of service (LOS) based on roadway volume and theoretical capacity. LOS is a scale from A (representing the best conditions) to F (representing failing conditions). The target LOS for similar facilities is LOS B. The corridor currently operates at LOS D.
- Based on low, moderate, and high growth scenarios, daily traffic volumes are projected to range from approximately 9,000 to 14,000 vpd on the south end and between 11,000 and 17,000 vpd on the north end in 2045. Peak summer weekday traffic volumes are projected to be approximately 3,000 to 6,000 vpd higher than those during a typical day.
- Under low growth projections, the corridor will continue to operate at LOS D in 2045. Under moderate and high growth projections, the corridor will experience degrading operations, with LOS E projected by the year 2045.
- The corridor currently provides poor non-motorized accommodations due to high traffic volumes, high travel speeds, and lack of dedicated facilities.



ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

SAFETY

MDT provided crash data for the study corridor for the years 2015-2019. The updated crash rate for the Ninepipe corridor was determined to be higher compared to the 2008 SEIS. However, the severity rate, percent of fatalities, and rate of head on and intersection crashes was lower compared to the 2008 SEIS.

- According to the MDT crash database, a total of 84 crashes occurred within the study area during the 2015 to 2019 analysis period.
- Most crashes involved a single vehicle, with the most common crash type being wild-animal crashes, followed by fixed-object.
- The most common multiple vehicle crash type was rear-end, followed by right angle and sideswipe crashes by vehicles traveling in opposite directions.
- Crash clusters occurred at the intersections with Eagle Pass Trail, MT 212, and Beaverhead Lane. At those intersections, nearly half were wild animal or fixed object crashes unrelated to the intersections.

Over a 5-Year Period:

84 crashes occurred in the study area

28 crashes involved a wild animal

13 were rear-end crashes

5 crashes resulted in a total of 4 serious injuries and 3 fatalities

CRASH DATA COMPARISON

Comparison Metric	2008 SEIS[i]	Updated Crash Data (2015 - 2019)
Crash Severity	5% Fatal	1% Fatal (6% severe)
Crash Rate	2.8 crashes per mile per year	4.3 crashes per mile per year
	0.98 crashes per million vehicle miles of travel	1.44 crashes per million vehicle miles of travel
Crash Type	6% Head On	3.6% Head On
Severity Rate	2.86	2.27
Noted Contributor	33% at or related to intersections/driveways	17% at or related to intersections/driveways

[i] *Data includes rural segments of US 93 between Evaro and Polson (1995-2003)*

Source: MDT Traffic and Safety Bureau (2015-2019) for Ninepipe segment

ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

LAND USE AND OWNERSHIP

An updated land use inventory was completed for this study. The land use by parcel was determined from Montana Cadastral data, with parcels categorized as residential, commercial/industrial/ institutional, and other or unknown. The corridor was also evaluated to determine existing right-of-way widths and property boundaries.

- Most of the study corridor is surrounded by public lands, with ownership varying between Tribal property, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.
- 12 private landowners own one or more parcels adjacent to the study corridor.
- Updated land use inventory shows similar findings as the 2008 SEIS, with approximately half of the parcels categorized as residential or agricultural properties.

Additionally, a review of corridor right-of-way was conducted. The SEIS recommended a right-of-way width of 160 feet for the Ninepipe segment to accommodate the preferred alternative for a two-lane roadway, widened shoulders, and a separated bicycle/pedestrian path. Generally, the recommended width is available throughout the corridor with some areas that vary.

- South of Eagle Pass Trail adjacent to the Ninepipes Lodge, the right-of-way width is 100 feet.
- North of Eagle Pass Trail, the right-of-way width is 130 feet.
- At the northern end of the study area south of Brooke Lane, the right-of-way width is 140 feet.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Federal laws, regulations, executive orders, policies, and guidelines require transportation officials to identify, evaluate, and protect cultural resources. Investigations conducted for this feasibility study included a records search of the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and review of major studies, decisions, and agreements relating to cultural resources within the Ninepipe corridor.

- Three previously identified cultural resources occur within the Ninepipe segment of the US 93 corridor, including the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project, Stagecoach Route, and the Ninepipe Cultural Property.
- Additional government-to-government consultation and coordination with CSKT Culture Committees is planned for 2022.

ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

WETLANDS

This study evaluated changed conditions since completion of the 2008 SEIS in terms of wetland boundaries, classification and functional assessments, and preliminary jurisdictional determinations to quantify potential impacts and identify anticipated mitigation requirements associated with the preferred alternative identified in the 2008 SEIS.

- No major changes in wetland boundaries were identified compared to the delineation presented in the 2008 SEIS.
- The SEIS identified 81 wetlands within the Ninepipe corridor. In 2021, minor boundary changes were noted for 26, and boundaries for 55 wetlands remained unchanged.
- A total of 3 new wetlands were delineated in 2021 totaling 0.09 acre.

FLOODPLAINS AND STREAMS

The study evaluated floodplain and stream conditions to identify potential implications for design and construction of wildlife crossing structures and anticipated mitigation requirements and permitting needs associated with the preferred alternative identified in the 2008 SEIS. Information obtained from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Flood Hazard Layer online database was used to document changed conditions since the 2008 SEIS. The most recent FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map (2013) for Lake County and incorporated areas was also reviewed.

- Approximately 200 feet of US 93 roadway crosses the 100-year floodplain associated with the Ninepipe Reservoir (compared to 350 feet as identified in the 2008 SEIS).
- Approximately 675 feet of US 93 roadway crosses the 100-year floodplain associated with Crow Creek (compared to 550 feet as identified in the 2008 SEIS).

ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

WILDLIFE

The Ninepipe area supports an abundance of wildlife. Understanding wildlife presence, habitat use, and movement characteristics are important in order to accommodate wildlife movements and minimize potential impacts from future improvements to the US 93 corridor. For this feasibility study, information from a literature review was supplemented by updated crash and carcass data and discussions with Tribal, state, and federal wildlife agency representatives through resource agency coordination.

- Numerous species occur in the Ninepipe area including grizzly bears (federally listed as Threatened), deer, birds, turtles, and other wildlife.
- Wildlife species are known to cross throughout the US 93 corridor, with concentrated movements occurring near the Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek areas.
- Carcass and crash data indicate deer strikes throughout the corridor. These data sources are likely not representative of the full extent of wildlife mortality in the Ninepipe segment.

SOILS, GROUNDWATER LEVELS, AND GEOTECHNICAL CONDITIONS

It is important to understand geological, soil, and groundwater conditions to determine if constructability challenges exist within the Ninepipe segment related to slope stability, liquefaction risk from seismic activity, settlement issues, and artesian conditions. Cone penetrometer testing (CPT) was performed to evaluate the general strength and compressibility of the soils. Additionally, potential artesian groundwater pressure was measured using vibrating wire piezometers. A total of 14 CPT soundings were performed at wildlife crossing structure locations proposed in the 2008 SEIS and at other locations of interest. Two wire piezometer readings were also conducted at the northern and southern ends of the Ninepipe segment.

- Soil textures in the study corridor were confirmed to be soft clays, silts, and sands.
- Soil liquefaction (or the possibility to temporarily behave like a liquid during an earthquake) is expected throughout the corridor.
- No evidence of artesian (or pressurized groundwater) conditions was found.

NEXT STEPS

The *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* involves three primary phases.

- **PHASE 1:** An analysis of relevant conditions was completed in late 2021. The analysis involved conducting research and gathering field data relating to traffic and safety conditions, land ownership and corridor right-of-way, wetland areas, wildlife presence and movements, cultural influences, and soil and groundwater constraints.
- **PHASE 2:** The feasibility evaluation will occur in early 2022 to consider costs, impacts, and construction feasibility relating to roadway and bicycle/pedestrian path preferred alignments and wildlife crossings.
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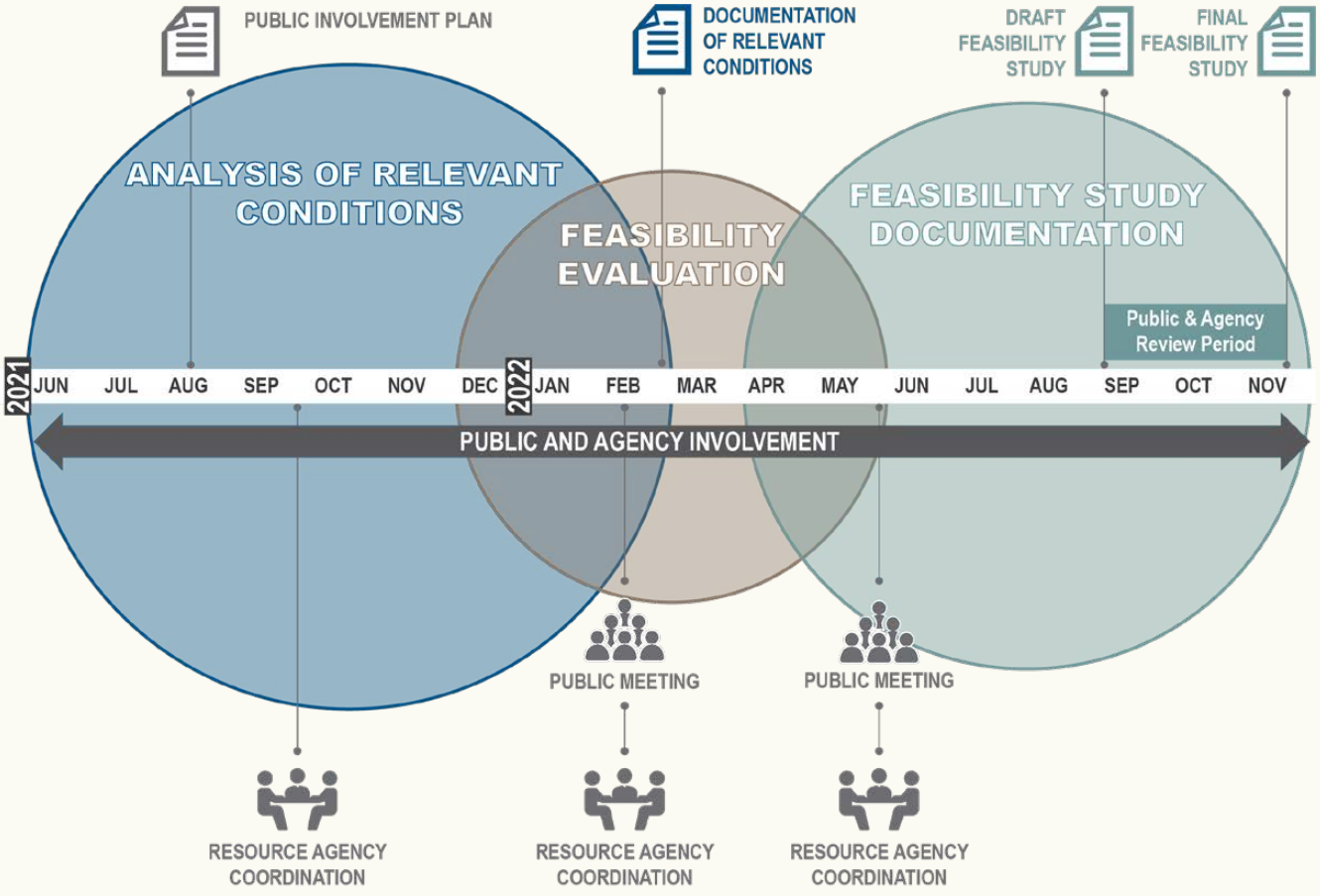

QUESTIONS?

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Vicki Crnich
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Public Informational Meeting

February 7, 2022

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Meeting Agenda

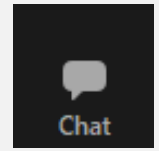
NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

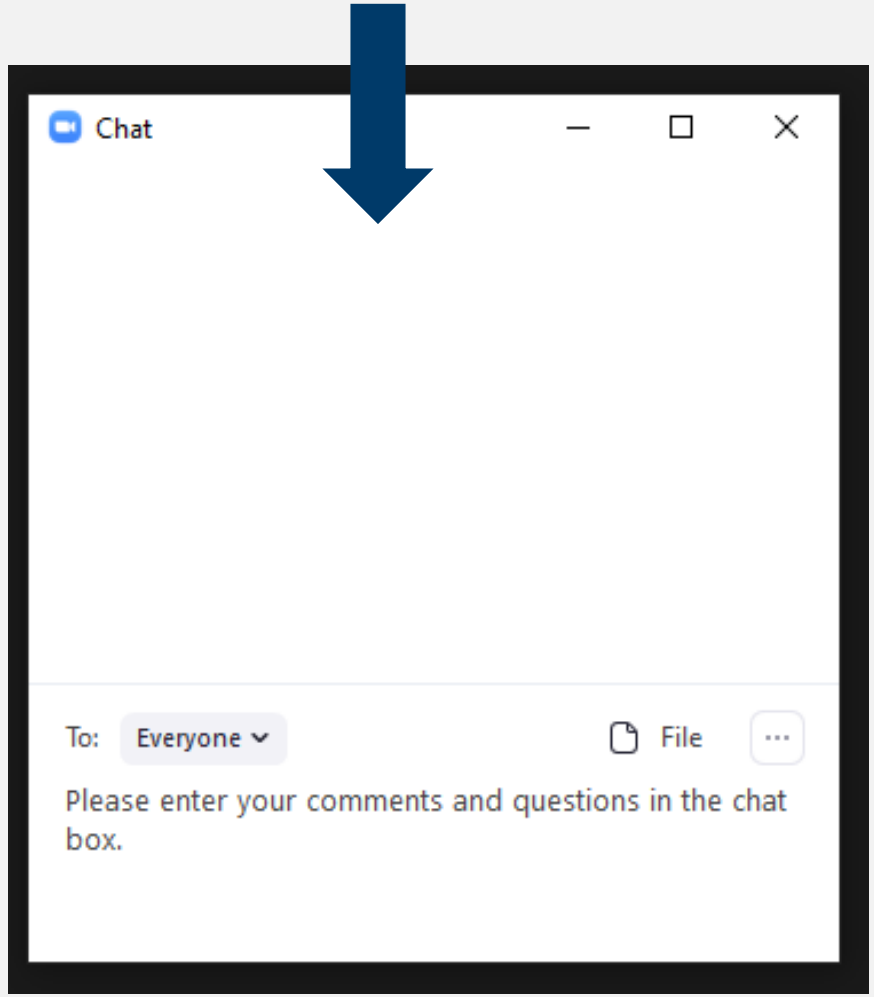
- **Introductions**
- **Background**
  - Why is MDT studying this corridor?
  - What is the preferred alternative?
  - What is involved in the feasibility study?
- **Analysis of Relevant Conditions**
- **Next Steps**
  - How do I stay involved?
- **Open Discussion**

Housekeeping Items

- Questions and comments will be addressed after the presentation
- Please **type** your questions and comments in the **chat box** on your screen.

To **type** a question, click on the chat button:



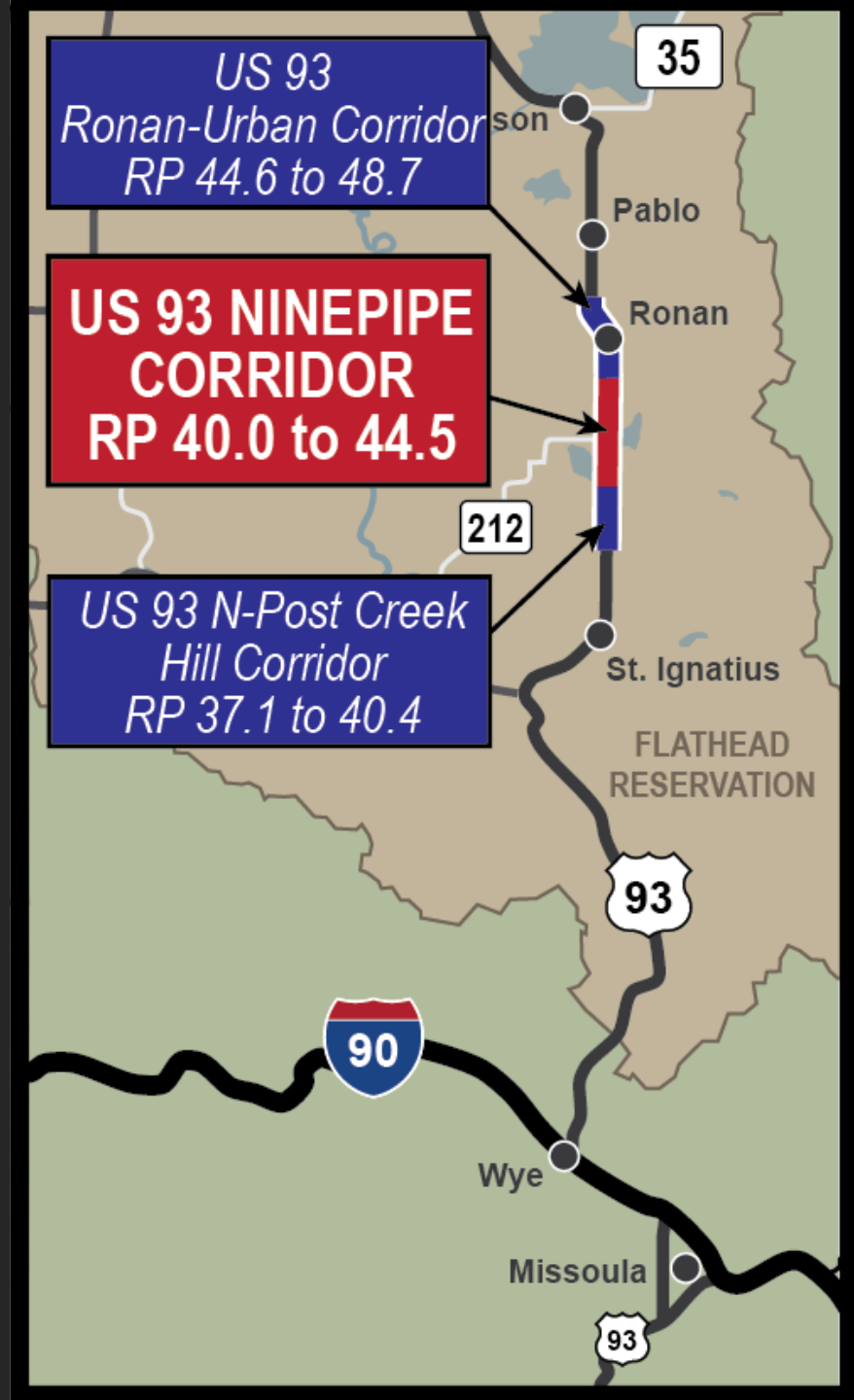


NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

BACKGROUND

Why is MDT studying this corridor?

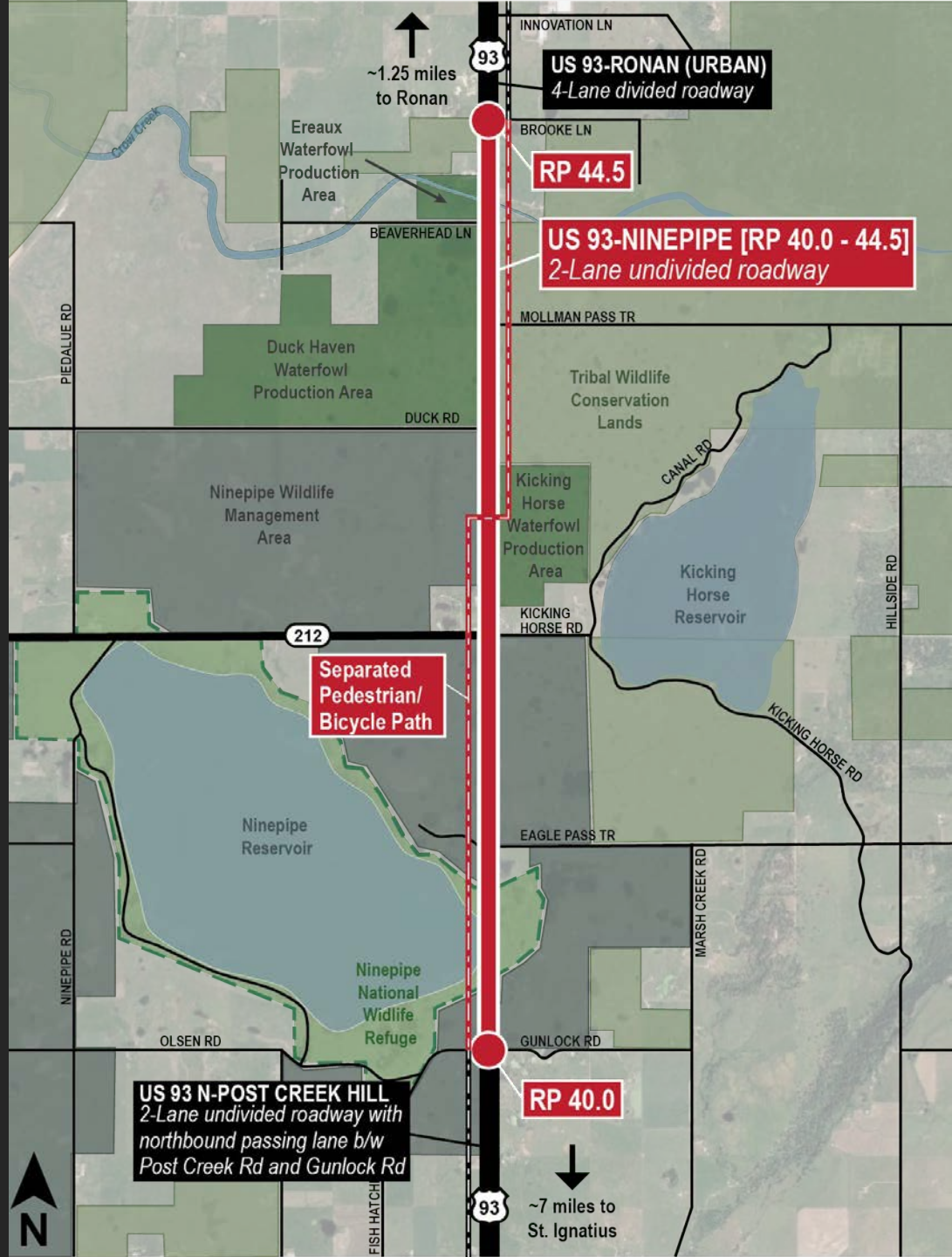
- **US 93 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) & Record of Decision– 1996**
- **Supplemental EIS – 2008**
  - Post Creek Hill to Ronan (RP 37.1 to 48.3)
- **Complications and Lessons Learned**
  - Ronan-Urban and Post Creek Hill



What is the preferred alternative?

2008 SEIS - Ninepipe Corridor

- Two-lane undivided roadway with widened shoulders
- Wildlife crossing structures
- Separated pathway
- 4-lane divided roadway north of Brooke Lane
- Northbound passing lane south of Gunlock Road



What is involved in a feasibility study?

1. **Verify Baseline Conditions**

2. **Confirm Feasibility of Preferred Alternative**
   - Impacts
   - Costs
   - Constructability

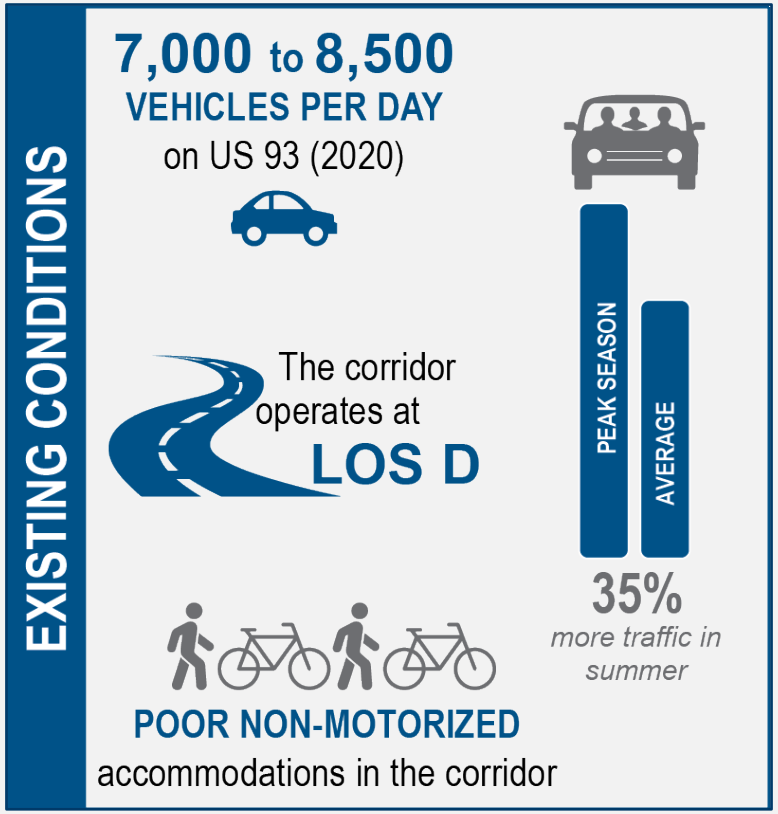
3. **Support Future Project Development**
   - Re-evaluation
   - Design
   - Pursuit of Funding

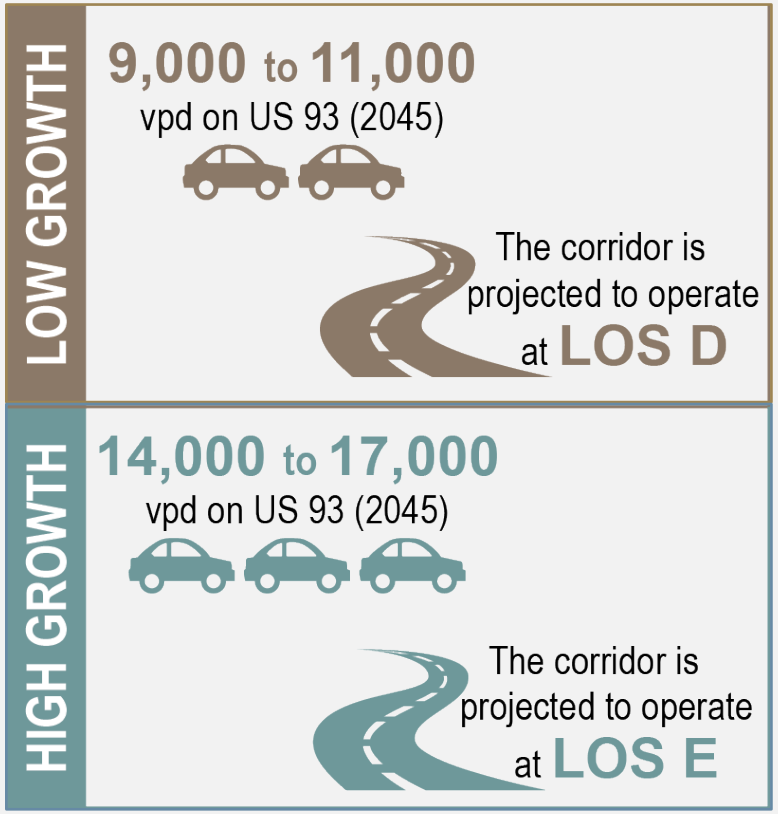
NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CONDITIONS

What conditions are relevant to the study?

Traffic & Safety





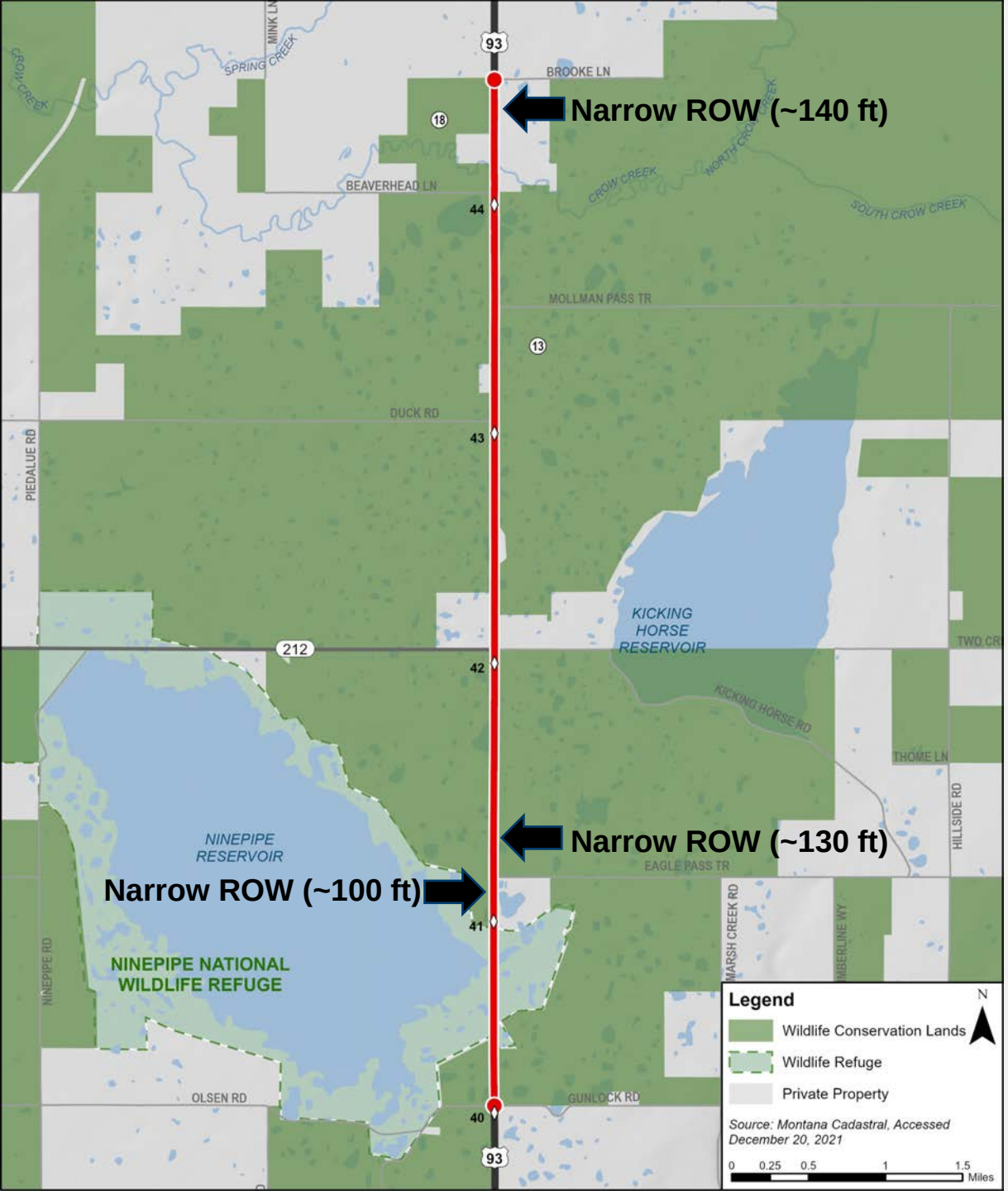
Over a 5-Year Period:

84 crashes occurred in the study area

13 were **rear-end** crashes

28 crashes involved a **wild animal**

5 crashes resulted in a total of **4 serious injuries** and **3 fatalities**



Land Use/Ownership

- Mostly public wildlife conservation lands
- 12 private landowners

Right-of-Way

- Desired Minimum: 160 feet
- Existing: mostly 160 feet, some narrower areas

Floodplains

- US 93 within 100-year floodplain:
  - 200 feet at Ninepipe Reservoir
  - 675 feet at Crow Creek

Wetlands & Soils

- Minor boundary changes to wetlands and 3 new wetlands

Wildlife

- Presence/Habitat Connectivity
- Injury/Mortality
- Use of Crossing Structures
- Habitat Connectivity

Cultural Resources

- **Previously Identified Resources**
  - Flathead Indian Irrigation Project
  - Stagecoach Route
  - Ninepipe Cultural Property
- **Government-to-Government Consultation**
  - MDT, FHWA, and CSKT
- **Field Tours – Spring 2022**
  - CSKT Preservation Office & Culture Committees

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

NEXT STEPS

What are the next steps?

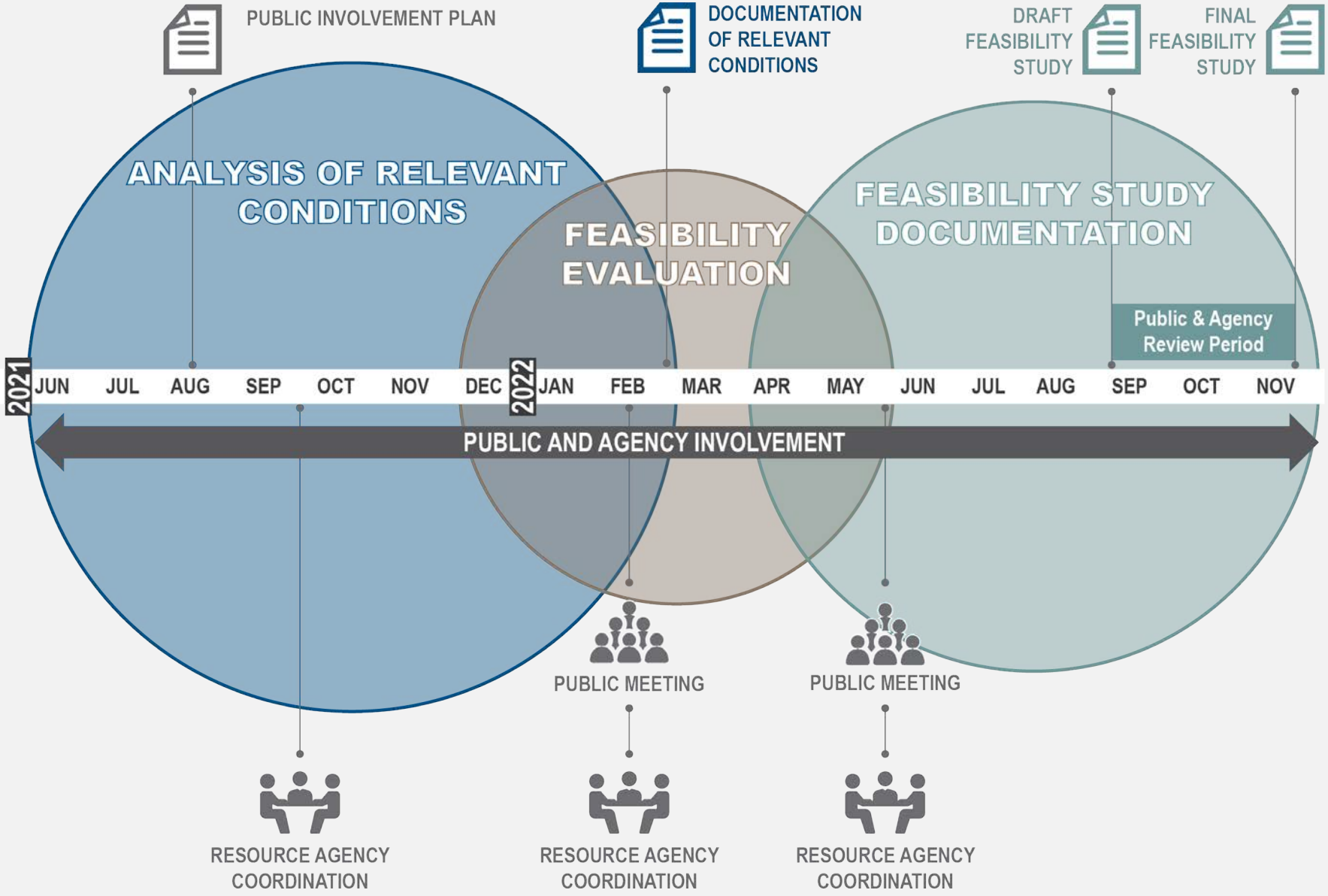
Feasibility Evaluation:

- Confirm:
  - Roadway and Path
  - Structures and Wildlife Crossing Accommodations
- Estimate Impacts & Costs
- Identify Screening Criteria
- Evaluate Preferred Alternative

Stay Involved

Next Public Outreach:

Late Spring/Early Summer 2022



OPEN DISCUSSION

Open Discussion

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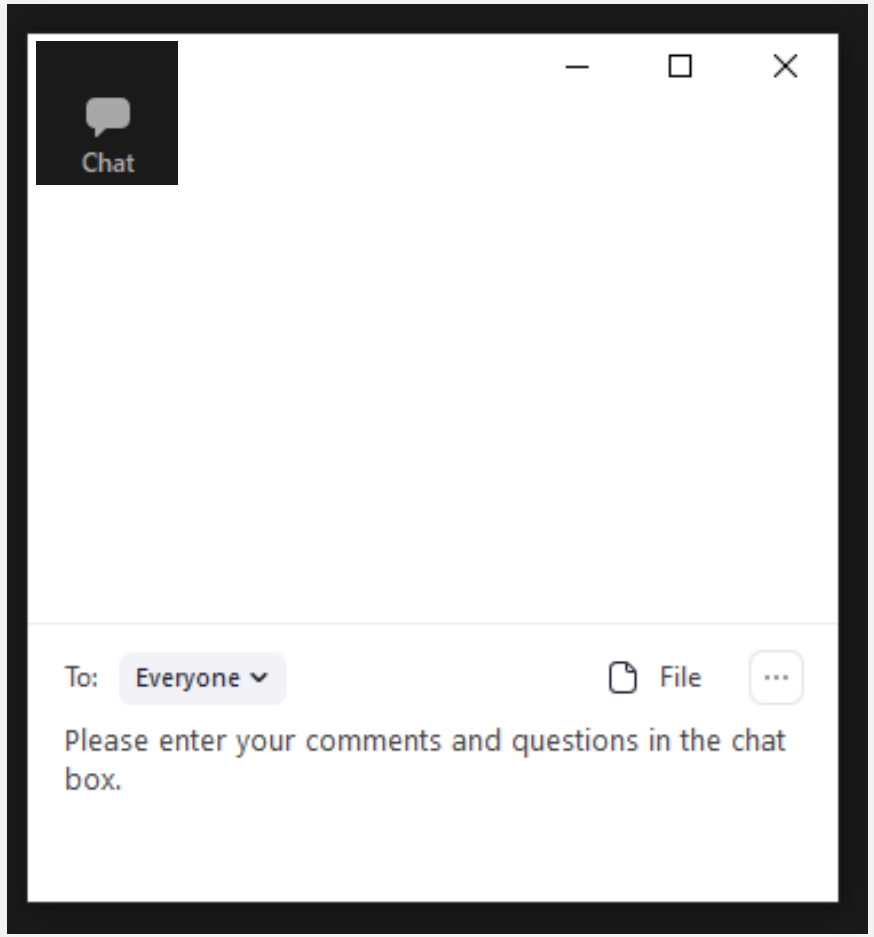

Questions?

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

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APPENDIX 1D:

Public Outreach #2

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Meeting Summary

Informational Meetings – January 2023

MEETING OVERVIEW

MDT hosted a set of informational meetings on January 11 and 12, 2023. To better serve the public, MDT hosted an in-person open house meeting at the Ninepipes Lodge the afternoon of the 11th in addition to a virtual informational event at noon on the 12th. The purpose of the meetings was to provide an overview of the study process, summarize findings from the study, and offer an opportunity for the public to ask questions and share feedback.

Exhibits detailing study findings were provided at the in-person open house to guide discussions. Members of the planning team were present to answer questions and address comments from attendees. The virtual meeting began with a brief presentation followed by a question-and-answer period. Attendees with internet access could view presentation slides and submit written questions using the Zoom platform. Attendees without internet access could call into the meeting and listen to the presentation and responses.

MEETING DETAILS

In Person Open House:
Wednesday, January 11, 2023
4:00 PM to 7:00 PM
Ninepipes Lodge Banquet Room, 69286 Highway 93

Virtual Meeting:
Thursday, January 12, 2023
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM
Online (Zoom)

OUTREACH AND PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided in multiple formats in advance of the informational meetings. A news release was issued to regional media outlets and advertisements were placed in the *Charkoosta* and *Missoulian* newspapers. Direct invitations were mailed to 67 adjacent landowners. Electronic invitations were sent to 82 identified stakeholders and study contacts. Electronic notice was also posted to the study website.

ATTENDEES

A total of 36 people signed in to the in-person open house, and additional attendees were present but chose not to sign in. A total of 35 people attended the virtual meeting, and an additional 11 people registered for the virtual meeting but did not attend. MDT and advisory committee representatives are not included in these counts. The following study advisory committee representatives participated in the meetings:

• Vicki Crnich	MDT	In-person/Virtual
• Bob Vosen	MDT	In-person
• Megan Redmond	MDT	In-person

• Scott Johnston	CSKT	In-person
• Melinda Charlo	CSKT	Virtual
• Whisper Means	CSKT	Virtual
• Scott Randall	RPA	In-person/Virtual
• Sarah Nicolai	RPA	In-person/Virtual
• Kerry Lynch	RPA	Virtual

MEETING MATERIALS

A newsletter was prepared for the meeting providing an overview of the study process and summarizing study findings. For the in-person open house, a series of exhibits were prepared summarizing key findings and recommendations from the study. A PowerPoint presentation was provided during the virtual meeting. Copies of the newsletter, exhibits, and meeting recording were posted to the study website following the meetings.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

A variety of feedback was received from participants at the in-person open house. Verbal comments received at the meeting were not formally recorded. A summary of the comments received at the open house are provided in **Table 1**. Topics are listed alphabetically.

Table 1: Summary of Public Comments – Open House

Topic	Comments
Construction Impacts	Some participants asked if traffic would be diverted onto gravel county roads during construction.
Implementation, Funding, and Next Steps	Many attendees wanted to know when the corridor would be reconstructed. They also wondered if grants and other new funding opportunities available under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) could help pay for improvements in the corridor.
Preferred Alternative	Several participants question why a two-lane configuration selected rather than a four-lane configuration. Many participants also expressed the need/desire for turn lanes at various intersections throughout the corridor.
Wildlife Structures	Several questions were received about the rationale for the sizing and location of wildlife crossing structures. There was also interest in the targeted species for each crossing.

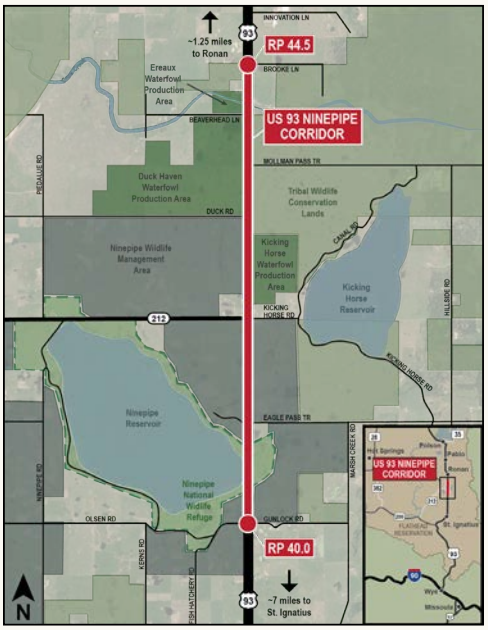
Table 2 lists comments provided by attendees at the virtual informational meeting. Attendees submitted written comments through the Zoom Q&A portal, and responses were provided live during the meeting. Topics are listed alphabetically.

Table 2: Summary of Public Comments – Virtual Meeting

Topic	Comments
Evaluation Process	Numerous recent studies show that sound impacts are a more important factor for both human beings and wildlife than is commonly assumed. It would be good to see those concerns elevated in this process and brought into these planning efforts, particularly given the tendency of bridges to have bigger sound impacts and the need to consider mitigation strategies.
	Since this is part of a larger 93 corridor, was the current and projected increase in tourist traffic included and will the proposed plan help mitigate those impacts?
	Will the Access Control Plan for Hwy 93 on the Reservation continue to be enforced regarding access consolidation or re-routing to county roads where possible? And regarding requests for new access points?
	Because of the number of traffic deaths that have occurred along this section of highway, I believe it should receive high priority.
	The improved two-lane configuration proposed by the SEIS will not change with any of the 3 options, correct?
Implementation, Funding, and Next Steps	Vicki mentioned these planning efforts date back to 1996, and the SEIS is from 2008. Can we expect to see a project develop from this study now in 2023?
	Also, this project history actually dates back to 1988. The FEIS was the result of a long preceding process.
	what support do you need to go after grants?
	What design and engineering will be needed following this study?
	Given the work anticipated, do you have an estimate on when the preferred alternative will go to design and what might be the estimated date of construction commencement?
	Is there funding available within MDT to develop the engineering plans after this process?
	Will the recently enacted Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) increase funding opportunities and shorten project timelines?
	If funding does not happen until more than five years down the road, will you have an opportunity to re-evaluate the feasibility study if new information is available?
	Is MDT looking into the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program?
	Will the safety project for Eagle Pass Trail include access to Ninepipes Lodge?
	There won't be detours during construction, but will there be anything done to address people voluntarily detouring onto unpaved county roads?
Preferred Alternative	can you please clarify that going into the study C-1 was preferred but now C-3 is preferred? I believe there was a 4th option proposed by a group of biologists making some changes to the crossing structure designs, was that considered or will it be moving forward?
	Also wondering about the bike/ped crossing from east to west. Will it be at grade or in a culvert?
Wildlife Accommodations	No overhead wildlife passages please.
	How do the three options differ in the amount of fencing proposed?
	Has there been discussion regarding the use of wildlife fencing and access structures at entrances (county roads, field accesses, residences, businesses)?
	Wildlife overpasses are great if well designed and located. However it seems difficult to understand how Alternative 3 scores higher for wildlife and aquatic ecosystems than Alternative 2 (110 vs 800 foot bridges over Kettle Ponds, with less clearance) and 300 vs 600 ft bridge at Ninepipes.
	Will the C-3 proposed wildlife crossing be similar in scale and size to that which is constructed and located north of Evaro?

Newsletter #3
January 2023

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has conducted a feasibility study for the Ninepipe segment of US Highway 93 (US 93) between Reference Points (RP) 40.0 (Gunlock Road) and 44.5 (Brooke Lane) within the Flathead Indian Reservation. The study has been a collaborative process between MDT, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), resource agencies, stakeholders, and the public.

Since completion of previous environmental documentation efforts, MDT has developed projects in stretches of US 93 adjacent to the Ninepipe segment and has encountered multiple challenges relating to constructability, impacts, and costs. The intent of the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* was to proactively address these challenges before a project is nominated by identifying potential constraints and considering the viability of the preferred alternative identified in the 2008 *Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and a Section 4(f) Evaluation*.

COMMENTS WELCOME ON THE DRAFT STUDY!

MDT welcomes your comments on the draft feasibility study! Beginning January 6, 2023, the report is available for review at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/US93Ninepipe. Comments can be submitted online at www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/comment_form.shtml or to the study contacts below. Please note comments are for the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* and submit by **February 6, 2023**.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

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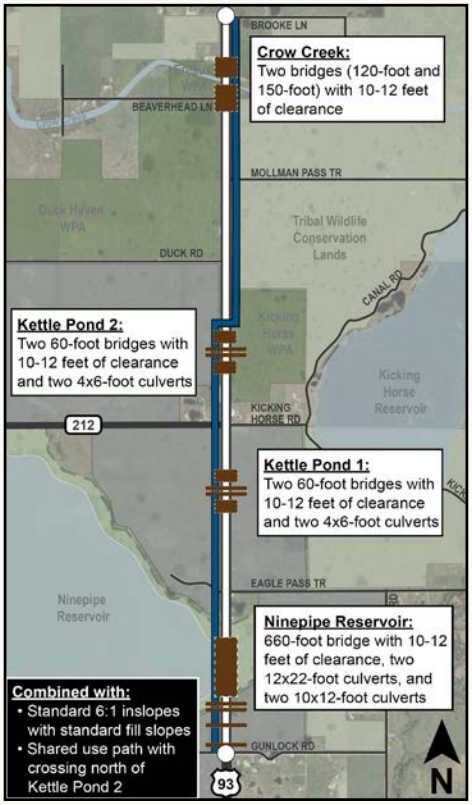
LEARN MORE ABOUT VISION ZERO AT: www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT: www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/US93Ninepipe

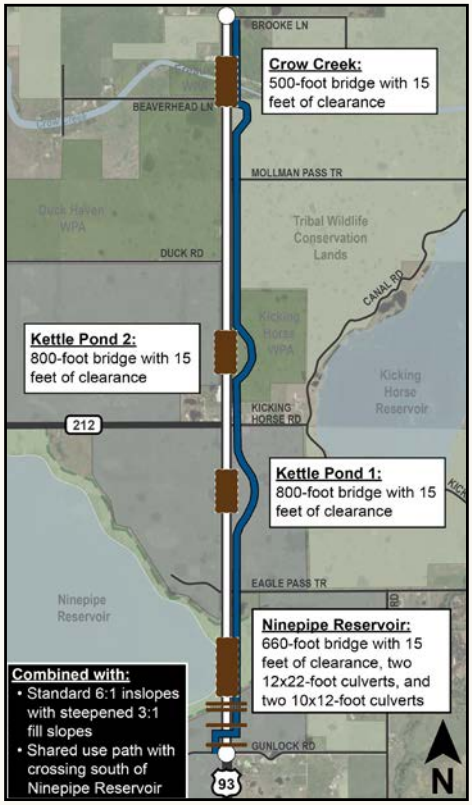
CORRIDOR OPTIONS

Due to constructability challenges encountered in other segments of the US 93 Evaro to Polson corridor and the amount of time since completion of the SEIS, MDT initiated this feasibility study to evaluate if the SEIS preferred alternative would be viable in terms of impacts, costs, and constructability considerations. Additionally, changed conditions since 2008 prompted a desire to investigate the feasibility of modified reconstruction options which may reduce impacts and potentially be more cost effective and easier to implement.

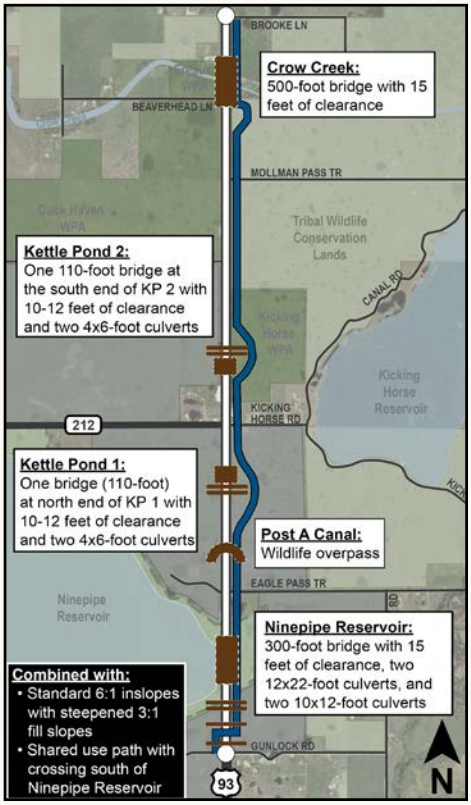
For this study, the SEIS preferred alternative (identified as Option C-1) was established as the baseline configuration, with two 12-foot lanes, widened 8-foot shoulders, standard slopes, provision of a shared use path (SUP), and crossing structures as outlined in the 2008 SEIS. Options C-2 and C-3 were developed for this feasibility study to improve transportation system performance and enhance wildlife accommodations with the goal of reducing resource impacts and wildlife-vehicle conflicts. Key features associated with each of the corridor options are illustrated below.



C-1: SEIS Preferred Alternative



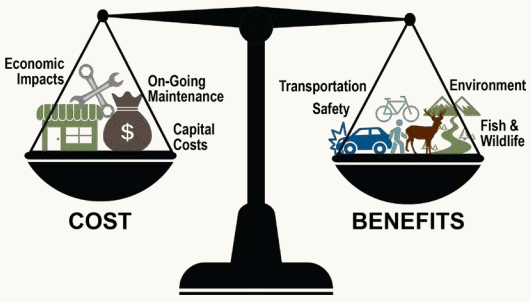
C-2: Enlarged Wildlife Crossing Structures



C-3: Wildlife Overpass **Configuration**

EVALUATION PROCESS AND RESULTS

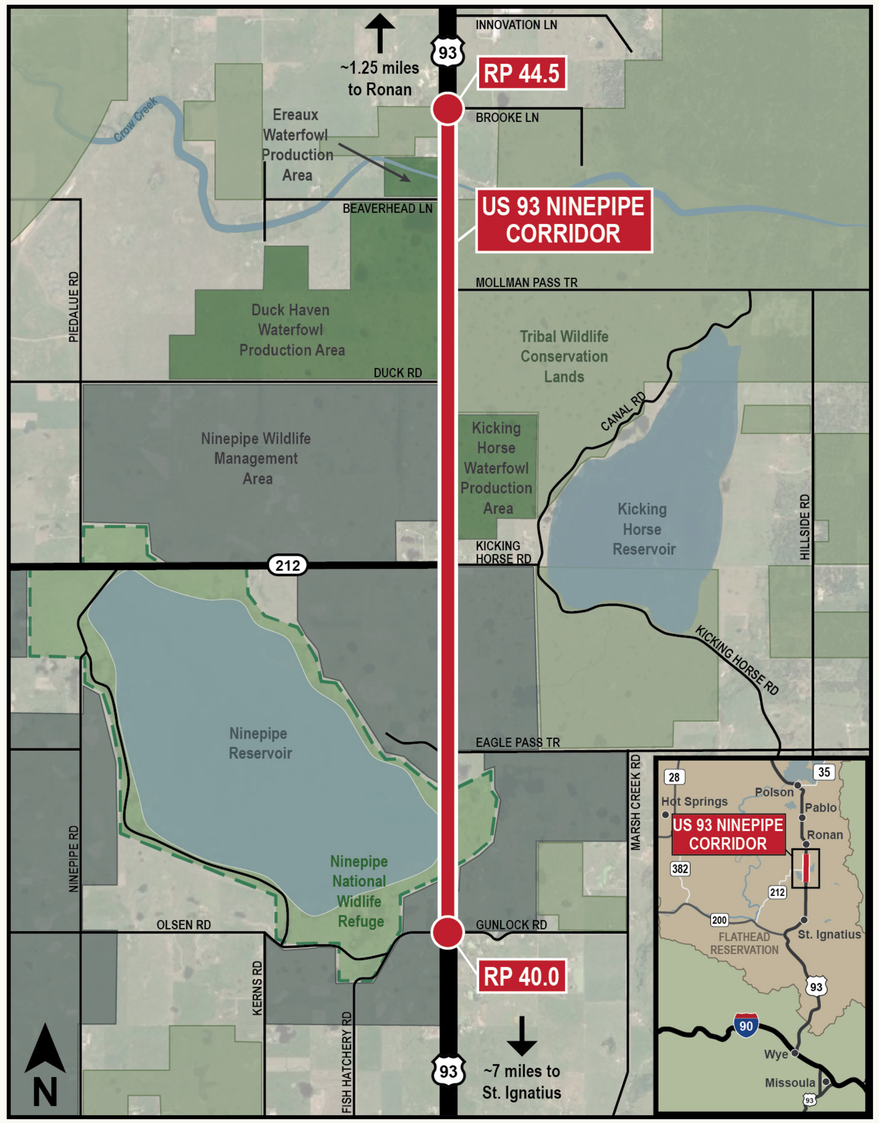
A screening process was used to determine which corridor options would be feasible to implement and to understand the tradeoffs between resource impacts, overall benefits, and project costs. Options were evaluated numerically according to their performance under six screening criteria, including transportation, ecological environment, fish and wildlife, human environment, constructability, and cost categories.



The study determined that all three options are likely feasible to implement. There are no known conditions that would prohibit construction of the options given adequate funding availability. Of the three options considered, Option C-3 was determined to be less impactful with more benefits and a lower cost. Based on these results, **Option C-3 was identified as the preferred option to advance for future project development**.

For any future corridor projects advanced from this study, next steps would include funding identification, project nomination, project development including environmental documentation, and collaboration with resource agencies, stakeholders, and the public. No funding has been identified for corridor projects at this time.

STUDY AREA & BACKGROUND

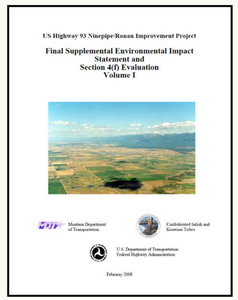


1996

MDT completed a *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Section 4(f) Evaluation* for the portion of US 93 between Evaro and Polson, MT. The Record of Decision (ROD) did not provide specific design details so FHWA, MDT, and the CSKT agreed to further explore possible alternate alignments and study the effects of highway improvements on wetlands and wildlife in the corridor.

2008

MDT, FHWA, and CSKT completed a *Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and a Section 4(f) Evaluation* for the Ninepipe/Ronan section. The SEIS/ROD identified a preferred alternative for the Ninepipe corridor consisting of a two-lane roadway, widened shoulders, wildlife crossing structures, and a separated bicycle/pedestrian path.


US Highway 93 Ninepipe/Ronan Improvement Project

Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation Volume I

Montana Department of Transportation

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration

February 2008

2013

Design of US 93 - Post Creek Hill project began. A construction date has not yet been determined. MDT has encountered multiple challenges relating to constructability, impacts, and costs.

2016

A re-evaluation of the SEIS was completed for the Ronan-Urban segment (RP 44.6 – 47.2) of the corridor to confirm proposed design changes and project segmentation/ phasing. The Ninepipe segment was not addressed during the re-evaluation process.

Design of Ronan-Urban and Ronan-North projects have begun. A construction date has not yet been determined for Ronan-Urban. Construction activities for Ronan-North are scheduled from 2022-2024.

1996 2000 2004 2008 2012 2016 2020 2024

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

2021

MDT, FHWA, and CSKT initiated the US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study to determine if a future project would be viable in terms of impacts, costs, and constructability.

NEXT STEPS

To continue with the development of one or more projects in the corridor, the following steps would be needed. Additional environmental documentation would be required to satisfy National Environmental Policy Act regulations. A funding source has not yet been identified for improvements.

PLANNING — **STEP 1**

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT — **STEP 2**

CONSTRUCTION — **STEP 3**

WE ARE HERE

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

- → Identify/Secure Funding
- → Project Nomination
- → Survey/Environmental Documentation
- → Design
- → Right-of-Way Acquisition

Public Involvement
(Ongoing throughout all steps)

VISIT www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/US93Ninepipe/

QUESTIONS?

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MONTANA Department of Transportation

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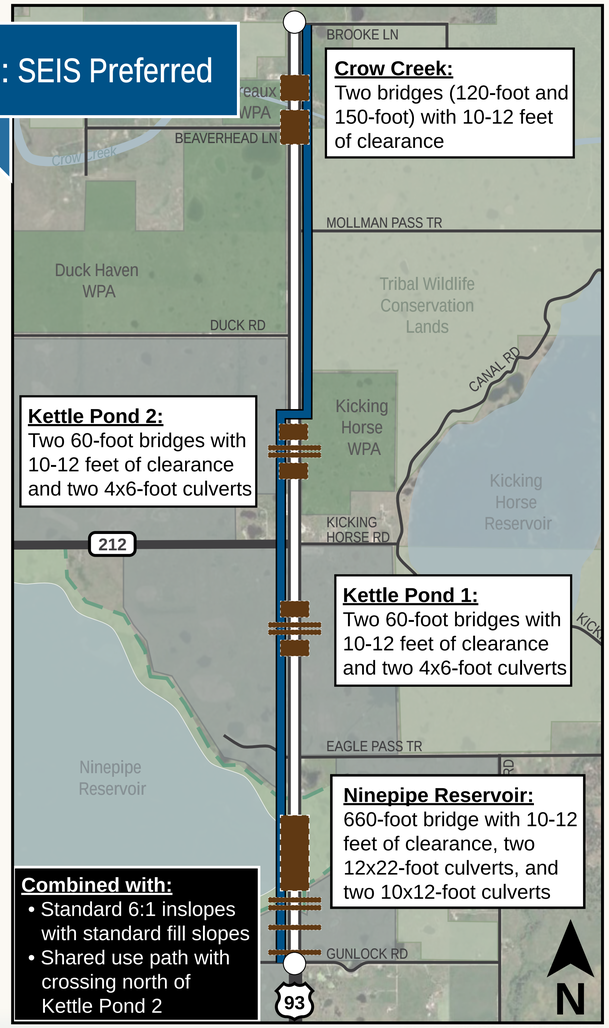
CORRIDOR OPTIONS

Three corridor-wide options were evaluated to comprehensively address the combination of roadway typical section, shared use path alignment, and wildlife crossings. Planning-level alignments and roadway profiles were developed for each of the proposed configurations to assist with preparation of preliminary cost estimates and identification and quantification of benefits and impacts. A **screening process** was then used to determine which corridor options would be feasible to implement and to **understand the trade-offs** between resource impacts, overall benefits, and project costs. A total of 20 subcategories were defined under the **six screening criteria**, with a total of 5 possible points per subcategory and a total possible score of 100.

C-1: SEIS Preferred



Crow Creek:
Two bridges (120-foot and 150-foot) with 10-12 feet of clearance

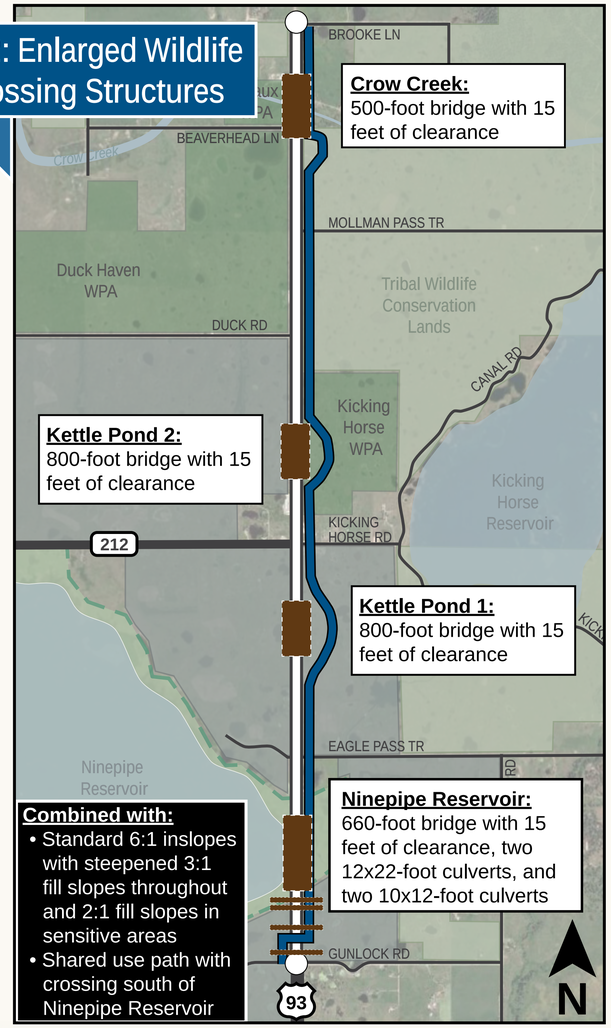
Kettle Pond 2:
Two 60-foot bridges with 10-12 feet of clearance and two 4x6-foot culverts

Kettle Pond 1:
Two 60-foot bridges with 10-12 feet of clearance and two 4x6-foot culverts

Ninepipe Reservoir:
660-foot bridge with 10-12 feet of clearance, two 12x22-foot culverts, and two 10x12-foot culverts

Combined with:
- Standard 6:1 inslopes with standard fill slopes
- Shared use path with crossing north of Kettle Pond 2

C-2: Enlarged Wildlife Crossing Structures



Crow Creek:
500-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance

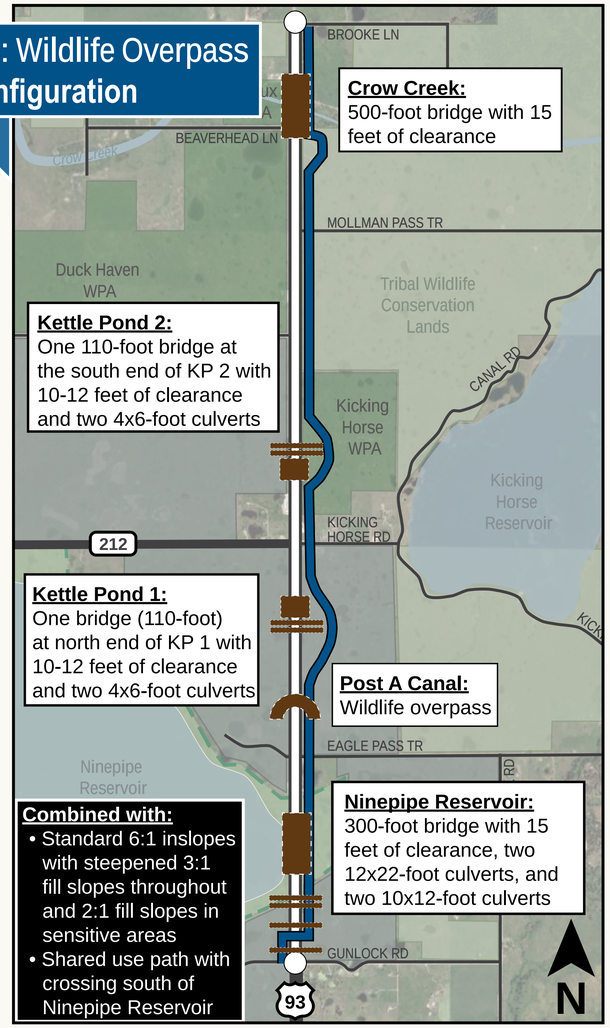
Kettle Pond 2:
800-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance

Kettle Pond 1:
800-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance

Ninepipe Reservoir:
660-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance, two 12x22-foot culverts, and two 10x12-foot culverts

Combined with:
- Standard 6:1 inslopes with steepened 3:1 fill slopes throughout and 2:1 fill slopes in sensitive areas
- Shared use path with crossing south of Ninepipe Reservoir

C-3: Wildlife Overpass Configuration



Crow Creek:
500-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance

Kettle Pond 2:
One 110-foot bridge at the south end of KP 2 with 10-12 feet of clearance and two 4x6-foot culverts

Kettle Pond 1:
One bridge (110-foot) at north end of KP 1 with 10-12 feet of clearance and two 4x6-foot culverts

Post A Canal:
Wildlife overpass

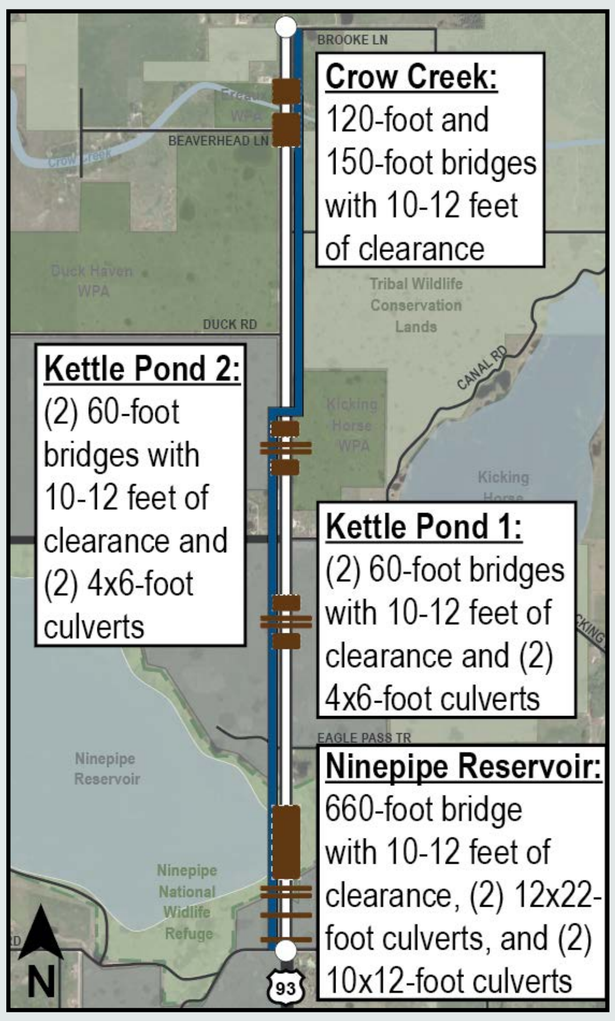
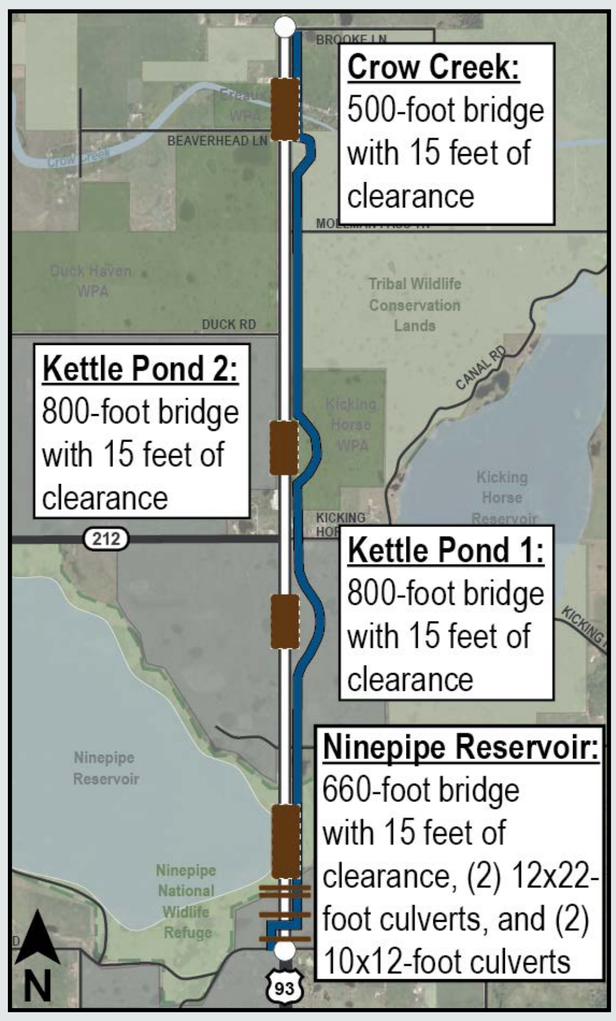
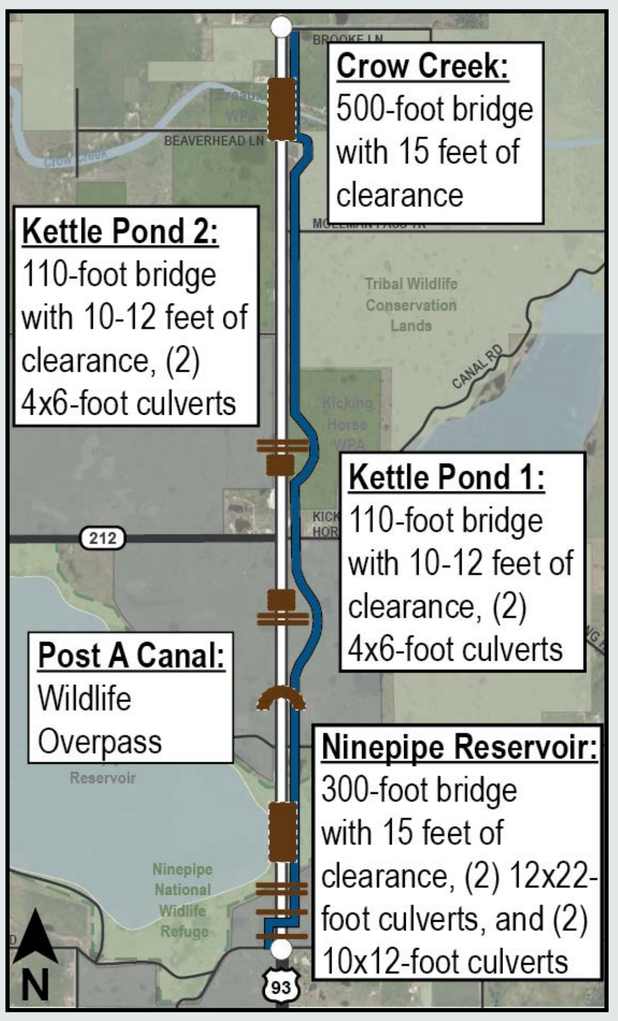
Ninepipe Reservoir:
300-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance, two 12x22-foot culverts, and two 10x12-foot culverts

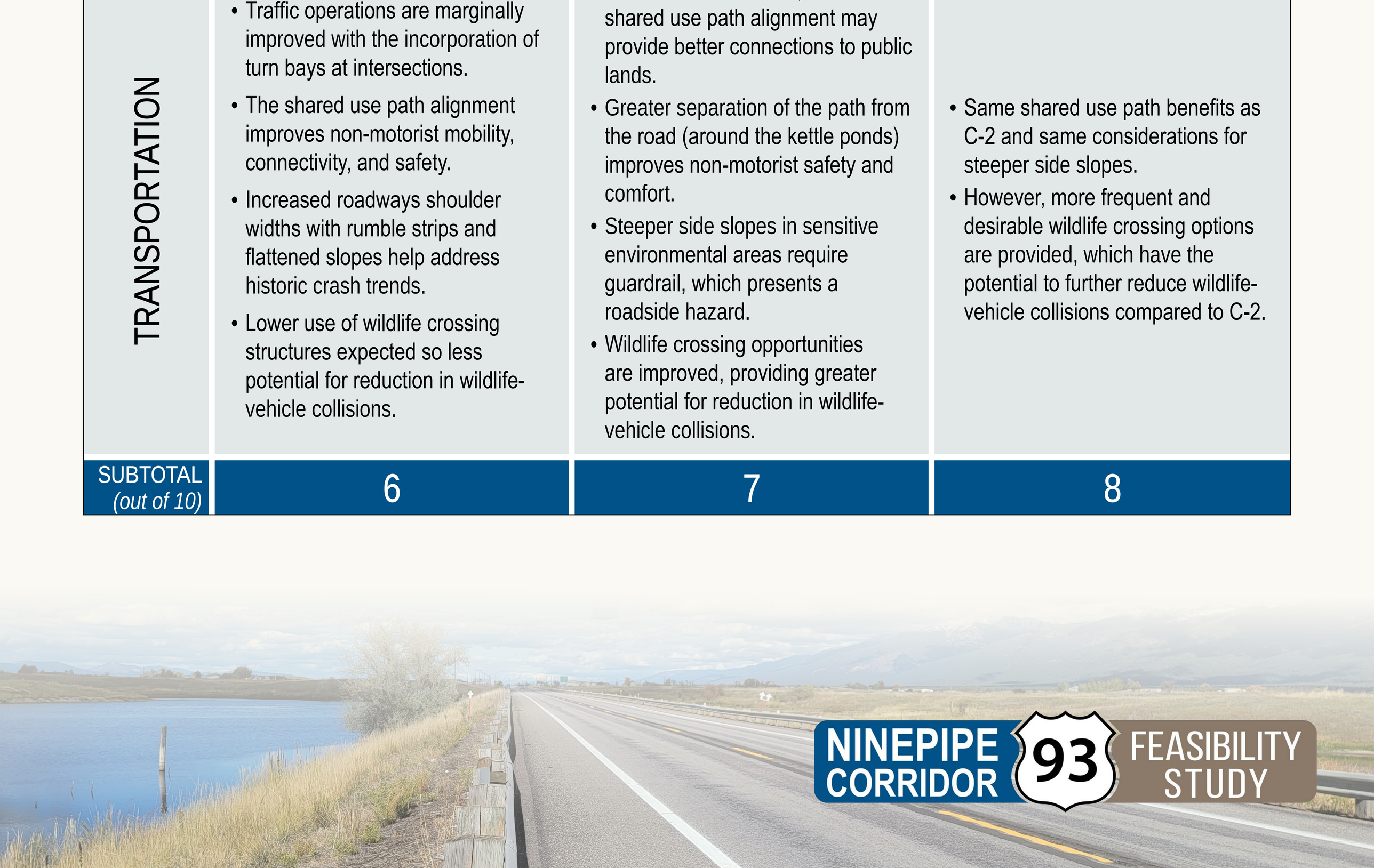
Combined with:
- Standard 6:1 inslopes with steepened 3:1 fill slopes throughout and 2:1 fill slopes in sensitive areas
- Shared use path with crossing south of Ninepipe Reservoir

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

SCREENING CRITERION 1: TRANSPORTATION

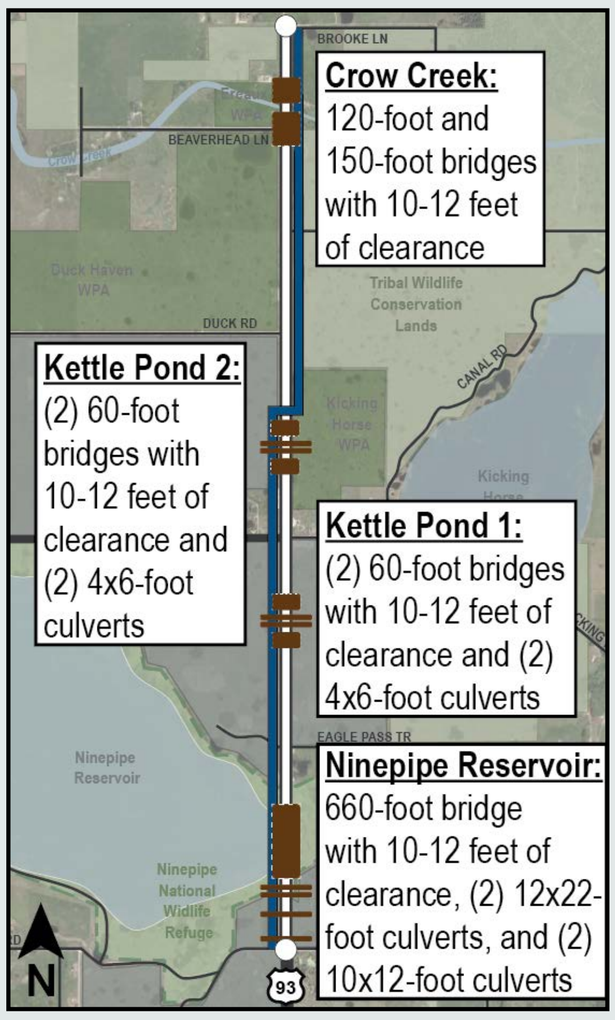
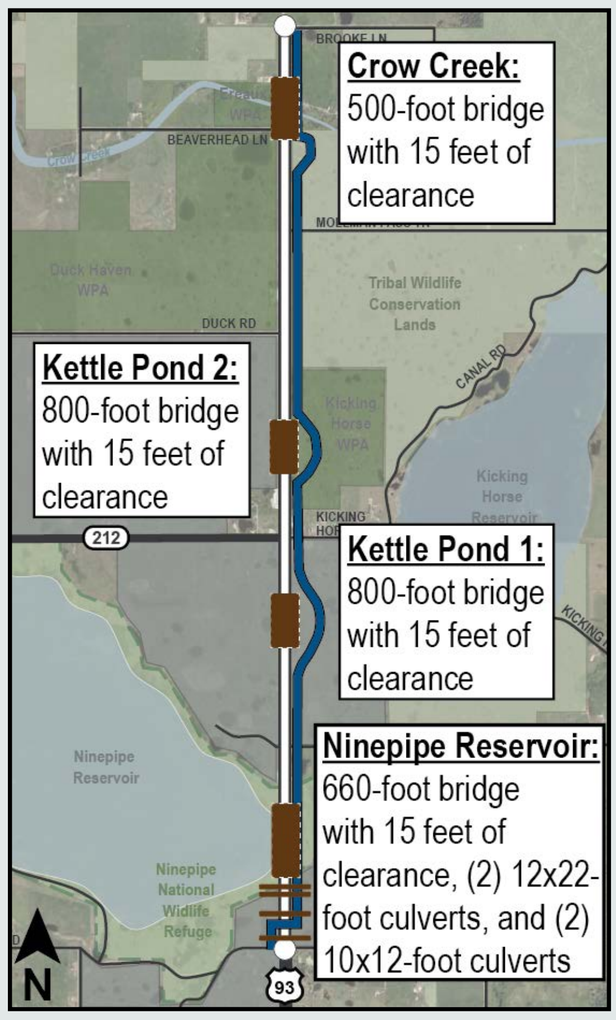
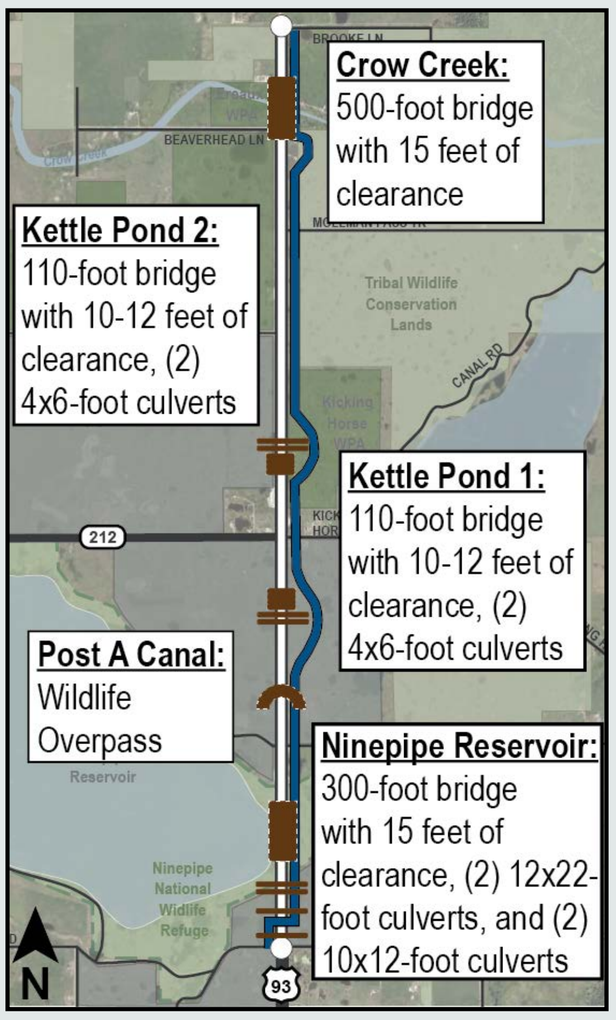
The SEIS determined reconstruction of the corridor is needed to **improve safety**, provide **multimodal accommodations**, and to ensure that the corridor can **operate efficiently** under current and projected traffic conditions. This screening category assessed vehicular traffic operations and safety as well as non-motorist accommodations, connectivity, and safety.

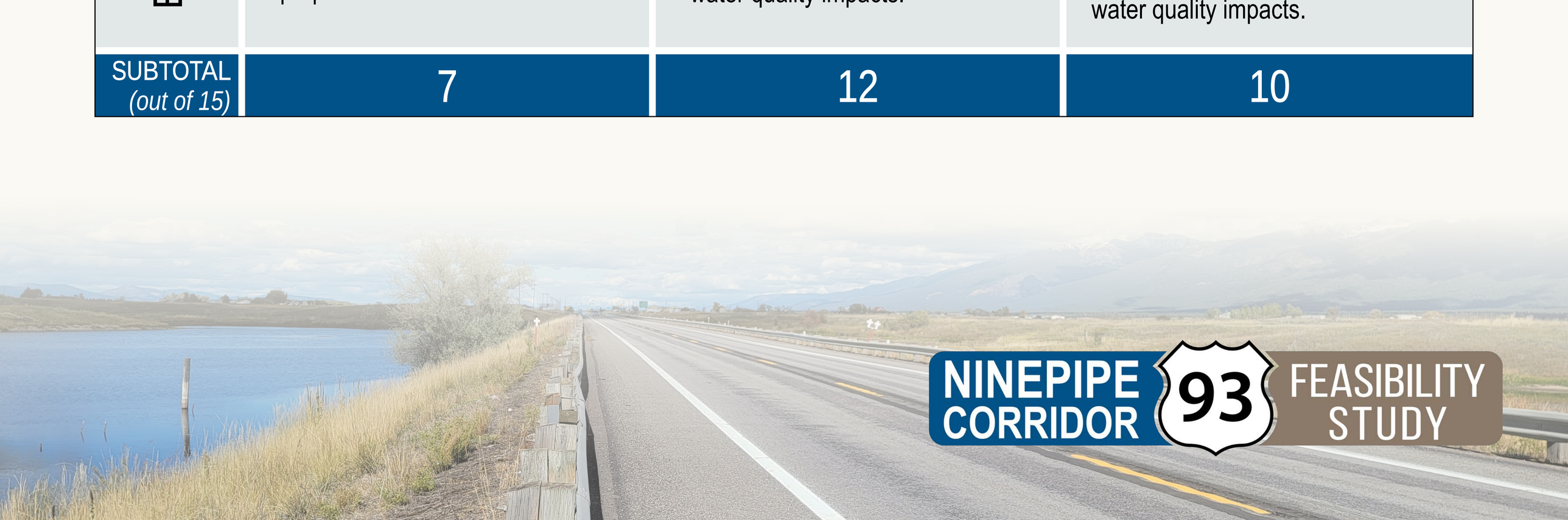
	C-1: SEIS Preferred	C-2: Enlarged Crossings	C-3: Wildlife Overpass
			
TRANSPORTATION	• Traffic operations are marginally improved with the incorporation of turn bays at intersections. • The shared use path alignment improves non-motorist mobility, connectivity, and safety. • Increased roadways shoulder widths with rumble strips and flattened slopes help address historic crash trends. • Lower use of wildlife crossing structures expected so less potential for reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions.	• Similar benefits to C-1, but the shared use path alignment may provide better connections to public lands. • Greater separation of the path from the road (around the kettle ponds) improves non-motorist safety and comfort. • Steeper side slopes in sensitive environmental areas require guardrail, which presents a roadside hazard. • Wildlife crossing opportunities are improved, providing greater potential for reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions.	• Same shared use path benefits as C-2 and same considerations for steeper side slopes. • However, more frequent and desirable wildlife crossing options are provided, which have the potential to further reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions compared to C-2.
SUBTOTAL *(out of 10)*	6	7	8



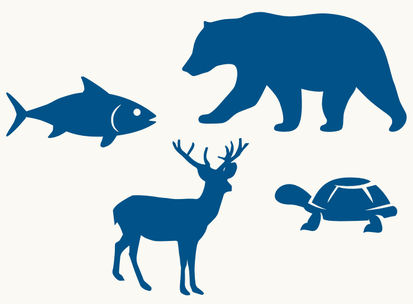
SCREENING CRITERION 2: ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

US 93 crosses several **wetlands**, **streams**, **irrigation** systems, other surface waters, and their associated **floodplains** throughout the Ninepipe segment. The most prominent water resources include Ninepipe Reservoir, Kettle Pond 1, Kettle Pond 2, and Crow Creek. Screening Criterion 2 considered the ability of each option to support hydraulic conveyance and to **minimize impacts** to wetlands, water bodies, and floodplains.

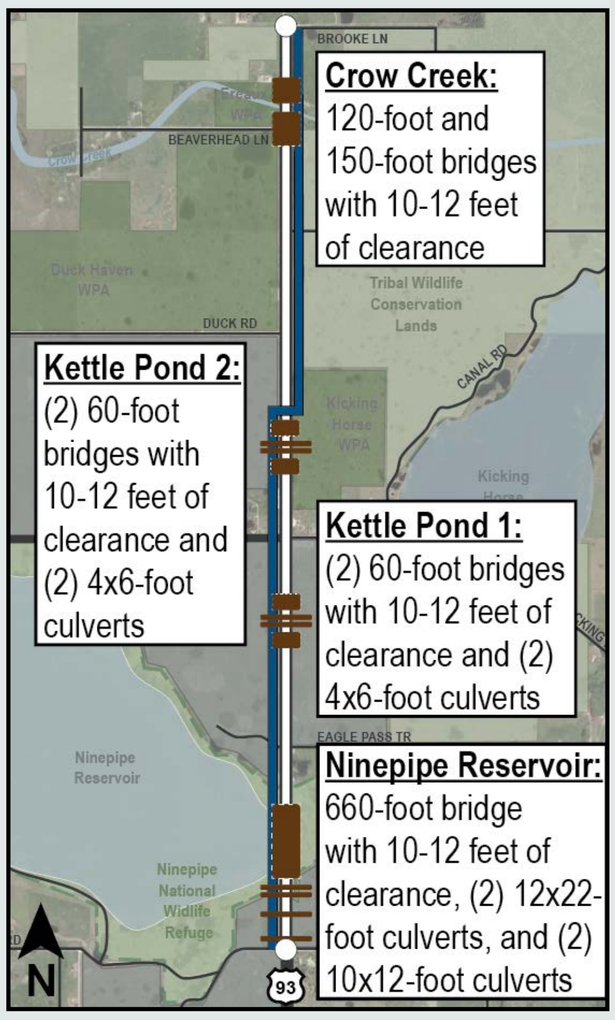
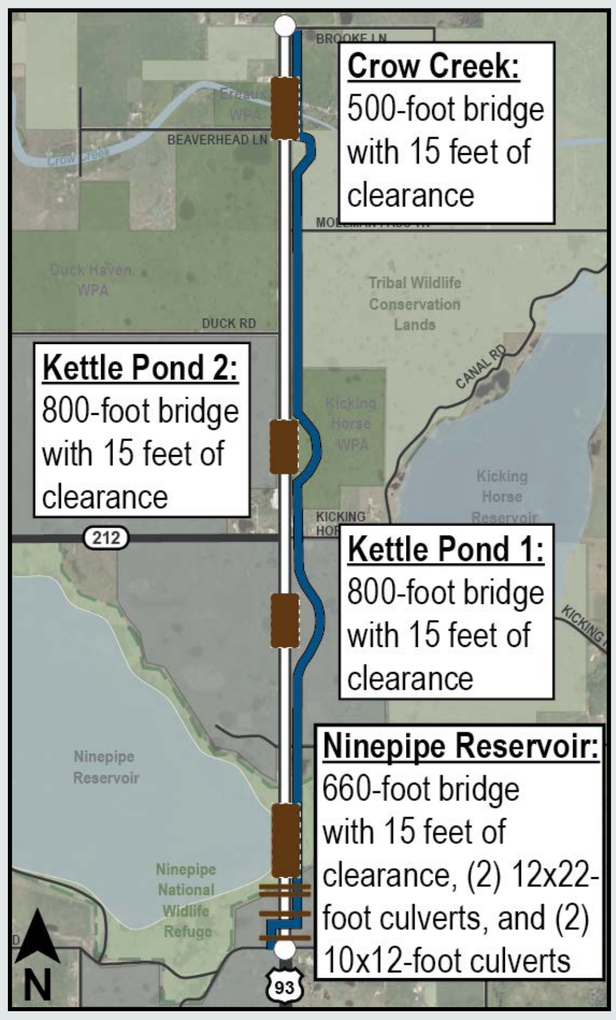
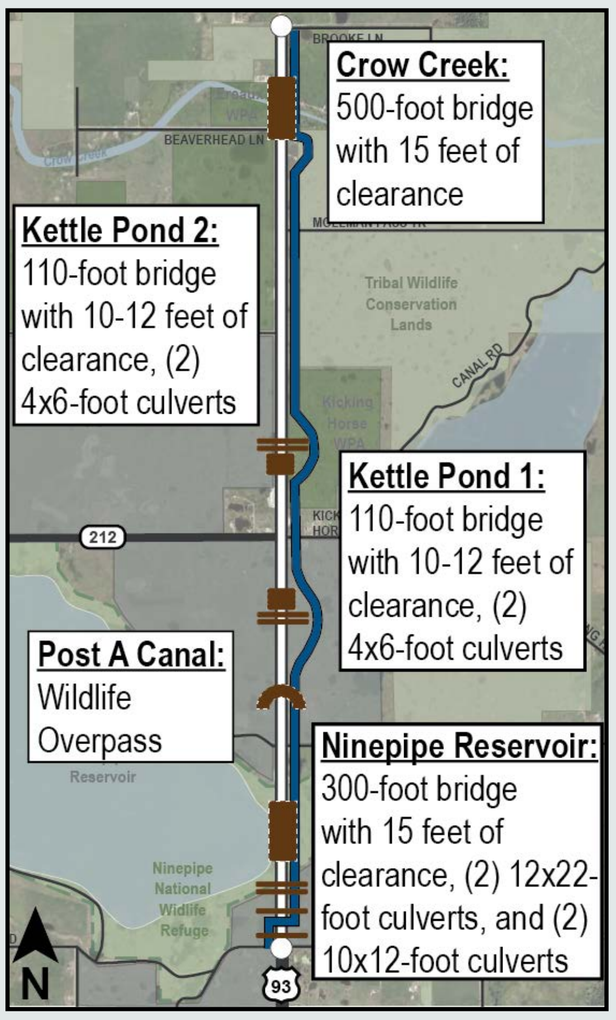
	C-1: SEIS Preferred	C-2: Enlarged Crossings	C-3: Wildlife Overpass
			
ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT	• All structures improve connectivity and conveyance capacity but kettle pond structures may be too small for adequate hydraulic performance. • Greatest wetland impacts and least potential for wetland reconnection at crossing locations. • 100% span of Ninepipe Reservoir and 42% span of Crow Creek floodplains. • Less risk of adverse stream or water quality impacts with proposed structures.	• Larger, multi-span bridges have a higher probability of in-stream piers. • Kettle pond connectivity full restored. • Fewest wetland impacts overall but higher probability of short-term impacts during construction due to larger structures. • 100% span of Ninepipe Reservoir and 78% span of Crow Creek floodplains. • Higher risk of adverse stream or water quality impacts.	• Structures designed to meet minimum hydraulic requirements. • More wetland impacts than C-2, but less than C-1. Smaller structures at kettle ponds do not restore full connectivity but there is opportunity to reconnect wetlands at Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek. • Fewer bridge spans required, reduces probability of in-stream piers. • 100% span of Ninepipe Reservoir and 78% span of Crow Creek floodplains. • Lower risk of adverse stream or water quality impacts.
SUBTOTAL *(out of 15)*	7	12	10



SCREENING CRITERION 3: FISH AND WILDLIFE

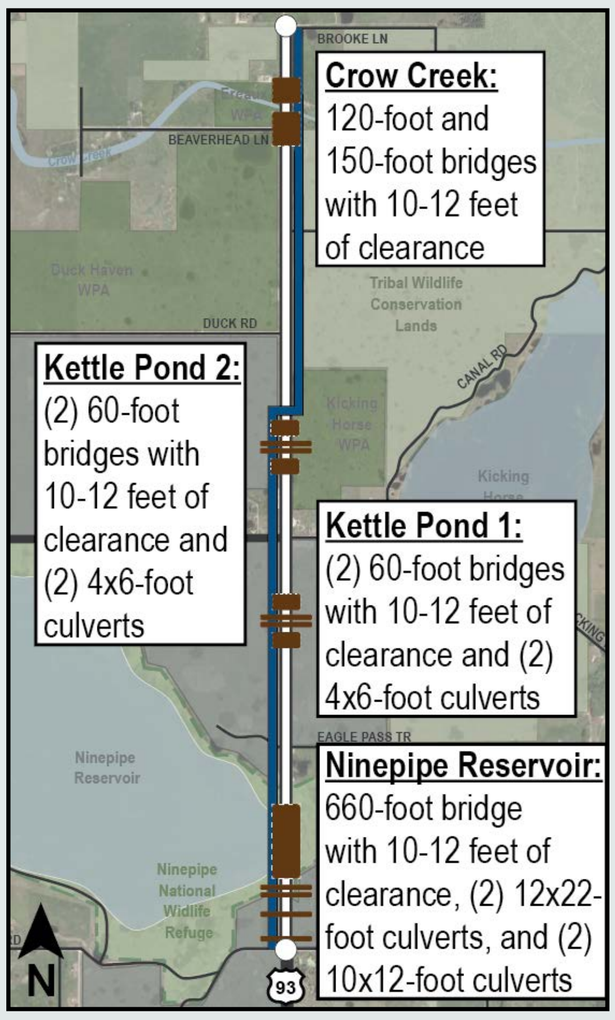
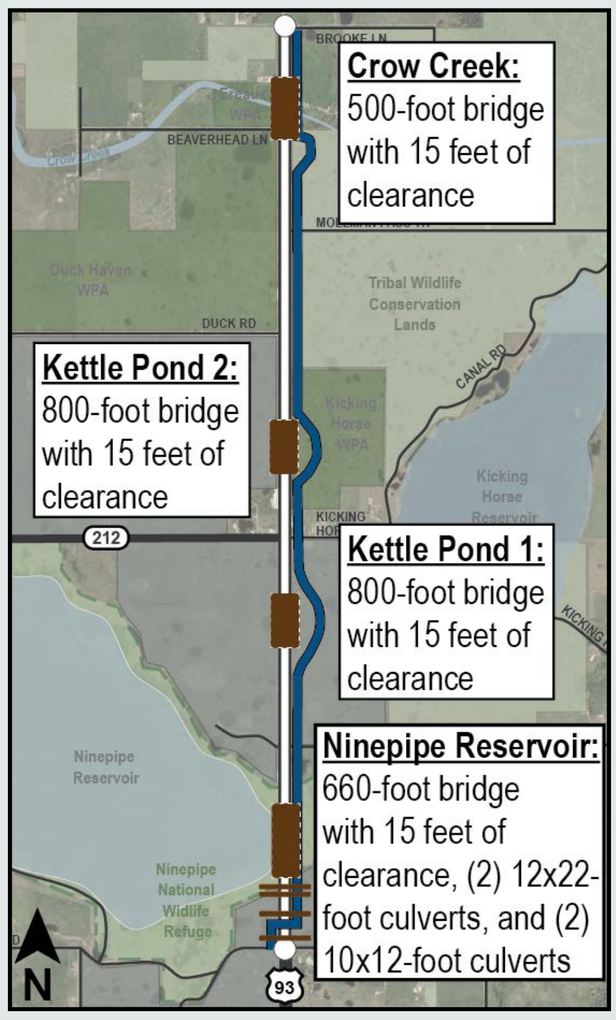
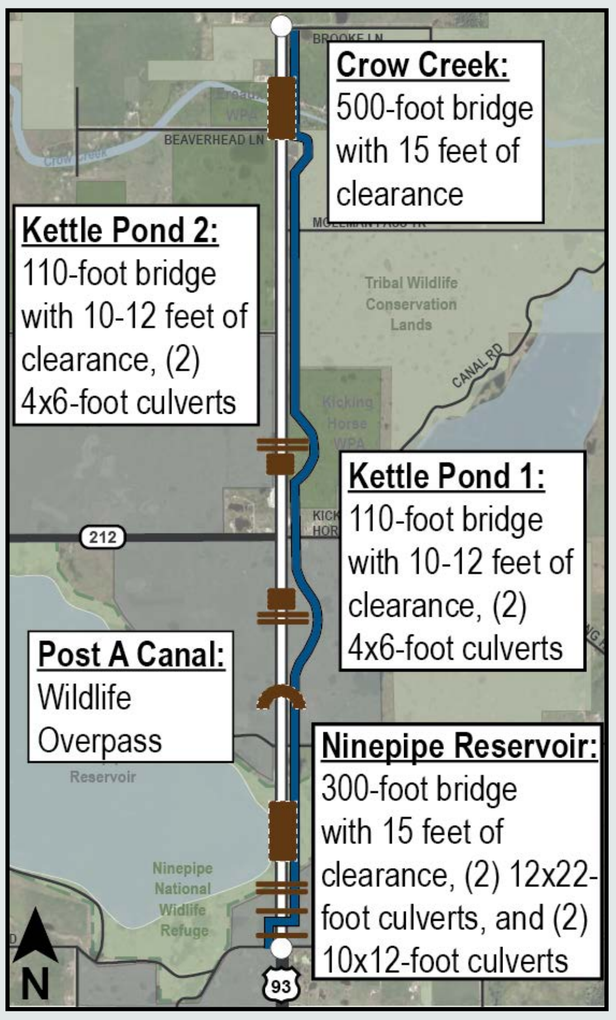


The US 93 Ninepipe corridor provides **habitat** for numerous wildlife species including a variety of fish, turtles, birds, deer, various small to large mammals, and grizzly bears which are federally listed as Threatened. Screening Criterion 3 considered the ability of each option to accommodate **safe passage** of aquatic and terrestrial species, **reduce wildlife mortality**, provide habitat connectivity, and support **federally listed species**.

	C-1: SEIS Preferred	C-2: Enlarged Crossings	C-3: Wildlife Overpass
			
FISH AND WILDLIFE	• Improvement to passability at hydraulic crossings. • Potential risk of fish mortality due to in-stream construction. • Wider footprint across waterbodies from shared use path. • Crossings may not be sized appropriately (low clearance, small openings in some locations) for use by larger mammals, especially grizzly bears. Some reduction in wildlife mortality anticipated. • Permanent habitat impacts due to increased roadway width and shared use path.	• Longer structures best restore the hydrologic regime, but at the expense of potential in-stream construction and extensive placement of fill to raise road grade for taller structures. • Shared use path around kettle ponds avoids aquatic habitat. Larger structures provide greater ability to restore habitat connectivity. • Reduction in wildlife mortality anticipated. Larger crossings provide most attractive grizzly bear crossings and ability to connect habitat.	• Similar hydrologic connectivity to C-2 but potentially less disruption to species in kettle ponds due to smaller structures. • Most crossing opportunities, overpass is most attractive to large mammals and grizzly bears. Crossings strategically sized to serve the needs of wildlife anticipated to use each crossing. • Greatest potential for habitat connectivity and reduced wildlife mortality. Smaller kettle pond structures provide less aquatic habitat connectivity but assumed to be adequate for anticipated use.
SUBTOTAL *(out of 20)*	9	14	18

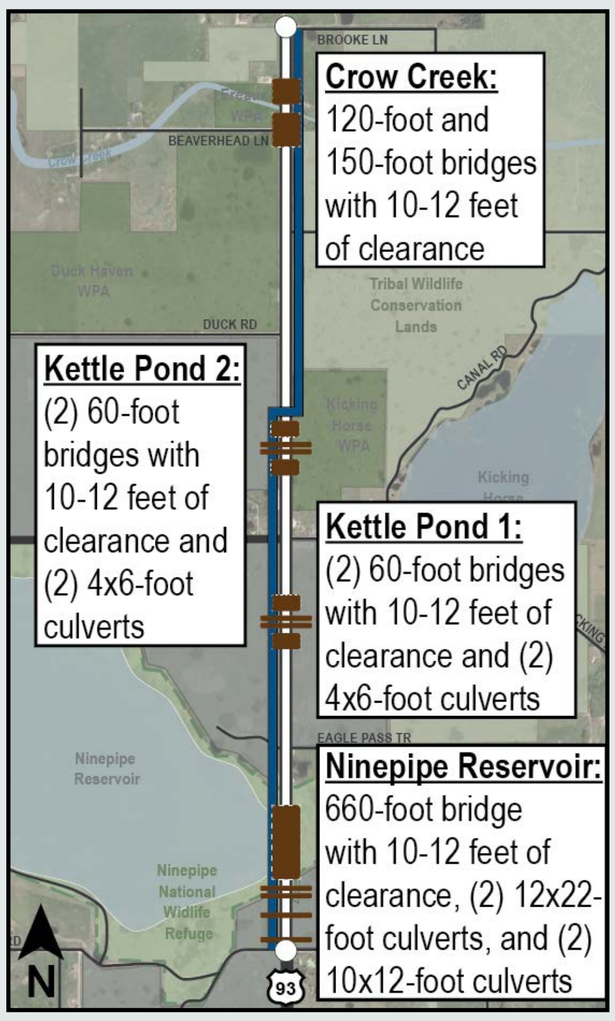
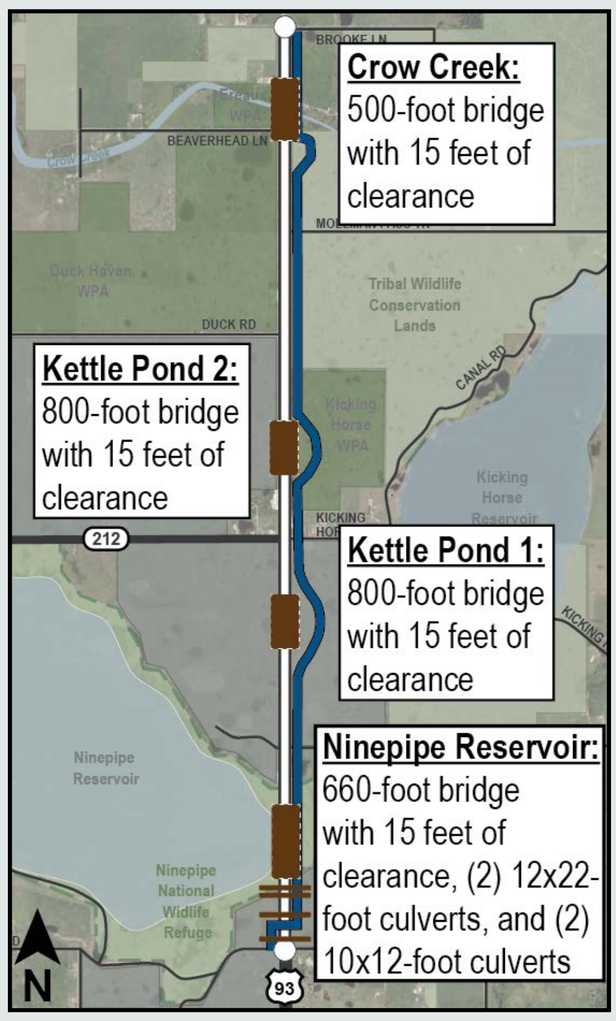
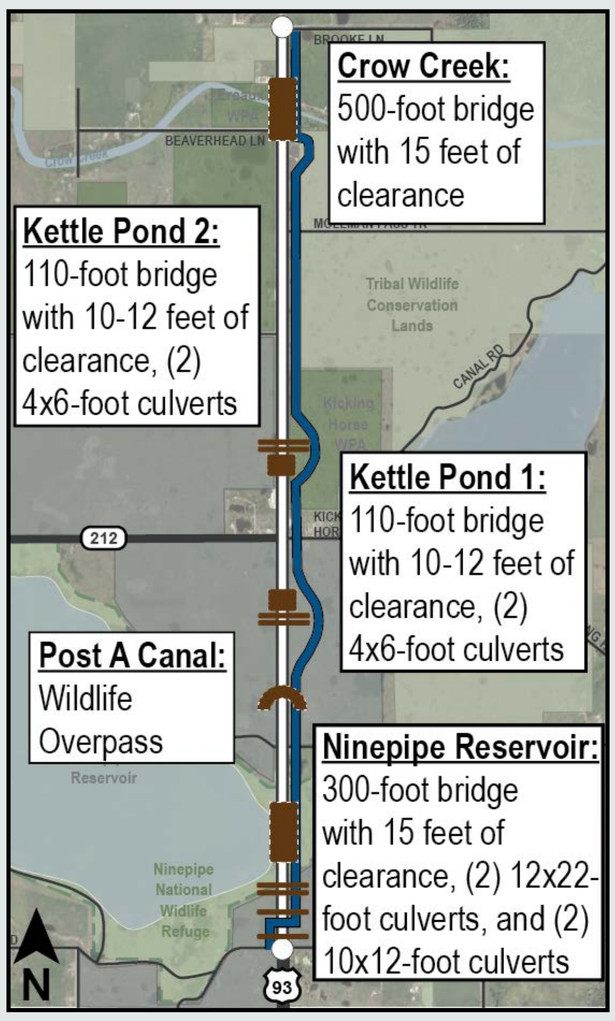
SCREENING CRITERION 4: HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

The US 93 Ninepipe segment traverses a primarily rural area dominated by low-density **residential**, **cultural**, and **agricultural** uses, although many **public lands** (Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, multiple Wildlife Management Areas, Waterfowl Production Areas) and some highway/tourist-oriented **commercial** properties are also located in the corridor. Screening Criterion 4 considered the ability of each option to **minimize impacts** to cultural and recreational resources, visual characteristics of the corridor, and **adjacent properties**.

	C-1: SEIS Preferred	C-2: Enlarged Crossings	C-3: Wildlife Overpass
HUMAN ENVIRONMENT			
	• Potential impacts to the Ninepipe Cultural Property and potential impacts to public lands, moderately offset by enhancements to wildlife and wetland connectivity, which are culturally valued. • Temporary visual impacts during construction and permanent impacts to view shed due to roadway grade raise and wildlife fencing. • One directly impacted building and various access impacts. • Approximately 31.6 acres of right-of-way would need to be acquired.	• Potential impacts to the Ninepipe Cultural Property and potential impacts to public lands and historic stagecoach route, substantially offset by enhancements to wildlife and wetland connectivity, which are culturally valued. • Similar temporary and permanent view shed impacts to C-1, except greatest raise in roadway grade required of all options. • One indirectly impacted building and various access impacts. • Approximately 34.7 acres of right-of-way would need to be acquired.	• Similar impacts to Ninepipe Cultural Property, historic stagecoach route, and public lands as C-2, substantially offset by culturally valued wildlife and wetland connectivity improvements. • Temporary visual impacts during construction and permanent impacts to view shed due to roadway grade raise, wildlife fencing, and overpass structure. • One indirectly impacted building and various access impacts. • Approximately 35.7 acres of right-of-way would need to be acquired.
SUBTOTAL *(out of 15)*	7	8	8

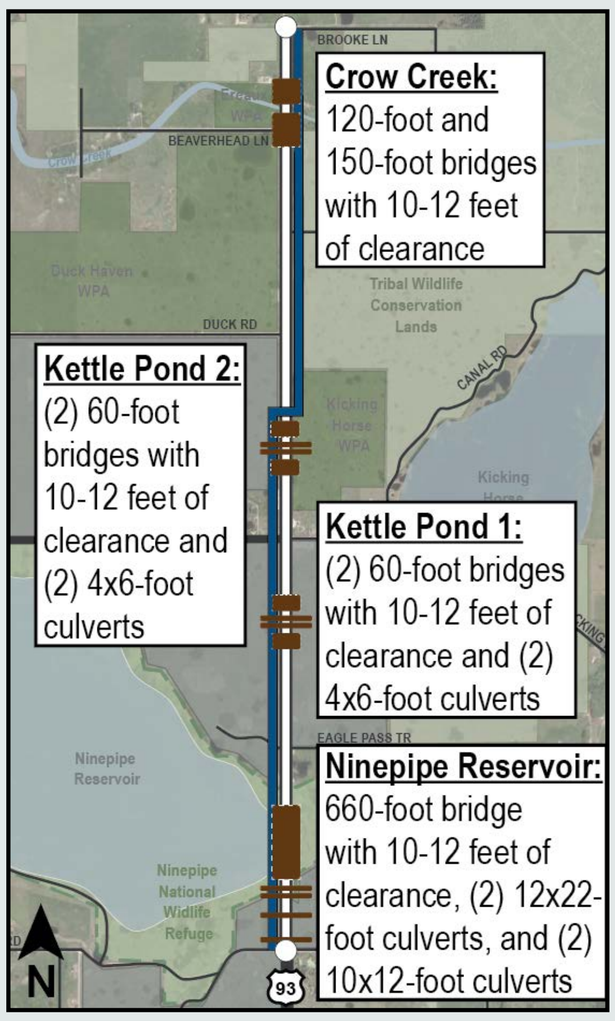
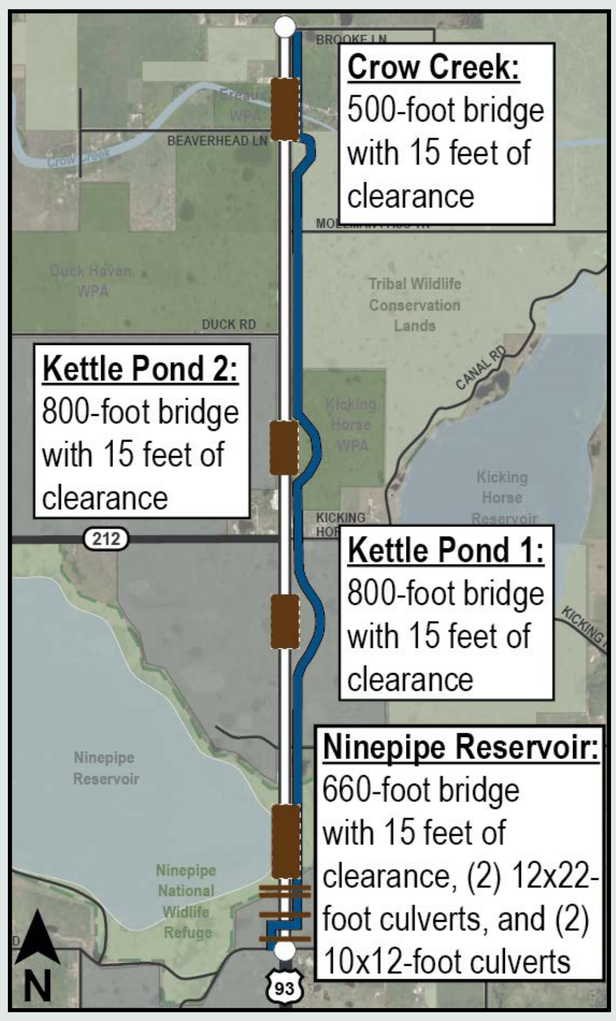
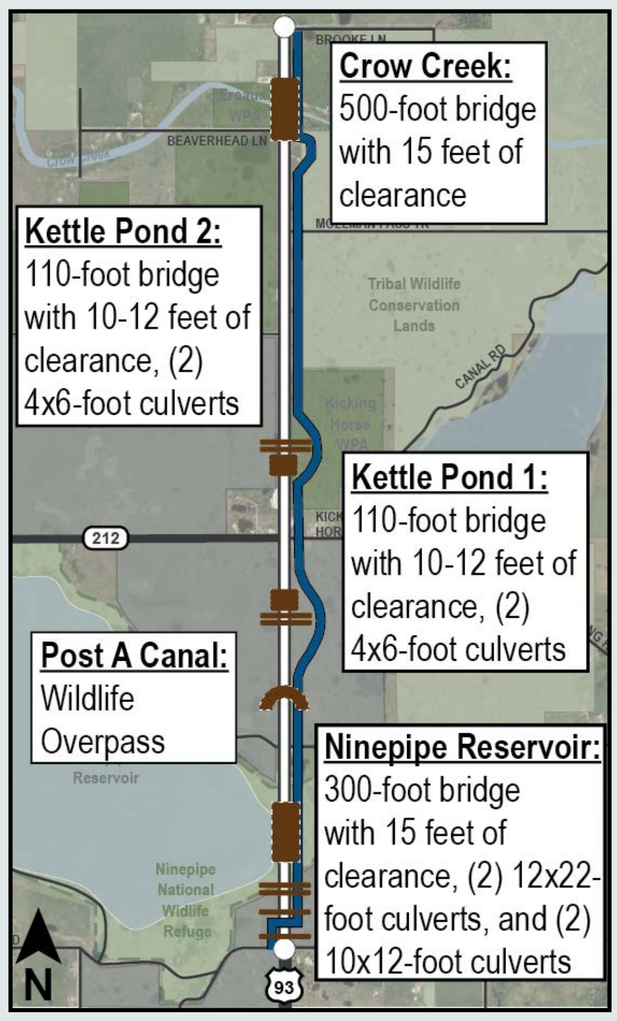
SCREENING CRITERION 5: CONSTRUCTABILITY

Improvements to US 93 within the Ninepipe segment will need to consider **geotechnical** and general **construction feasibility**, **impacts to the traveling public** during construction, as well as **regulatory construction requirements**. Screening Criterion 5 considered multiple geotechnical factors along with the construction feasibility, impacts, and requirements associated with each option.

	C-1: SEIS Preferred	C-2: Enlarged Crossings	C-3: Wildlife Overpass
			
CONSTRUCTABILITY	• Moderate geotechnical and constructability challenges at the Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek. • Travel could likely be maintained on routes adjacent to US 93 during construction. Some travel delays are expected due to reduced speeds in work zones. • Permitting, additional environmental documentation, and wetland mitigation would be required for construction.	• Most geotechnical and constructability challenges due to long structures and steepened fill slopes. • Greatest impacts during construction due to long structures. • Adjacent detours may be required around kettle ponds and travel delays are expected due to reduced travel speeds in work zones. • Permitting and environmental documentation would be required, but wetland mitigation needs would be less compared to C-1.	• Moderate geotechnical and constructability challenges due steep slopes and structures at Ninepipe Reservoir, kettle ponds, and Crow Creek. • Moderate construction impacts, with travel likely maintained on routes adjacent to US 93. Detours may be required around kettle ponds and travel delays are expected due to reduced travel speeds in work zones. • Permitting and environmental documentation would be required, but wetland mitigation needs would be less compared to C-1.
SUBTOTAL *(out of 20)*	12	9	12

SCREENING CRITERION 6: COST

Cost is an important component of the feasibility evaluation for improvements within the Ninepipe segment. Funding may come from a variety of sources including federal, state, or local sources. Screening Criterion 6 considered the **cost of improvements**, **maintenance** needs and costs, **benefit-cost ratio**, general **cost effectiveness**, and relative **fundability** of each option.

	C-1: SEIS Preferred	C-2: Enlarged Crossings	C-3: Wildlife Overpass
			
COST	Estimated Cost (2022$): $90.2M • Lower capital cost compared to C-2, but slightly higher than C-3. • Maintenance would be needed for the new shared use path and wildlife crossing structures. • Although similar in cost to C-3, this option provides fewer benefits and more impacts. • Somewhat favorable for funding, but low potential for funding partnerships.	Estimated Cost (2022$): $138.0M • Highest capital cost (1.5 times the cost of C-3) with moderate impacts and moderate environmental benefits. • Slightly more maintenance required for the shared use path and wildlife crossing structures due to increased length. • Low likelihood of funding due to the estimated cost outweighing anticipated benefits.	Estimated Cost (2022$): $86.2M • Lowest capital cost with greatest wildlife accommodation benefits, moderate environmental benefits, and moderate environmental impacts. • Benefit to cost ratio is favorable for funding and there is a potential opportunity to partner with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) for the wildlife overpass. • Maintenance required for the shared use path and structures (smaller, comparatively). The overpass requires minimal maintenance and the responsibility could be shared with MFWP.
SUBTOTAL *(out of 20)*	11	7	14

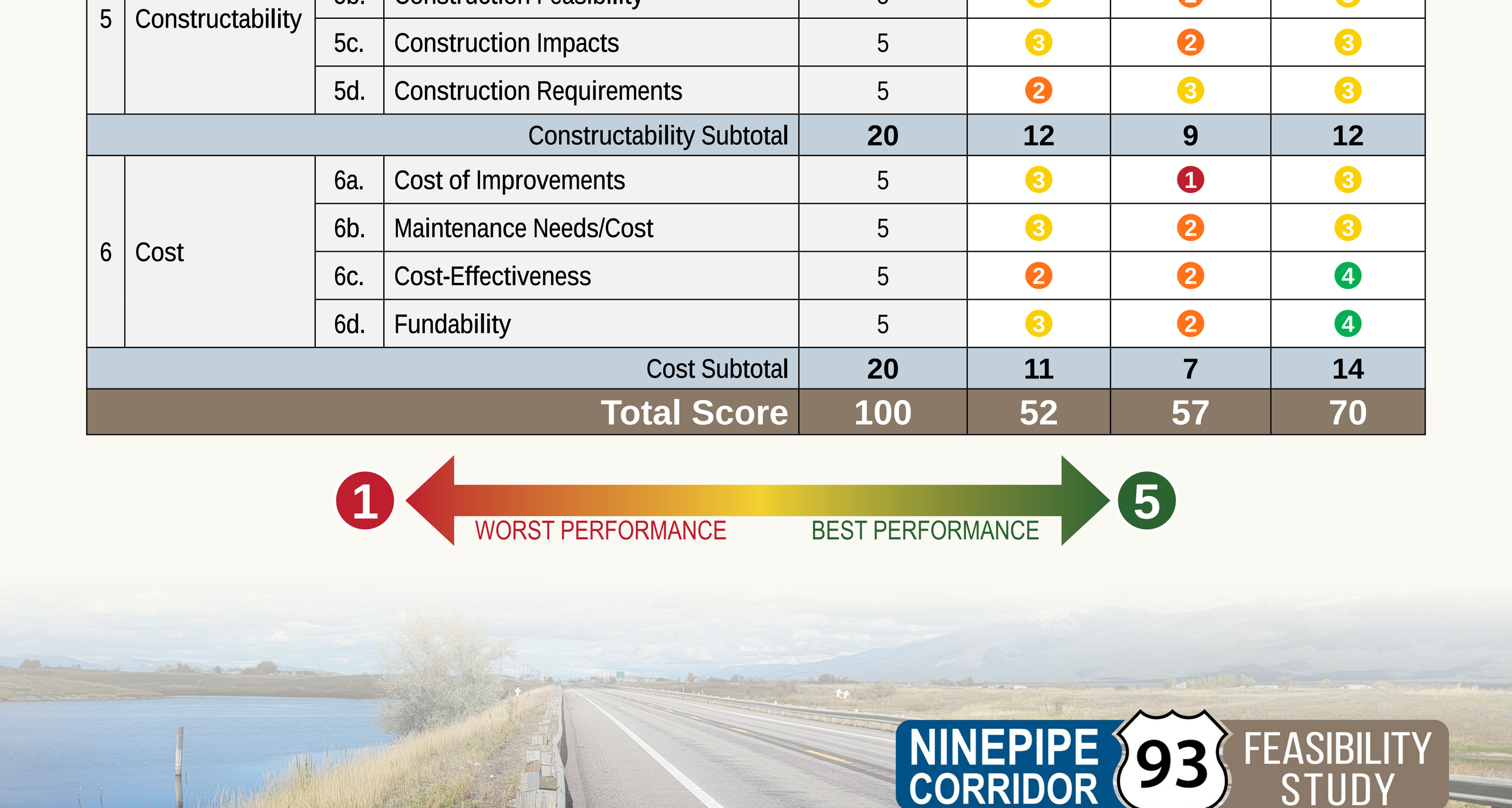
SCREENING RESULTS SUMMARY

Option C-3 received the highest overall score (70 out of 100 points) and also scored the highest or tied for the highest score in all screening categories except ecological environment. Options C-1 and C-2 scored similarly (52 and 57 points out of 100, respectively) with C-2 scoring slightly higher due to superior operational, ecological, and fish and wildlife elements.

Based on this evaluation, Option C-3 **was identified as the preferred option to advance for future project development.**

Screening Criteria		Sub-Criteria		Total Possible Points	C-1: SEIS	C-2 Enlarged Crossings	C-3: Wildlife Overpass
1	Transportation	1a.	Operations	5	3	4	4
		1b.	Safety	5	3	3	4
			Transportation Subtotal	**10**	**6**	**7**	**8**
2	Ecological Environment	2a.	Hydraulic Performance	5	2	4	3
		2b.	Wetlands	5	2	4	3
		2c.	Surface Water Resources	5	3	4	4
			Ecological Environment Subtotal	**15**	**7**	**12**	**10**
3	Fish and Wildlife	3a.	Aquatic Accommodations	5	3	3	4
		3b.	Terrestrial Accommodations	5	2	4	5
		3c.	Habitat	5	2	3	4
		3d.	Threatened and Endangered Species	5	2	4	5
			Fish and Wildlife Subtotal	**20**	**9**	**14**	**18**
4	Human Environment	4a.	Cultural and Recreational Resources	5	3	4	4
		4b.	Visual Quality	5	3	2	2
		4c.	Adjacent Properties	5	1	2	2
			Human Environment Subtotal	**15**	**7**	**8**	**8**
5	Constructability	5a.	Geotechnical Considerations	5	4	2	3
		5b.	Construction Feasibility	5	3	2	3
		5c.	Construction Impacts	5	3	2	3
		5d.	Construction Requirements	5	2	3	3
			Constructability Subtotal	**20**	**12**	**9**	**12**
6	Cost	6a.	Cost of Improvements	5	3	1	3
		6b.	Maintenance Needs/Cost	5	3	2	3
		6c.	Cost-Effectiveness	5	2	2	4
		6d.	Fundability	5	3	2	4
			Cost Subtotal	**20**	**11**	**7**	**14**
			Total Score	**100**	**52**	**57**	**70**

1 WORST PERFORMANCE — BEST PERFORMANCE 5

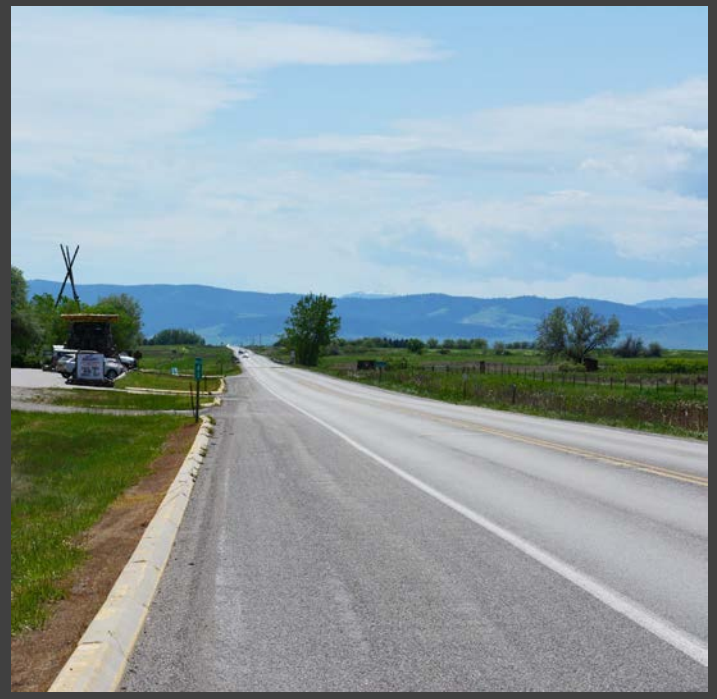


Public Informational Meeting

January 12, 2023

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Meeting Agenda



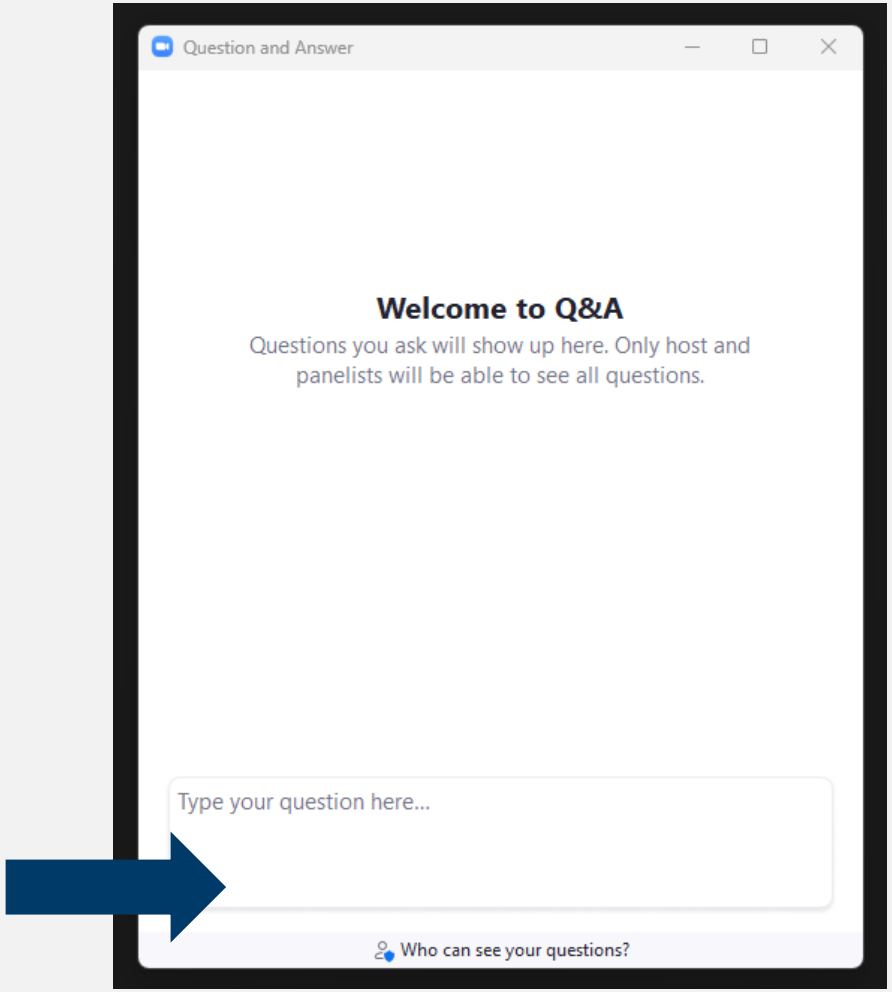
NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

- **Introductions**
- **Background and Planning Process**
  - Why is MDT studying this corridor?
  - What is involved in the feasibility study?
  - What outreach has been conducted?
- **Corridor Options and Evaluation**
- **Next Steps**
- **Open Discussion**

Housekeeping Items

- Questions and comments will be addressed after the presentation
- Please **type** your questions and comments in the **Q&A box** on your screen.

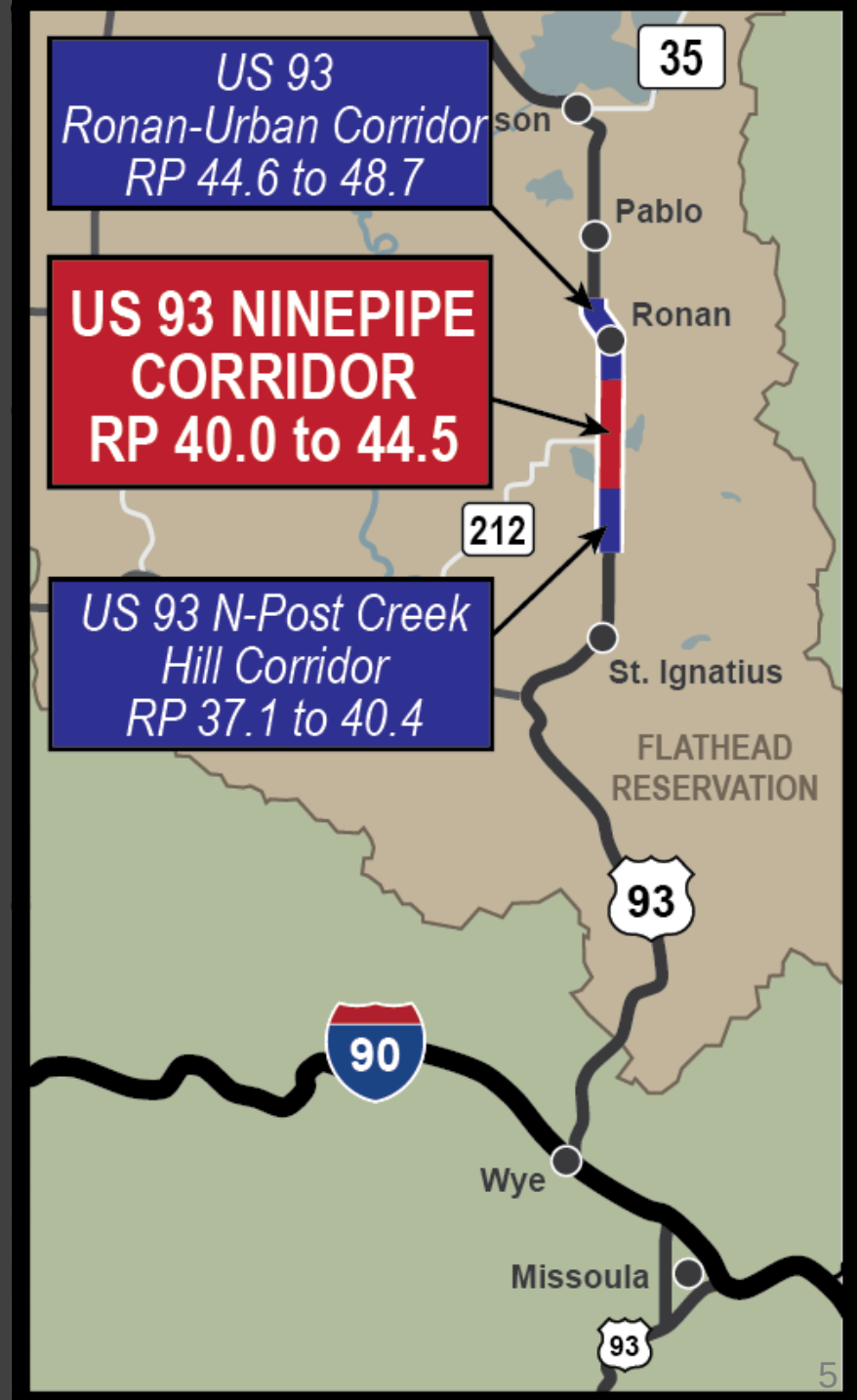
To **type** a question, click on the Q&A button:



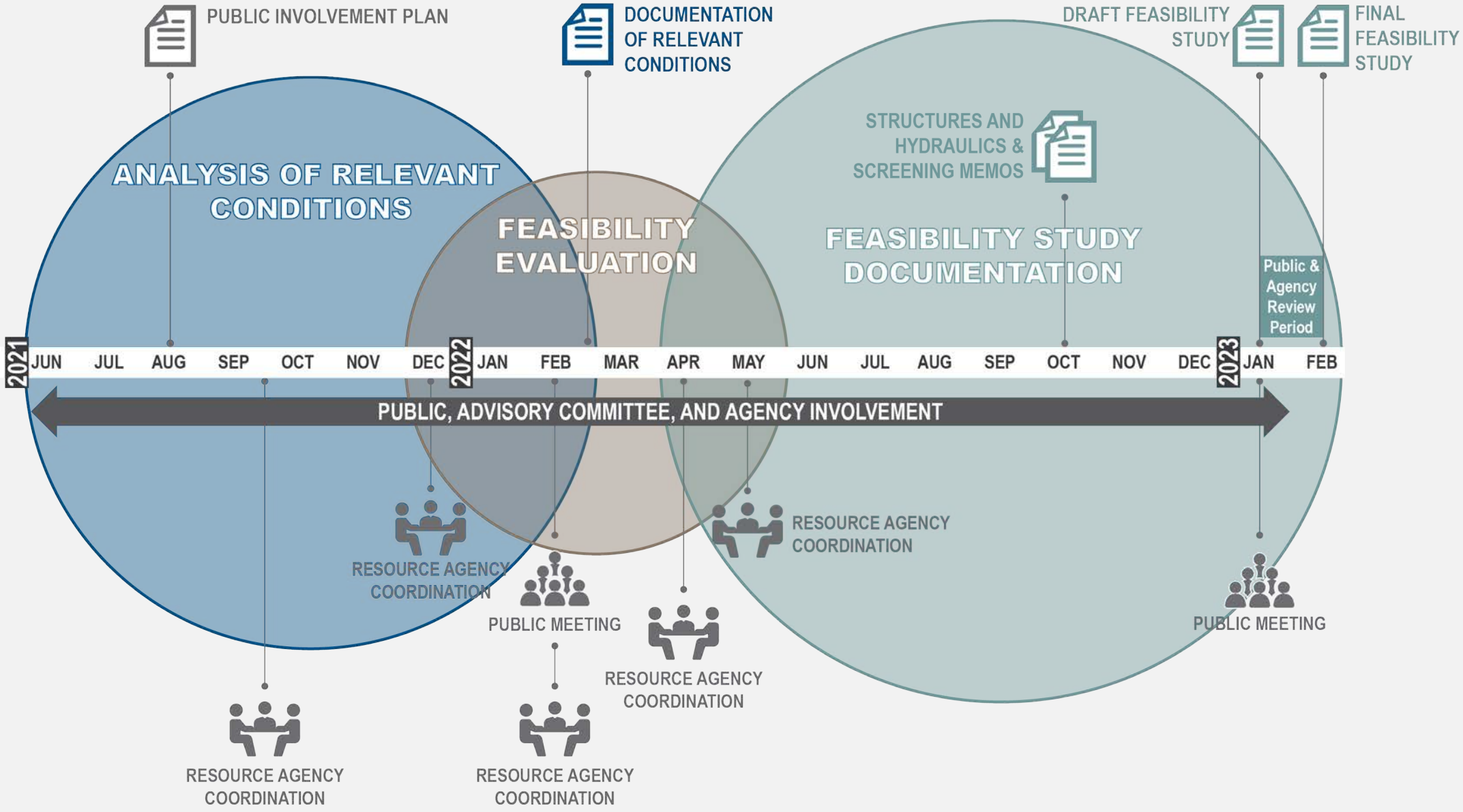
BACKGROUND AND PLANNING PROCESS

Why is MDT studying this corridor?

- **US 93 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) & Record of Decision– 1996**
- **Supplemental EIS – 2008**
  - Post Creek Hill to Ronan (RP 37.1 to 48.3)
- **Complications and Lessons Learned**
  - Ronan-Urban and Post Creek Hill



Planning Process



Previous Outreach

Advisory Committee

- June 2021
- August 2021
- October 2021
- January 2022
- February 2022
- April 2022
- August 2022
- October 2022
- November 2022

Resource Agencies

Virtual

- September 2021
- December 2021
- February 2022
- April 2022

Field Review

- May 2022

Tribal Council

- September 2021
- March 2022
- December 2022

Public Outreach

- September 2021
- February 2022
- *January 2023*

Public

- Minimize impacts to adjacent properties
- Consider access for residents and businesses
- Identify potential funding sources
- Ensure adequate coordination with agencies and stakeholders
- Consider how improvements will connect with other projects (such as Post Creek Hill and Eagle Pass Trail)

Resource Agencies

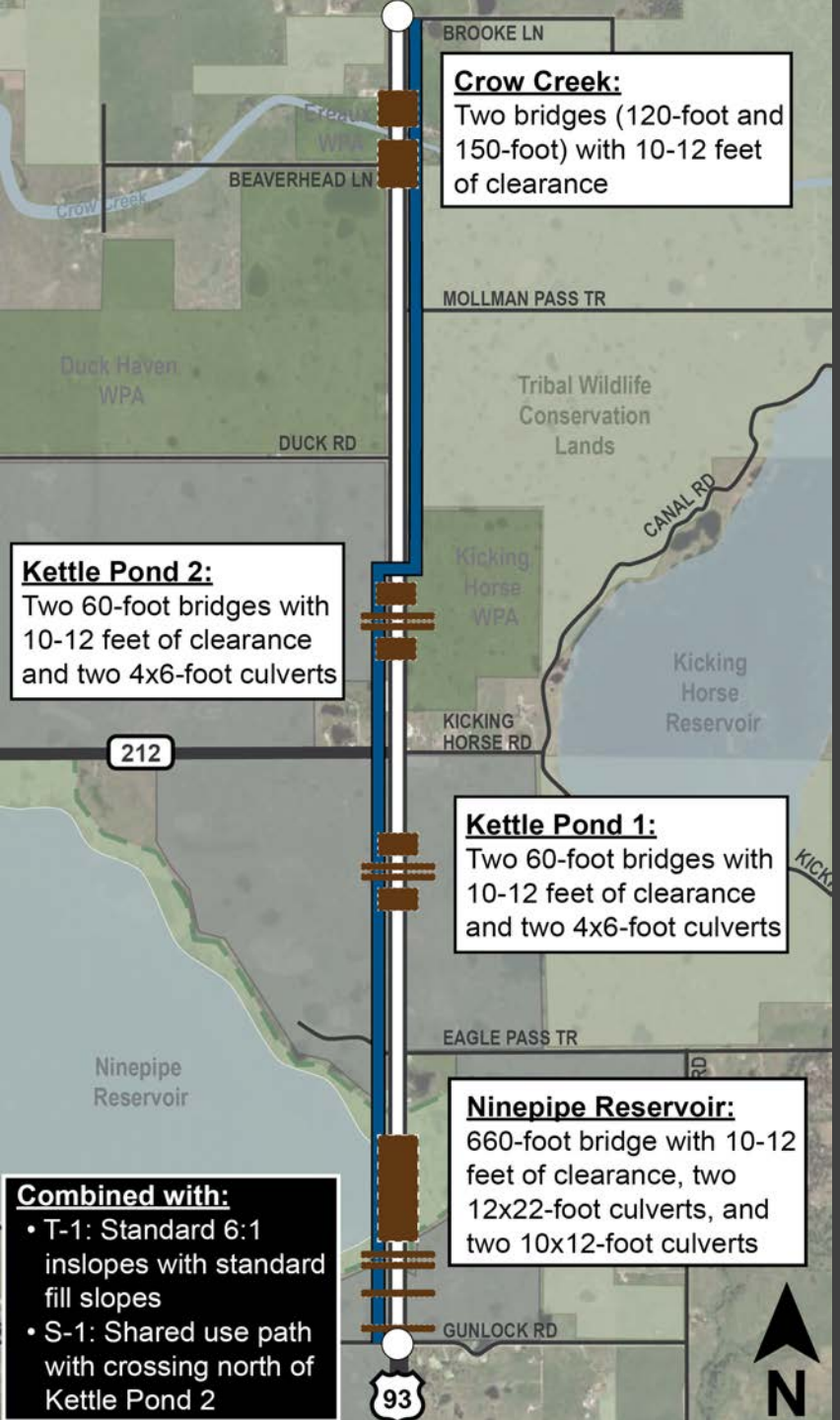
- Size crossing structures according to targeted species known to cross the highway in each location
- Ensure adequate vertical clearance and dry passage at crossing structures to encourage use by grizzly bears and large mammals
- Consider the cultural and traditional elements of the landscape
- Restore the corridor by improving connectivity across the highway

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

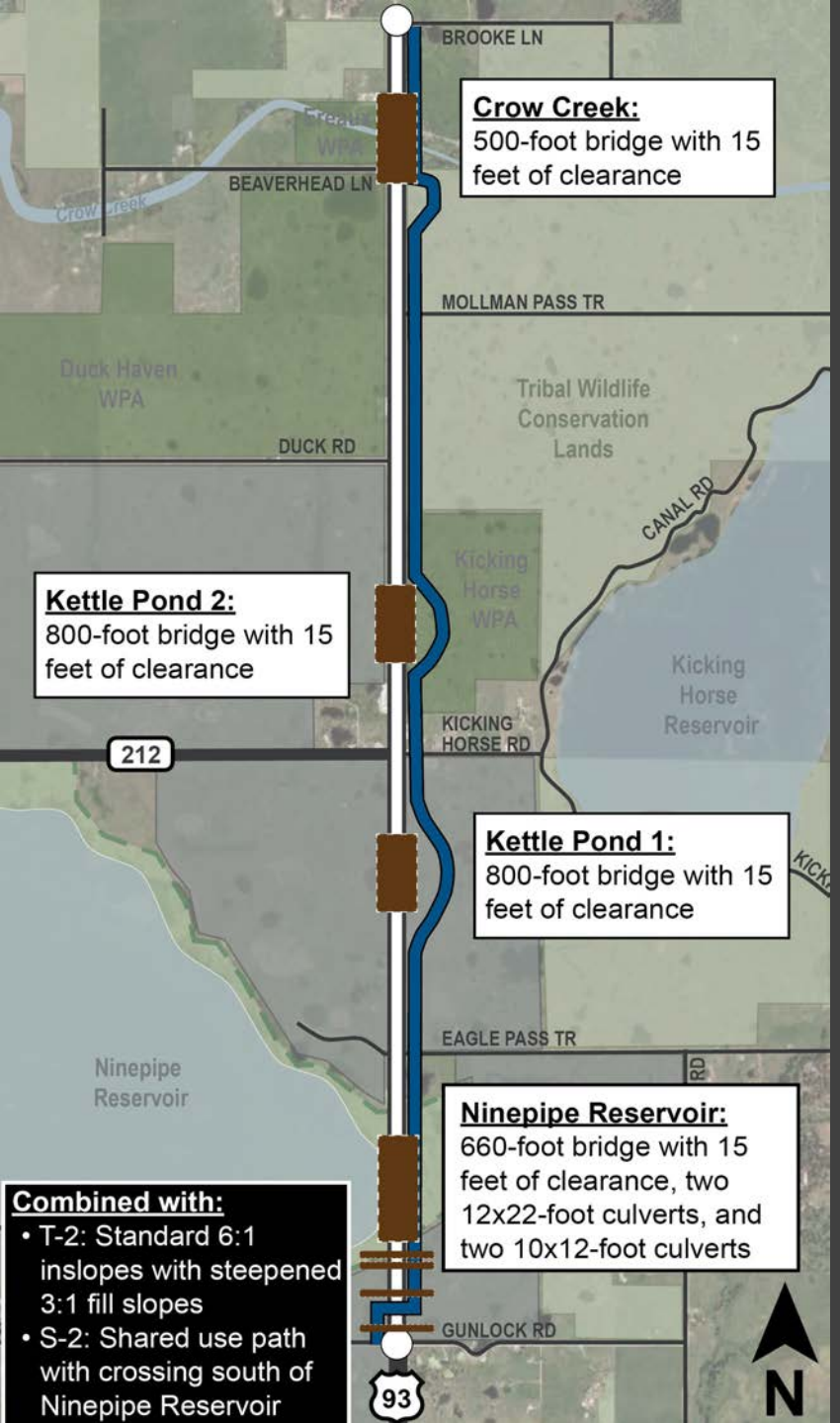
CORRIDOR OPTIONS

Corridor Options

C-1: SEIS Preferred



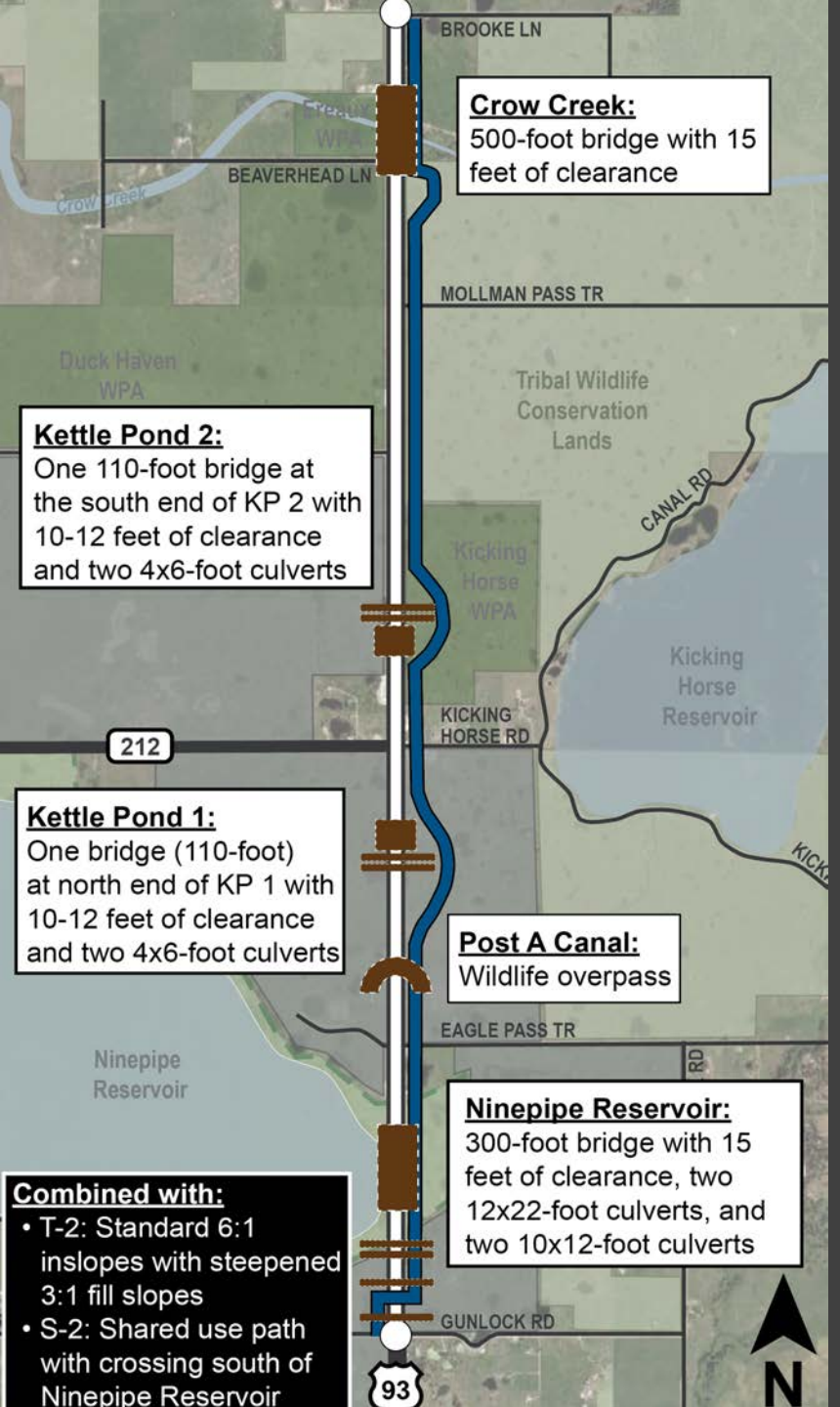
Location	Treatment
Crow Creek	Two bridges (120-foot and 150-foot) with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 2	Two 60-foot bridges with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance, two 4x6 culverts
Kettle Pond 1	Two 60-foot bridges with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance, two 4x6 culverts
Ninepipe Reservoir	Single 660-foot bridge with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance, two 12x22 culverts, two 10x12 culverts



Corridor Options

C-2: Enlarged Crossings

Location	Treatment
Crow Creek	Single 500-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 2	Single 800-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 1	Single 800-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Ninepipe Reservoir	Single 660-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance, two 12x22 culverts, two 10x12 culverts



Corridor Options

C-3: Wildlife Overpass

Location	Treatment
Crow Creek	Single 500-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 2	One 110-foot bridge with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 1	One 110-foot bridge with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance
Post A Canal	Wildlife overpass
Ninepipe Reservoir	Single 300-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance, two 12x22 culverts, two 10x12 culverts

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

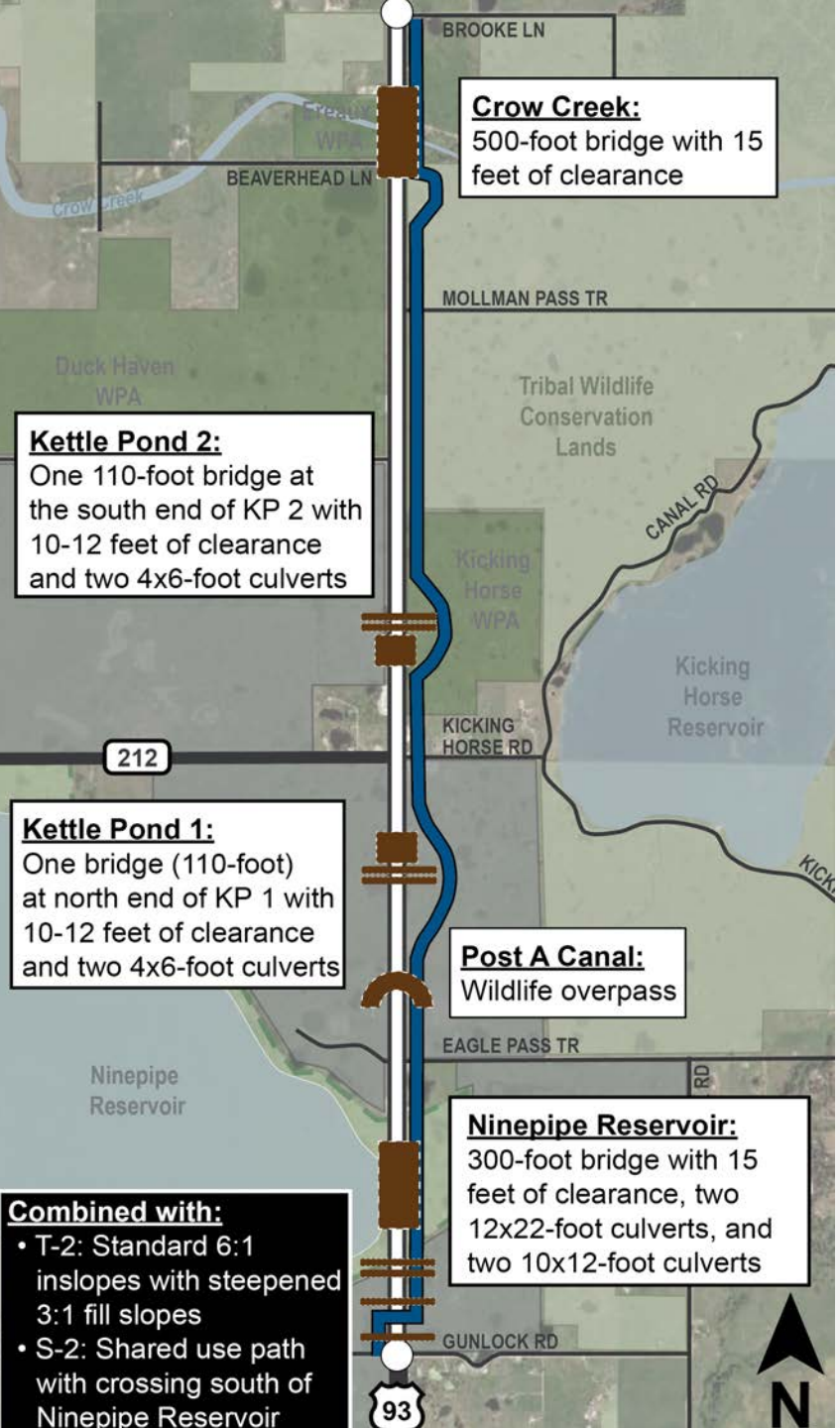
EVALUATION

Screening Criteria

1. **Transportation**
2. **Ecological Environment**
3. **Fish and Wildlife**
4. **Human Environment**
5. **Constructability**
6. **Cost**

Screening Summary

Screening Criteria		Sub-Criteria		Points	C-1	C-2	C-3
1	Transportation	1a.	Operations	5	3	4	4
		1b.	Safety	5	3	3	4
			Transportation Subtotal	10	6	7	8
2	Ecological Environment	2a.	Hydraulic Performance	5	2	4	3
		2b.	Wetlands	5	2	4	3
		2c.	Surface Water Resources	5	3	4	4
			Ecological Environment Subtotal	15	7	12	10
3	Fish and Wildlife	3a.	Aquatic Accommodations	5	3	3	4
		3b.	Terrestrial Accommodations	5	2	4	5
		3c.	Habitat	5	2	3	4
		3d.	Threatened and Endangered Species	5	2	4	5
			Fish and Wildlife Subtotal	20	9	14	18
4	Human Environment	4a.	Cultural and Recreational Resources	5	3	4	4
		4b.	Visual Quality	5	3	2	2
		4c.	Adjacent Properties	5	1	2	2
			Human Environment Subtotal	15	7	8	8
5	Constructability	5a.	Geotechnical Considerations	5	4	2	3
		5b.	Construction Feasibility	5	3	2	3
		5c.	Construction Impacts	5	3	2	3
		5d.	Construction Requirements	5	2	3	3
			Constructability Subtotal	20	12	9	12
6	Cost	6a.	Cost of Improvements	5	3	1	3
		6b.	Maintenance Needs/Cost	5	3	2	3
		6c.	Cost-Effectiveness	5	2	2	4
		6d.	Fundability	5	3	2	4
			Cost Subtotal	20	11	7	14
			Total Score	100	52	57	70



Preferred Option: C-3

- Typical Section: Steepened fill slopes
- Shared Use Path: Crossing south of Ninepipe Reservoir
- Ninepipe Reservoir: Single 300-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance, 4 culverts
- Post A Canal: Wildlife overpass
- Kettle Pond 1: Single 110-foot bridge with 10 to 12 feet of vertical clearance, 2 culverts
- Kettle Pond 2: Single 110-foot bridge with 10 to 12 feet of vertical clearance, 2 culverts
- Crow Creek: Single 500-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance

NEXT STEPS

What are the next steps?

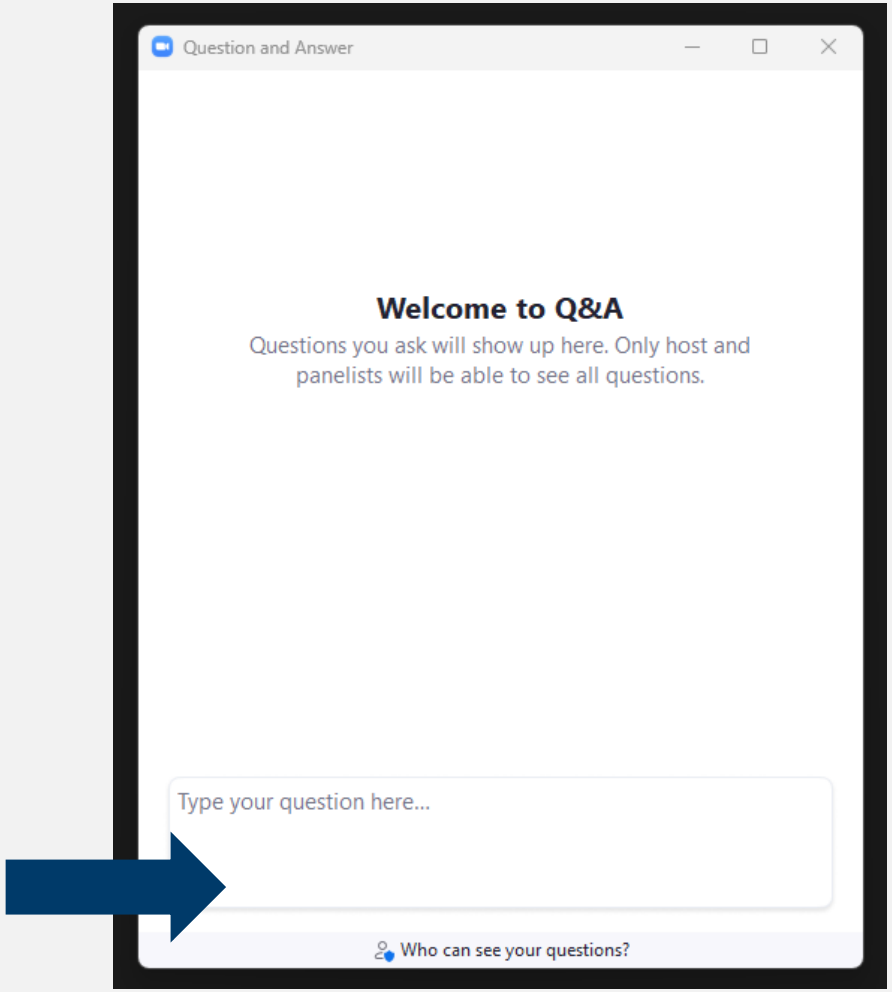
- **Feasibility Report Review Period**
  - January 6 through February 6, 2023
  - Available at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93ninepipe/documents.aspx
- **Address Comments**
- **Finalize Feasibility Study**

OPEN DISCUSSION

Open Discussion

Please type your questions and comments in the Q&A box on your screen.

To **type** a question, click on the Q&A button:



Questions?

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

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Montana Department of Transportation

vcrnich@mt.gov

(406) 444-7653

www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/US93Ninepipe

APPENDIX 1E:

Resource Agency Coordination

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Resource Agency Meeting

September 21, 2021

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

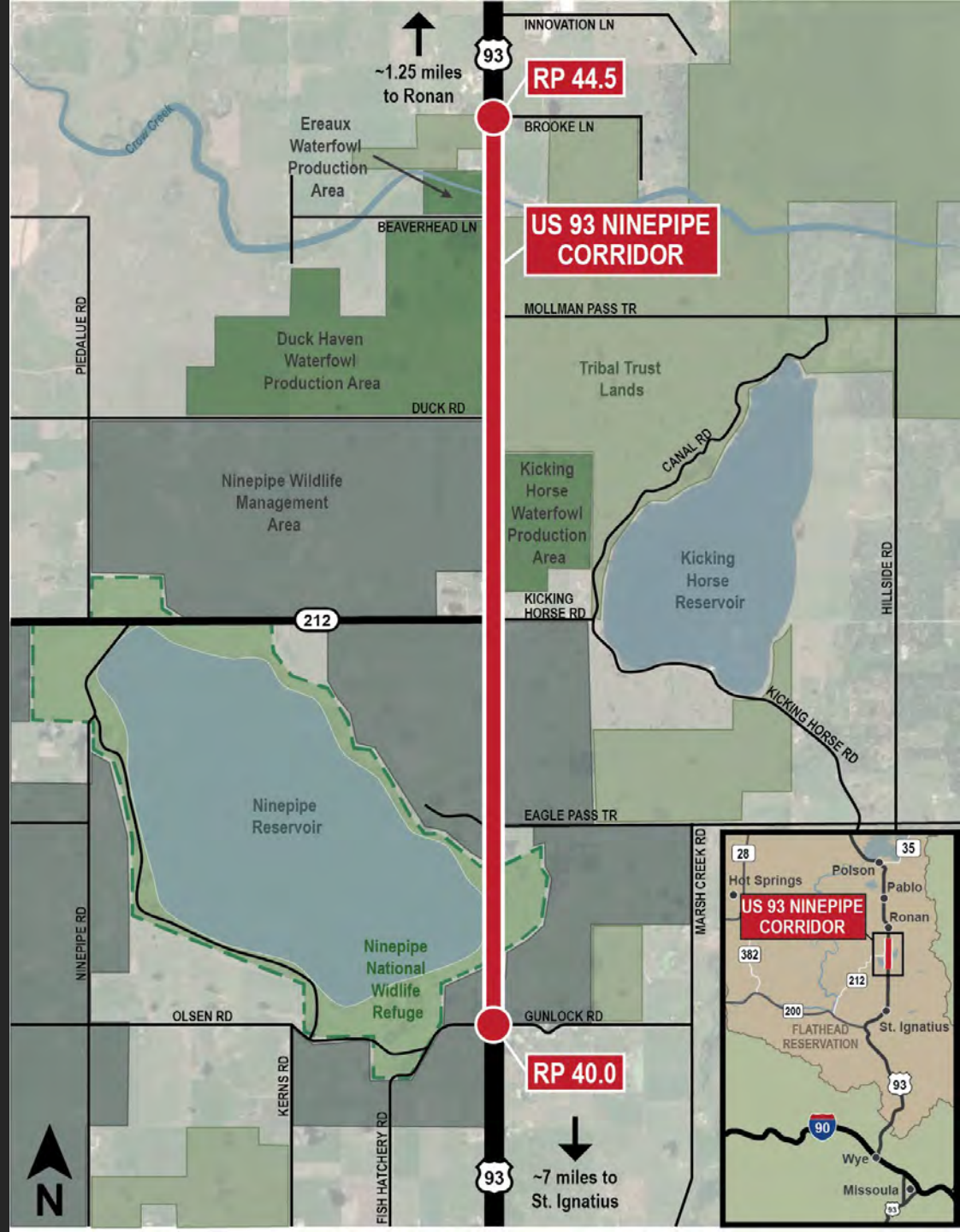
Meeting Agenda

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

- **History of Study Area**
- **Planning Objectives**
- **Workplan**
  - Task 2: Public and Agency Involvement
  - Task 3: Analysis of Relevant Conditions
    - Wetlands
    - Cultural Resources
    - Wildlife Crossings
  - Task 4: Feasibility Evaluation
  - Task 5: Feasibility Study Documentation
- **Schedule**
- **Open Discussion**

History of Study Area

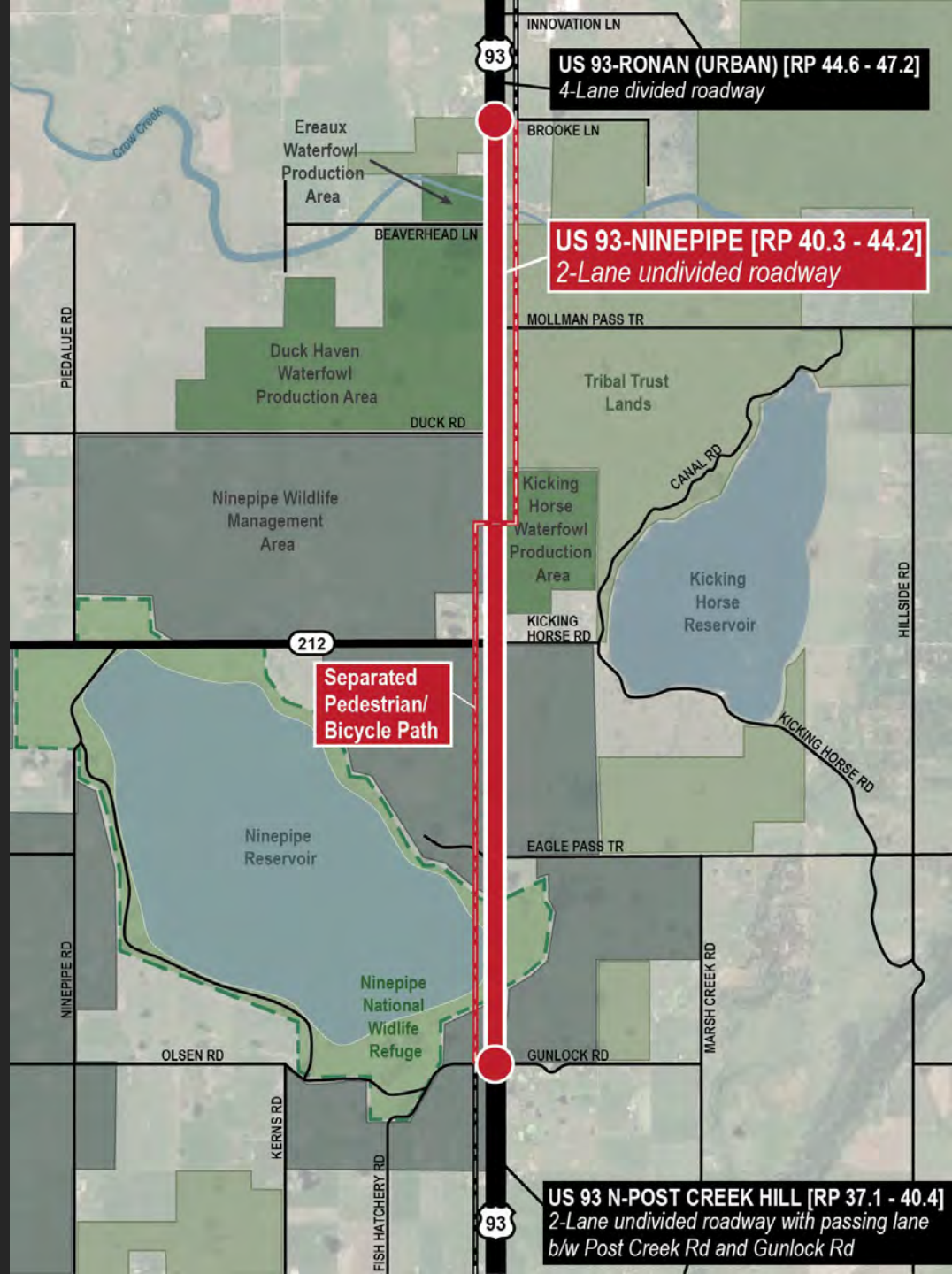
- US 93 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) – 1996
- Supplemental EIS – 2008
  - Post Creek Hill to Ronan (RP 37.1 to 48.3)
- Complications and Lessons Learned



History of Study Area

SEIS Preferred Alternative - Ninepipe Corridor

- Two-lane undivided roadway
- Separated pathway
- 4-lane divided roadway north of Brooke Lane
- Passing lane south of Gunlock Road



Planning Objectives

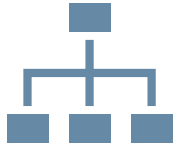
Objectives

- **Verify Baseline Conditions**
- **Confirm Viability of Preferred Alternative**
  - Impacts
  - Costs
  - Constructability
- **Support Future Project Development Decisions**
  - Re-evaluation
  - Design

Approach

- Rely on existing information and supplement as needed
- Consider minor modifications to minimize impacts and costs
- Hybrid approach – planning, environmental, and engineering components

Workplan:
Overview



Task 1:

Management and Administration

Task 2:

Public and Agency Involvement

Task 3:

Analysis of Relevant Conditions

Task 4:

Feasibility Evaluation

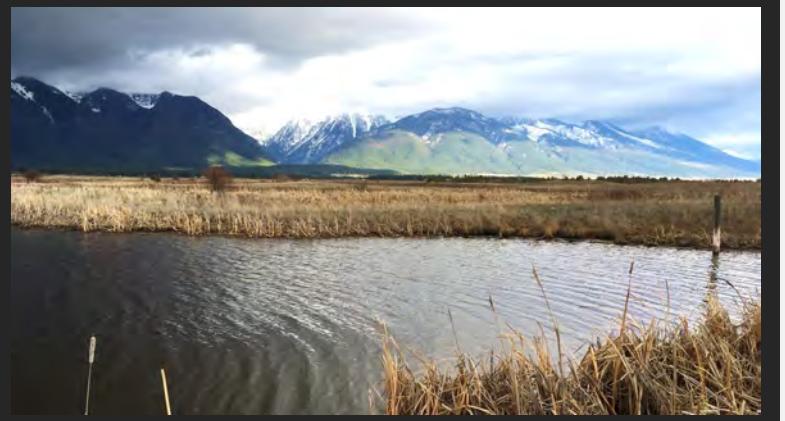
Task 5:

Feasibility Study Documentation

Workplan Task 2:
Public and Agency Involvement

- **Public and Agency Involvement Plan**
- Advisory Committee Meetings
  - Provide guidance and review
  - Technical expertise (MDT, FHWA, CSKT)
  - Approximately every 8 weeks (at key milestones)
- Website
- Progress Updates
- Meetings
  - Public Informational Meetings
  - Resource Agency Meetings
  - CSKT Tribal Council
  - CSKT Highway Team Meetings
  - Technical Design Committee
- Other
  - THPO Coordination
  - Stakeholder Conversations

Workplan Task 3:
Analysis of Relevant Conditions



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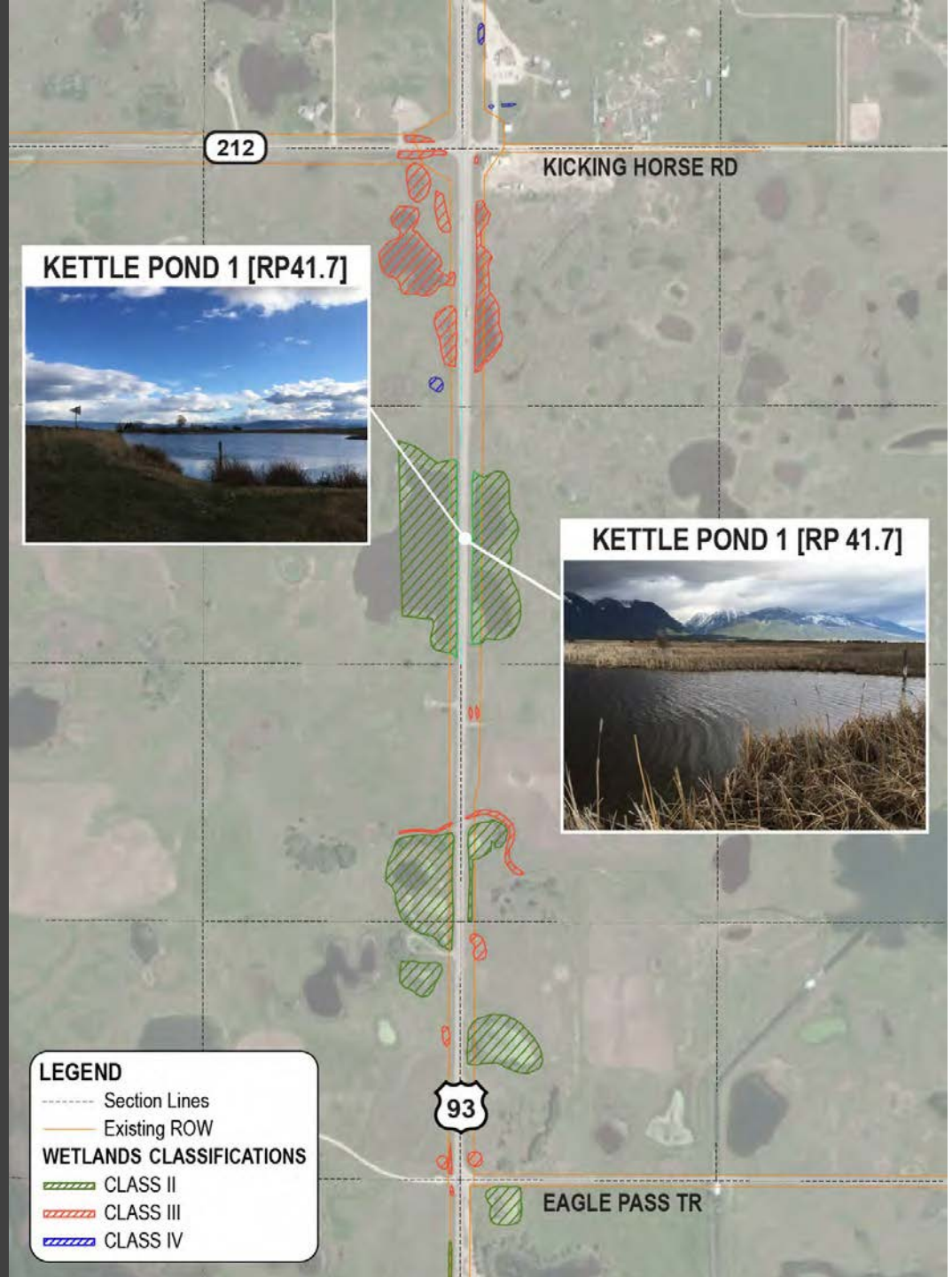
- Available Data and Information Review
- Field Review and Investigation
- Traffic and Safety Data Review
- Geotechnical Investigation
- Right-of-Way Research
- Survey Activities
- Wetland and Wildlife Investigation
- Cultural/Historic Investigation
- **Documentation of Relevant Conditions Technical Memo**

Workplan Task 3:
Analysis of Relevant Conditions

2008 SEIS Affected Resources	
Traffic Operations & Safety	**Floodplains & Streams**
Land Use	**Fish & Wildlife**
Prime & Unique Farmland	**T&E Species**
Social	**Cultural Resources**
Economics	**Parks & Recreation**
Pedestrians & Bicyclists	Hazardous Materials
Air Quality	Visual
Noise	Relocations
Water Quality	**Geology & Soils**
Wetlands	

Workplan Task 3: *Analysis of Relevant Conditions*

Wetlands



HERRERA

Reconnaissance-level evaluation

- Confirm wetland boundaries and functions
- Based on most recent delineations, updated in 2002

Workplan Task 3:
Analysis of Relevant Conditions

Cultural Resources

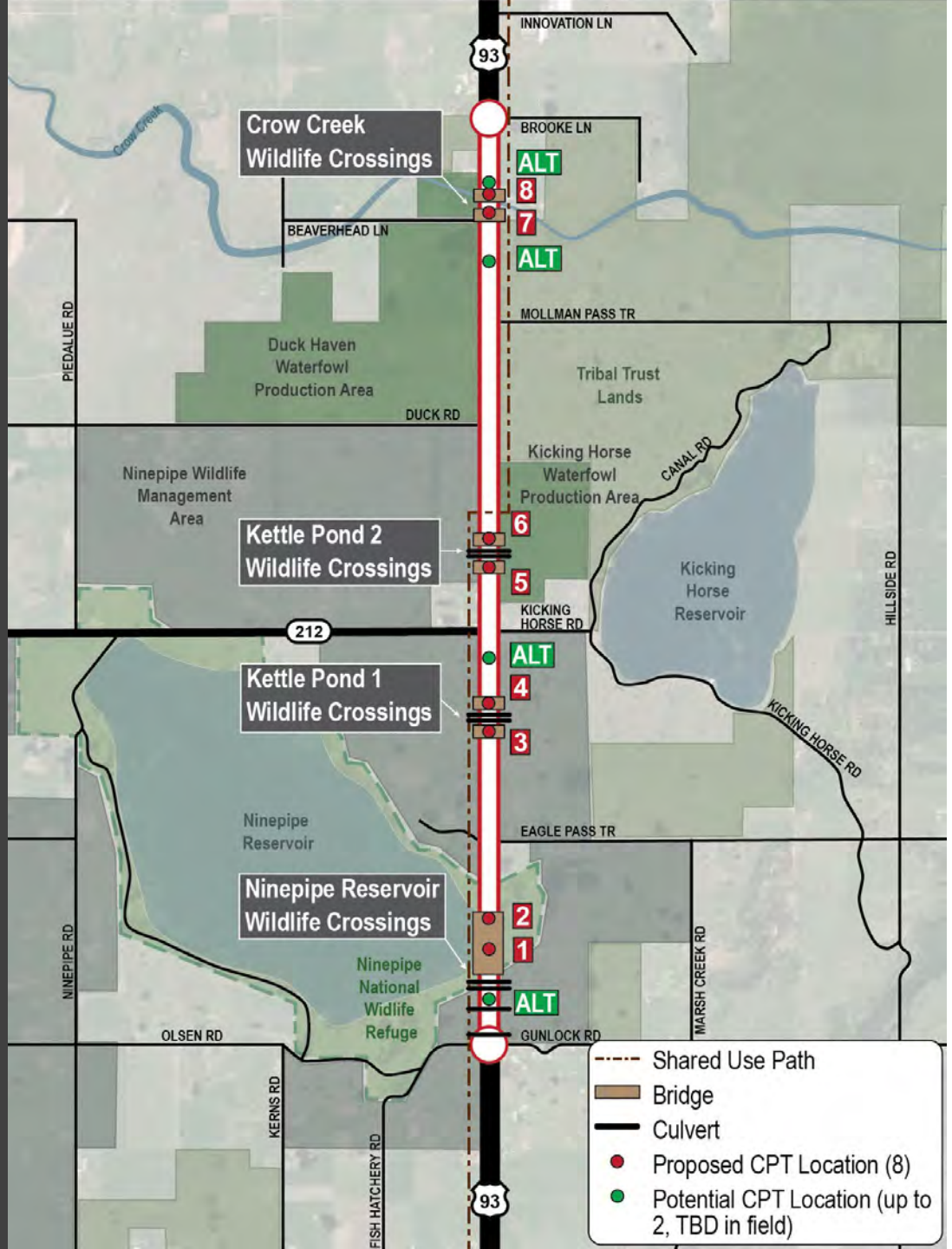
EthnoTech, llc

- **Cultural Resources Report**
  - Historic Resources
  - Previous Cultural Inventories
  - NRHP Properties
  - Previous Commitments
- **Government-to-Government Consultation**
  - MDT/FHWA and CSKT
- **Field Tours**
  - CSKT Preservation Office & Culture Committees

Workplan Task 3: *Analysis of Relevant Conditions*

Wildlife Crossings

Geotechnical Investigation



HERRERA

Wildlife Analysis

- Confirm wildlife movements

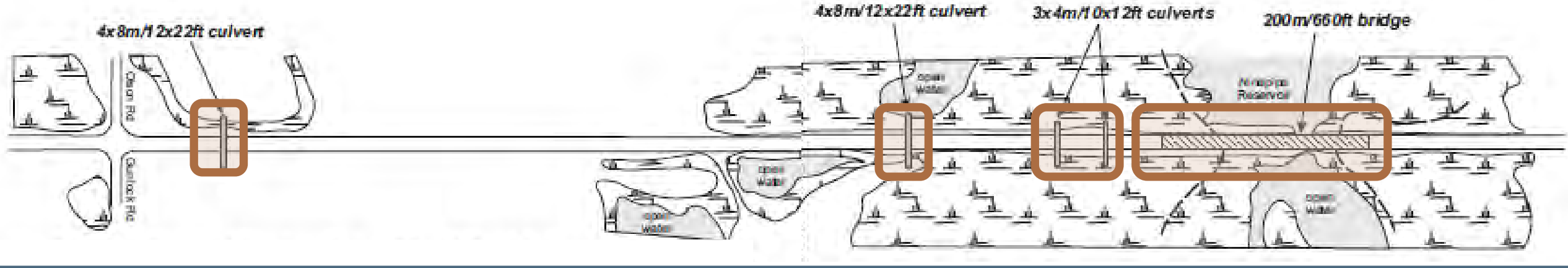
SK GEOTECHNICAL

CPT Borings

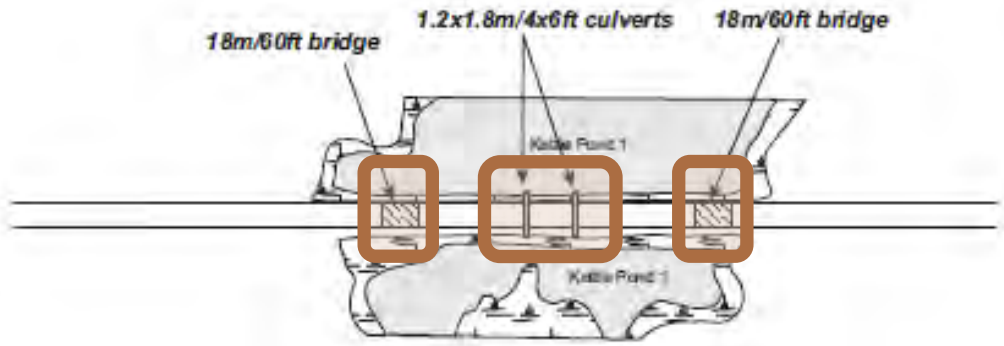
- Confirm soil conditions in proposed crossing locations

**Cone Penetrometer Testing*

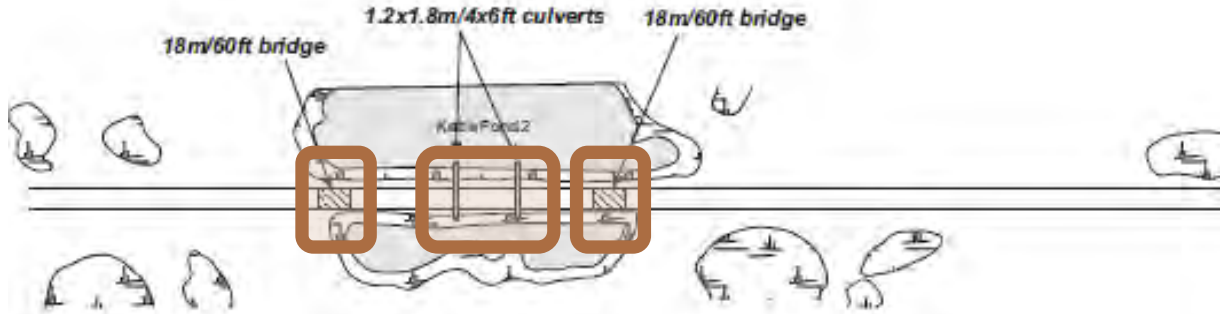
Ninepipe Reservoir



Kettle Pond 1

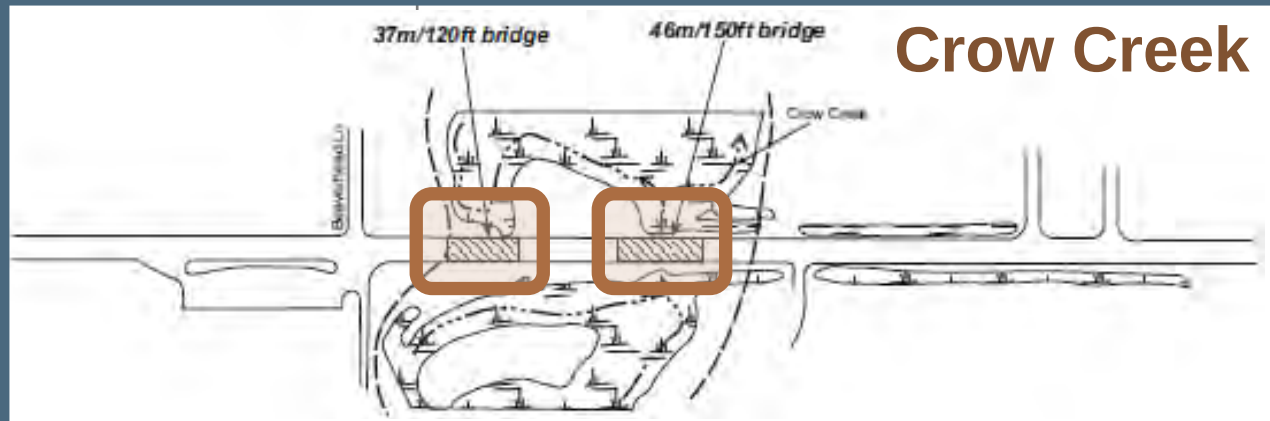


Kettle Pond 2



2008 SEIS
Proposed Wildlife Crossings

Crow Creek



Workplan Task 4:
Feasibility Evaluation

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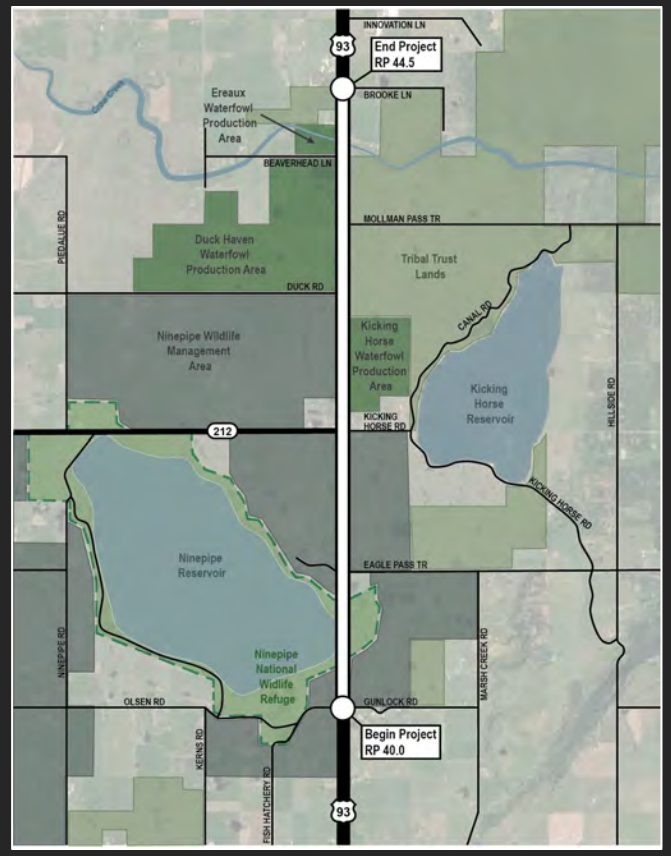
- Preliminary Alignment/Profile – Road & Path
- Evaluate Structures and Wildlife Crossing Accommodations
- Establish Preliminary Construction and R/W Limits
- Identify Preliminary Impacts/Cost Estimate
- Identify Screening Criteria
- Evaluate No Action and Proposed Alternatives
- **Screening Matrix and Description**

Workplan Task 5: *Feasibility Study Documentation*

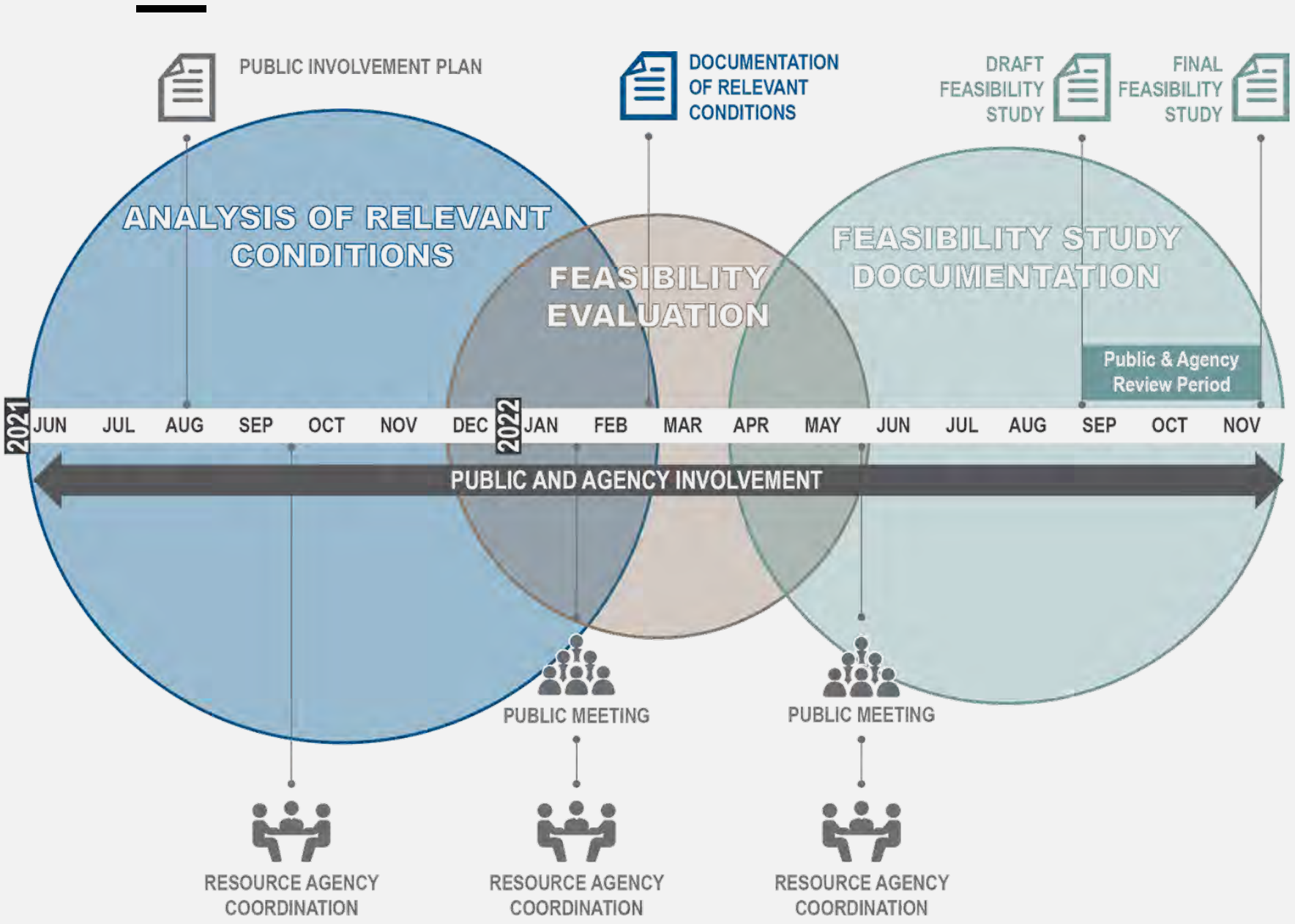


—

- Document Feasibility Study Process and Results
  - Summarize planning process
  - Key findings
  - Changed conditions from SEIS
  - Screening
  - Feasibility evaluation results
  - Next steps
- **Administrative Draft Report**
- **Draft Report**
  - 30-day public and agency review period
- **Finalize Report**

Schedule

- 18 months
- Includes time for review and coordination



Questions?

Scott Randall, PE, PTOE

Robert Peccia and Associates

srandall@rpa-hln.com

(406) 447-5005

Parker Osterloh

Montana Department of Transportation

josterloh@mt.gov

(406) 444-6121

Meeting Summary

Resource Agency Meeting #1

MEETING GOALS

The purpose of this Resource Agency meeting was to provide an overview of the *US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study* and discuss resource areas of concern.

MEETING DETAILS

Date: September 21, 2021

Time: 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Welcome and Introductions**
2. **History of Study Area**
3. **Planning Objectives**
4. **Workplan**
    a. Task 2: Public and Agency Involvement
    b. Task 3: Analysis of Relevant Conditions
    c. Task 4: Feasibility Evaluation
    d. Task 5: Feasibility Study Documentation
5. **Schedule**
6. **Open Discussion**

ATTENDEES

• Parker Osterloh	MDT
• Katie Potts	MDT
• Vicki Crnich	MDT
• Jacquelyn Smith	MDT
• Rebecca Ridenour	MDT
• Joe Weigand	MDT
• Ryan Wendel	MDT
• Ryan Hammon	FHWA
• Craig Pablo	CSKT
• Willie Keenan	CSKT
• Evan Smith	CSKT
• Tabitha Espinoza	CSKT
• Chauncey Means	CSKT
• Scott Johnston	CSKT
• Kathryn McDonald	CSKT
• Whisper Means	CSKT
• Mike McGrath	USFWS
• Jennifer Fortin-Noreus	USFWS
• Hilary Cooley	USFWS
• Amy Coffman	USFWS
• Rick Northrup	MFWP
• Neil Anderson	MFWP
• Stephen Carpenedo	MDEQ
• Scott Randall	RPA
• Sarah Nicolai	RPA
• Sue Wall	Herrera
• David Schwab	Ethnotech
• Alex Schwab	Ethnotech

MEETING NOTES

Sarah Nicolai provided an overview of the feasibility study workplan and schedule. Attendees discussed the following items.

Study Area

- Whisper Means noted there are several designations of Tribal Trust Lands. Some are home sites whereas others are specifically designated wildlife areas, including both north and south of Mollman Pass Trail.

Roadway Alignment

- Whisper noted that other portions of US 93 were intentionally designed with a curvilinear alignment designed to meander through the landscape and provide speed calming. However,

at the time of previous environmental documentation, MDT and the CSKT agreed the Ninepipe segment should follow a straight alignment to minimize impacts to sensitive resources, including wildlife management areas. It will be important to remain within existing right-of-way to the extent practicable to minimize impacts in this segment.

Wetlands

- Sue Wall reported that the Herrera team has conducted supplemental field investigations to determine changed conditions since the 2008 SEIS. Some previously identified wetland areas now occur further away from the roadway corridor (which will result in fewer impacts), while some newly identified wetlands were mapped and will be included in the study. Overall, no major changes were identified from 2008 conditions.

Cultural Resources

- Dave Schwab noted the lengthy history within the corridor, with multiple previous cultural studies and involved parties. Dave clarified that Ethnotech will help facilitate cultural consultation between MDT, FHWA, and the CSKT. Kathryn McDonald noted her office will look forward to reviewing Ethnotech's report. The CSKT Database Specialist may be able to identify additional resources to make sure nothing is missed.

Wildlife

- Sue noted Herrera will be interested to talk with resource agencies regarding wildlife fencing.
- Mike McGrath noted he would like to see a thorough analysis of crossing structure types and dimensions. Although the EIS presented what was state of the art at that time, understanding of wildlife movements has evolved since 2008, with crossings now sized to accommodate targeted wildlife species. The same is true for wildlife fencing, with new information about sufficient lengths and effectiveness in guiding wildlife to crossing structures available from Highway 93 to the north of the study corridor.
- Rebecca Ridenour and Joe Weigand noted they appreciated Mike's comments, and MDT will coordinate with Sue to identify appropriate structure and fencing types, sizes, and locations. In addition to accommodating large species such as grizzly bear, new information is available about waterfowl and turtles.
- Whisper noted there is a grizzly bear crossing at an irrigation canal north of the Ninepipe Lodge. It may be valuable to include irrigation representatives in future agency meetings. Whisper will suggest appropriate names to add to the contact list.
- Rick Northrup noted he will provide more of a statewide perspective, while Neil Anderson will be the local lead for MFWP. Neil noted at one time in the past, there was discussion about a wildlife walking tour. There might be value in doing this as part of the study.

Wildlife Meeting

December 2, 2021

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

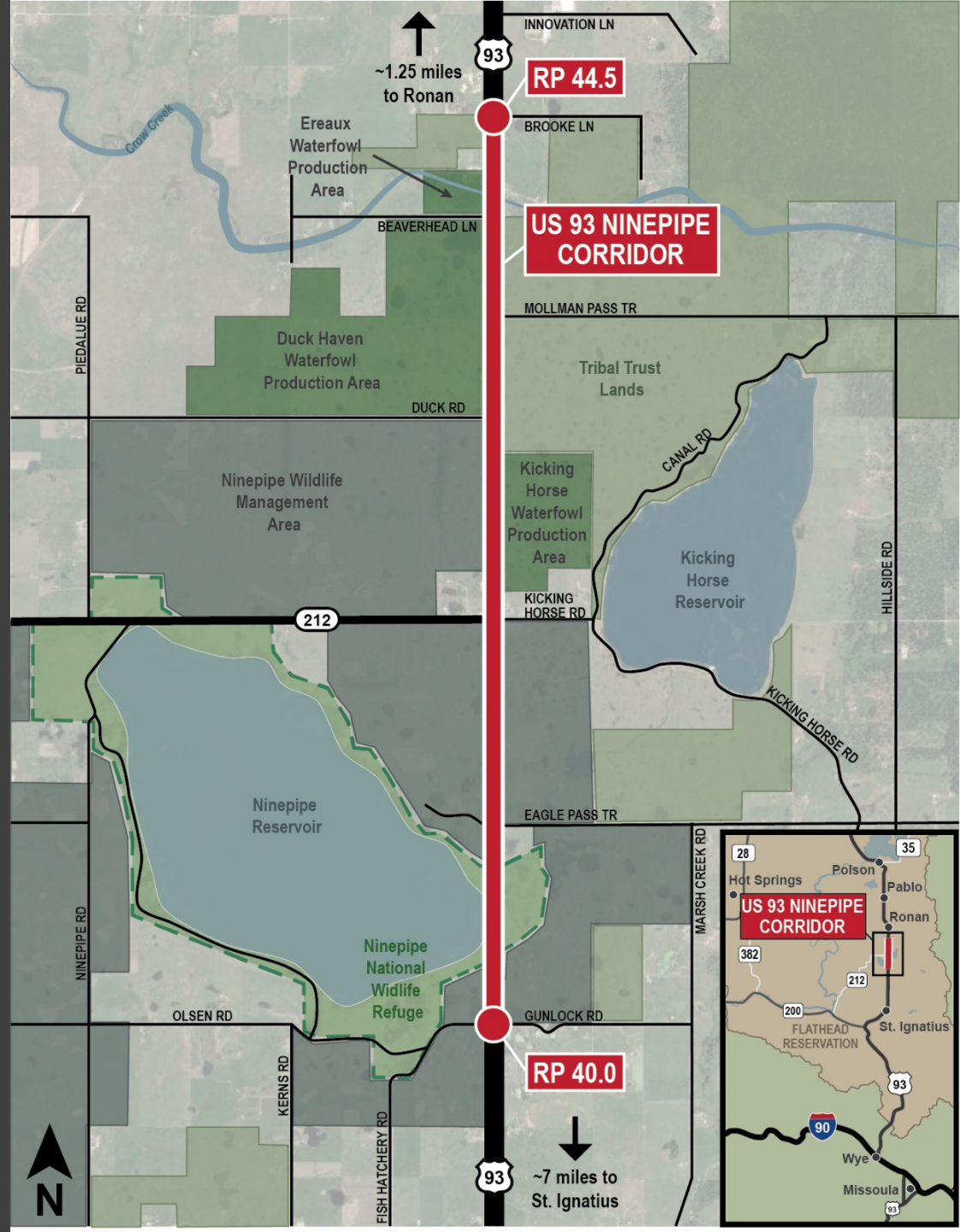
Meeting Agenda

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

- **History of Study Area**
- **Planning Objectives**
- **Wildlife Crossings Overview**
- **Crash & Carcass Data**
- **Wildlife Issues**
  - Grizzly Bears
  - Large Mammals
  - Turtles
  - Other Wildlife
- **Open Discussion**

History of Study Area

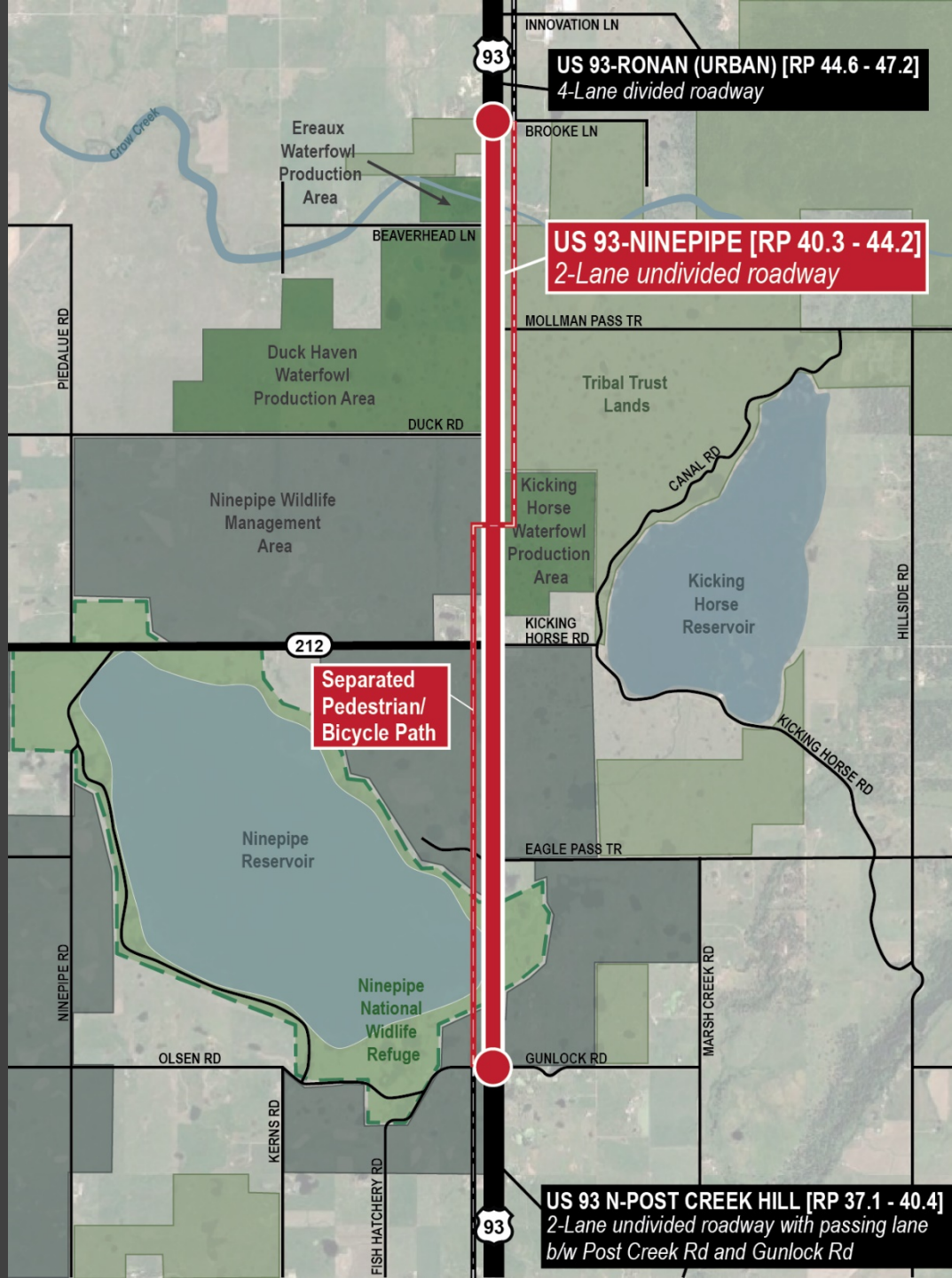
- US 93 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) – 1996
- Supplemental EIS – 2008
  - Post Creek Hill to Ronan (RP 37.1 to 48.3)
- Complications and Lessons Learned



History of Study Area

SEIS Preferred Alternative - Ninepipe Corridor

- Two-lane undivided roadway
- Separated path
- 4-lane divided roadway north of Brooke Lane
- Passing lane south of Gunlock Road



Planning Objectives

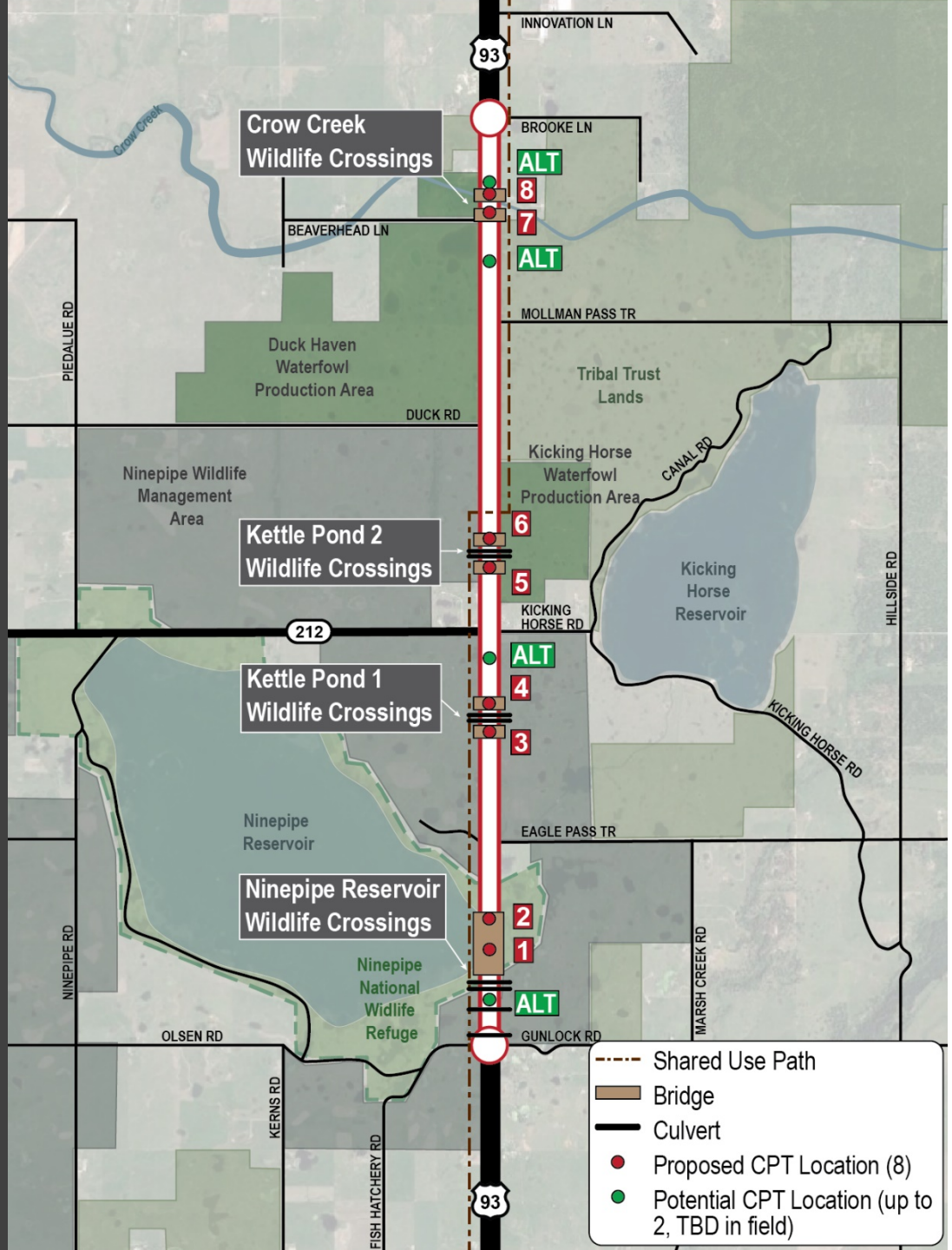
Objectives

- **Verify Baseline Conditions**
- **Confirm Viability of Preferred Alternative**
  - Impacts
  - Costs
  - Constructability
- **Support Future Project Development Decisions**
  - Re-evaluation
  - Design

Approach

- Rely on existing information and supplement as needed
- Consider minor modifications to minimize impacts and costs
- Hybrid approach – planning, environmental, and engineering components

Wildlife Crossings Overview



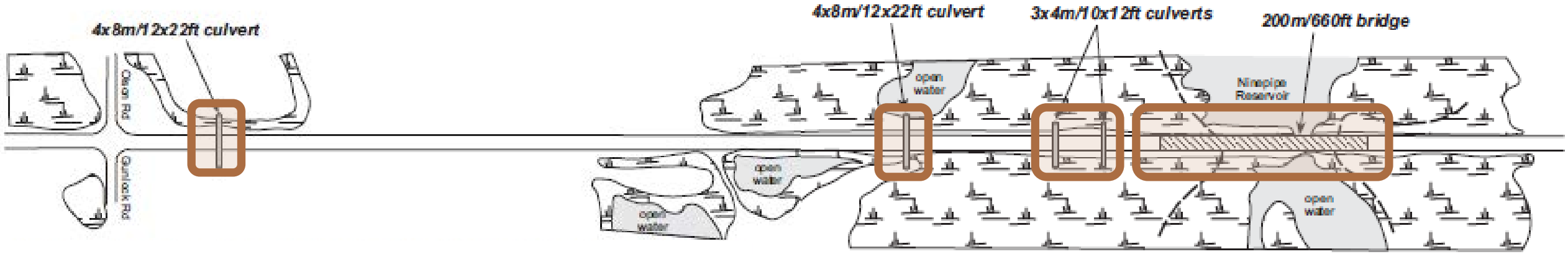
HERRERA

Wildlife Analysis

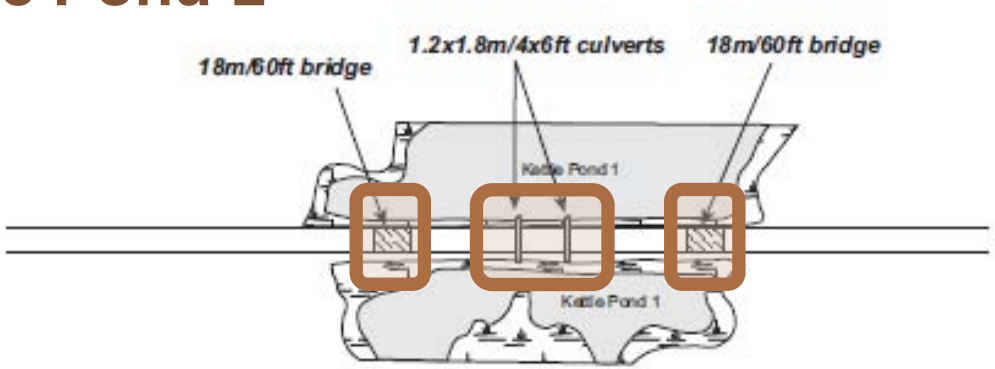
- Confirm wildlife movements
- Confirm crossing type and location

**Cone Penetrometer Testing* (CPT) to confirm soil conditions at crossing locations

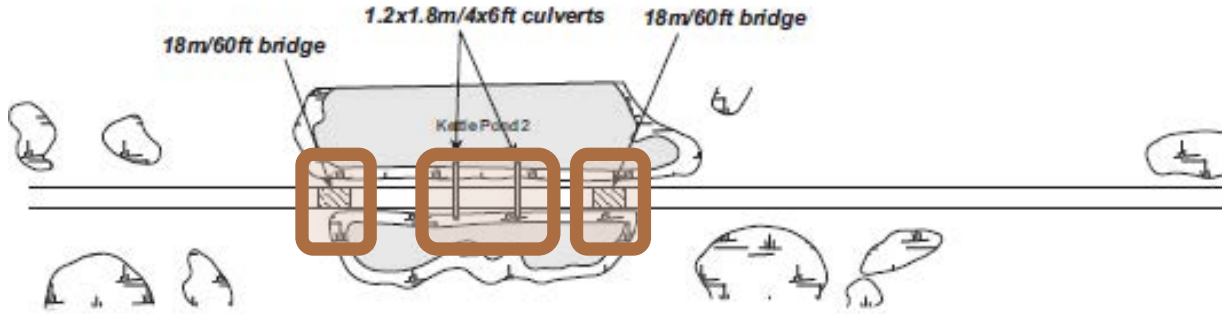
Ninepipe Reservoir



Kettle Pond 1

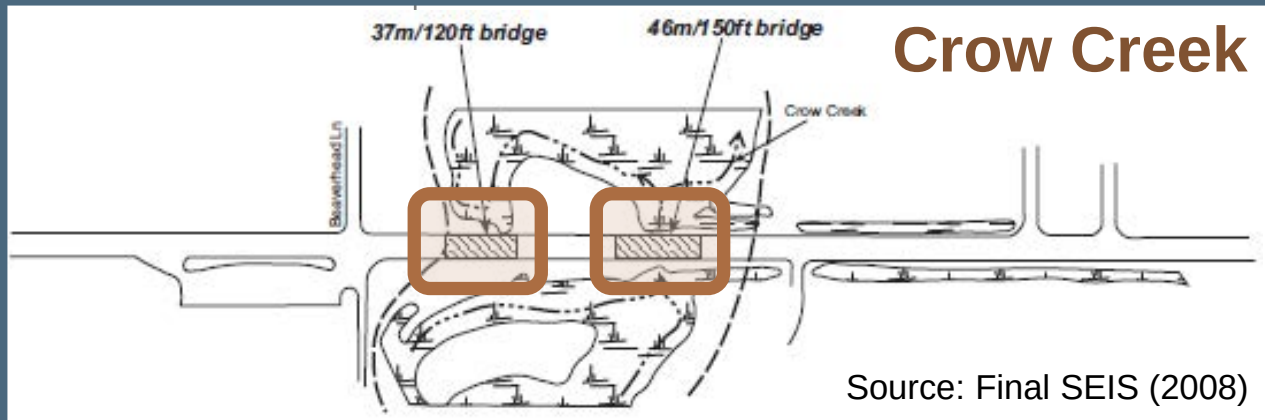


Kettle Pond 2



2008 SEIS
Proposed Wildlife Crossings

Crow Creek



Source: Final SEIS (2008)

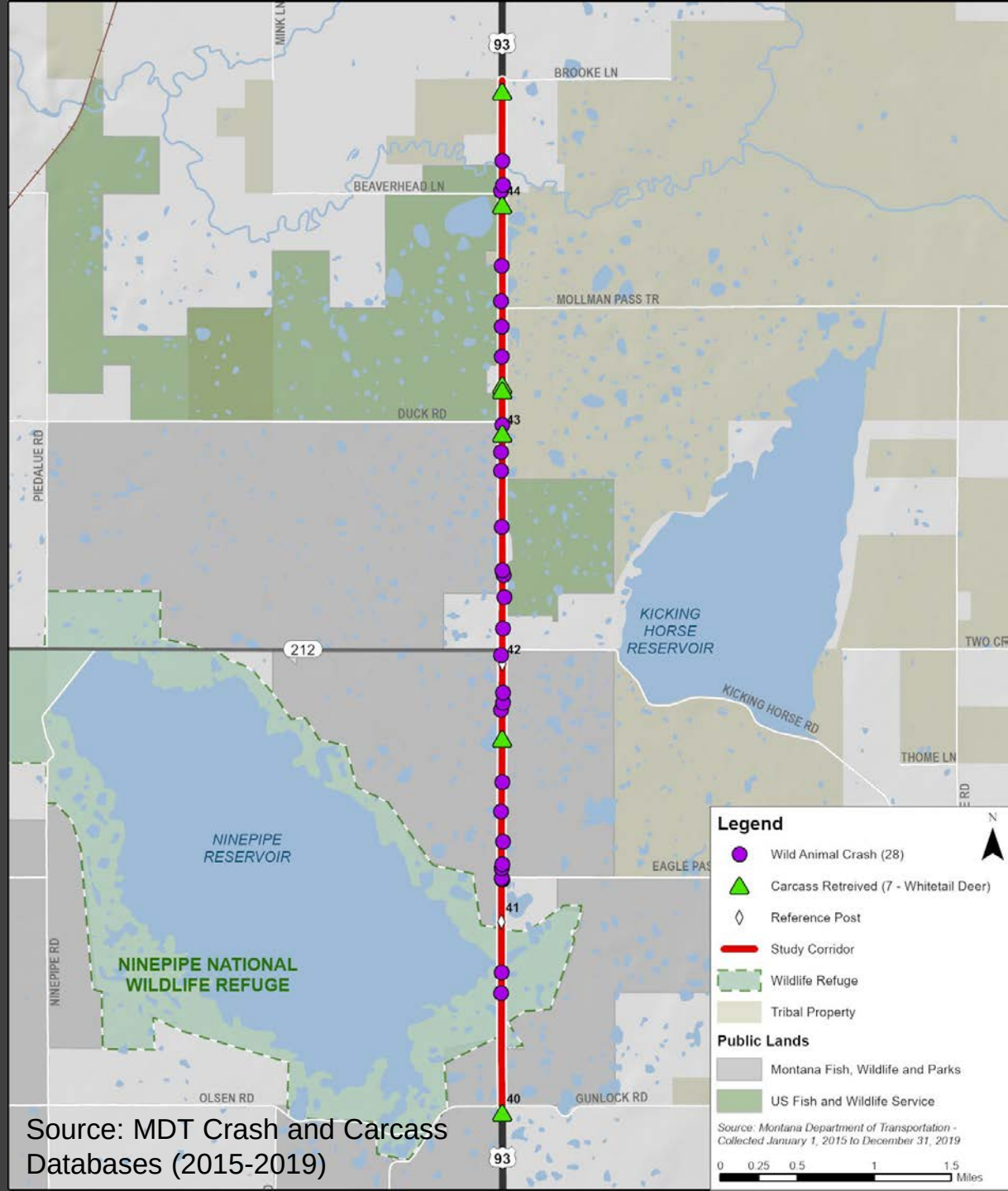
Crash and Carcass Data

MDT Crash Database

- 2015-2019
- 28 animal strikes (33% of 84 total crashes)
- Animal species not noted

MDT Carcass Database

- 2015-2019
- 7 whitetail deer carcasses



Source: MDT Crash and Carcass Databases (2015-2019)

Wildlife Issues

<u>Meeting Purpose</u>:
Gather current information on wildlife presence and use of Ninepipe area to answer these questions:

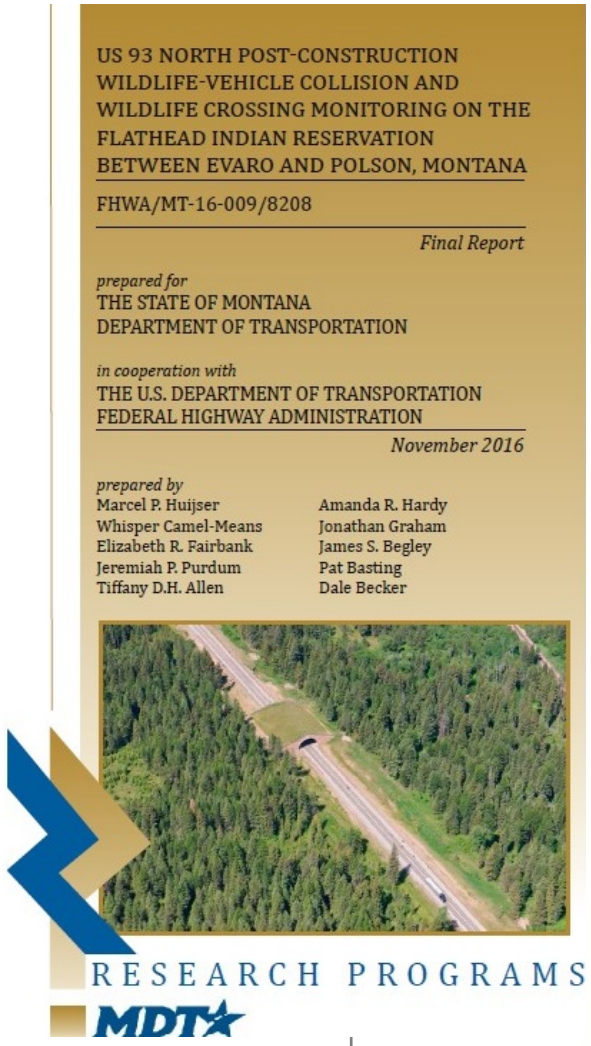
- **Are the proposed wildlife crossing structures in appropriate locations**?
- **Are design and dimensions appropriate for the species of greatest concern**?
    - o Grizzlies
    - o Large Mammals
    - o Turtles
    - o Other Wildlife

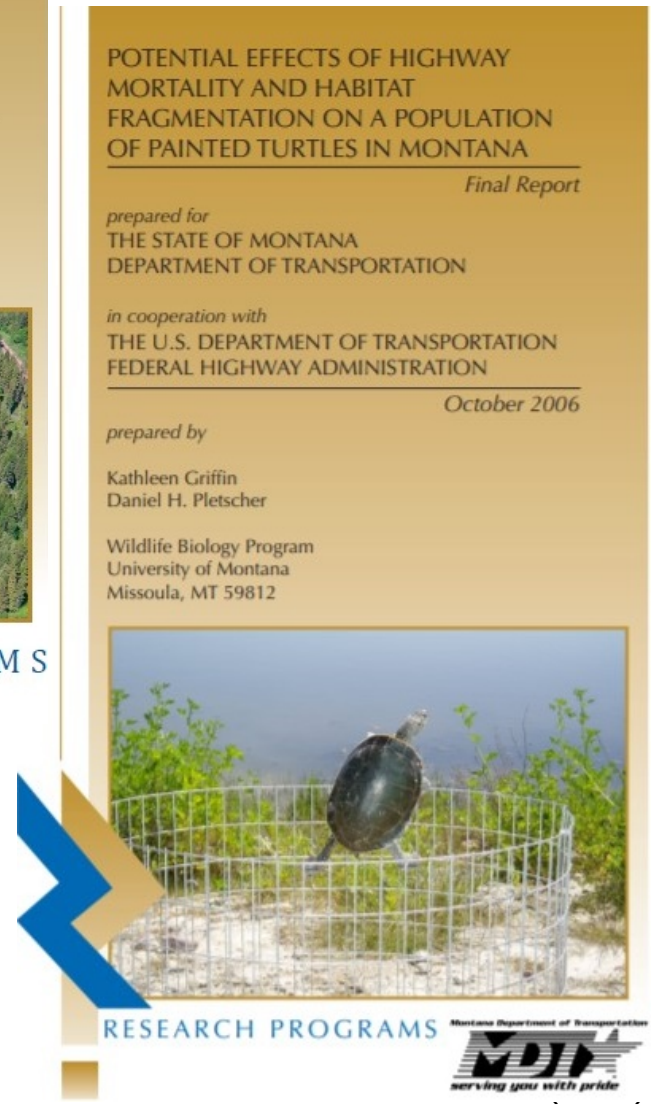

Source: Herrera 2021


Source: Herrera 2021

Review of Existing Information

- Revised US 93 Evaro to Polson Biological Opinion (USFWS 2020)
- US 93 Post-construction Wildlife-vehicle Collision and Wildlife Crossing Monitoring and Research on the Flathead Indian Reservation between Evaro and Polson, Montana Final Report (Huijser et al. 2016)
- US 93 Ninepipe/Ronan Final SEIS (Herrera 2008)
- Potential Effects of Highway Mortality and Habitat Fragmentation on a Population of Painted Turtles in Montana (Griffin and Pletscher 2006)





Grizzly

Presence

Injury/ Mortality

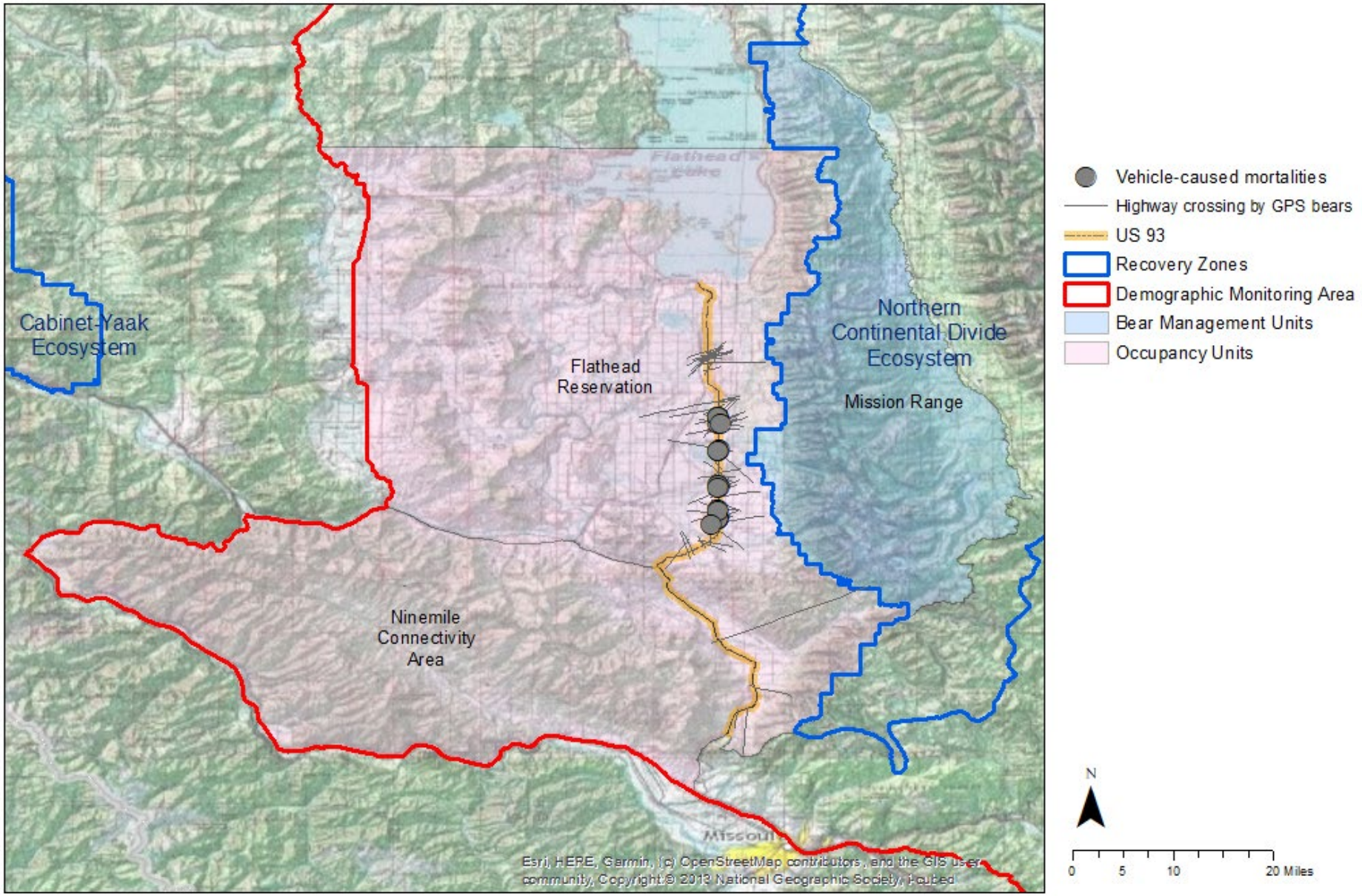
Use of Crossing Structures

Habitat Connectivity

- 28+ bears captured and collared on the reservation
- Concentrated use – Post Creek riparian corridor, east of Kicking Horse Reservoir, and Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge
- Vehicle collisions = 30 percent of 69 total mortalities – 1973 to 2019
- 17 grizzly bear-vehicle collisions, 20 known mortalities – 1998 to 2019
- 35 grizzly bear crossings in 5 structures – 2009 to 2017
- 22 bears with home ranges on west/both slopes of Mission Range, 11 (50%) crossed Highway 93 between Evaro and Polson

Grizzly

Injury/
Mortality



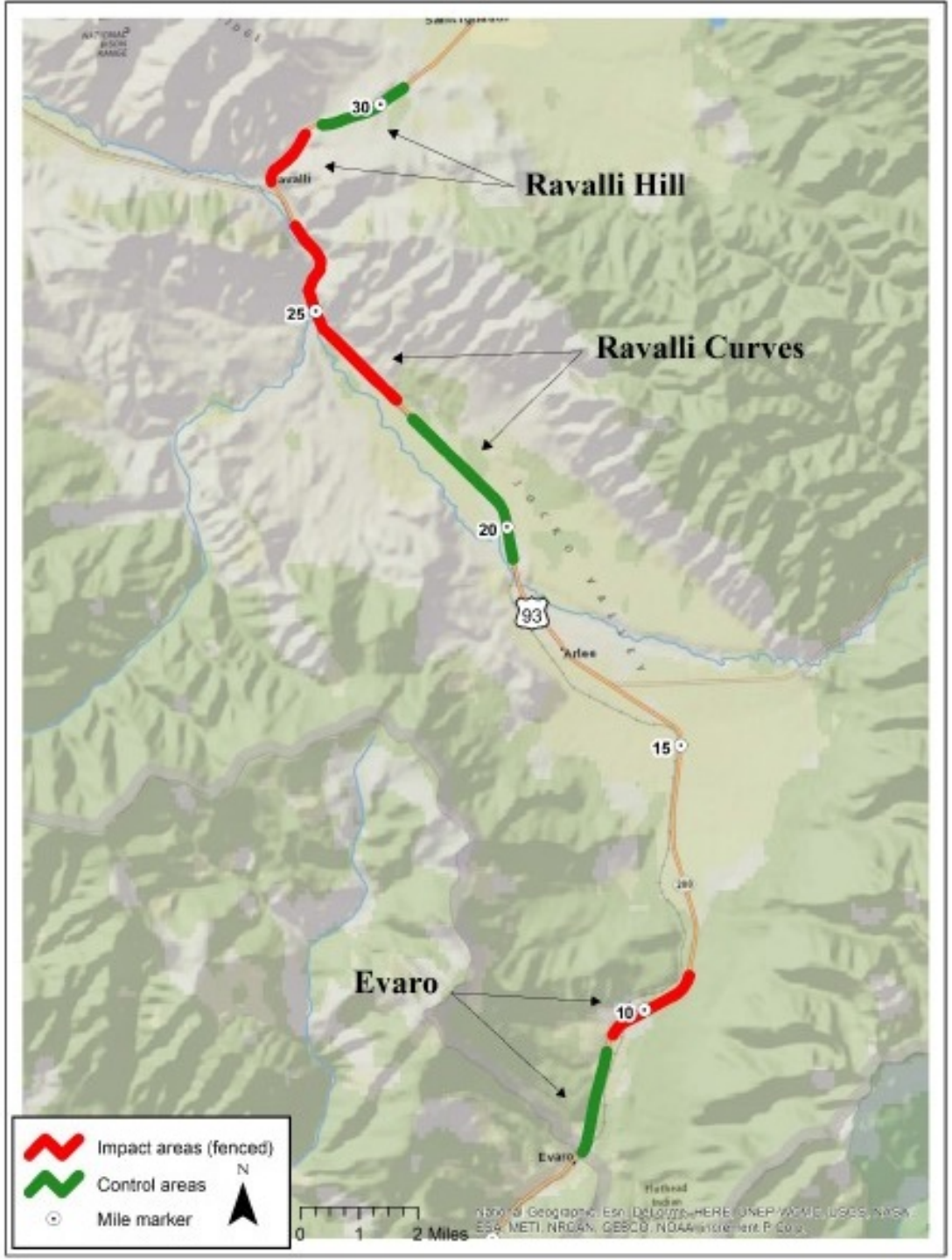
Source: Revised US 93 Evaro to Polson Biological Opinion Appendix B Analyses of Vehicle-caused Grizzly Bear Mortalities in the US Highway 93 Corridor (Costello et al. 2020)

Large Mammals

Injury/Mortality

Use of Crossing Structures

Habitat Connectivity



- White-tailed deer most reported large mammal wildlife-vehicle collisions
- ~6,300 deer, ~300 black bear crossings per year at Evaro, Ravalli, and Post Creek Hill structures
- Mitigated road sections: increased deer connectivity, no change for black bear

Source: US 93 North Wildlife Mitigation Final Report (Huijser et al. 2016)

Turtles

Injury/Mortality

Use of Crossing Structures

Habitat Connectivity

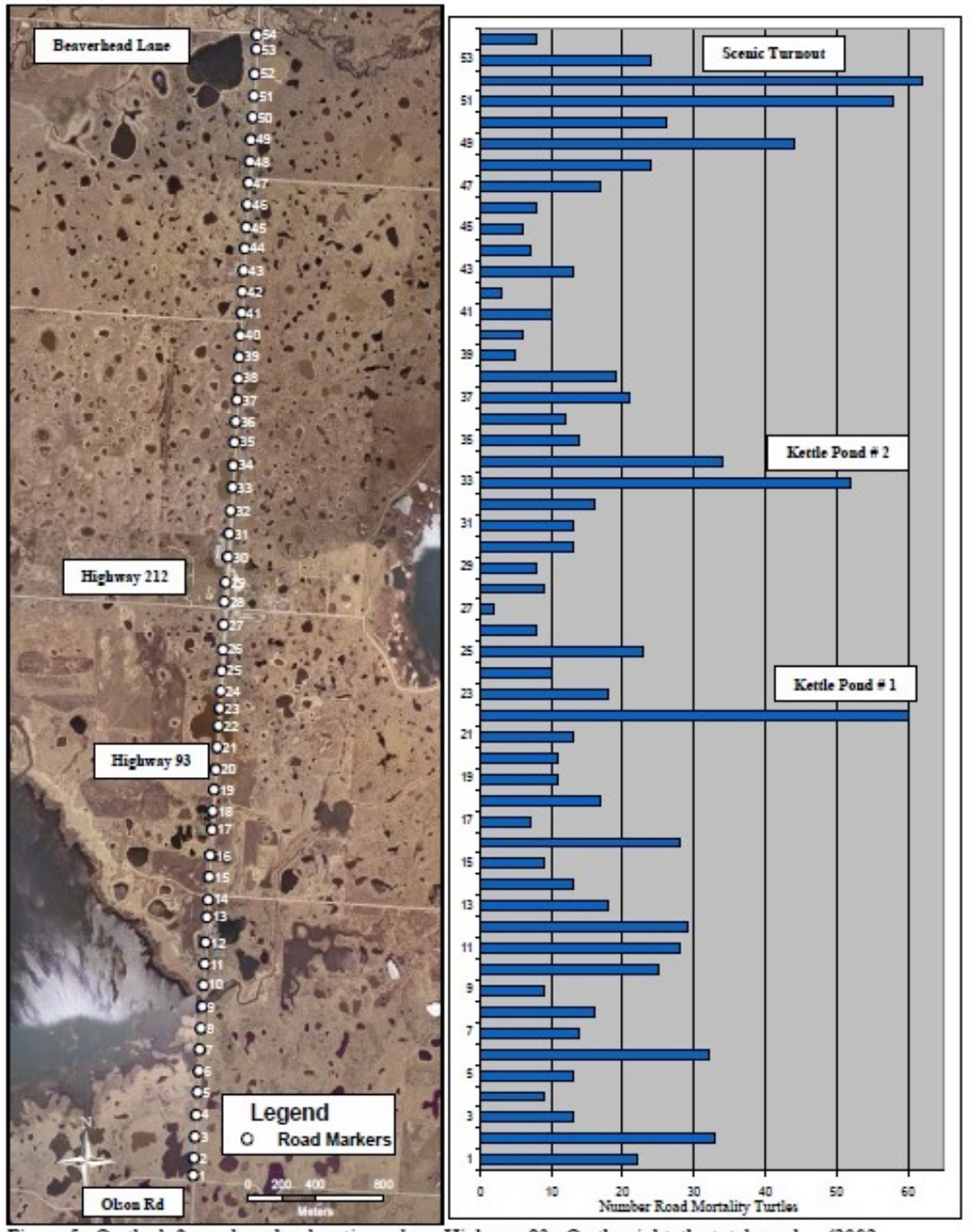


Figure 5. On the left, road marker locations along Highway 93. On the right, the total number (2002-2004) of turtle road mortalities corresponding to mapped road markers. Road marker 1 occurs at Olson Road and Marker 54 occurs at Beaverhead Lane. The markers are approximately every 160 m.

- ~6% to 17% of Western painted turtle population killed on highway 2003/2004.
- Half of crossing attempts at Kettle Ponds (RP 41.8/42.5) succeeded
- Large permanent water bodies (Crow Creek, Kicking Horse/Ninepipe reservoirs) important during drought
- High priority areas :
  - Kettle Ponds 1 and 2 (RP 41.8/42.5)
  - South of Beaverhead Lane turnout (RP 44.1)

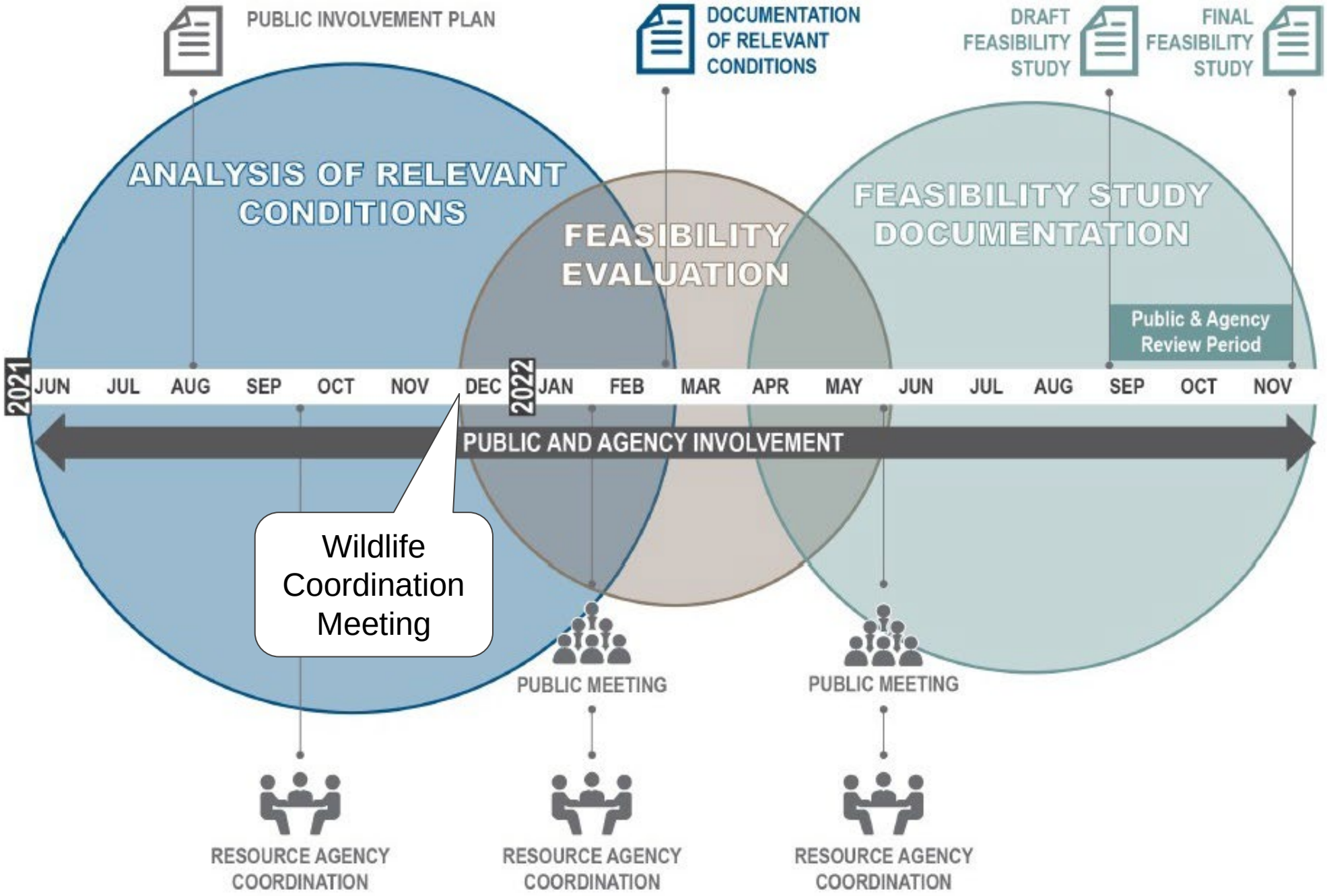
Source: Potential Effects of Highway Mortality and Habitat Fragmentation on a Population of Painted Turtles in Montana (Griffin and Pletscher 2006)

Other Wildlife

Source: Herrera 2021

- High levels of mortality for nongame birds, upland gamebirds, waterfowl, small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles
- After turtles, birds second most common road-killed wildlife recorded in 2002-2003.

Discussion & Input



Meeting Summary

Wildlife Meeting

MEETING GOALS

The purpose of this wildlife meeting was to discuss wildlife presence and use of the Ninepipe area to help determine if proposed wildlife crossing structures are sited and designed appropriately for species of greatest concern.

MEETING DETAILS

Date: December 2, 2021

Time: 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Welcome and Introductions**
2. **History of Study Area**
3. **Planning Objectives**
4. **Wildlife Crossings Overview**
5. **Crash and Carcass Data**
6. **Wildlife Issues**
    - Grizzly Bears
    - Large Mammals
    - Turtles
    - Other Wildlife
7. **Open Discussion**

ATTENDEES

- Parker Osterloh MDT
- Katie Potts MDT
- Vicki Crnich MDT
- Rebecca Ridenour MDT
- Joe Weigand MDT
- Whisper Means CSKT
- Kari Eneas CSKT
- Payton Adams CSKT
- Art Soukkala CSKT
- Mike McGrath USFWS
- Jennifer Fortin-Noreus USFWS
- Amy Coffman USFWS
- Amy Lisk USFWS
- Neil Anderson MFWP
- Lori Roberts MFWP
- Cecily Costello MFWP
- John Grant MFWP
- Scott Randall RPA
- Sarah Nicolai RPA
- Sue Wall Herrera

MEETING NOTES

Sarah Nicolai provided an overview of the history of the area, feasibility study objectives, wildlife crossings identified in the 2008 SEIS, and crash and carcass data provided by MDT for the period 2015-2019. Sue Wall facilitated a discussion of wildlife presence, injury/mortality, use of crossing structures, and habitat connectivity. Attendees discussed the following items.

Grizzly Bears

- Two grizzly collisions have occurred since publication of the Biological Opinion in 2020. One was hit by an ambulance in 2020, one (a cub) was hit near the irrigation canal just north of Eagle Pass Trail. Numerous collisions have occurred near that canal. This should be identified as one of the hot spots for grizzly collisions. It will be important to include the irrigation district in future discussions.
- From the 1970s through 2000s, low numbers of grizzly-vehicle collisions occurred. Collisions have increased in the last 10 years. Bears have expanded distribution in all directions.
- A “heat map” was presented by Kari showing clusters of grizzly mortalities from 1989 to the present. Zones 1 and 2 of the map are in the Ninepipe project corridor.
- The SEIS proposed a bridge and culverts in Zone 2, intended to serve larger mammals, small mammals, and aquatic species. The proposed bridges are 120 feet and 150 feet at Crow Creek.
- A suggestion was made to expand the bridges to allow grizzlies to cross in dry areas. The Crow Creek crossing was not a focus for grizzly bears in the SEIS, but several vehicle strikes have occurred in the areas since that time, including a mother grizzly and two cubs as well

as a male. Females with cubs are more likely to use overpasses, so the planned structure may not provide opportunities for those family groups. Mitigation projects have improved habitat along the creek farther from the highway making the Crow Creek corridor more attractive for grizzlies.

- The planned structures only span the wet portion of the creek. A suggestion was made to build a long bridge instead of two bridges. The feasibility study can be used to explore different configurations.
- There was a suggestion to look at longer bridges at the Kettle Ponds as well. Although possibly outside of the timeframe of this project, the infrastructure bill includes $350 million for crossing structures, and crossing structures are also available for block grants.
- Geotechnical considerations complicate crossing structure design and construction. A large bridge was proposed at Post Creek, but artesian groundwater, geotechnical, and seismic considerations are creating complications. Access roads have been an issue as well.
- Studies published since the SEIS showed that the more open the structure, the greater attractiveness to grizzlies and the greater likelihood of their use. A Ford et al. (2017) study looked at overpasses vs underpasses. Grizzly families preferred overpasses, with open span structures next most commonly used but much less frequently. The length of the proposed structures in the SEIS seems adequate, but the vertical clearance is less than adequate.
- The SEIS proposed 10 to 13 feet vertical clearance at the bridges. FHWA recommendations call for 15 feet of vertical clearance. There is a tradeoff between height and width due to the need to raise grades for the road profile. Building a taller structure could result in greater impacts to wetlands. Natural appearance and a feeling of openness are also important. A longer structure that looks more like an elevated highway than a bridge would probably be the most effective.
- The impacts of the pedestrian/bike path need to be considered. The feasibility study will evaluate the feasibility of the proposed path and impacts on wildlife.
- Grizzlies don't cross the highway very frequently in the area between Zone 1 and Zone 2 on the "heat map." Deer, turtles, and birds are frequently hit in that area. The area between the Kettle Ponds is probably not a preferred grizzly crossing corridor, although they may be feeding there, with roadkill serving as an attractant to bears.
- Grizzlies use the area around Kicking Horse Reservoir and the shelterbelts west of the highway. They also travel along the irrigation canal that crosses Eagle Pass Trail, and an area to the south where G canal crosses. The canal maintenance roads provide cover with trees along the roads.

Large Mammals

- The CSKT use Survey 1 2 app for roadkill records. Game wardens and biologists monitor and add data. There is an informal understanding between MDT and the CSKT that deer and sensitive wildlife including grizzly, mountain lion, bobcat, and elk are collected by the Tribes. MDT collects animals that are a danger to the travelling public. Large numbers of whitetail deer are hit through the Ninepipe segment. Information about species other than deer, grizzly, mountain lion, bobcat, and elk is insufficient to identify hot spots.
- The CSKT are still tracking use of the crossing structures on reconstructed portions of US 93 North. They recently received a grant to continue to monitor grizzly bear crossing areas.
- Few black bears are hit on the Ninepipe segment.

Turtles

- No additional studies have been conducted on turtles beyond the 2006 Griffin study. Many people are concerned about turtles crossing the road. People who stop to try to help turtles create a danger on the highway.
- Both Kettle Ponds are proposed to have two bridges and two culverts which would benefit turtles. New information is available on designs of crossings for turtles. Turtles don't like to go into dark areas. Culverts should be big enough to allow light.

Other Wildlife

- The CSKT are concerned about all wildlife but don't have data sets on other species to help inform the study.
- Bird mortality has not been evaluated as much as grizzlies and large mammals. Data may be available from Adventure Scientists that collected data along Highway 200 and may have collected data at Ninepipe as well.
- A pair of swans with cignets crossed the highway several times at the Kettle Ponds and also at Beaverhead Lane. They fly from Duckhaven Pond to the Tribal lands.
- The bridges would benefit waterfowl, and some birds may walk through the crossing structures. Waterfowl collisions occur when leading young to new areas. This would be resolved at the Kettle Ponds with the proposed bridges.
- There is concern that 8-foot fences suggested in the past might cause a collision hazard for waterfowl. A project in California included a high fence along a bridge to reduce bird strikes on the bridge. Fence markers used for sage grouse may be worth considering to reduce waterfowl strikes on the fencing. There are markings on power lines for trumpeter swans, but it is unknown if they would be effective on fences. MFWP is working to increase populations of pheasants. They will fly over fences to get at grit on the roads.
- Bird densities and behaviors make a big difference in effectiveness of mitigation measures. They vary from year to year.
- No mitigation for birds was proposed in the SEIS. In the past, the public was most focused on turtles and the pedestrian path. If a project moves forward from the feasibility study, a reevaluation of the SEIS would need to be prepared.
- USFWS is getting a lot of comments on projects they are currently working on, especially about hunted species. They would expect a lot of public comments on this project about wildlife in addition to turtles and bears.

Next Steps and Action Items

- RPA is planning to meet with resource agencies again in January/February 2022 to share findings from the analysis of relevant conditions. All attendees from the wildlife meeting will be invited to participate.
- The following information is requested from resource agency representatives by **December 10, 2021**. Please send information to Sue Wall (swall@herrerainc.com), Sarah Nicolai (snicolai@rpa-hln.com), and Scott Randall (srandall@rpa-hln.com).
    - PDF of the 2017 Ford et al study (Whisper Means)
    - PDF of grizzly hot spots (Kari Enaes)
    - Closeup version of the map showing grizzly crossings from Mission Range to habitat west of Hwy 93 (Cecily Costello)
    - CSKT carcass data (Whisper Means)
    - Study regarding birds using the Ninepipe area (USFWS)

Resource Agency Meeting

February 16, 2022

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Meeting Agenda

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

- **Study Area**
- **Relevant Conditions**
  - Traffic & Safety
  - Land Use/Ownership & Right-of-Way
  - Soils & Geotechnical Conditions
  - Floodplains
  - Wetlands
  - Wildlife & Crossings
  - Cultural Resources
- **Next Steps**
- **Open Discussion**

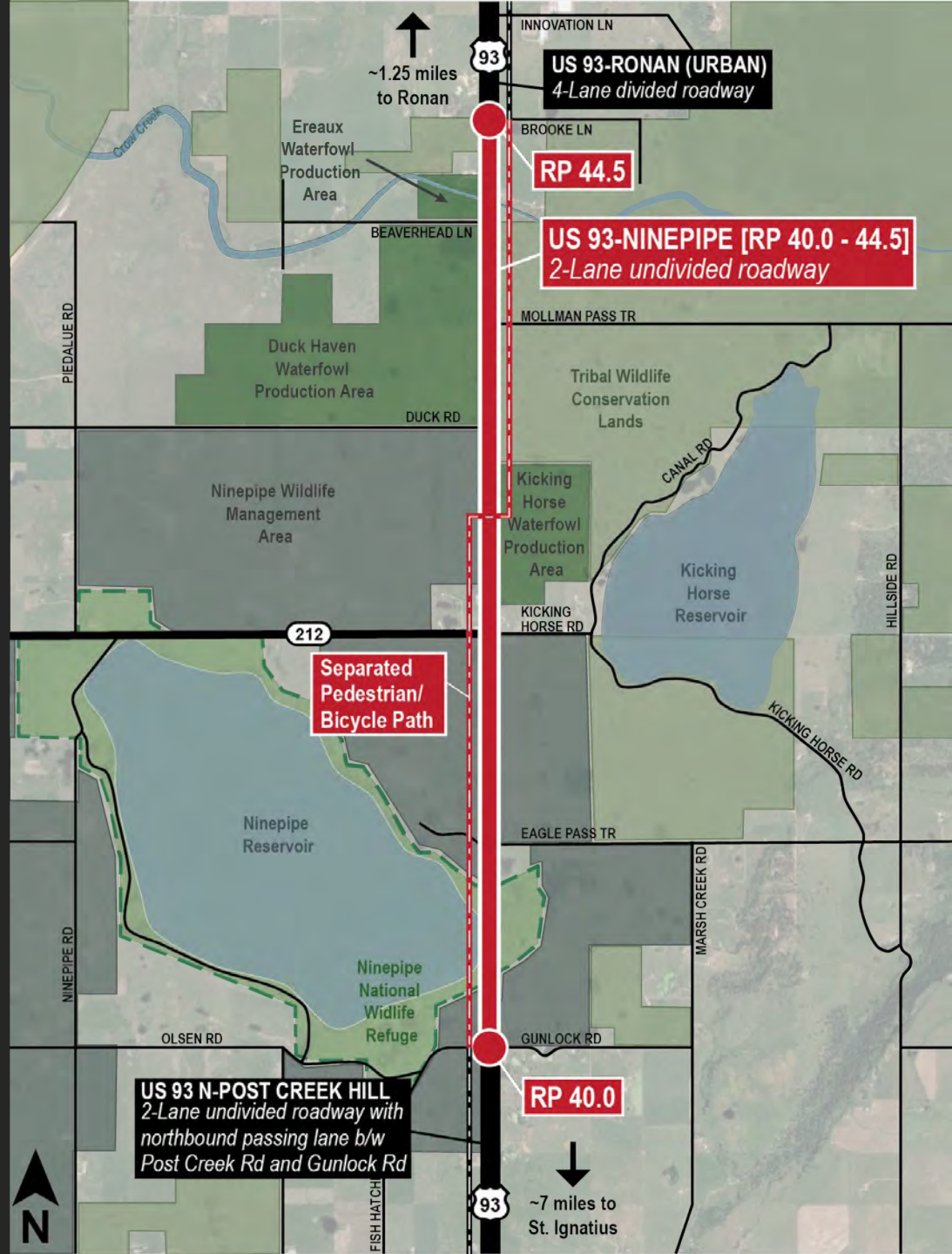
NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

STUDY AREA

Study Area

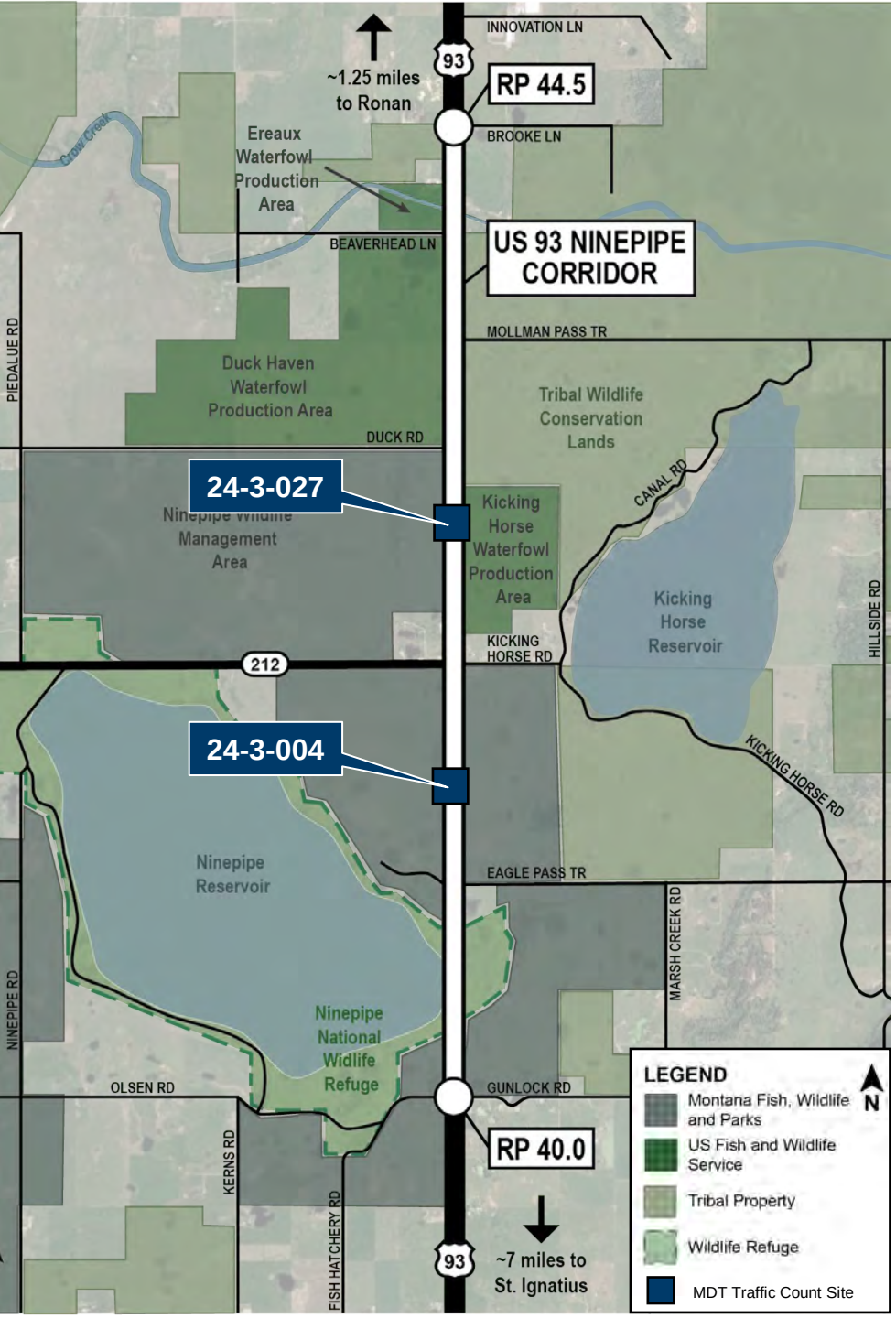
SEIS Preferred Alternative for Ninepipe Corridor

- Two-lane undivided roadway with widened shoulders
- Wildlife crossing structures
- Separated pathway
- 4-lane divided roadway north of Brooke Lane
- Northbound passing lane south of Gunlock Road

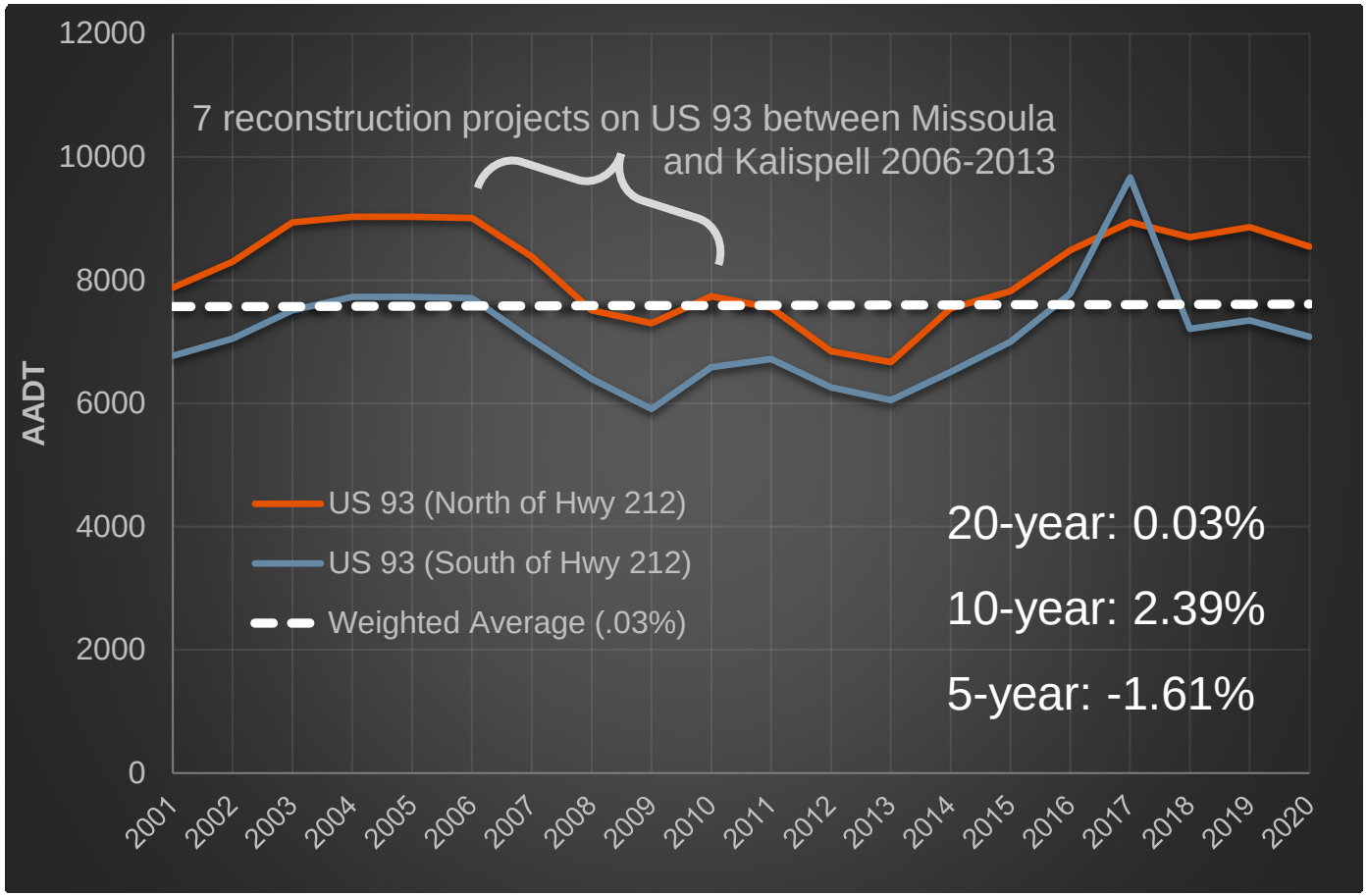


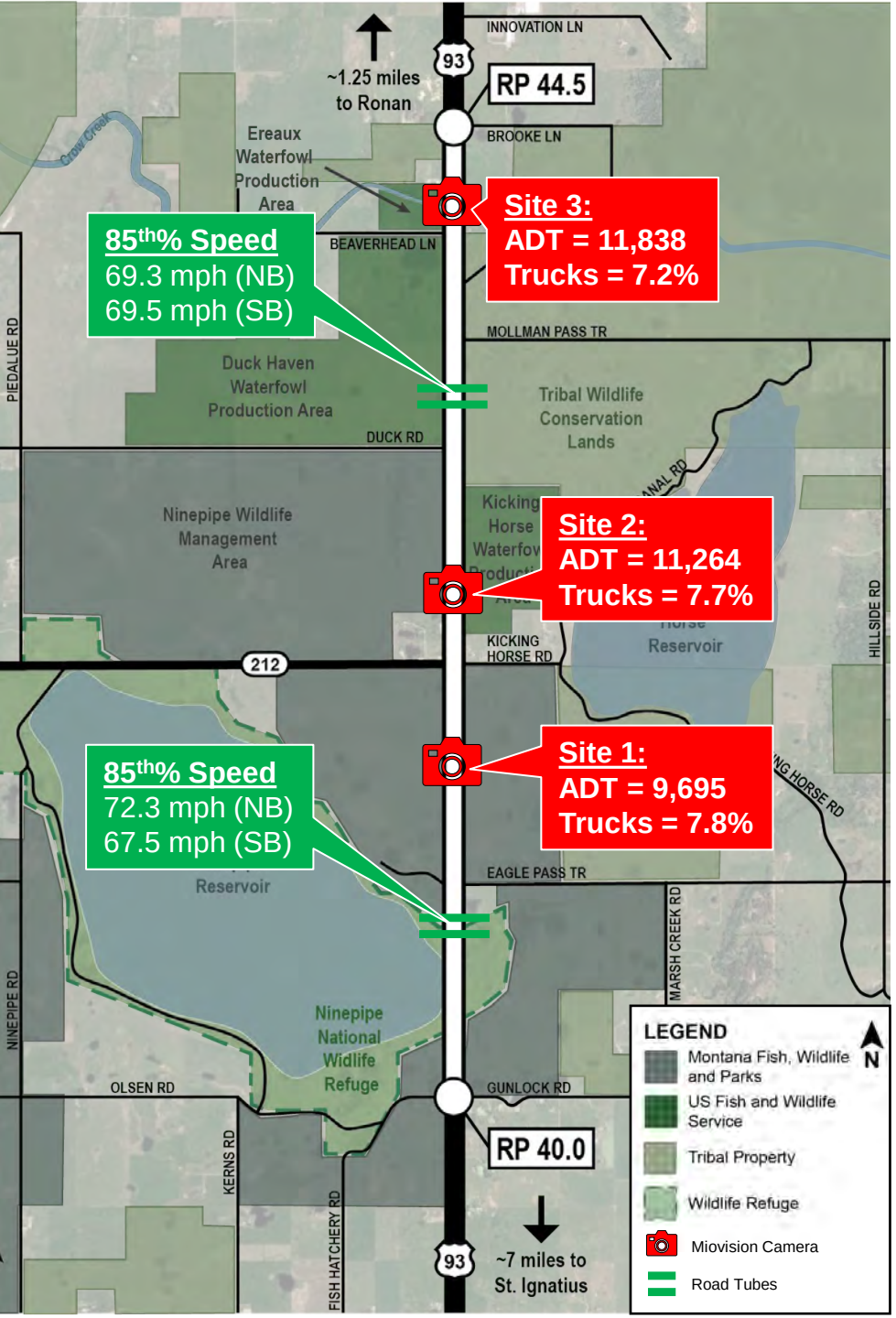
NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

RELEVANT CONDITIONS

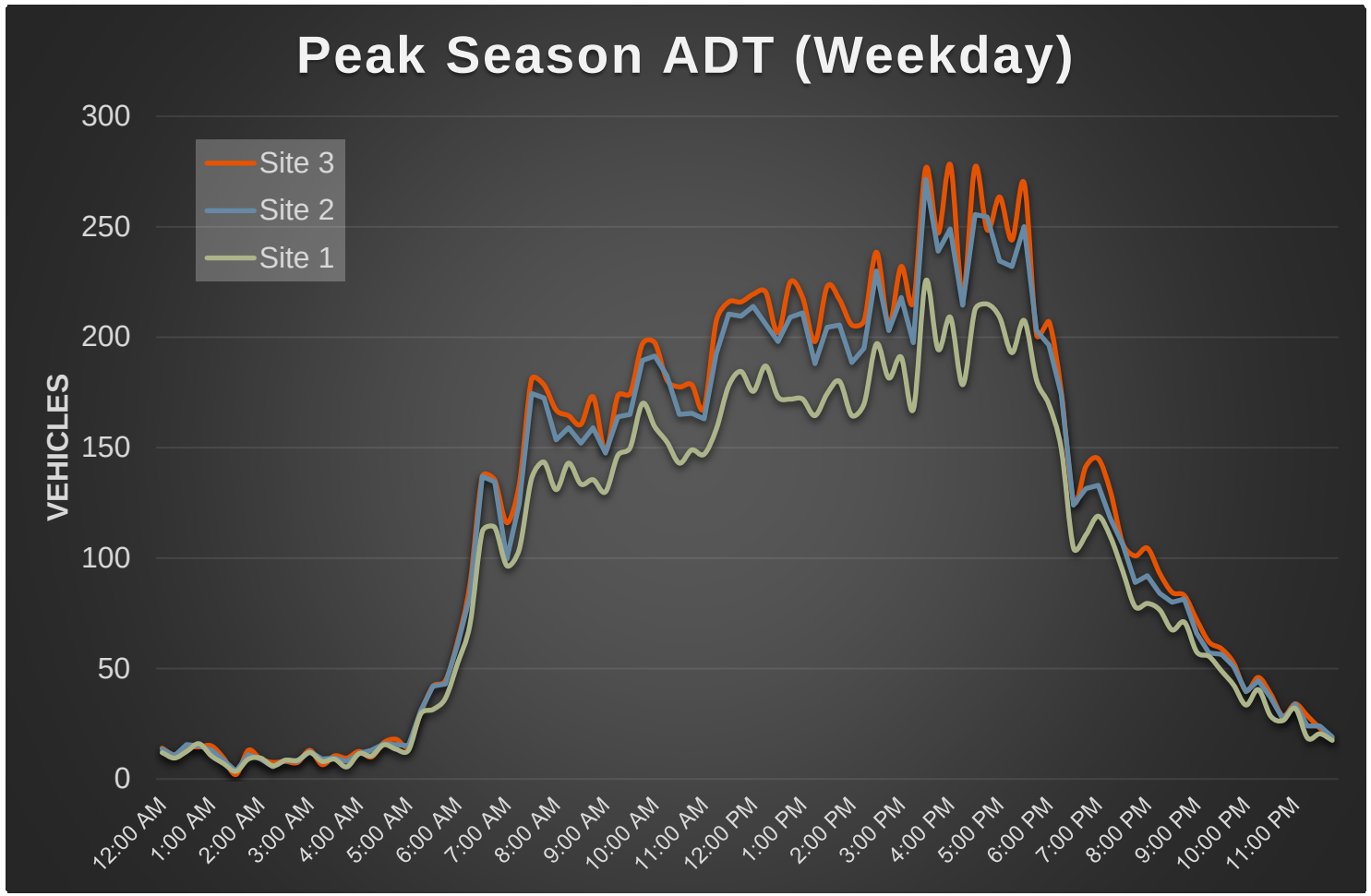


Historic AADT

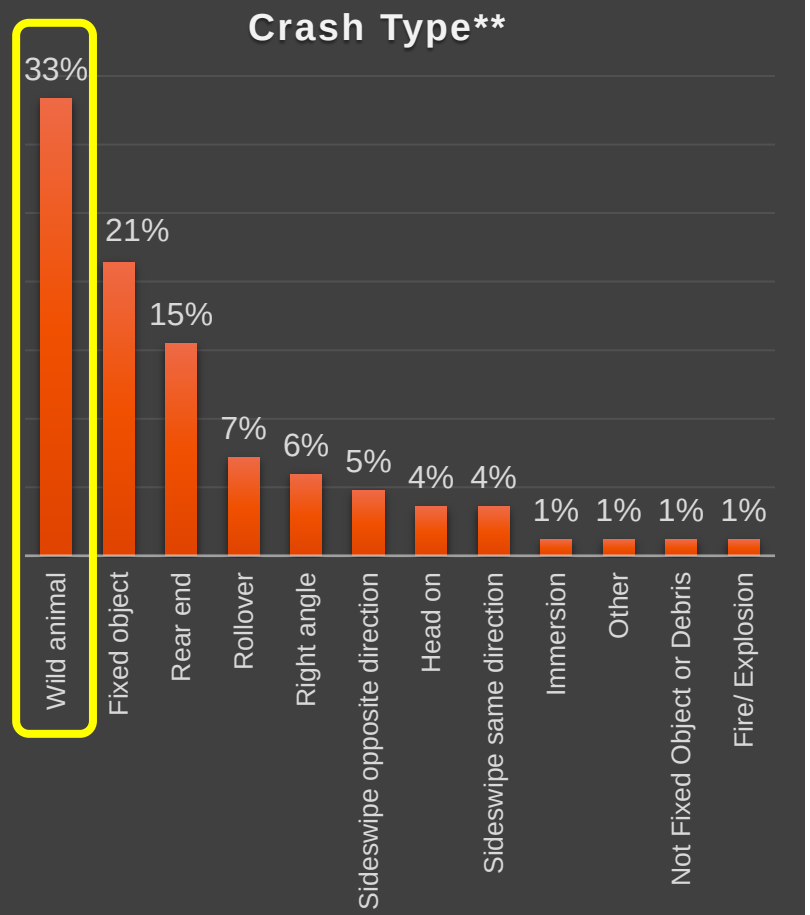




RPA Collected Traffic Data



Safety – *Data Comparison*



2008 SEIS Summary*

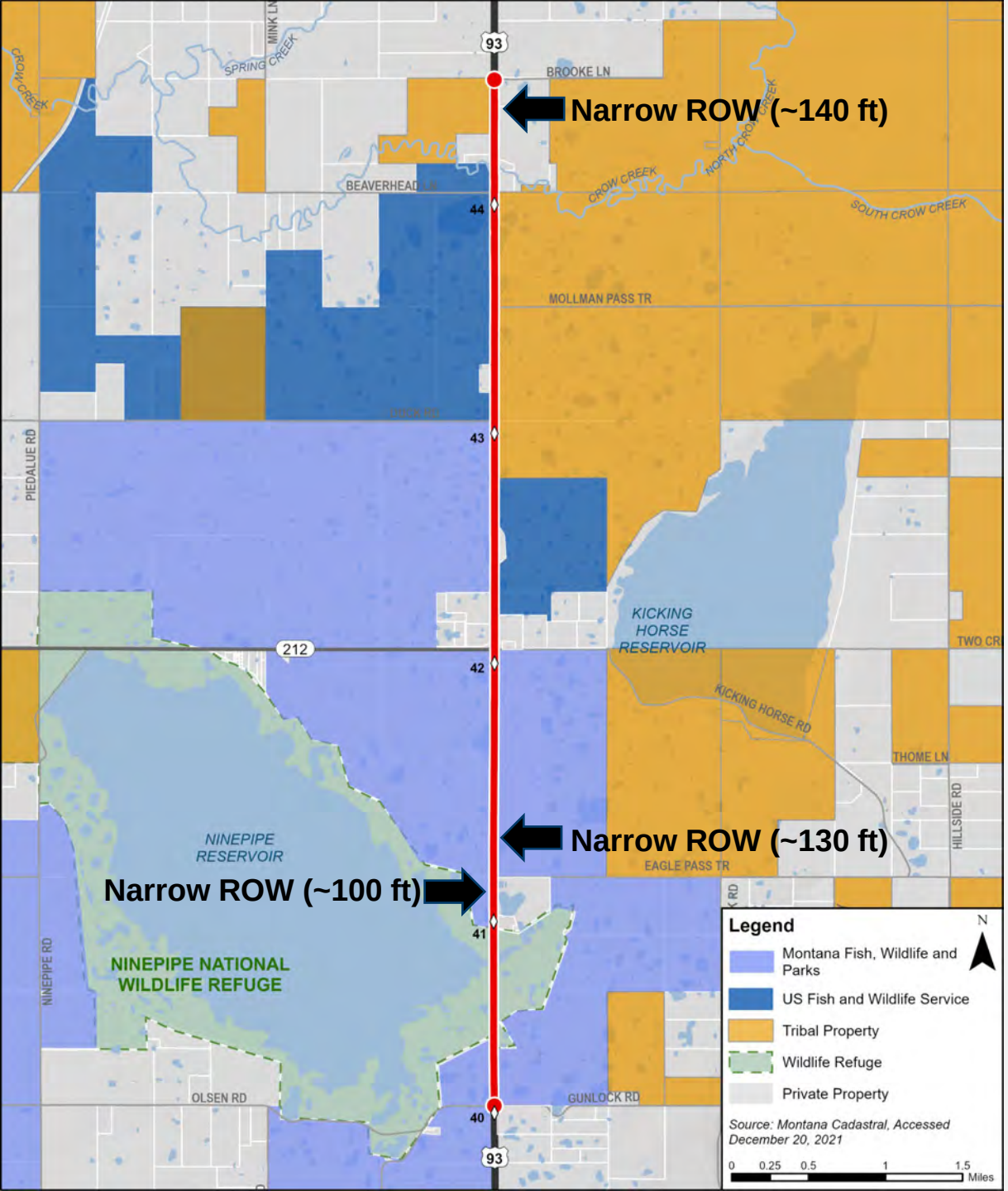
- 5% involve fatalities
- 2.8 crashes per mile per year
- 0.98 crashes per million vehicle miles of travel
- 6% head on
- 2.86 severity rate
- 33% at or related to intersections/driveways
- 0% wild animal crashes *(however, 43% "not stated")*

Updated Crash Data Review**

- 1% fatal (6% severe)
- 4.3 crashes per mile per year
- 1.44 crashes per million vehicle miles of travel
- 3.6% head on
- 2.27 severity rate
- 17% at or related to intersections/driveways
- 33% wild animal crashes

**Data includes rural segments of US 93 between Evaro and Polson (1995 – 2003)*

***Source: MDT Traffic and Safety Bureau (2015 – 2019)*

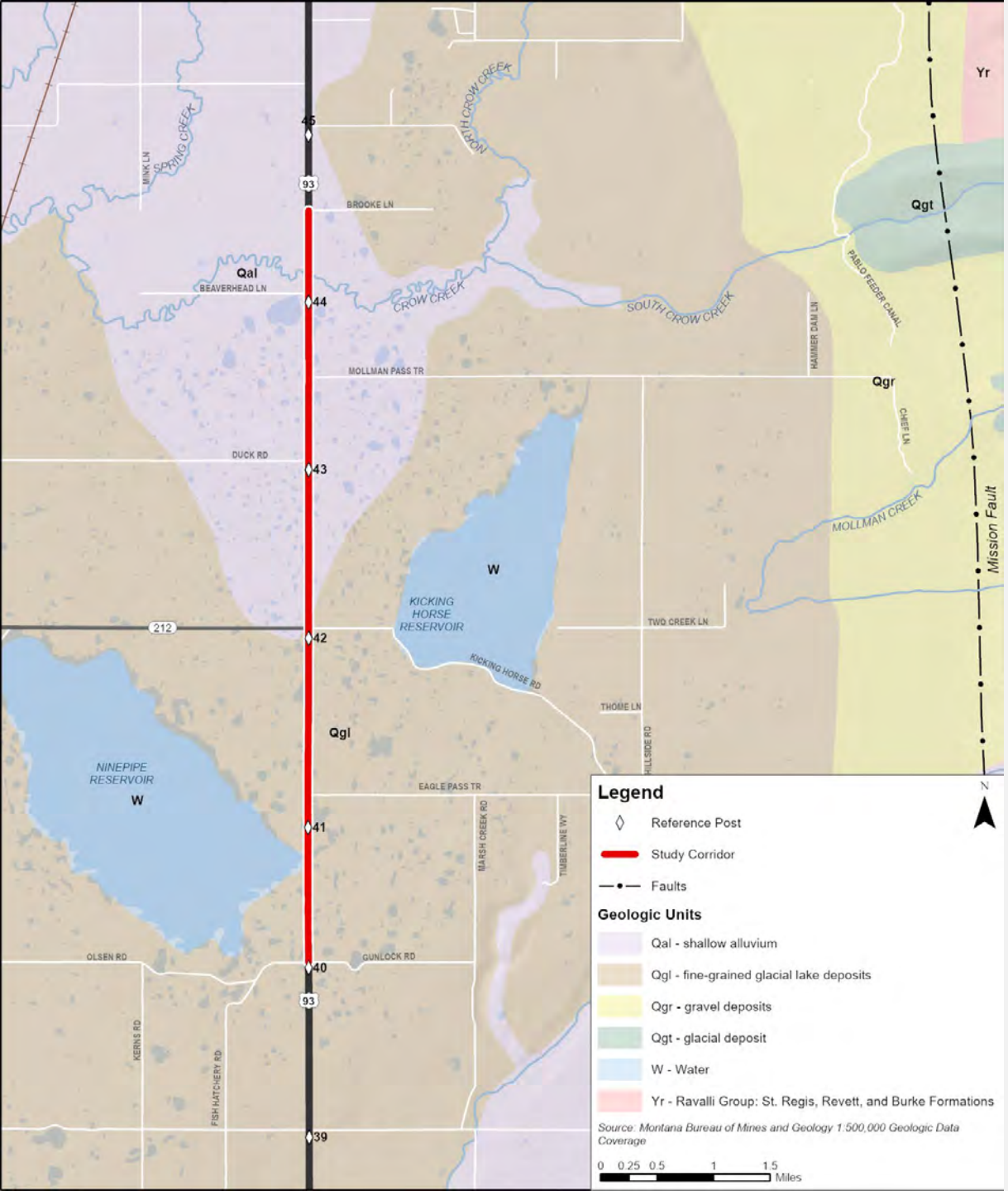


Land Use/Ownership

- Mostly wildlife conservation lands
- 12 private landowners

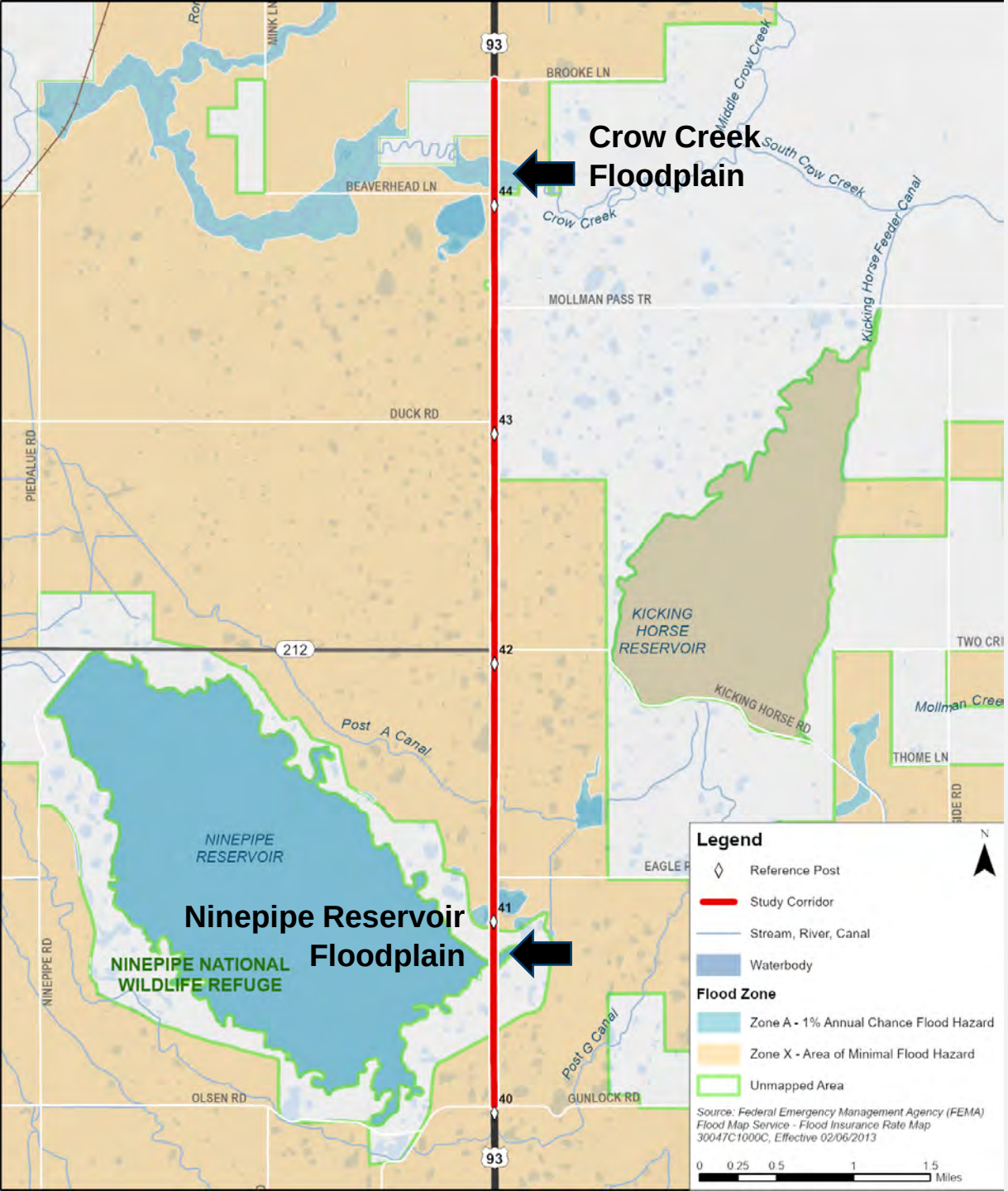
Right-of-Way

- Desired Minimum: 160 feet
- Existing: mostly 160 feet, some narrower areas
  - Ninepipes Lodge (100’-130’)
  - Crow Creek (140’)



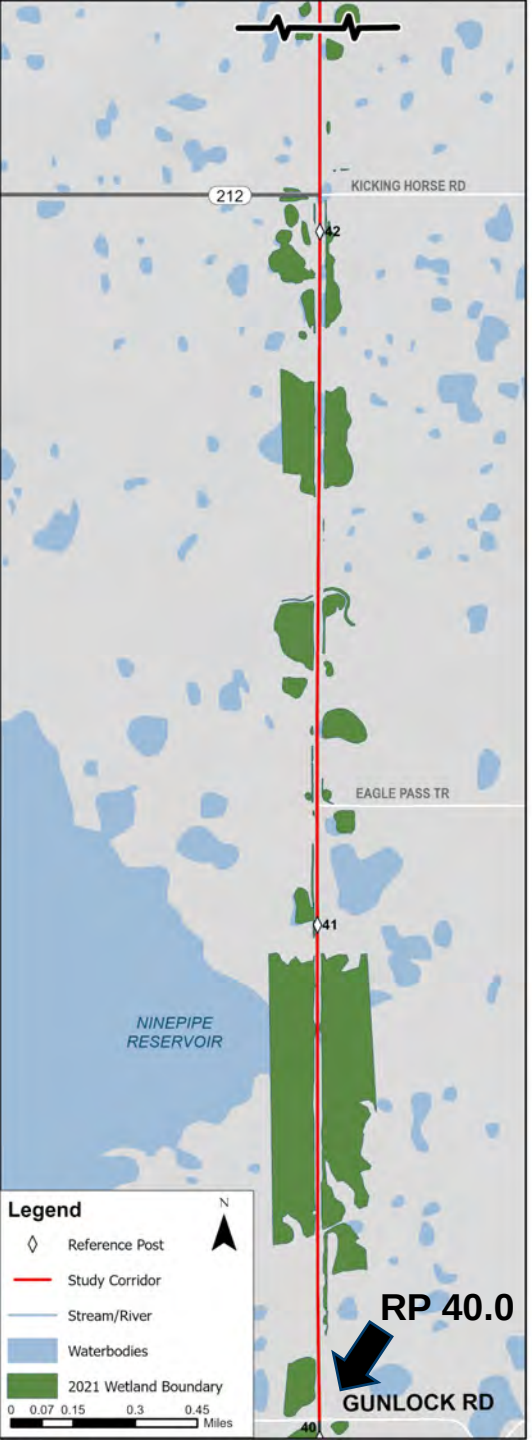
Soils & Geotechnical Conditions

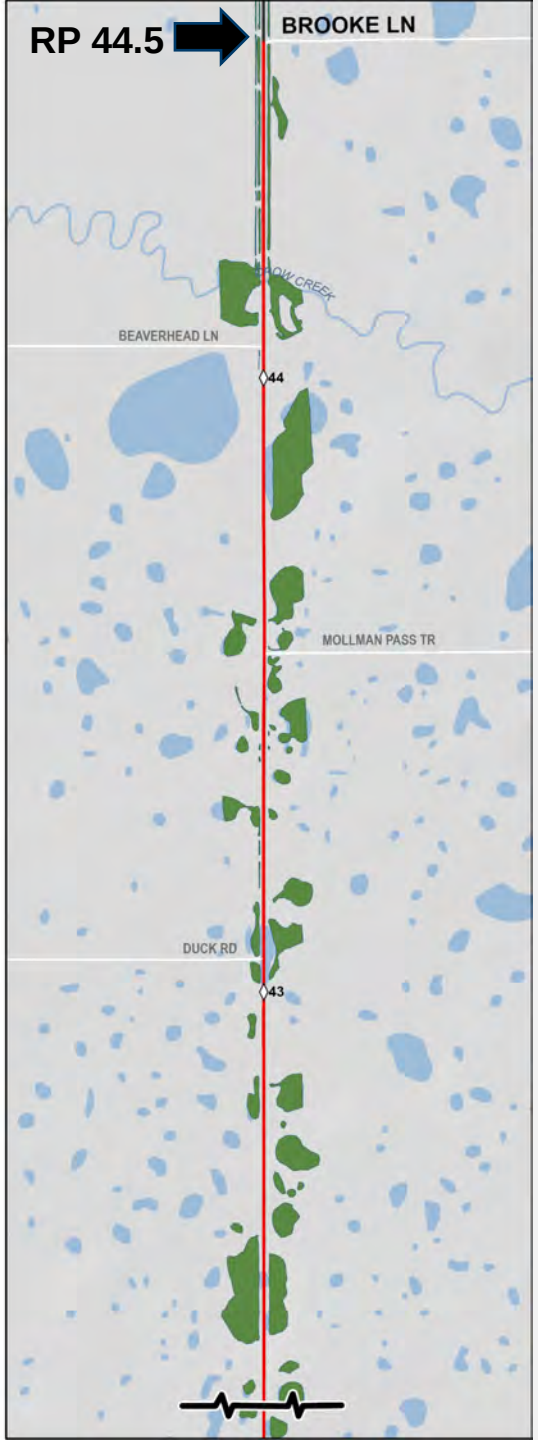
- Primarily soft clays, silts, and sands.
- Dense bearing layers generally at ~50 to 80 feet below ground or not encountered.
- Minor liquefaction expected in all locations analyzed.
- Groundwater at 10-15 feet below ground.
- No evidence of artesian conditions.



Floodplains

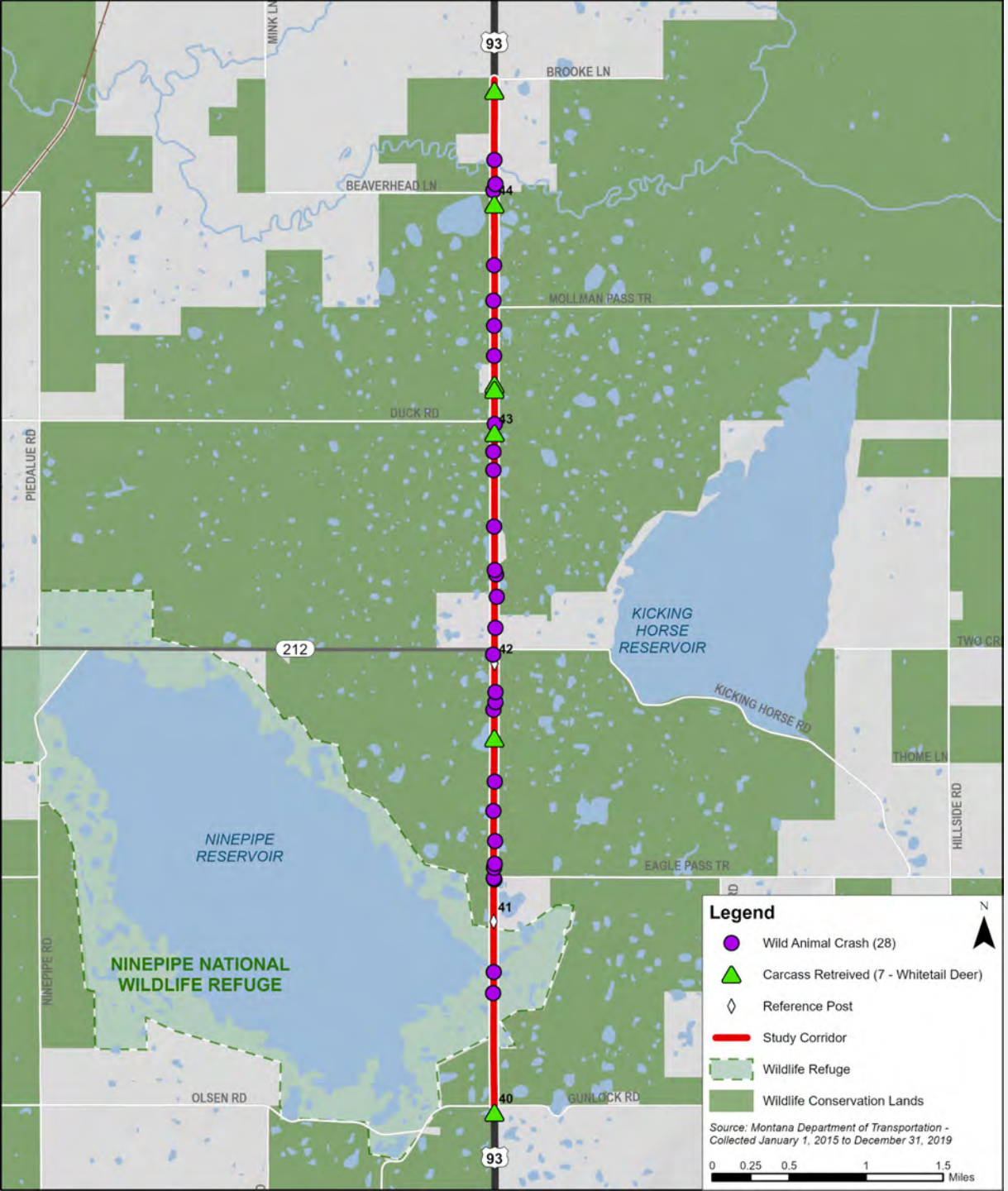
- At **Ninepipe Reservoir**, ~**200 feet** of US 93 crosses 100-year floodplain (reduction of 150 feet from SEIS).
- At **Crow Creek**, ~**675 feet** of US 93 crosses 100-year floodplain (increase of 125 feet from SEIS).
- Existing culverts at Crow Creek may be inadequate to convey high water flows.





Wetlands

- 3 new wetlands (~0.09 acre) delineated at RP 42.0, RP 43.2, and RP 44.0.
- Of 82 wetlands identified in SEIS, minor changes for 26 wetlands, 56 unchanged.
- 3 wetlands were reclassified from Category III to Category IV (changes to the scoring methodology).
- No changes to preliminary jurisdictional status.



Wildlife

- Species of Concern
  - Forster's tern (nesting reporting within 0.25 mile)
  - Bald eagle (wintering individuals near RP 41.5).
- Deer cross throughout corridor, most represented in carcass data.
- Concentrated wildlife movement near core pothole area (RP 39.4 to 44.1) and Crow Creek riparian corridor (RP 44.2).
- Large numbers of birds and turtles struck near core pothole area.
- High grizzly bears use documented in Crow Creek riparian area and area between Ninepipe and Kicking Horse reservoirs.
- Grizzly bear mortalities from vehicle collisions have increased significantly since 2000 and have notably accelerated since 2010.

Cultural Resources

- **Previously Identified Resources**
  - Flathead Indian Irrigation Project: multiple canals crossing or paralleling US 93.
  - Stagecoach Route: follows southwest edge of the Ninepipe Reservoir before crossing US 93 and continuing in a northeast direction through USFWS management lands
  - Ninepipe Cultural Property: entire Ninepipe segment adjacent to US 93, considered a traditional cultural property due to unique qualities as an environmentally rich area of kettle lakes and glacial wetlands.
- **Government-to-Government Consultation**
  - MDT, FHWA, and CSKT
- **Field Tours – Spring 2022**
  - CSKT Preservation Office & Culture Committees

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

NEXT STEPS

What are the next steps?

Relevant Conditions

- Review and Finalize
  - Relevant Conditions Report available at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93ninepipe/documents.aspx

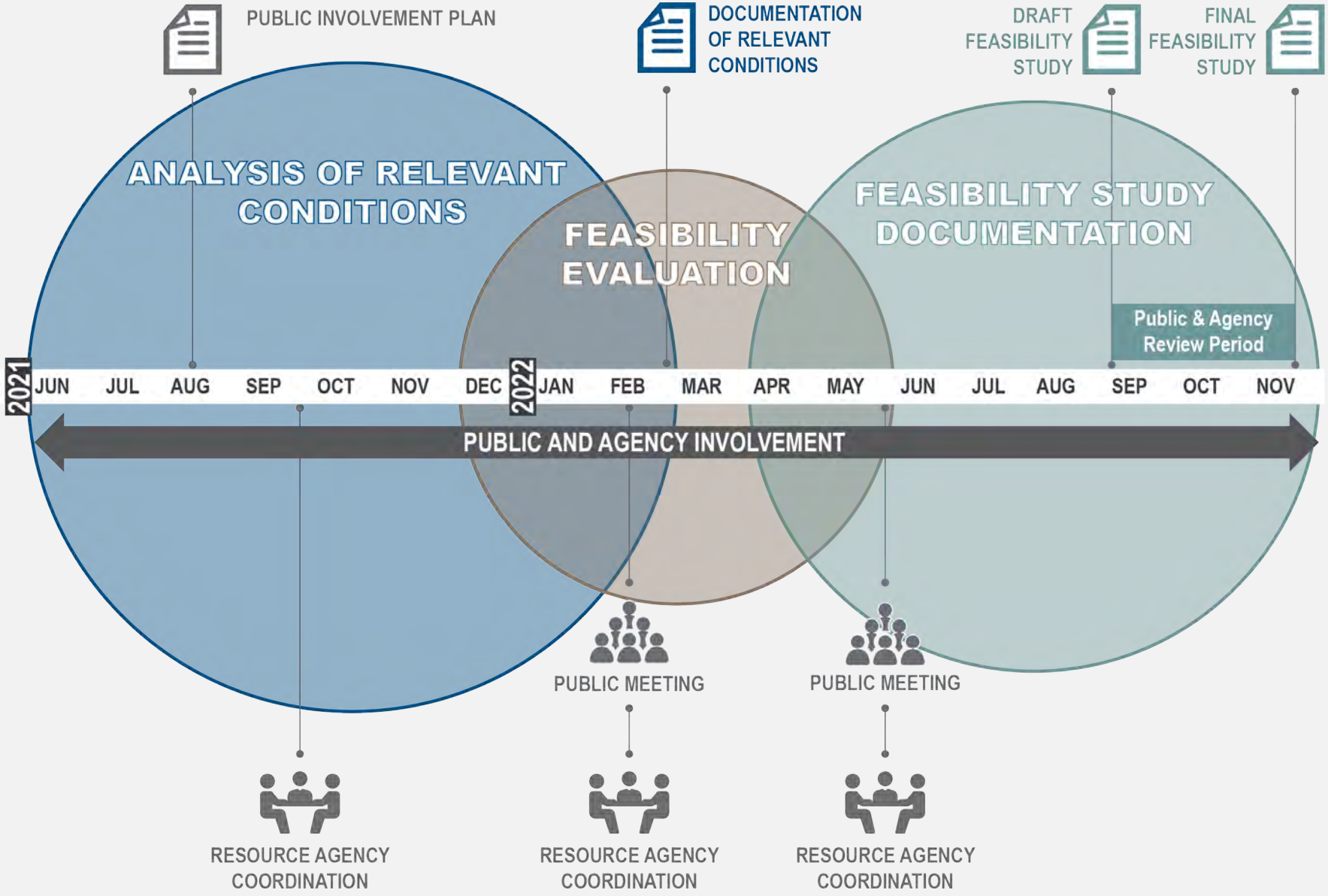
Feasibility Evaluation

- Confirm
  - Roadway and Path Alignment
  - Structures and Wildlife Crossing Accommodations
- Estimate Impacts & Costs
- Identify Screening Criteria
- Evaluate Preferred Alternative & Modifications

Stay Involved

Next Public Outreach:

Late Spring/Early Summer 2022



NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

OPEN DISCUSSION

Questions?

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

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Vicki Crnich

Montana Department of Transportation

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www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/US93Ninepipe

Meeting Summary

Resource Agency Meeting #2

MEETING GOALS

The purpose of this resource agency meeting was to share key findings from the relevant conditions analysis and request agency review of the *Relevant Conditions Technical Memorandum*.

MEETING DETAILS

Date: February 16, 2022

Time: 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Study Area**
2. **Relevant Conditions**
   - Traffic & Safety
   - Land Use/Ownership & Right-of-Way
   - Soils & Geotechnical Conditions
   - Floodplains
   - Wetlands
   - Wildlife & Crossings
   - Cultural Resources
3. **Next Steps**
4. **Open Discussion**

ATTENDEES

In addition to 13 team members from MDT, FHWA, and the RPA team, 20 resource agency representatives participated in the meeting.

• Parker Osterloh	MDT
• Vicki Crnich	MDT
• Katie Potts	MDT
• Jacquelyn Smith	MDT
• Rebecca Ridenour	MDT
• Joe Weigand	MDT
• Jon Axline	MDT
• Ryan Hammon	FHWA
• Rich Janssen	CSKT
• Whisper Means	CSKT
• Kari Eneas	CSKT
• Willie Keenan	CSKT
• Art Soukkala	CSKT
• Chauncey Means	CSKT
• Scott Johnston	CSKT
• Vernon Finley	CSKT
• Payton Adams	CSKT
• Mary Rose Morigeau	CSKT
• Jerin Borrego	USACE
• Mike McGrath	USFWS
• Jennifer Fortin-Noreus	USFWS
• Jodi Clark	USFWS
• Amy Coffman	USFWS
• Amy Lisk	USFWS
• Neil Anderson	MFWP
• John Grant	MFWP
• Cecily Costello	MFWP
• Lori Roberts	MFWP
• Scott Randall	RPA
• Sarah Nicolai	RPA
• Sue Wall	Herrera
• David Schwab	Ethnotech
• Alex Schwab	Ethnotech

MEETING NOTES

Sarah Nicolai reviewed the study area and the 2008 SEIS preferred alternative. Sarah was joined by Scott Randall, Sue Wall, and Dave Schwab to provide an overview of relevant conditions findings and next steps for the feasibility study. Attendees discussed the following items.

Truck Traffic

- Rich Janssen commented that 7 to 8% truck traffic seems to be low. Scott responded that the percentage of trucks is similar to what was found in the 2008 SEIS and is actually a fairly high percentage compared to similar facilities around the state.

Wetlands

- With 3 new wetlands delineated in 2021, Whisper Means asked if additional mitigation would be required. Sue Wall responded that RPA will be overlaying the wetland boundaries onto the highway design to determine impact areas. Mitigation conversations will be ongoing with the resource agencies, and additional information will be available at the next agency meeting later in the spring.
- Sue asked if the CSKT and USACE prefer onsite restoration or offsite options. Whisper responded that the CSKT have developed a wetland mitigation plan that she will share to help inform the study. The CSKT use a different crediting system compared to the USACE. Joe Weigand suggested scheduling a separate conversation to talk about USACE mitigation, and Jerin Borrego indicated she would be happy to participate. Sue will coordinate with MDT, the CKST, and USACE to further discuss wetland mitigation.

Wildlife

- Sue noted crossing types are appropriate and they are generally sited in appropriate locations, however conversations will be ongoing about width and length for crossing structures, particularly to accommodate grizzly bears at Crow Creek. Mike McGrath agreed these elements will need to be reviewed and asked for enough time in the planning process to provide input.
- Mike requested that wildlife fencing be included in discussions about wildlife accommodations within the corridor. Sue agreed, noting consideration would need to include fencing lengths and locations in relation to driveways, approach roadways, and other landowner concerns.
- The group discussed the possibility of an interactive workshop and onsite field review in April 2022. RPA will coordinate with MDT and resource agencies to identify an appropriate date.

Cultural Resources

- In addition to previously identified cultural resources in the corridor, Dave Schwab noted the Tribal Historic Preservation Office may provide additional resource information.
- Cultural field tours with the THPO and culture committees are targeted for April 2022.
- Cultural research and coordination activities are intended to set a foundation for future Section 106 consultation.

Media Coordination

- Jacquelyn Smith noted that a recent *Missoulian* article incorrectly referenced upcoming construction in the corridor. No funding has been identified for the Ninepipe segment, and a construction timeframe has not been identified at this time.

Relevant Conditions Memorandum

- Resource agencies were asked to review the Relevant Conditions Technical Memorandum posted to the website at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93ninepipe/documents.aspx. Comments are requested by **March 11th**.

Meeting Summary

Resource Agency Meeting #3

MEETING OVERVIEW

The purpose of this resource agency meeting was to present the baseline evaluation of the 2008 SEIS preferred alternative and potential modifications for improvements within the Ninepipe segment of US Highway 93 from Gunlock Road to Brooke Lane and to discuss agency comments and concerns relating to wildlife, wetlands, and other corridor resources.

MEETING DETAILS

Date: April 13, 2022

Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Welcome and Introductions**
2. **Baseline Evaluation of 2008 SEIS Preferred Alternative**
    - Assumptions
    - Plan and Profile Sheets
    - Impacts and Areas of Concern
3. **Potential Modifications & Design Details**
    - Wildlife Crossing Accommodations
    - Wildlife Fencing
    - Shared Use Path
4. **Wetland Impacts and Mitigation**
5. **Next Steps**
    - Cultural Field Tours / Resource Agency Field Tour
    - Feasibility Evaluation
    - Draft Feasibility Study
    - Public and Agency Review Period
    - Final Feasibility Study

ATTENDEES

In addition to 14 team members from MDT and the RPA team, 19 resource agency representatives participated in the meeting.

• Vicki Crnich	MDT
• Katie Potts	MDT
• Joe Weigand	MDT
• Ryan Wendel	MDT
• Ben Nunnallee	MDT
• Grant Rodway	MDT
• Larry Urban	MDT
• Bill Semmens	MDT
• Tom Gocksch	MDT
• Whisper Means	CSKT
• Blair Libby	CSKT
• Tabitha Espinoza	CSKT
• Willie Keenan	CSKT
• Art Soukkala	CSKT
• Chauncey Means	CSKT
• Evan Smith	CSKT
• Michael Durglo	CSKT
• Katie McDonald	CSKT
• Kevin Askan	CSKT
• Kayla Johnson	CSKT
• Jerin Borrego	USACE
• Christina Schroeder	USACE
• Mike McGrath	USFWS
• Jennifer Fortin-Noreus	USFWS
• Amy Coffman	USFWS
• John Grant	MFWP
• Franz Ingelfinger	MFWP
• Keenan Storrar	MDEQ
• Scott Randall	RPA
• Sarah Nicolai	RPA
• Sue Wall	Herrera
• David Schwab	Ethnotech
• Alex Schwab	Ethnotech

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Meeting participants offered the following comments.

Baseline Evaluation

- Joe Weigand: For the Post Creek segment of US 93, additional reptile/amphibian crossings were added that were not included in the SEIS
- John Grant: Significant changes would likely be needed to the culverts north of Olsen Road due to topographical constraints.
- Larry Urban: Could the Ninepipes Lodge be acquired and relocated?
    - Scott Randall: Impacts to the building are not anticipated. Access to the Lodge may need to be relocated, but there are no plans to acquire the property.
- John Grant: At the canal shown at approximate station 180+00, is a major through way for wildlife. Grizzly bears like to use the woody cover. Consider a crossing structure in this location.
    - Sue Wall: The SEIS did not include a recommendation at this location, however this issue was previously mentioned during the December 2021 resource agency meeting as a consideration.
    - Larry Urban: There was a discussion about the canal location after completion of the SEIS.
    - Whisper Means: Given the change in knowledge and lessons learned since the SEIS, it may be beneficial to consider an additional crossing in this location.
- John Grant: The elevation at approximate station 189+00 may be conducive for a wildlife overpass structure.
    - Scott Randall: An overpass structure is not being considered as part of this study and would need to be considered through a separate effort.
- Mike McGrath: At Kettle Pond 1, the study should consider if the crossing would be in the dry or the wet.
- Larry Urban: It would be beneficial to align the shared use path around the kettle ponds.
- Whisper Means: The study should consider the possibility of relocating the scenic turnout elsewhere given the anticipated grade differential.
- Larry Urban: Would it be worth considering acquiring the private properties near Crow Creek and using for wetland mitigation?
    - Scott Randall: Acquiring residences can be difficult and costly and we try hard to avoid; only a last resort.

Potential Modifications: Slopes and Shared Use Path

- Mike McGrath: The study should consider the cost tradeoff between retaining walls and guardrail vs. wetland mitigation associated with 6:1 slopes.
- John Grant: The shared use path was added in at the end of the SEIS process and the alignment was not fully determined. An eastside alignment may receive higher use due to the location of food/drink establishments on the east side and since the old roadbed still exists on the eastside.

Potential Modifications: Ninepipe Reservoir

- Whisper Means: Elk sometimes cross in the vicinity of the Ninepipe Reservoir, but it's not a huge wildlife crossing area. A grizzly bear was hit on the north side of the bridge. There is also a concentration north of the Ninepipes Lodge. Deer cross throughout the corridor. This location may not be a huge crossing area.
- Mike McGrath: Given the usage characteristics in this location, increased vertical clearance may not be as necessary in this area if the bridge opening is open and wide and sufficient fencing is provided. It should be open and inviting, and animals should be guided to use it.
- John Grant: Water levels change a lot between spring and fall, with water used for irrigation.

Potential Modifications: Kettle Ponds

- Larry Urban: Would it be possible to shift the roadway alignment around the kettle ponds?
    - Scott Randall: The decision at the time of the SEIS was to maintain the roadway on the existing alignment to minimize impacts to adjacent resources.
- Tabitha Espinoza: Can you clarify the purpose of bridge and culvert structures?
    - Sarah Nicolai: Bridge structures are intended to facilitate passage for larger mammals, while culverts are intended to facilitate passage for small mammals, turtles, and other small wildlife.
- Tabitha Espinoza: The study should attempt to minimize fill in wetlands.

Potential Modifications: Crow Creek

- Tabitha Espinoza: Habitat restoration was conducted in the Crow Creek area.
    - Art Soukkala: No restoration activities occurred in the rest area/scenic pullout area.
- Mike McGrath: Several grizzly fatalities have occurred in the Crow Creek area. If two smaller bridges are provided, vertical clearance of 15 feet with dry passage on either side would be needed. However, if one larger bridge structure were constructed, it may not need to have 15 ft of vertical clearance since the opening would be wider and more inviting (similar to the Ninepipe Reservoir comments). It would still be important to provide guide fencing of sufficient length within the defined riparian corridor with appropriate fence end treatments so that wildlife would be directed to use the crossing instead of gaps in the fencing.

Potential Modifications: Fencing

- Mike McGrath: Longer fencing is better to encourage animals to use the crossing structure. The current US 93 corridor has fencing of various lengths. The study should refer to current research on this topic, including work conducted by Marcel Huijser (from the Western Transportation Institute [WTI]).
- Whisper Means: While recognizing the need to raise the roadway grade to accommodate new crossing structures and to add wildlife fencing in the corridor, the study should also consider the visual aspect of the Mission Valley and its importance to the community.
- John Grant: Although 20 years ago there would have been outcry over fencing along the corridor, there weren't nearly the number of deer and bear crossings at that time. Fencing is needed today, however impacts to birds should be considered.
- Sue Wall: The study will consider the latest research to identify fencing recommendations.

Wetlands

- Sue Wall: The most recent delineation was conducted in the summer of 2021 to confirm or adjust boundaries previously delineated in 2002 and 1996. Approximately 16.62 acres of wetland impacts are anticipated from the baseline condition (including 6:1 slopes and the

shared use path). Based on determinations listed in the SEIS, approximately 7.5 impact acres are anticipated to be USACE jurisdictional and 9 acres are anticipated to be non-jurisdictional.

- Bill Semmens: MDT met recently with CSKT representatives to discuss Tribal credits. MDT is in the process of obtaining USACE recertification for wetland reserves, and there may be enough USACE credits at the time of a future project. That would be the preferred mitigation method.
- Blair Libby: The CSKT would likely use the existing credit ratio table. However, at the time of a future project, the CSKT would coordinate with MDT to determine the appropriate ratio for CSKT crediting through the Shoreline Protection/ALCO staff.
- Christina Schroeder: To ensure feasibility and costs are fully considered, early coordination is strongly encouraged including a field component to obtain USACE agreement with wetland boundaries and jurisdictional status assumptions. Onsite mitigation is USACE's lowest preference and is considered as a last resort after preferred methods are exhausted. A description of wetland impacts will be needed for each alternative, as well as a thorough discussion of avoidance and minimization measures before a 404 permit can be issued. The Finley Flats area may potentially be used for a future project.

Cultural Resources

- Michael Durglo: Coordination for upcoming cultural field tours should be coordinated with appropriate CSKT officials.
- Katie McDonald: No formal consultation is occurring at this time. Field notes based on conversations with elders will be prepared for CSKT Tribal Preservation Office review.

NEXT STEPS

Meeting participants expressed interest in rescheduling the field tour as weather allows. Additional information will be provided later this spring.

Meeting Summary

Resource Agency Meeting #4 – Field Review

MEETING OVERVIEW

The purpose of this resource agency meeting was to view important locations within the Ninepipe corridor and to discuss opportunities for improved wildlife crossing accommodations and aquatic connectivity.

MEETING DETAILS

Date: June 6, 2022

Time: 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Gathering Location: Mission Mountains View Point – public rest stop south of Beaverhead Drive

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Welcome and Introductions**
2. **Safety Orientation**
3. **Corridor Stops**
    - Stop 1: Crow Creek Area
    - Stop 2: Kettle Pond 1
    - Stop 3: Ninepipes Reservoir Area
    - Stop 4: Kettle Pond 2

ATTENDEES

In addition to 10 team members from MDT and the RPA team, 7 resource agency representatives participated in the meeting.

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Vicki Crnich	MDT	Sue Wall	Herrera
Joe Weigand	MDT	Art Soukkala	CSKT
Ryan Wendel	MDT	Katie McDonald	CSKT
Jacquelyn Smith	MDT	Kari Eneas	CSKT
Grant Rodway	MDT	Payton Adams	CSKT
Shane Talley	MDT	Mike McGrath	USFWS
Connor Johnson	MDT	Jennifer Fortin-Noreus	USFWS
Scott Randall	RPA	John Grant	MFWP
Sarah Nicolai	RPA		

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Meeting participants offered the following comments and questions at the corridor stops. In some cases, answers to questions will be dependent on the feasibility evaluation and refinement of corridor options.

Stop 1: Crow Creek Area

- Kari Eneas: How will wildlife fencing be effectively installed given the multiple access points along this portion of US 93?
- Katie McDonald: During the cultural tour, elders and culture committee members asked if the increased roadway elevation would affect bird migration patterns.
- Kari Eneas: Changes to bird movement would not be a major concern, however increased roadway elevation would result in viewshed impacts.
- Mike McGrath: Wildlife exclusion fencing can be marked for visibility to waterfowl. How far back will grades needs to be chased on Beaverhead Drive?
- Art Soukkala: In past years, Crow Creek has nearly overtopped US 93.
- Shane Talley: Would both bridges provide 15 feet of vertical clearance?
- Mike McGrath: Bears want to cross in this area. It is important to provide a large enough opening to be inviting. It may be possible to reduce the desired vertical clearance from 15 feet if the opening is widened with a single bridge structure instead of two smaller bridges structures. This would also help address flooding issues.
- Art Soukkala: How will connections with side streets and approaches be addressed?
- Jacquelyn Smith: How is the two-track paralleling US 93 within the MDT right-of-way used?
- Jennifer Fortin-Noreus: It doesn't work to try to push bears where they aren't currently. More bear data are available now compared to when the 2008 SEIS was developed.

Stop 2: Kettle Pond 1

- Joe Weigand: The study will need to consider tradeoffs relating to adverse impacts and benefits. MDT recognizes the desire to reconnect the two sides of the kettle ponds, which would restore hydraulic connectivity and provide aquatic, amphibian, and waterfowl benefits. However, instead of trying to stuff large mammals such as grizzly bears underneath, it might make more sense to consider a terrestrial wildlife crossing over the highway. The terrain is built up in this area and may be an appropriate location.
- Art Soukkala: This is a high use area for grizzly bears. Bears already use the canal as a crossing location.
- Kari Eneas: Grizzlies won't want to run underneath a bridge or through wet areas. An overpass would provide a better connection for larger animals and potentially alleviate mortality at the canal.
- Art Soukkala: Collared bear data weren't available in 2008. This information should be considered as a changed condition or a lesson learned since that time that would justify modifications to the wildlife crossing recommendations contained in the SEIS.
- Katie McDonald: Tribal elders would like to see an overpass. The Evaro overpass is considered a success. They wanted to know if it would be the same size. They don't necessarily view an overpass as a negative viewshed impact. They are concerned about keeping animals and humans safe.
- Mike McGrath: The Wyoming crossing structures for pronghorn (over US 191 near Pinedale) could be a reference example.

- John Grant: I have worked 32 years at Ninepipe, and I have seen a change in traffic during that time. Wildlife use has also changed. Whereas it used to be primarily a bird area, now more whitetail deer and grizzly bears cross US 93 through the Ninepipe segment. Agency understanding of wildlife needs has evolved since the 2008 SEIS. A wildlife overpass could be constructed to blend into the landscape. It would be heavily used. Currently, large mammals use the trees and cover near the canal. Additional plantings could provide similar cover for a new overpass crossing. Fencing would also be needed to direct animals to the crossing location. The natural concealment of the draw means that animals would have cover soon after crossing the highway in this location.
- Art Soukkala: Instead of marring the viewshed, people genuinely like the Evaro crossing and see it as a positive addition to the landscape.
- Shane Talley: What size would the culverts need to be?
- Art Soukkala: Would the culverts be submerged or partially above water to facilitate amphibian crossing? Aquatic connections are important, however turtles also like dry crossing opportunities.
- Joe Weigand: The roadway should avoid too much undulation (i.e., roller-coaster effect).
- Jennifer Fortin-Noreus: It might be sufficient to provide a single dry bridge at the kettle pond with lower vertical clearance if an overcrossing were also provided.
- John Grant: FWP owns the adjacent land and it is encumbered, so an overpass would provide an effective terrestrial animal crossing for years to come. The study should think about how an overpass structure would connect with the shared use path (SUP).
- Joe Weigand: MDT previously talked with FWP about Section 4(f) impacts and avoiding right-of-way acquisition. To be successful, construction of an overpass would need to be a partnership and joint effort between FWP and MDT involving construction on property owned by both entities.

Stop 3: Ninepipes Reservoir Area

- Kari Eneas: If an overpass were constructed, consistent fencing would be needed to guide animals to that safe crossing location. Breaches in fencing would reduce effectiveness. There have been bear mortalities at the guardrail and historic strikes generally in the area. Even if an overpass were provided, bears would still likely cross at the Ninepipe Reservoir as well.
- Jennifer Fortin-Noreus: Would it be possible to consider a smaller bridge structure at the Reservoir to accommodate bears here if an overpass were also constructed? We don't know how far bears will travel for a designated crossing.
- Mike McGrath: Bears have been getting hit here since the turn of the millennium. Adequate fencing would be needed. The study should consider data from the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff, Alberta, on spacing between crossings.
- Art Soukkala: I favor an overpass crossing structure. Wildlife-managed lands extend for miles to the east and west, and that protection won't change.
- Mike McGrath: Will improvements at the Ninepipe Reservoir and a new overpass structure balance out financially? Grant funding may be a possibility.
- Art Soukkala: If longer, single structures are not provided at the kettle ponds, an overpass structure would be a good trade.
- Shane Talley: What is the plan for wildlife fencing given the multiple approaches?

- Joe Weigand: Would it be possible to install fencing behind private properties to provide continuity? MDT can't work outside of MDT right-of-way, however partnerships with USFWS and FWP may enable development of a continuous fence system on adjacent lands.
- Jennifer Fortin-Noreus: It's important to keep in mind the types of crossing opportunities that bears will use. They won't cross in swampy, mucky conditions. Dry undercrossings or ideally an overpass would be most effective for bears. Why was the Ninepipe Reservoir defined at 660 feet? Bears need enough dry area to cross and good visibility (with a combination of vertical height and width). A 660-foot bridge is more than what they would need.

Stop 4: Kettle Pond 2

- Katie McDonald: Tribal elders and culture committee members may be open to considering an interpretive opportunity relating to construction of an SUP along the historic Stagecoach route. It may be possible to be creative during mitigation, however specific proposals would need to be presented to the tribal historic preservation office and the culture committees for consideration. Elders generally support connecting the kettle ponds and using the old roadbed.
- Art Soukkala: In past years, swans with cygnets have used the ponds and successfully crossed the road. A connection between the two sides of the ponds would be beneficial.

NEXT STEPS

The field visit will serve as the final resource agency meeting for this study. Agency representatives will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft feasibility study before it is finalized. The draft is anticipated by September 2022.

APPENDIX 1F:

Tribal Council Coordination

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

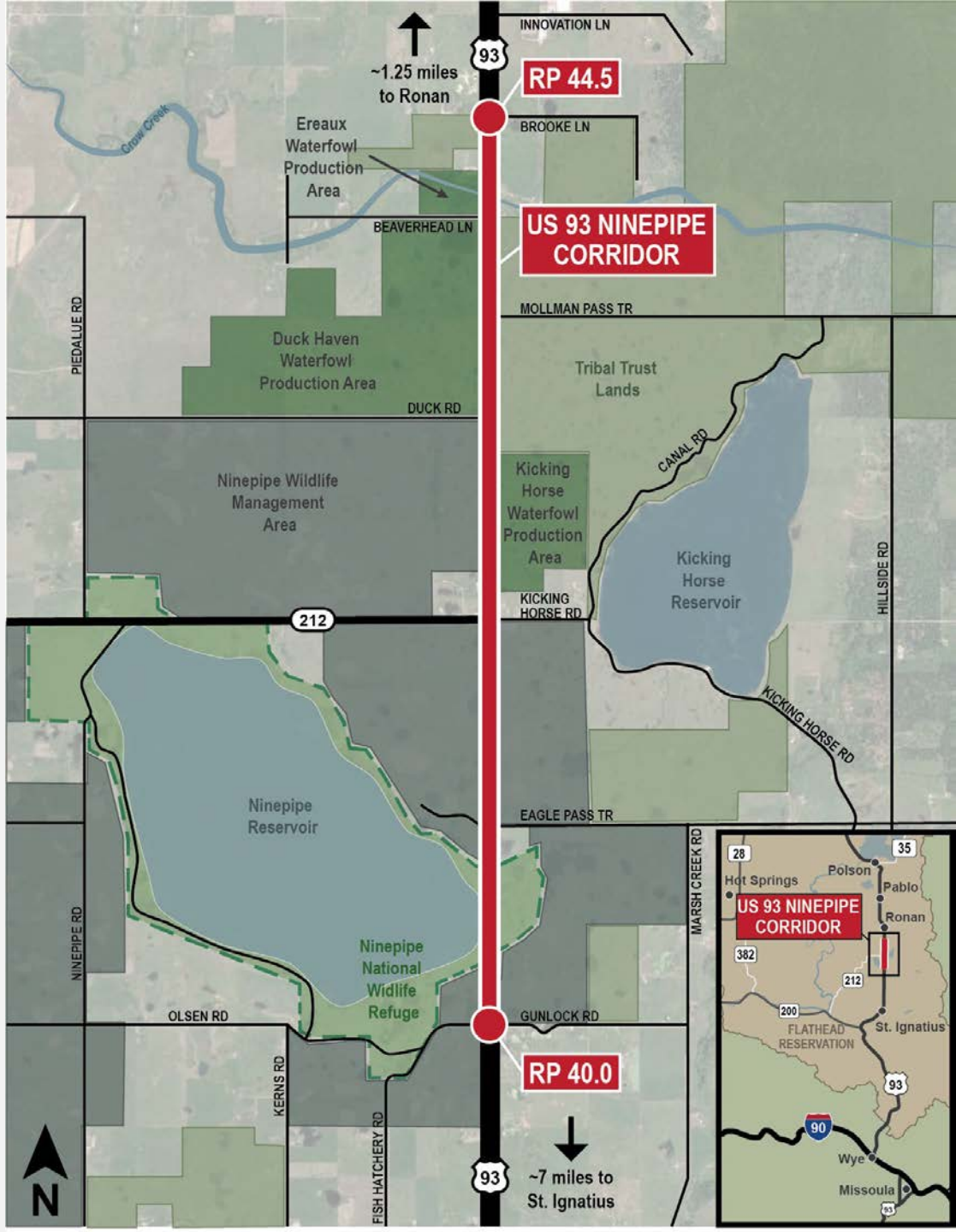
CSKT Highway Team Meeting

June 24, 2021

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Project History

- US 93 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – 1996
- Supplemental EIS – 2008
  - Post Creek Hill to Ronan (RP 48.3 to 37.1)
- Ninepipe Corridor Preferred Alternative
  - Two-lane roadway
  - Separated pathway
- Complications and Lessons Learned



Planning Objectives

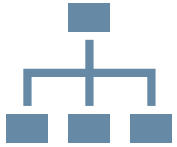
Objectives

- **Verify Baseline Conditions**
- **Confirm Viability of Preferred Alternative**
  - Impacts
  - Costs
  - Constructability
- **Support Future Project Development Decisions**
  - Re-evaluation
  - Design

Approach

- Rely on existing information and supplement as needed
- Consider minor modifications to minimize impacts and costs
- Hybrid approach – planning, environmental, and engineering components

Workplan:
Overview



Task 1:

Management and Administration

Task 2:

Public and Agency Involvement

Task 3:

Analysis of Relevant Conditions

Task 4:

Feasibility Evaluation

Task 5:

Feasibility Study Documentation

Workplan:
Public and Agency Involvement

- **Public and Agency Involvement Plan**
- Advisory Committee Meetings
  - Provide guidance and review
  - Technical expertise (MDT, FHWA, CSKT)
  - Approximately every 8 weeks (at key milestones)
- Website
- Progress Updates
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- Other
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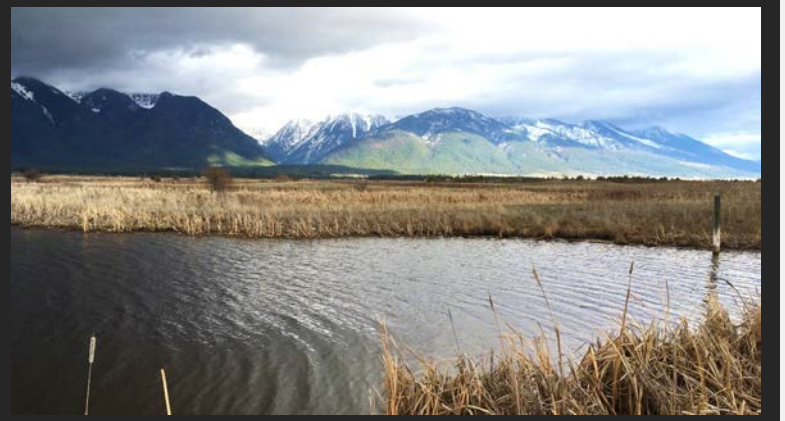
Analysis of Relevant Conditions



- Available Data and Information Review
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Feasibility Evaluation

- Preliminary Alignment/Profile – Road & Path
- Evaluate Structures and Wildlife Crossing Accommodations
- Establish Preliminary Construction and R/W Limits
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- Identify Screening Criteria
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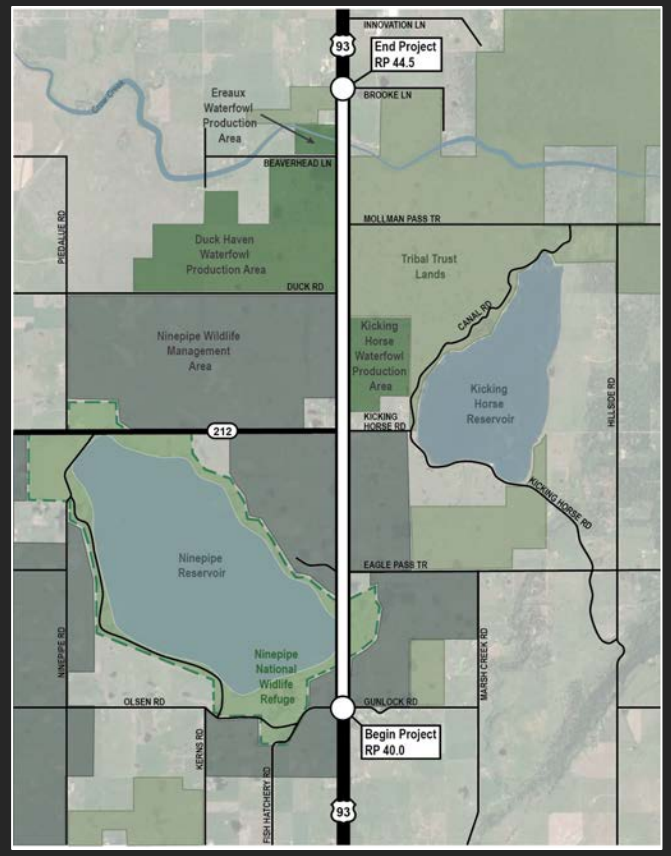
- **Screening Matrix and Description**

Workplan:
Feasibility Study Documentation



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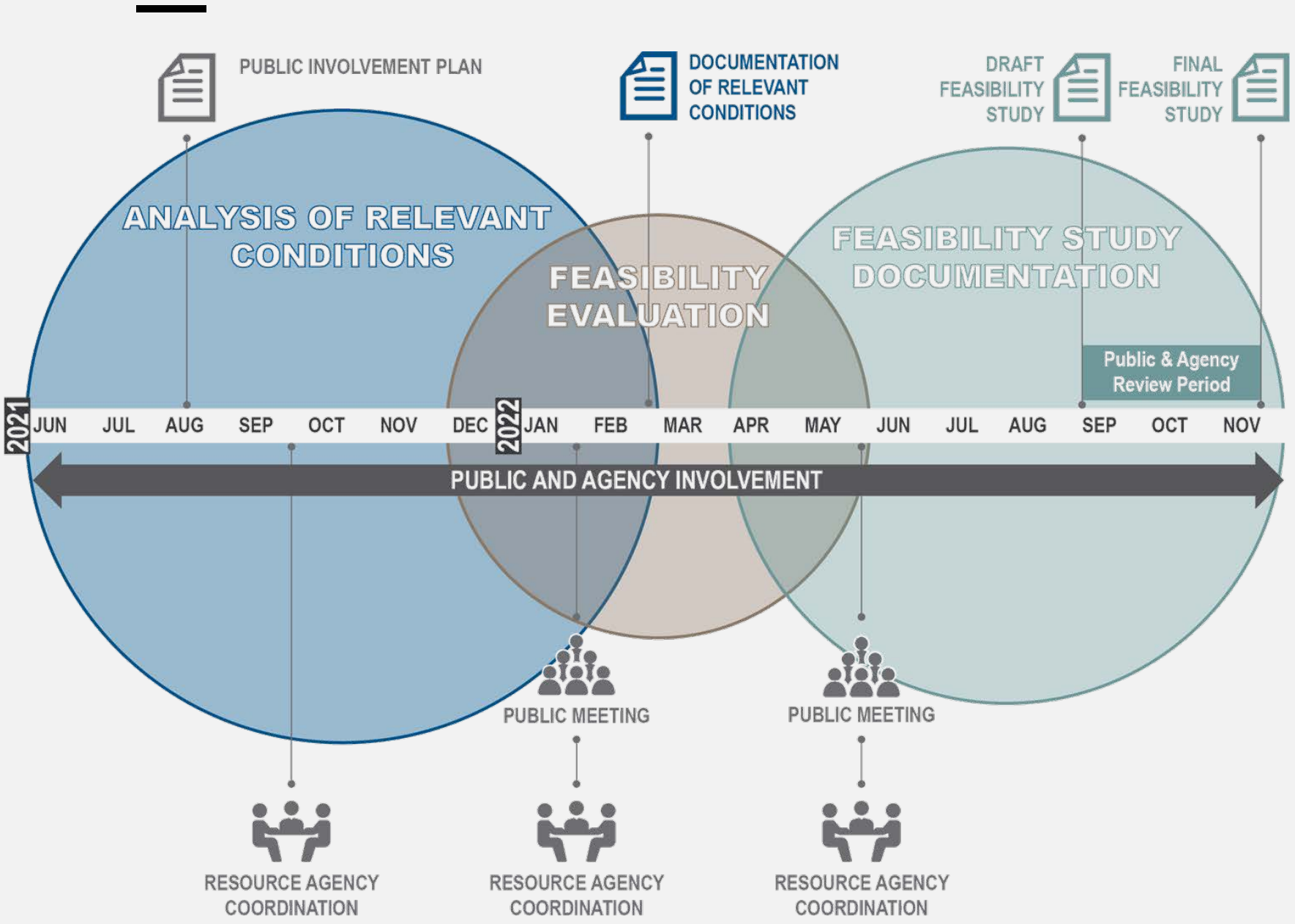
- **Finalize Report**

Schedule

- 18 months
- Includes time for review and coordination



Questions?

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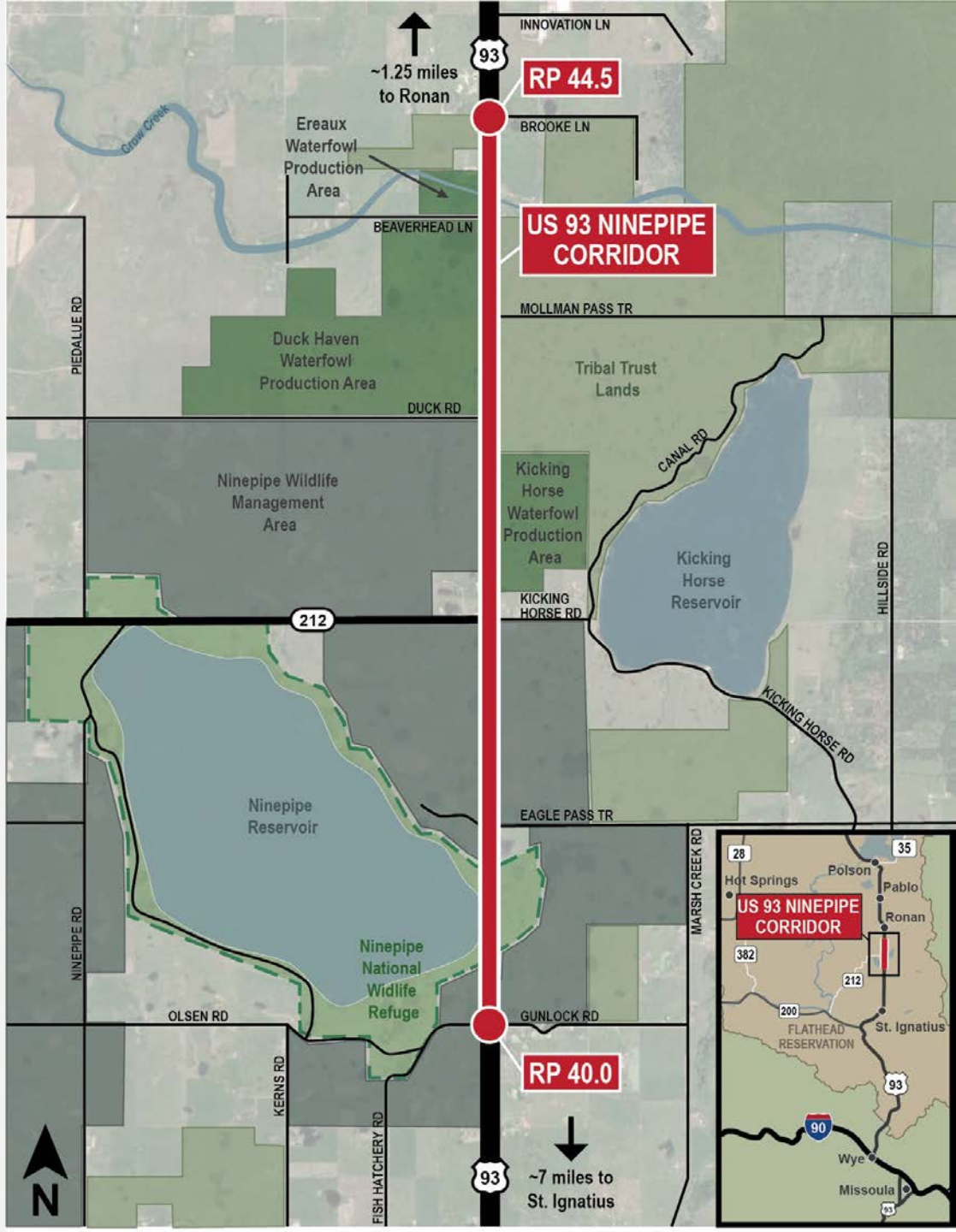
CSKT Tribal Council Presentation

September 30, 2021

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

History of Study Area

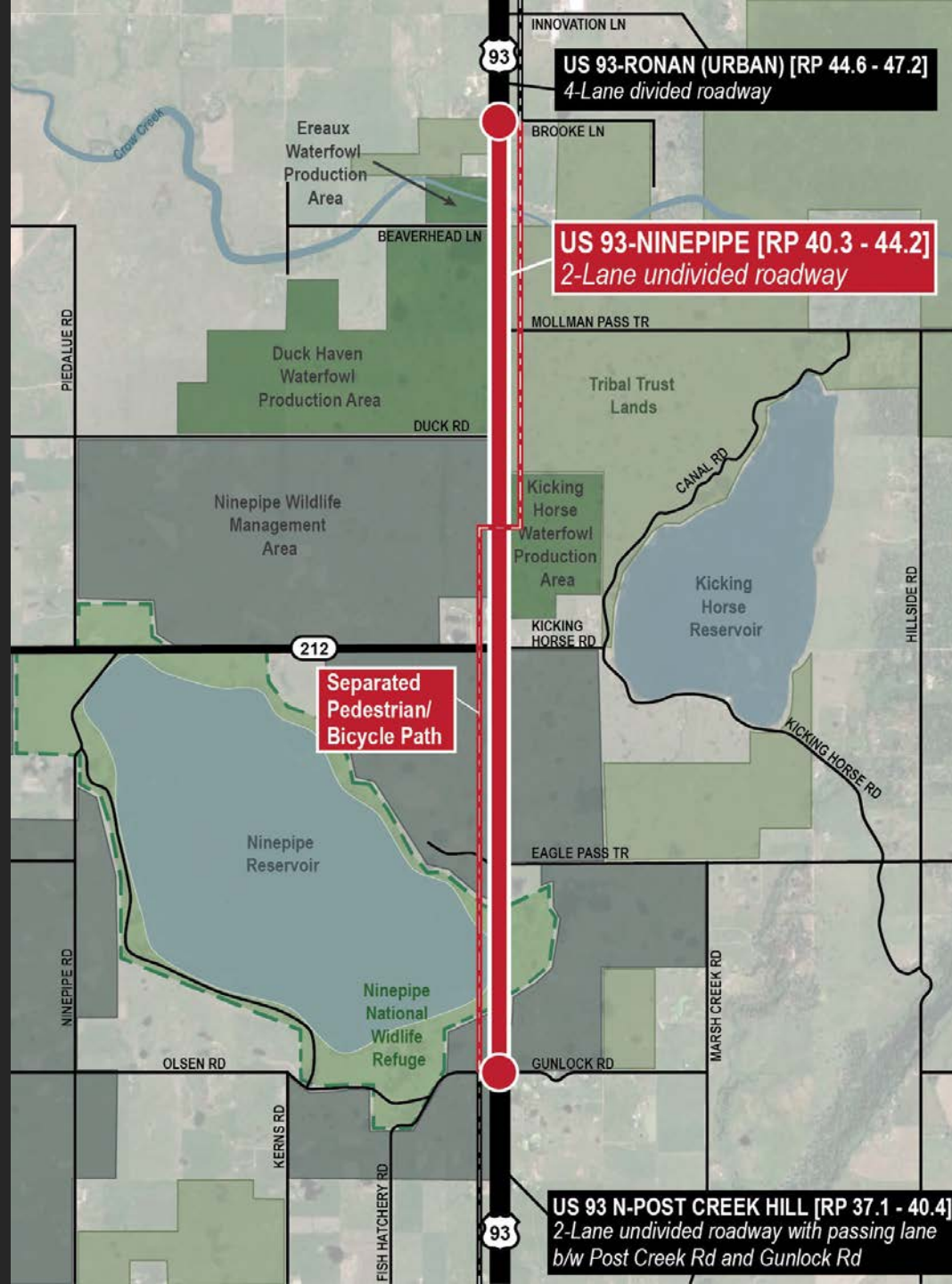
- US 93 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – 1996
- Supplemental EIS – 2008
  - Post Creek Hill to Ronan (RP 37.1 to 48.3)
- Ninepipe Corridor Preferred Alternative
  - Two-lane roadway
  - Separated pathway
- Complications and Lessons Learned



History of Study Area

SEIS Preferred Alternative - Ninepipe Corridor

- Two-lane undivided roadway
- Separated pathway
- 4-lane divided roadway north of Brooke Lane
- Passing lane south of Gunlock Road



Planning Objectives

Objectives

- **Verify Baseline Conditions**
- **Confirm Viability of Preferred Alternative**
  - Impacts
  - Costs
  - Constructability
- **Support Future Project Development Decisions**
  - Re-evaluation
  - Design

Approach

- Rely on existing information and supplement as needed
- Consider minor modifications to minimize impacts and costs
- Hybrid approach – planning, environmental, and engineering components

Workplan:
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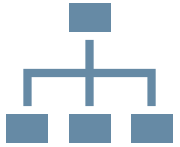

Task 1:

Management and Administration

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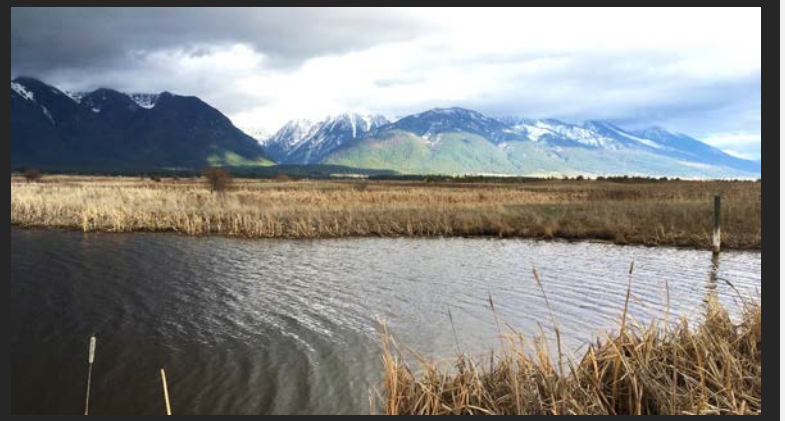
Workplan Task 3:
Analysis of Relevant Conditions



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- **Documentation of Relevant Conditions Technical Memo**

Workplan Task 3:
Analysis of Relevant Conditions

2008 SEIS Affected Resources	
Traffic Operations & Safety	**Floodplains & Streams**
Land Use	**Fish & Wildlife**
Prime & Unique Farmland	**T&E Species**
Social	**Cultural Resources**
Economics	**Parks & Recreation**
Pedestrians & Bicyclists	Hazardous Materials
Air Quality	Visual
Noise	Relocations
Water Quality	**Geology & Soils**
Wetlands	

Workplan Task 4: *Feasibility Evaluation*

- Preliminary Alignment/Profile – Road & Path
- Evaluate Structures and Wildlife Crossing Accommodations
- Establish Preliminary Construction and R/W Limits
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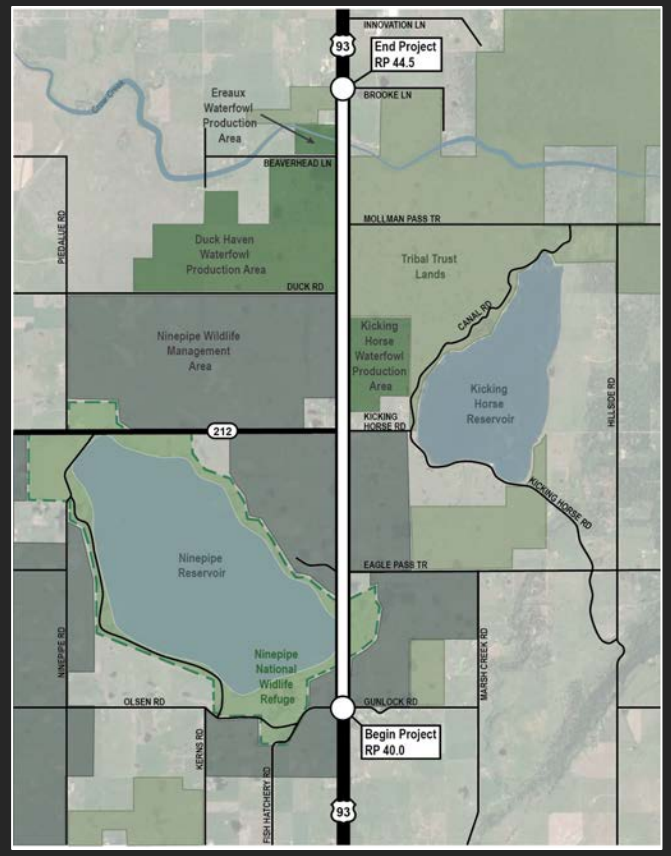
Workplan Task 5: *Feasibility Study Documentation*



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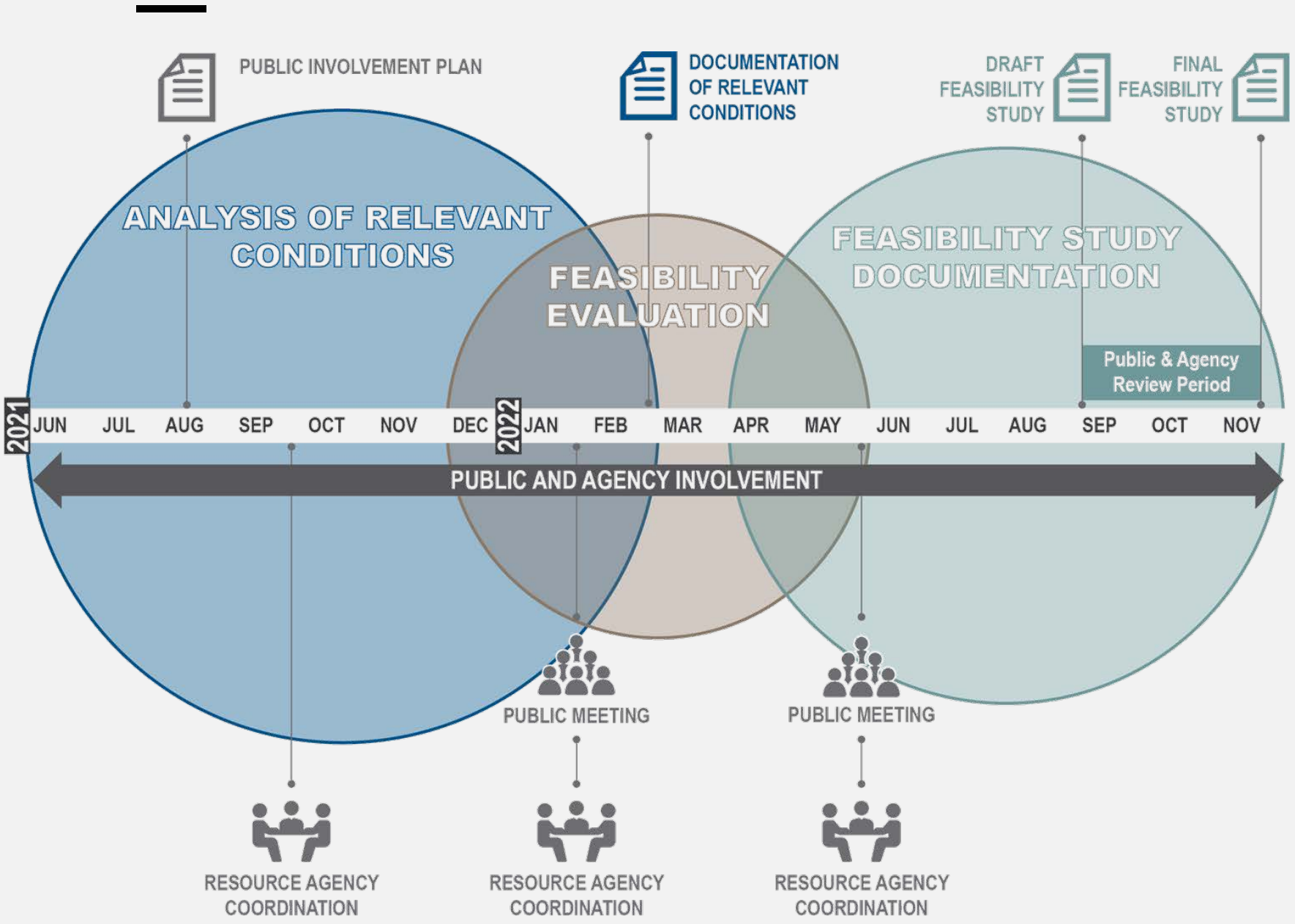

Questions?

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CSKT Tribal Council Presentation

March 31, 2022

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Meeting Agenda

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

- **History of Study Area**
- **Planning Objectives**
- **Relevant Conditions**
  - Traffic & Safety
  - Land Use/Ownership & Right-of-Way
  - Soils & Geotechnical Conditions
  - Floodplains
  - Wetlands
  - Wildlife & Crossings
  - Cultural Resources
- **Next Steps & Upcoming Outreach**
- **Open Discussion**

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

STUDY AREA & OBJECTIVES

History of Study Area

- US 93 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – 1996
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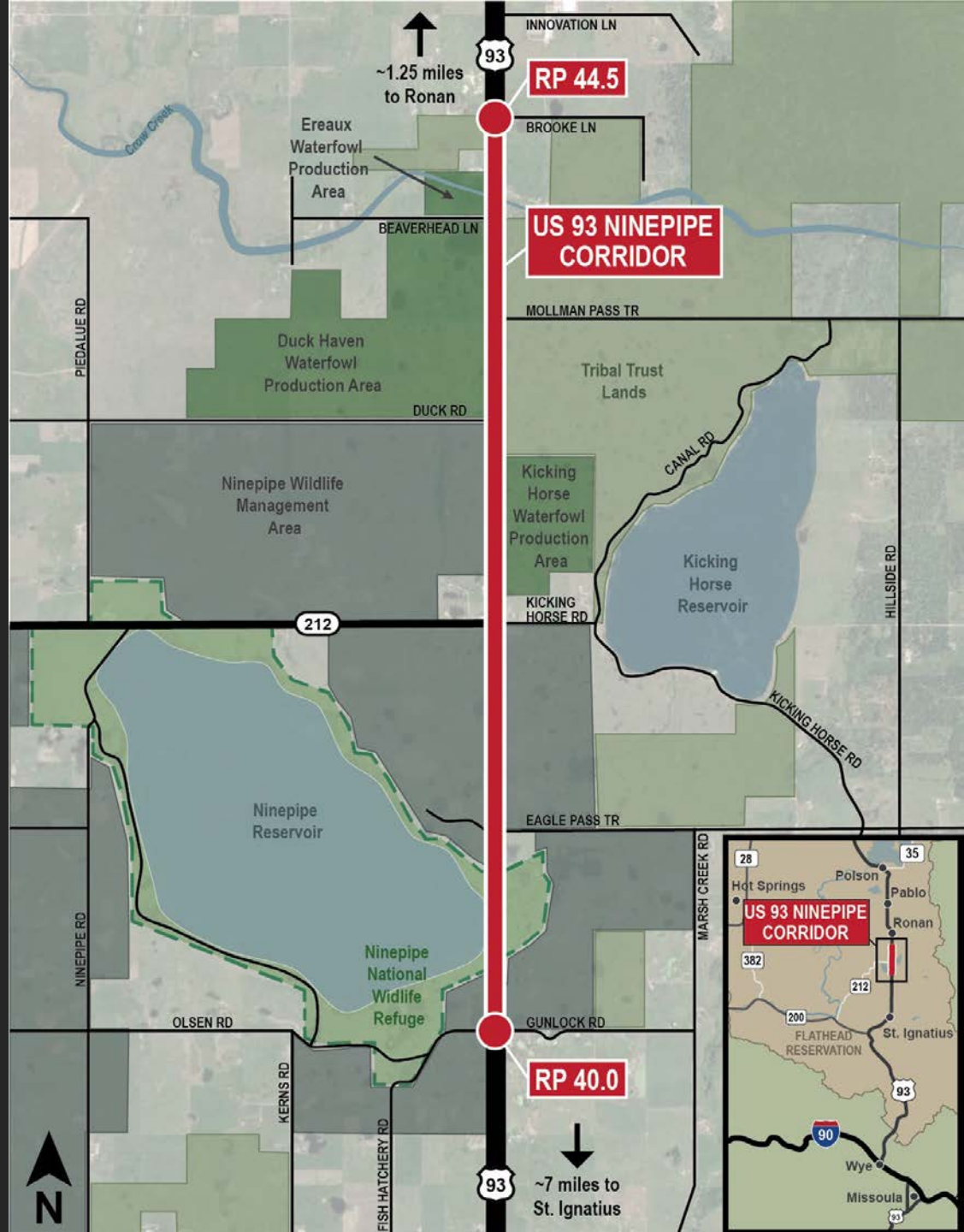
  - Post Creek Hill to Ronan (RP 37.1 to 48.3)
- Complications and Lessons Learned



History of Study Area

SEIS Preferred Alternative for Ninepipe Corridor

- Two-lane undivided roadway with widened shoulders
- Wildlife crossing structures
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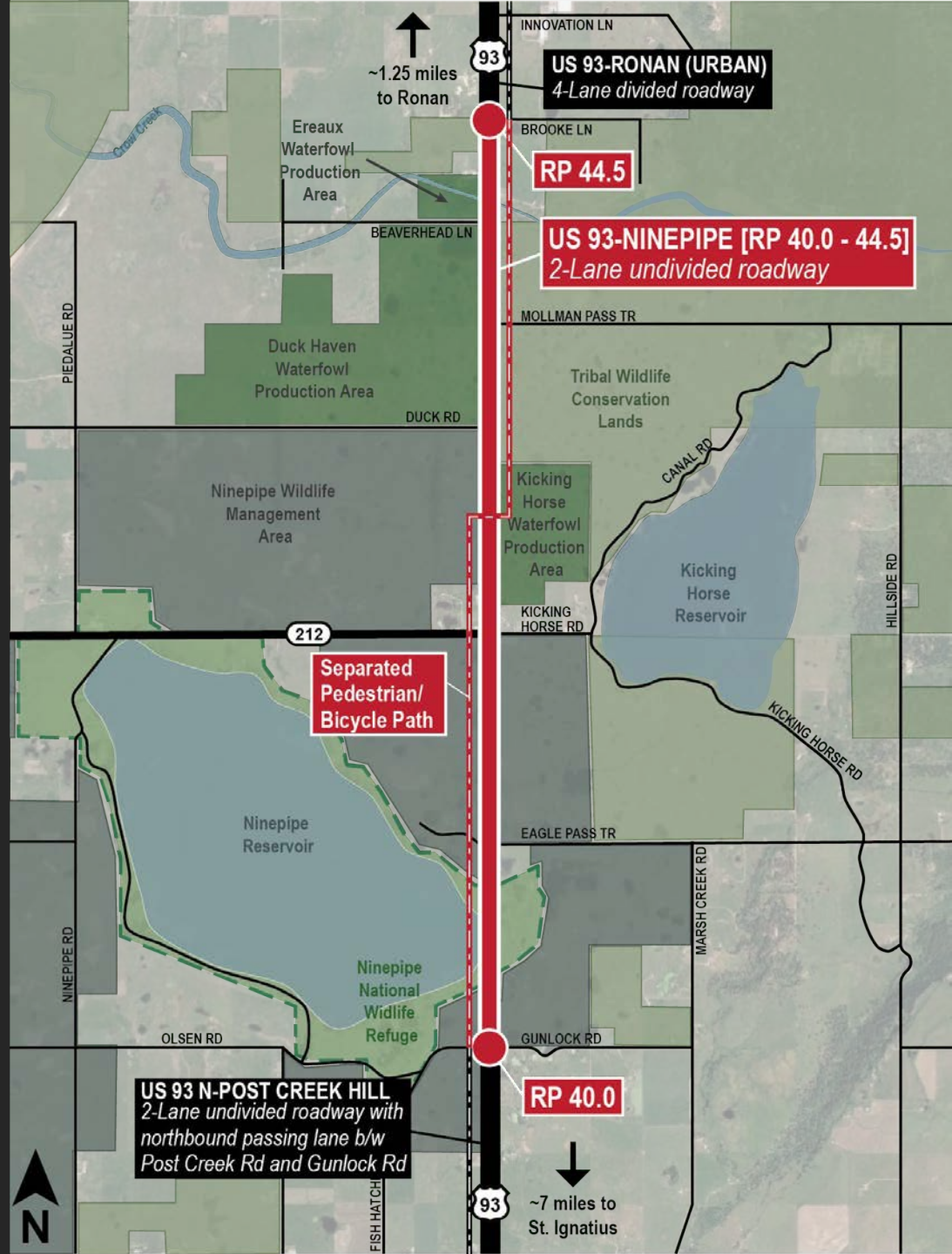
- 4-lane divided roadway north of Brooke Lane
- Northbound passing lane south of Gunlock Road



Planning Objectives

Objectives

- **Verify Baseline Conditions**
- **Confirm Viability of Preferred Alternative**
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Approach

- Rely on existing information and supplement as needed
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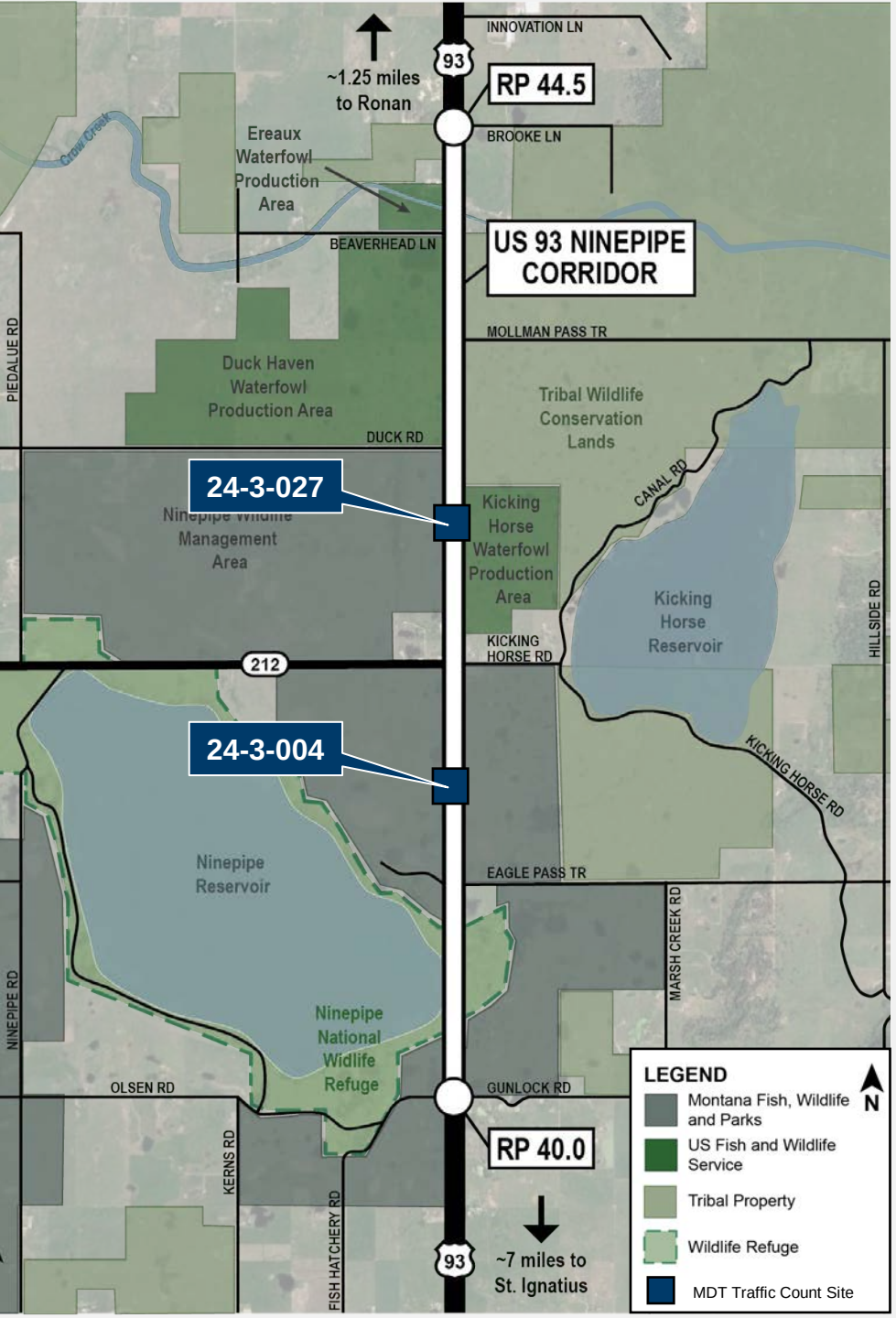
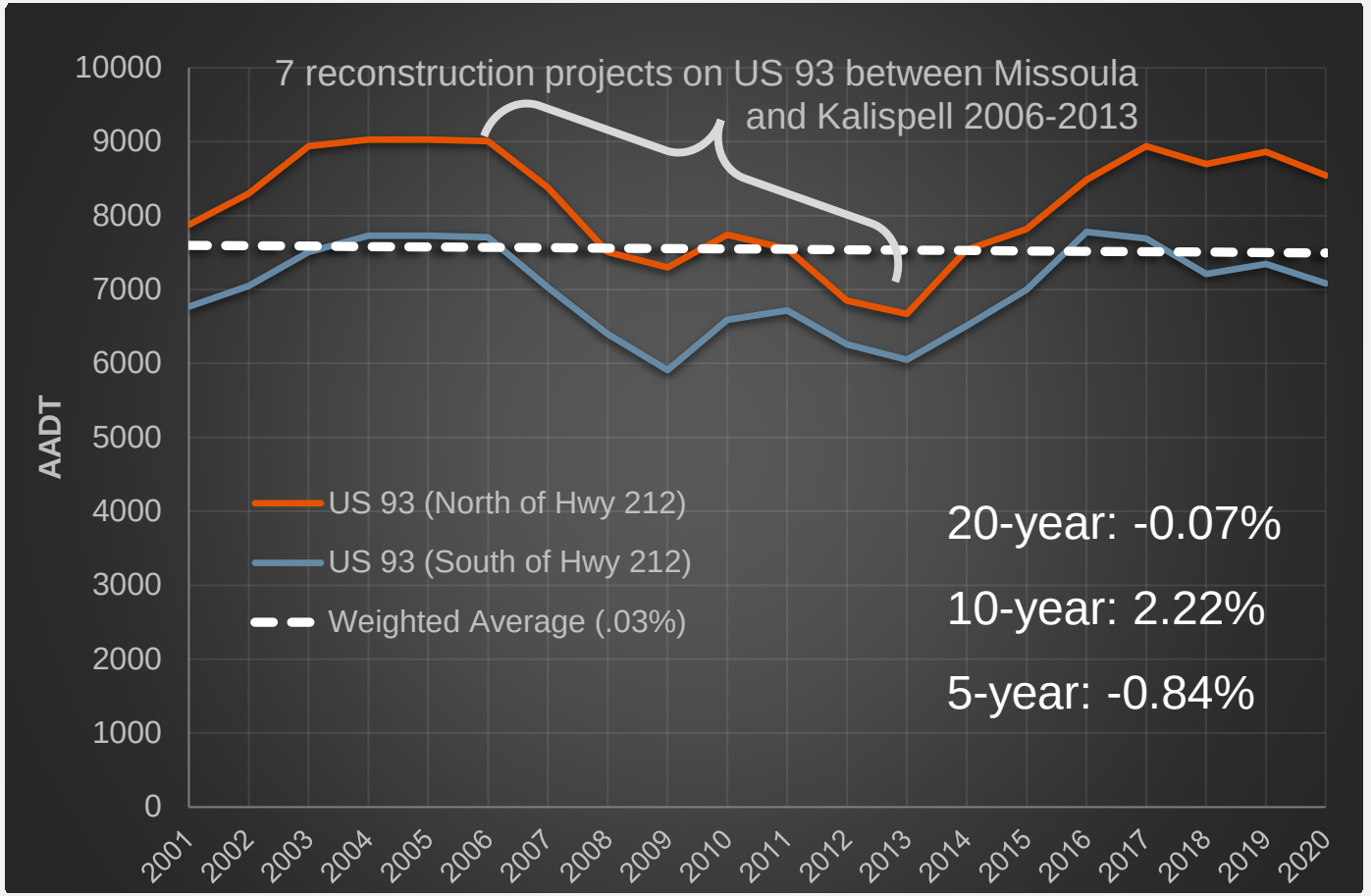
- Hybrid approach – planning, environmental, and engineering components

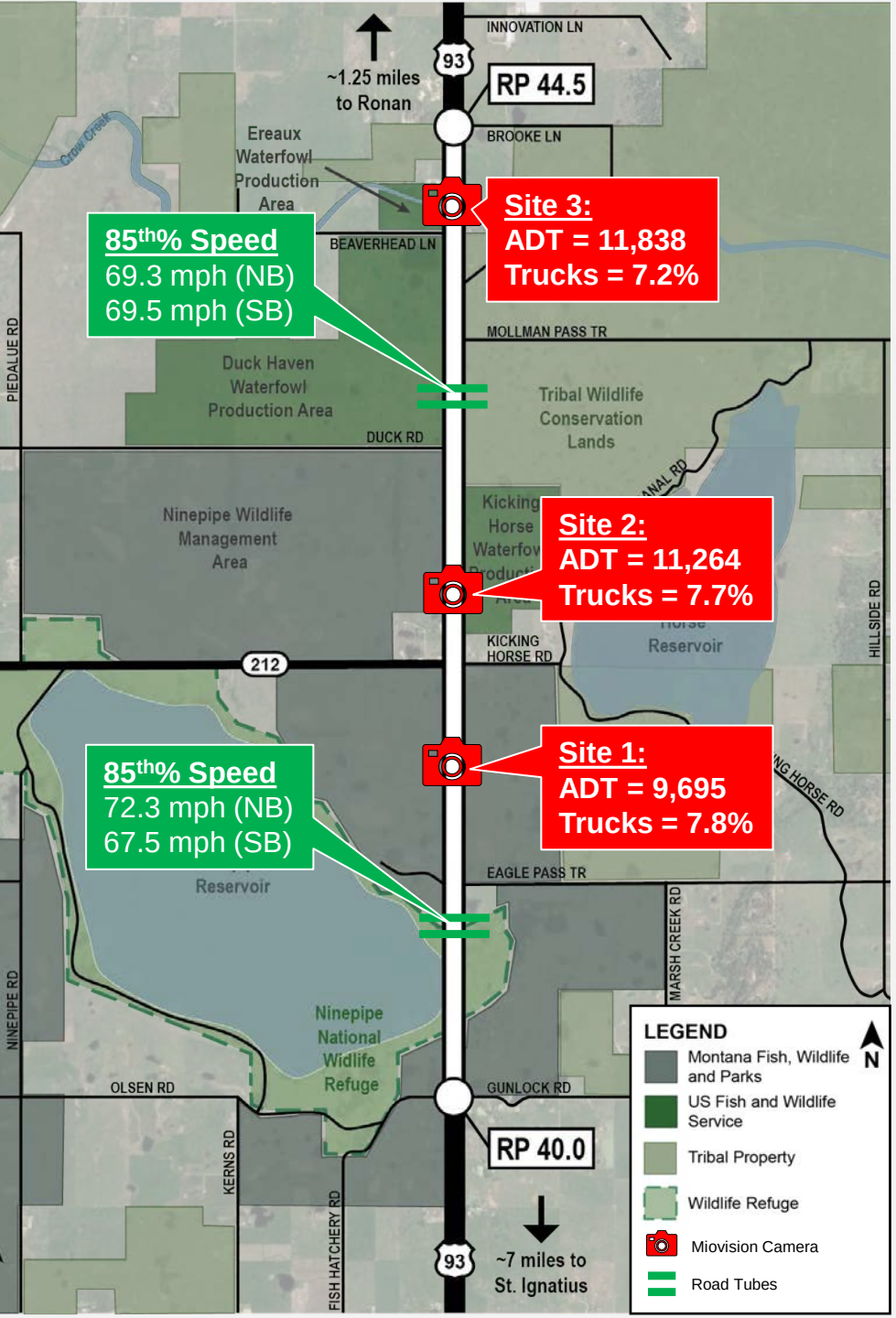
RELEVANT CONDITIONS

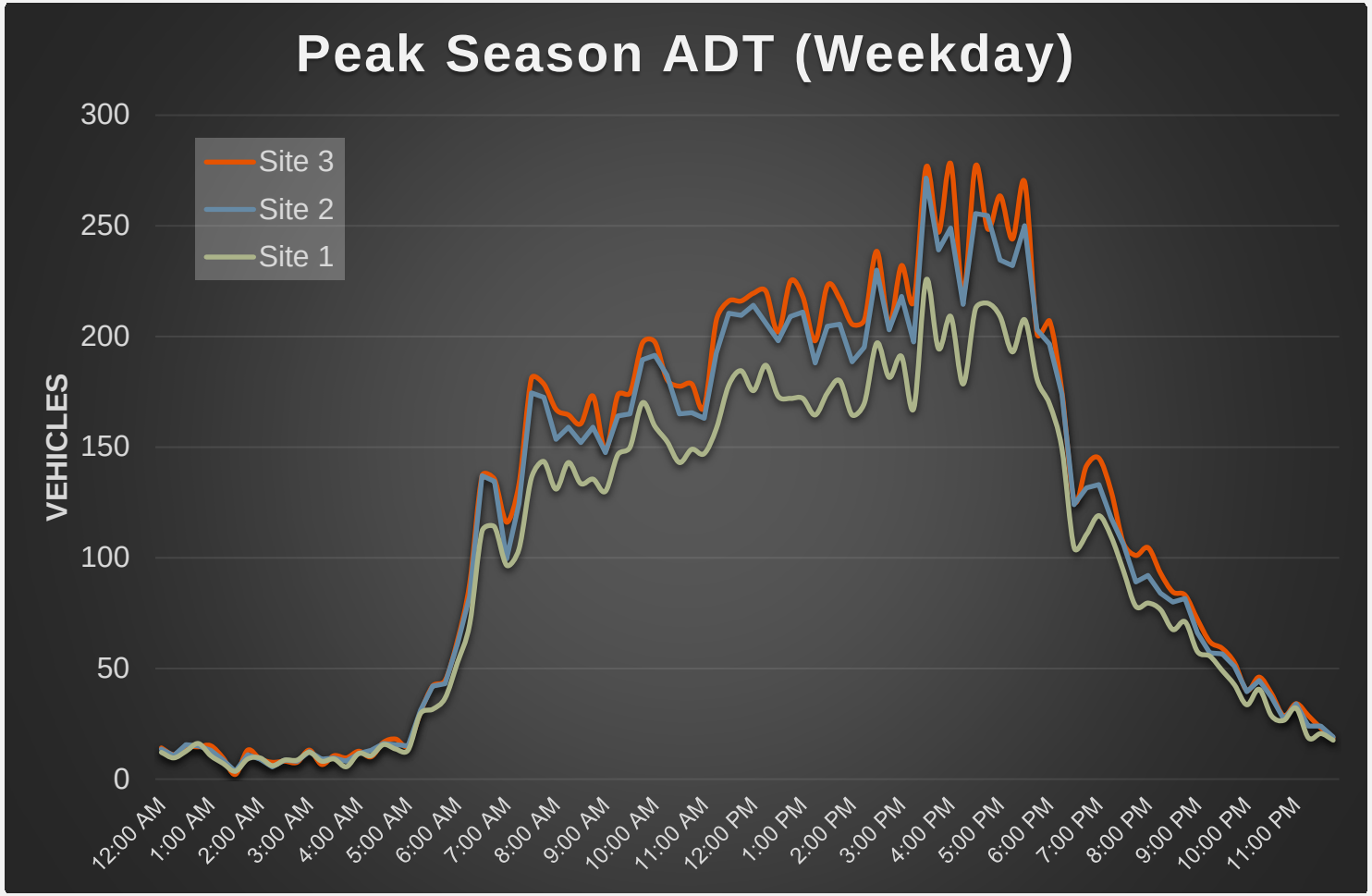


Historic AADT

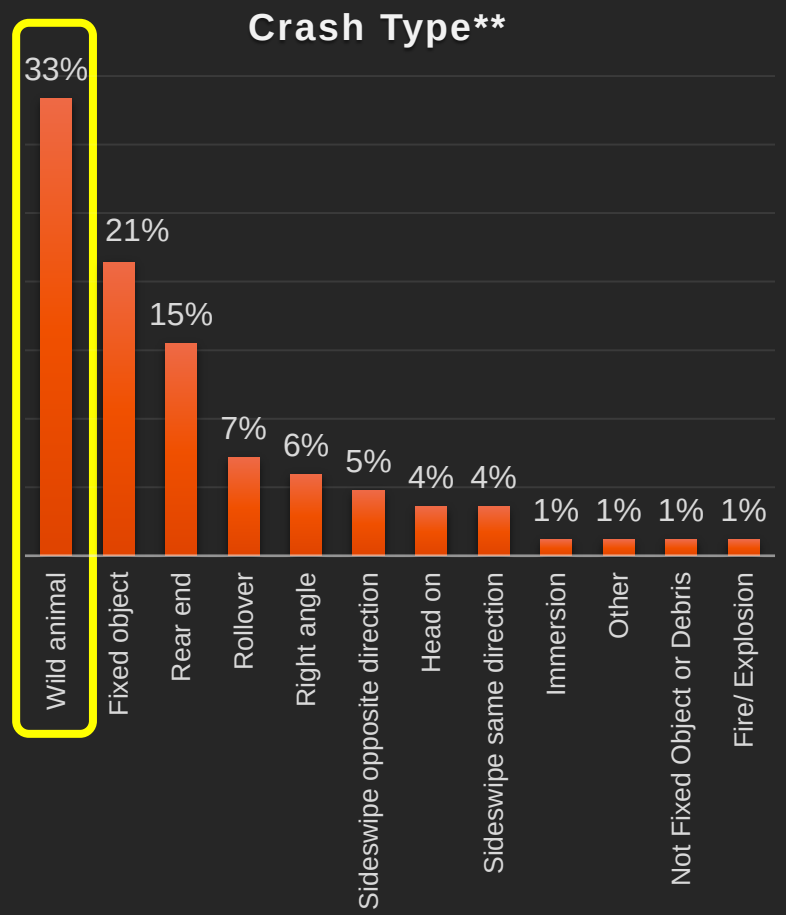


RPA Collected Traffic Data





Safety – *Data Comparison*



2008 SEIS Summary*

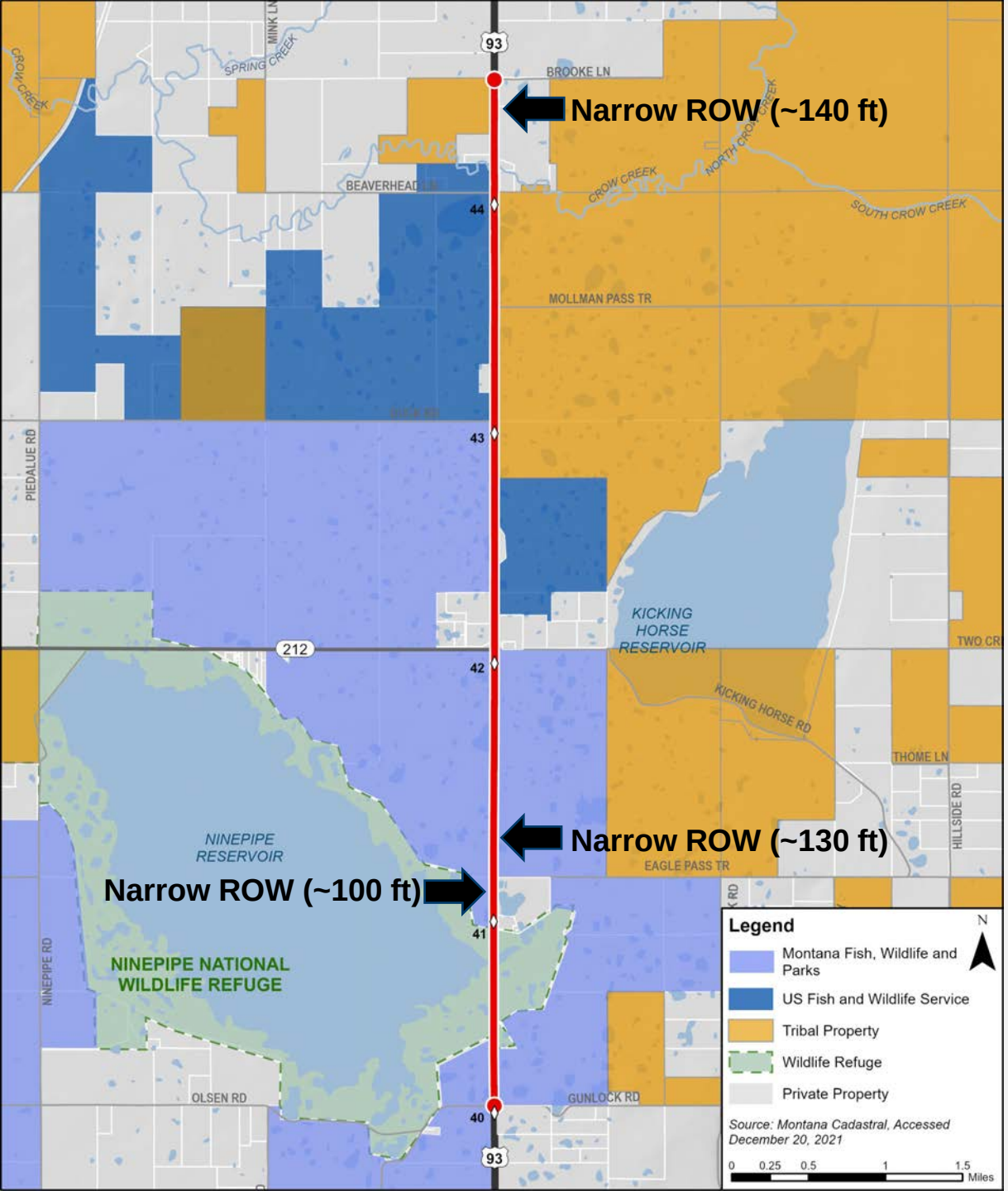
- 5% involve fatalities
- 2.8 crashes per mile per year
- 0.98 crashes per million vehicle miles of travel
- 6% head on
- 2.86 severity rate
- 33% at or related to intersections/driveways
- 0% wild animal crashes *(however, 43% "not stated")*

**Data includes rural segments of US 93 between Evaro and Polson (1995 – 2003)*

Updated Crash Data Review**

- 1% fatal (6% severe)
- 4.3 crashes per mile per year
- 1.44 crashes per million vehicle miles of travel
- 3.6% head on
- 2.27 severity rate
- 17% at or related to intersections/driveways
- 33% wild animal crashes

***Source: MDT Traffic and Safety Bureau (2015 – 2019)*

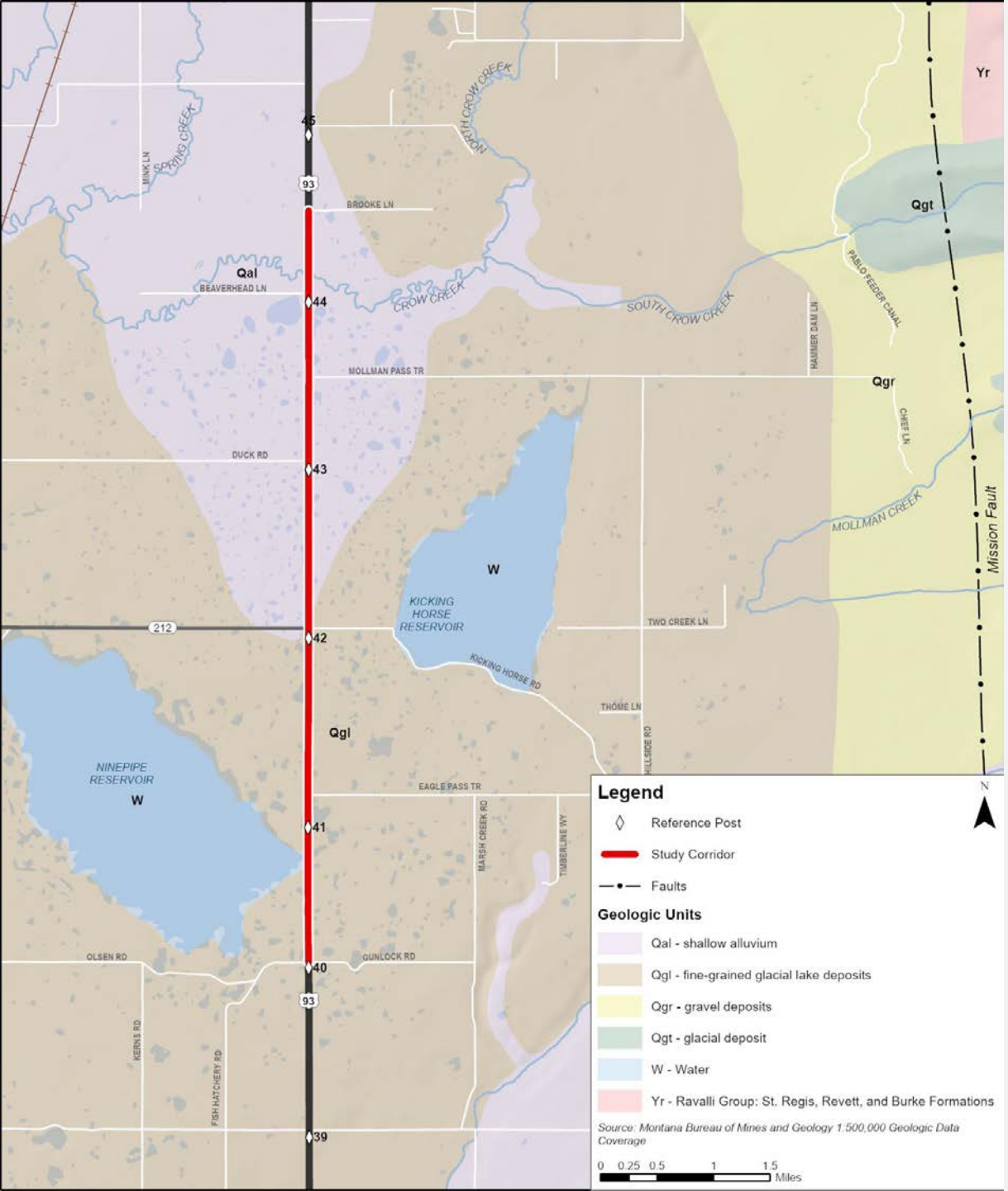


Land Use/Ownership

- Mostly wildlife conservation lands
- 12 private landowners

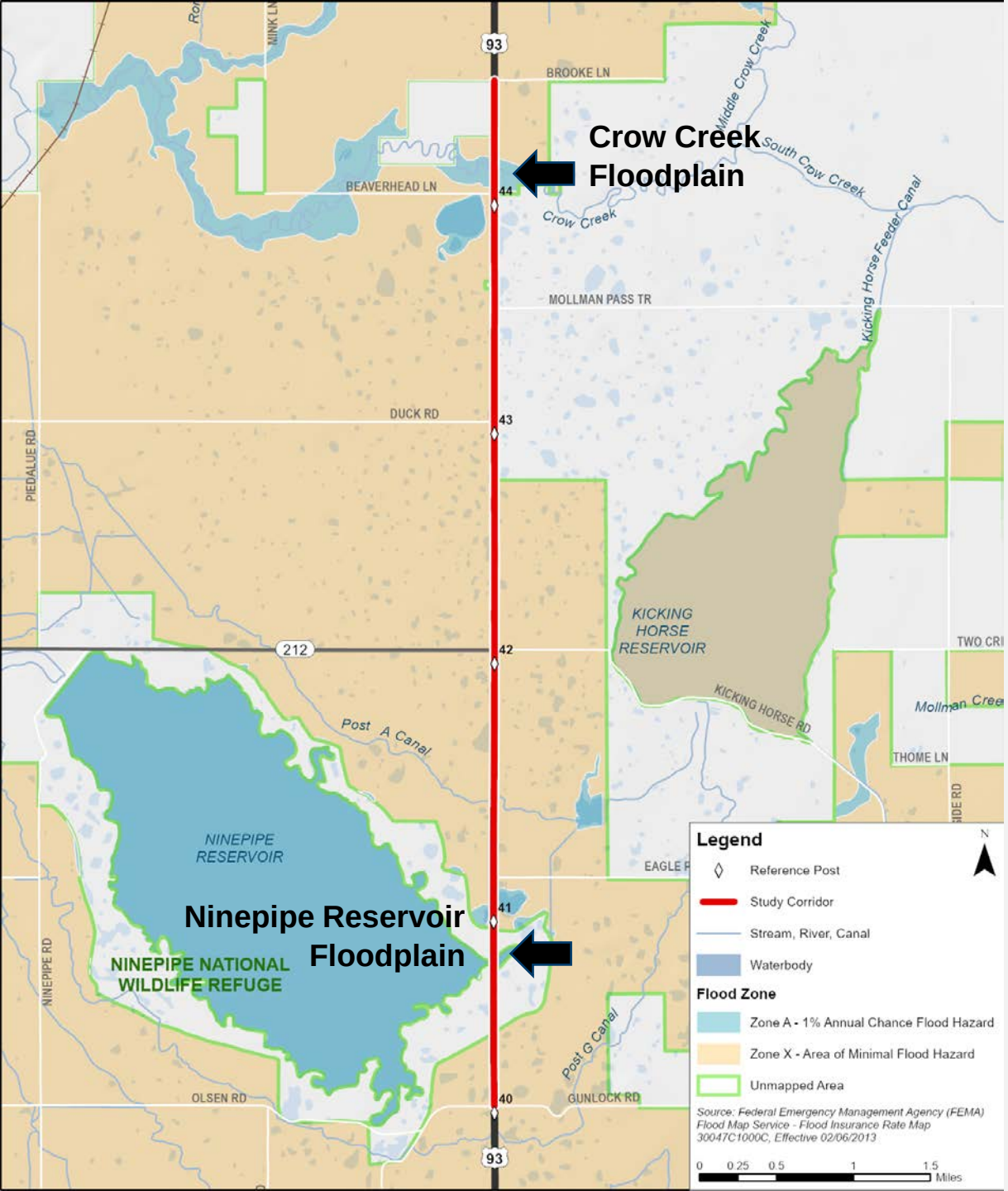
Right-of-Way

- Desired Minimum: 160 feet
- Existing: mostly 160 feet, some narrower areas
  - Ninepipes Lodge (100’-130’)
  - Crow Creek (140’)



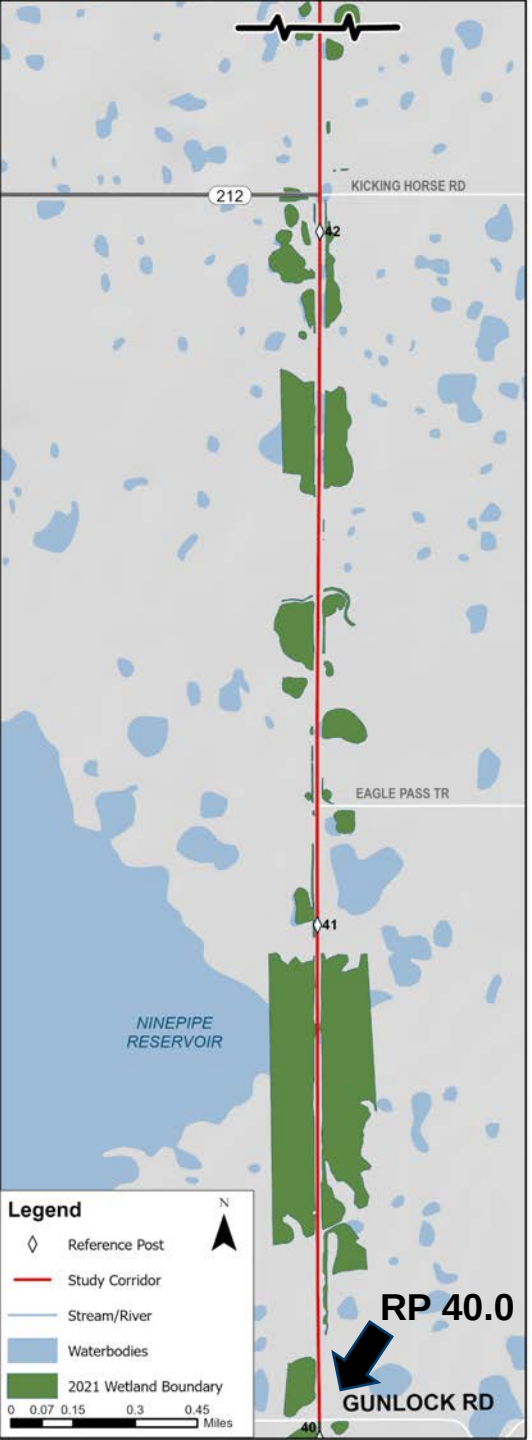
Soils & Geotechnical Conditions

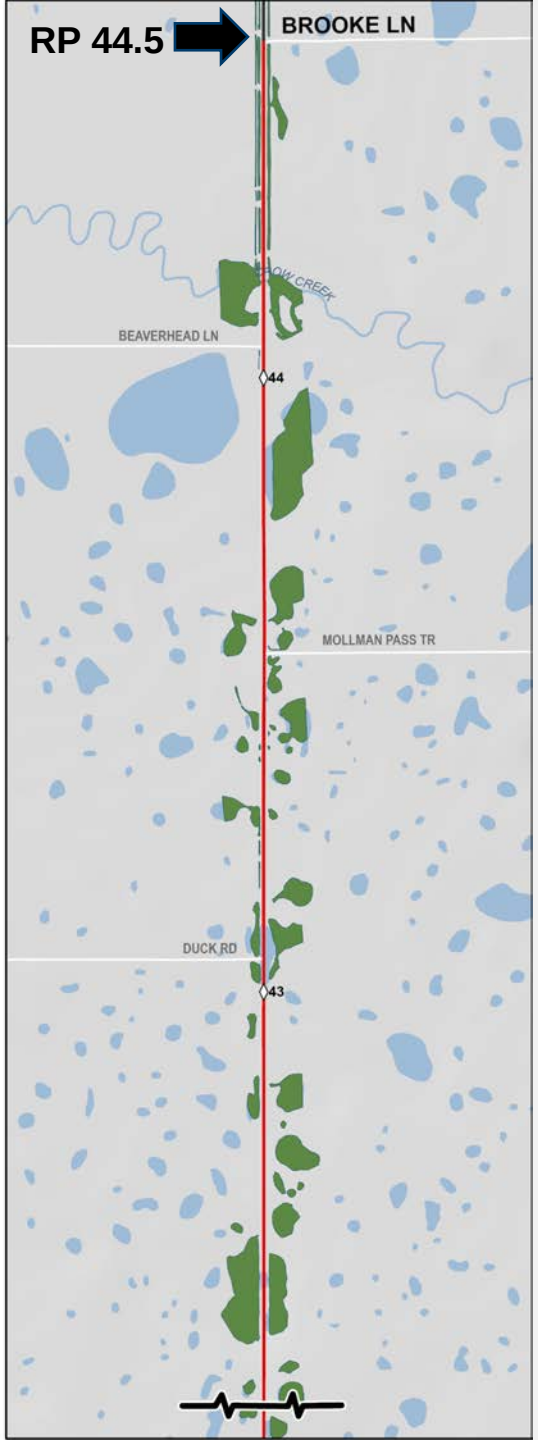
- Primarily soft clays, silts, and sands.
- Dense bearing layers generally at ~50 to 80 feet below ground or not encountered.
- Minor liquefaction expected in all locations analyzed.
- Groundwater at 10-15 feet below ground.
- No evidence of artesian conditions.



Floodplains

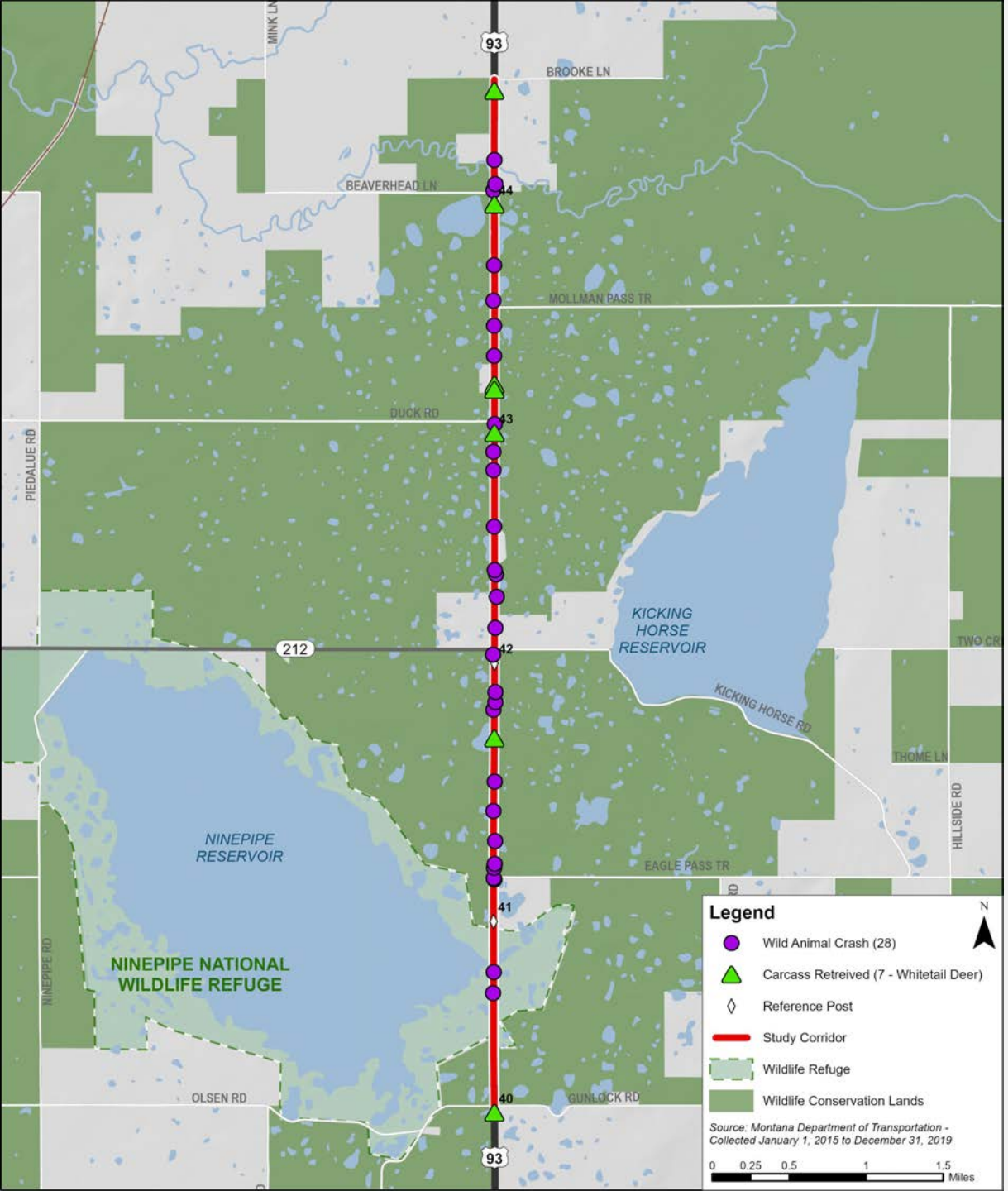
- At **Ninepipe Reservoir**, ~**200 feet** of US 93 crosses 100-year floodplain (reduction of 150 feet from SEIS).
- At **Crow Creek**, ~**675 feet** of US 93 crosses 100-year floodplain (increase of 125 feet from SEIS).
- Existing culverts at Crow Creek may be inadequate to convey high water flows.





Wetlands

- 3 new wetlands (~0.09 acre) delineated at RP 42.0, RP 43.2, and RP 44.0.
- Of 82 wetlands identified in SEIS, minor changes for 26 wetlands, 56 unchanged.
- 3 wetlands were reclassified from Category III to Category IV (changes to the scoring methodology).
- No changes to preliminary jurisdictional status.



Wildlife

- Species of Concern
  - Forster's tern (nesting reporting within 0.25 mile)
  - Bald eagle (wintering individuals near RP 41.5).
- Deer cross throughout corridor, most represented in carcass data.
- Concentrated wildlife movement near core pothole area (RP 39.4 to 44.1) and Crow Creek riparian corridor (RP 44.2).
- Large numbers of birds and turtles struck near core pothole area.
- High grizzly bears use documented in Crow Creek riparian area and area between Ninepipe and Kicking Horse reservoirs.
- Grizzly bear mortalities from vehicle collisions have increased significantly since 2000 and have notably accelerated since 2010.

Cultural Resources

- **Previously Identified Resources**
  - Flathead Indian Irrigation Project: multiple canals crossing or paralleling US 93.
  - Stagecoach Route: follows southwest edge of the Ninepipe Reservoir before crossing US 93 and continuing in a northeast direction through USFWS management lands
  - Ninepipe Cultural Property: entire Ninepipe segment adjacent to US 93, considered a traditional cultural property due to unique qualities as an environmentally rich area of kettle lakes and glacial wetlands.
- **Government-to-Government Consultation**
  - MDT, FHWA, and CSKT
- **Field Tours – April 2022**
  - CSKT Preservation Office & Culture Committees

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

Relevant Conditions

- Review and Finalize
  - Relevant Conditions Report available at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93ninepipe/documents.aspx

Feasibility Evaluation

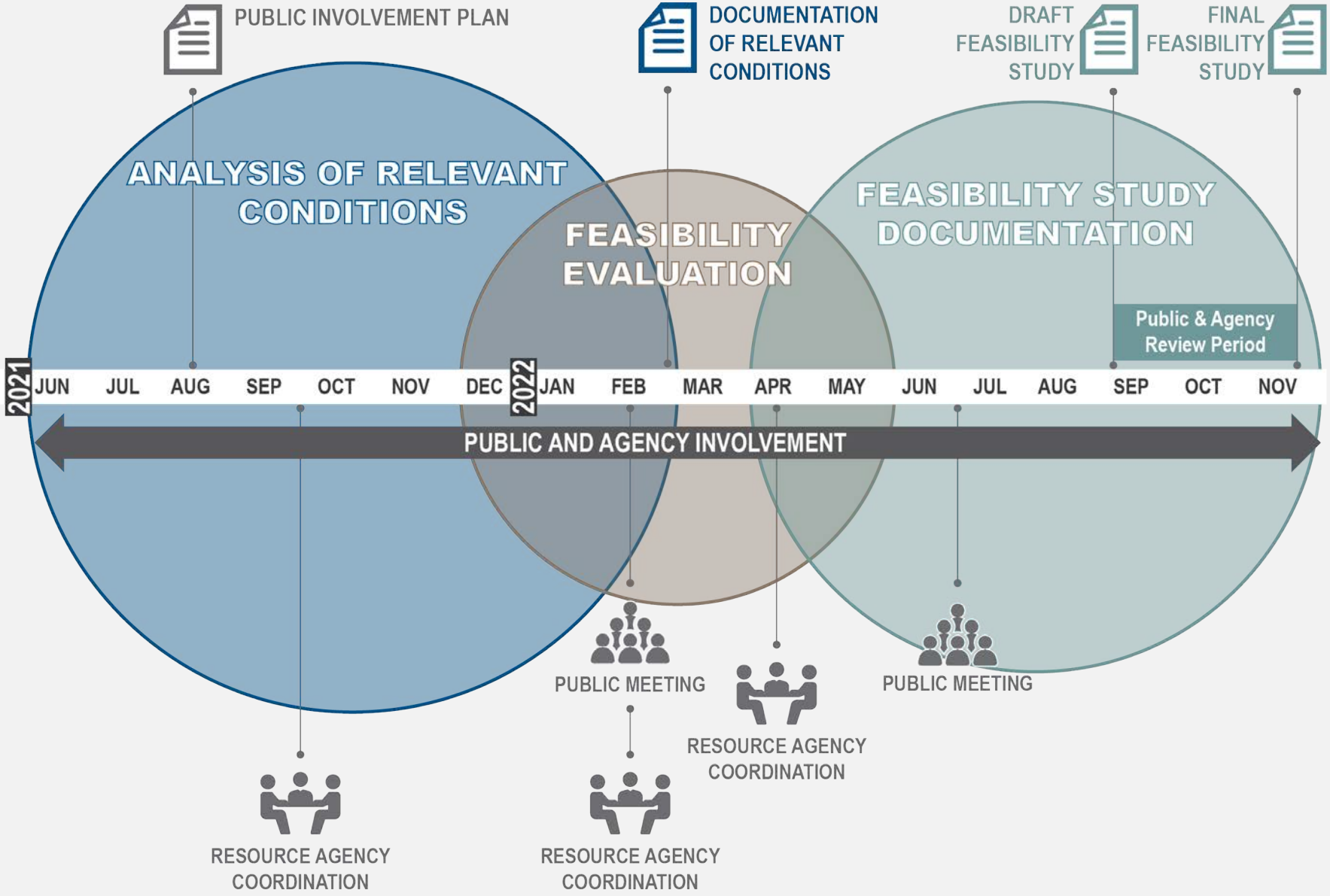
- Confirm
  - Roadway and Path Alignment
  - Structures and Wildlife Crossing Accommodations
- Estimate Impacts & Costs
- Identify Screening Criteria
- Evaluate Preferred Alternative & Modifications

Upcoming Outreach

Agency Meeting:
April 13, 2022

Cultural Field Tours:
April 2022

Public Outreach:
Summer 2022



NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

OPEN DISCUSSION

Questions?

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

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Vicki Crnich

Montana Department of Transportation

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www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/US93Ninepipe

CSKT Tribal Council Presentation

December 1, 2022

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

Meeting Agenda

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

- **Background Overview**
  - **History of Study Area**
  - **Planning Process**
  - **Previous Outreach & What We Heard**
- **Corridor Options and Evaluation**
- **Next Steps**
- **Open Discussion**

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

BACKGROUND

History of Study Area

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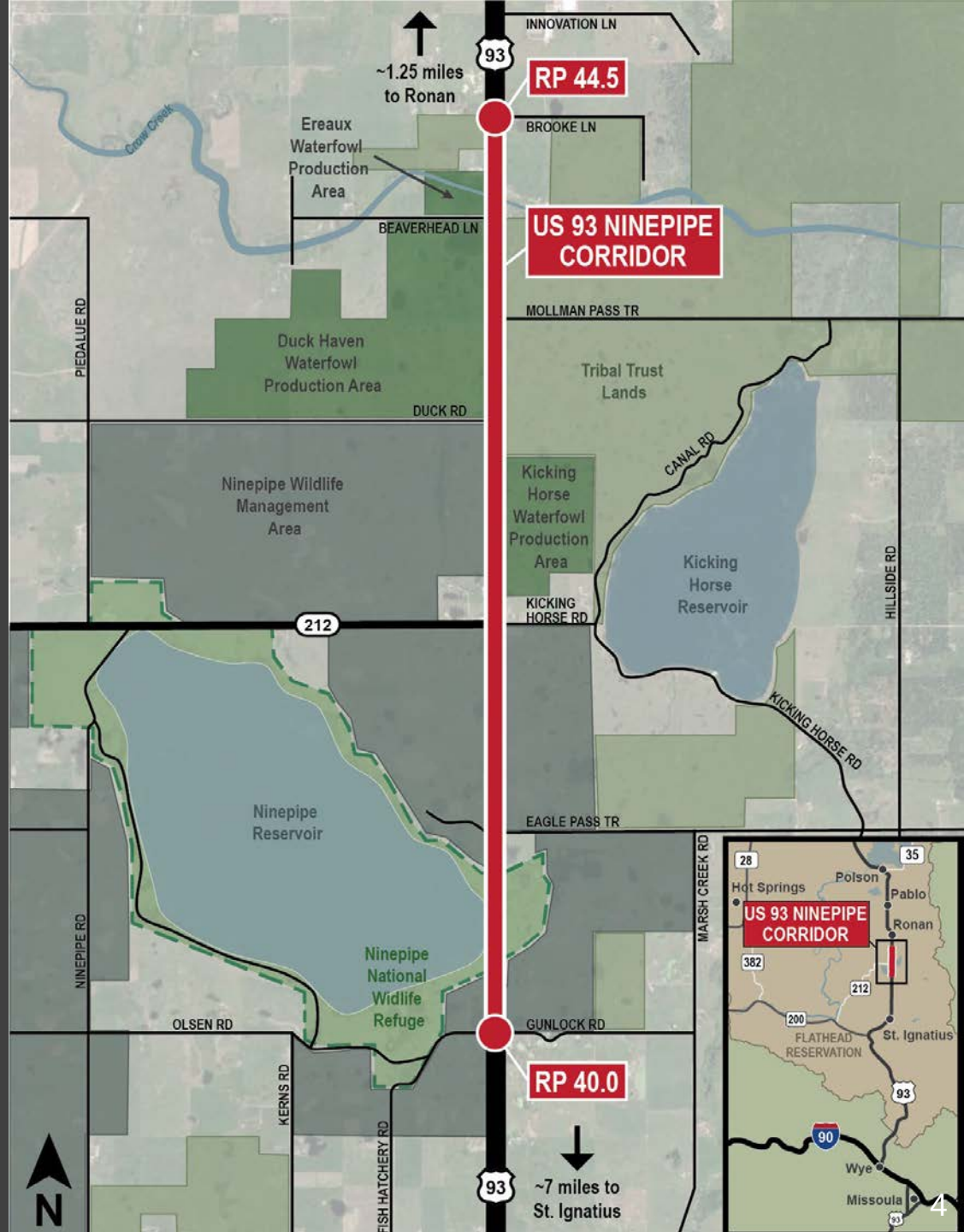
- Complications and Lessons Learned



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- Two-lane undivided roadway with widened shoulders
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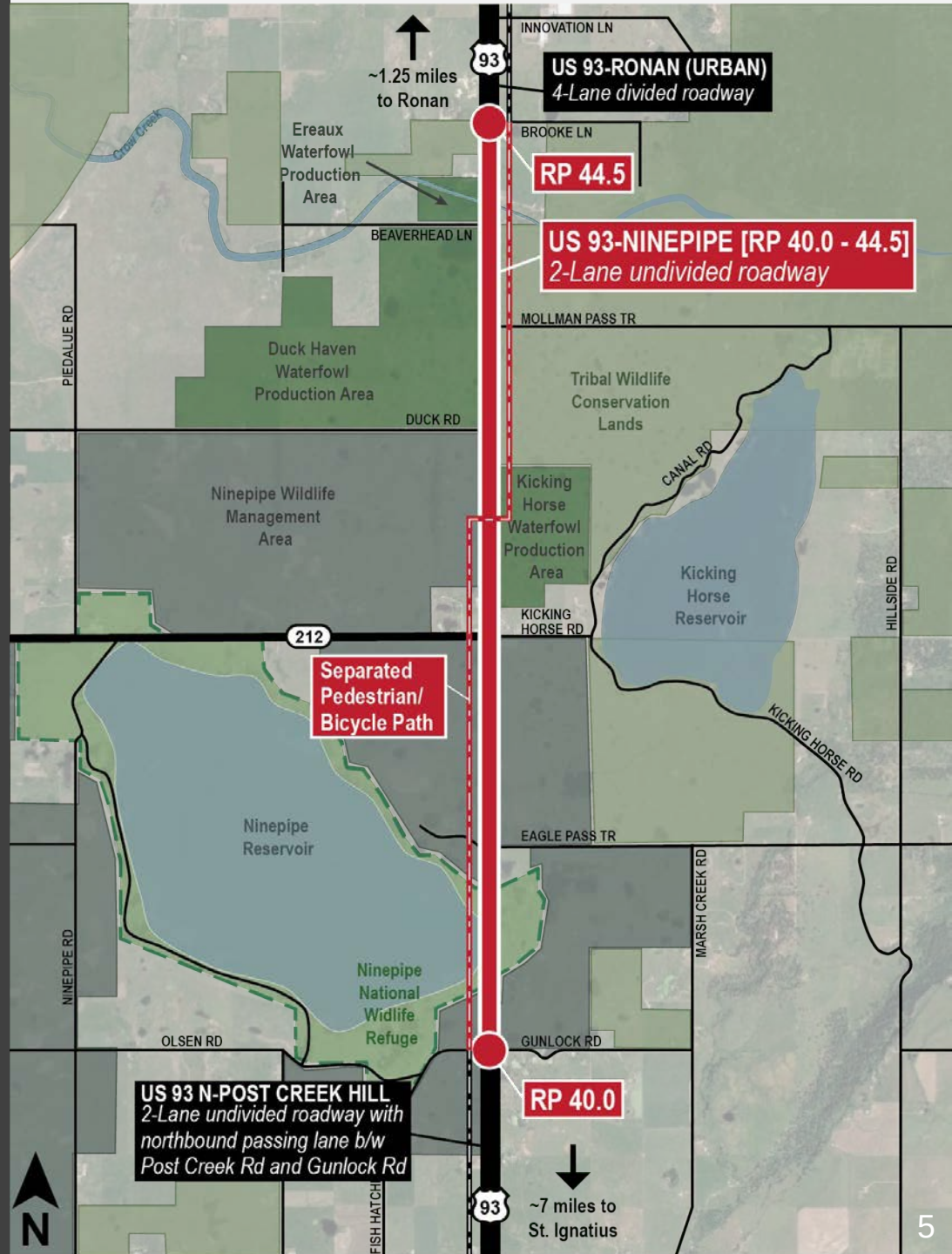
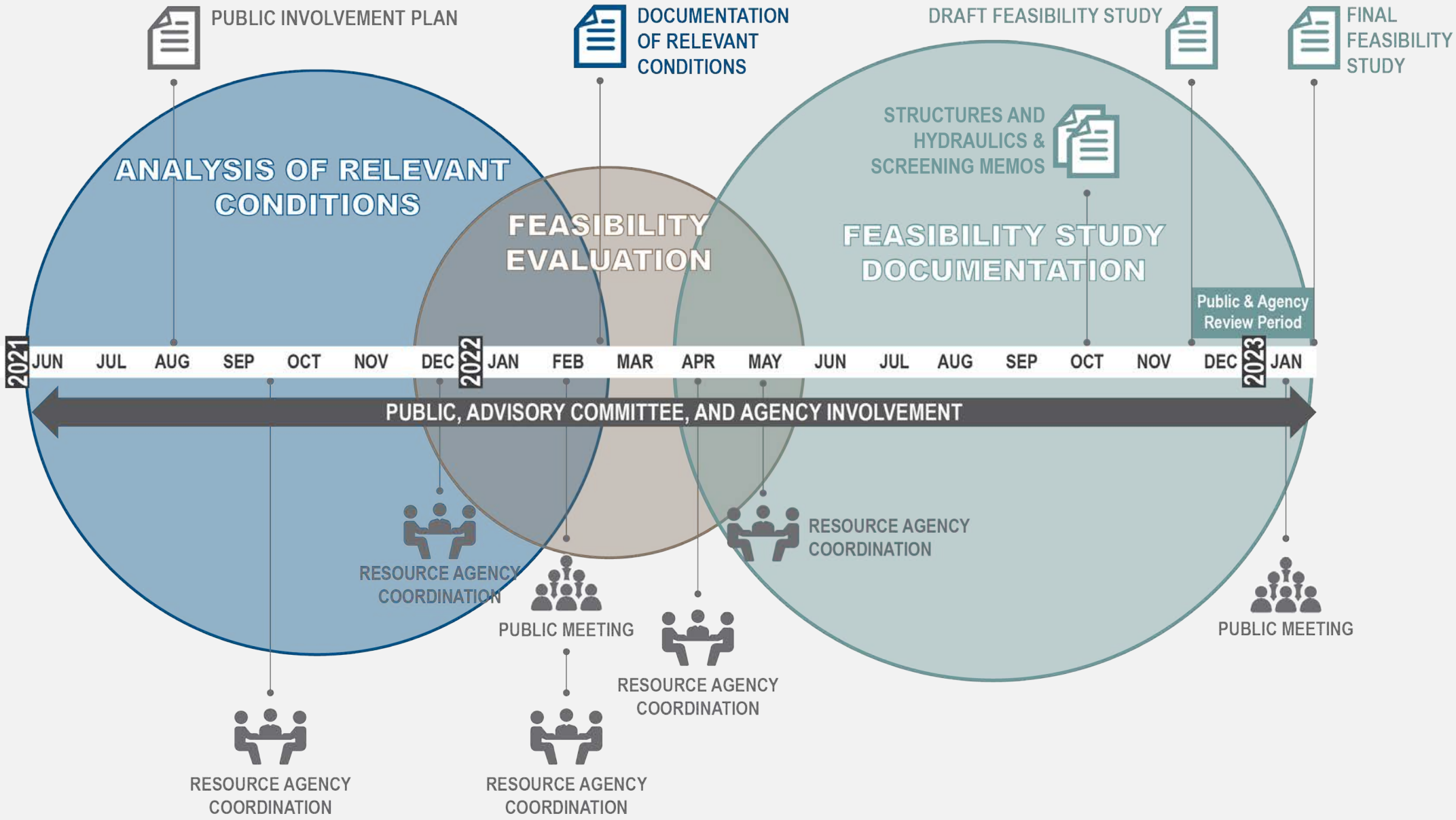


Planning Process



Previous Outreach

Advisory Committee

- June 2021
- August 2021
- October 2021
- January 2022
- February 2022
- April 2022
- August 2022
- October 2022
- November 2022

Resource Agencies

Virtual

- September 2021
- December 2021
- February 2022
- April 2022

Field Review

- May 2022

Tribal Council

- September 2021
- March 2022
- *December 2022*

Public Outreach

- September 2021
- February 2022
- *January 2023*

Public

- Minimize impacts to adjacent properties
- Consider access for residents and businesses
- Identify potential funding sources
- Ensure adequate coordination with agencies and stakeholders
- Consider how improvements will connect with other projects (such as Post Creek Hill and Eagle Pass Trail)

Resource Agencies

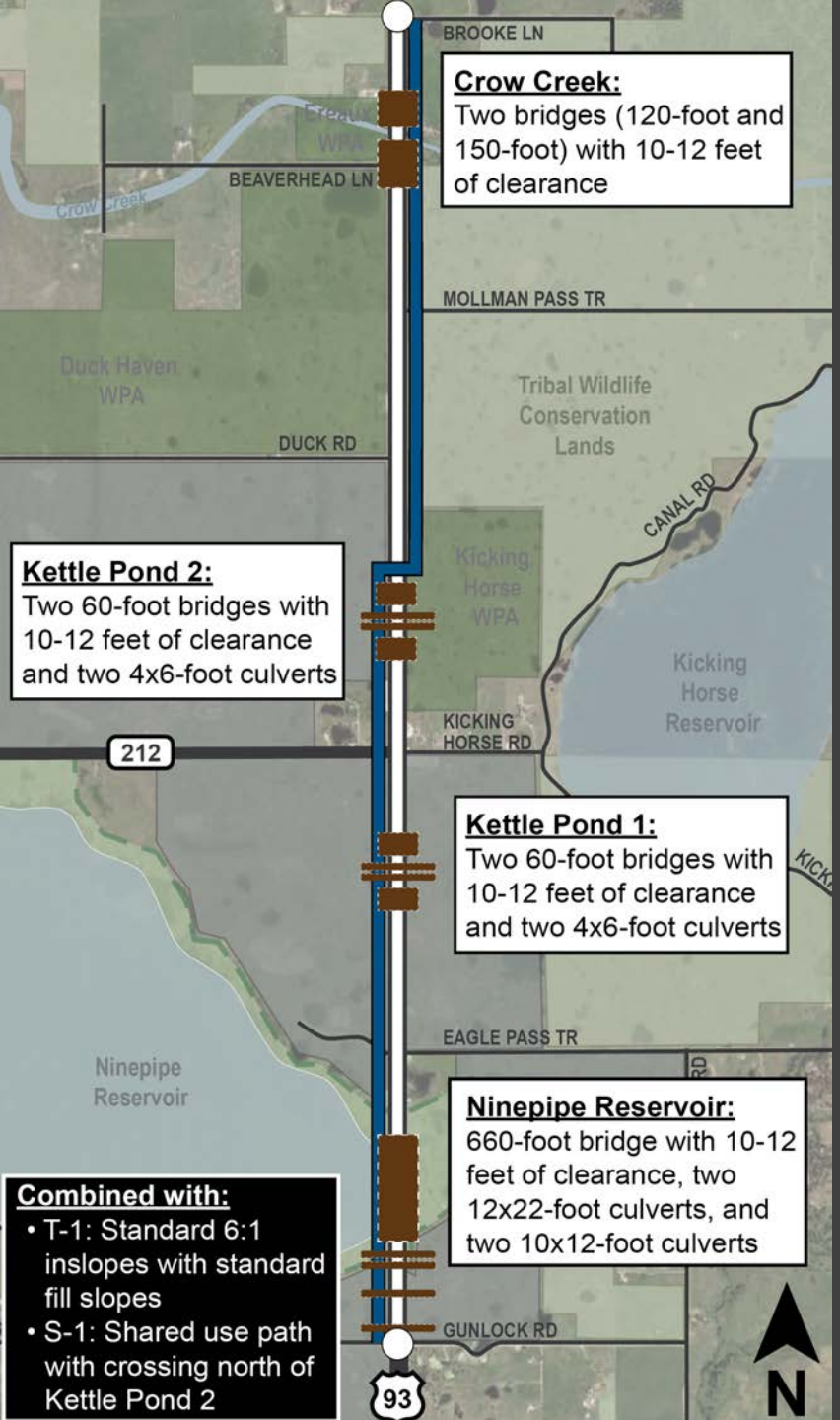
- Size crossing structures according to targeted species known to cross the highway in each location
- Ensure adequate vertical clearance and dry passage at crossing structures to encourage use by grizzly bears and large mammals
- Consider the cultural and traditional elements of the landscape
- Restore the corridor by improving connectivity across the highway

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

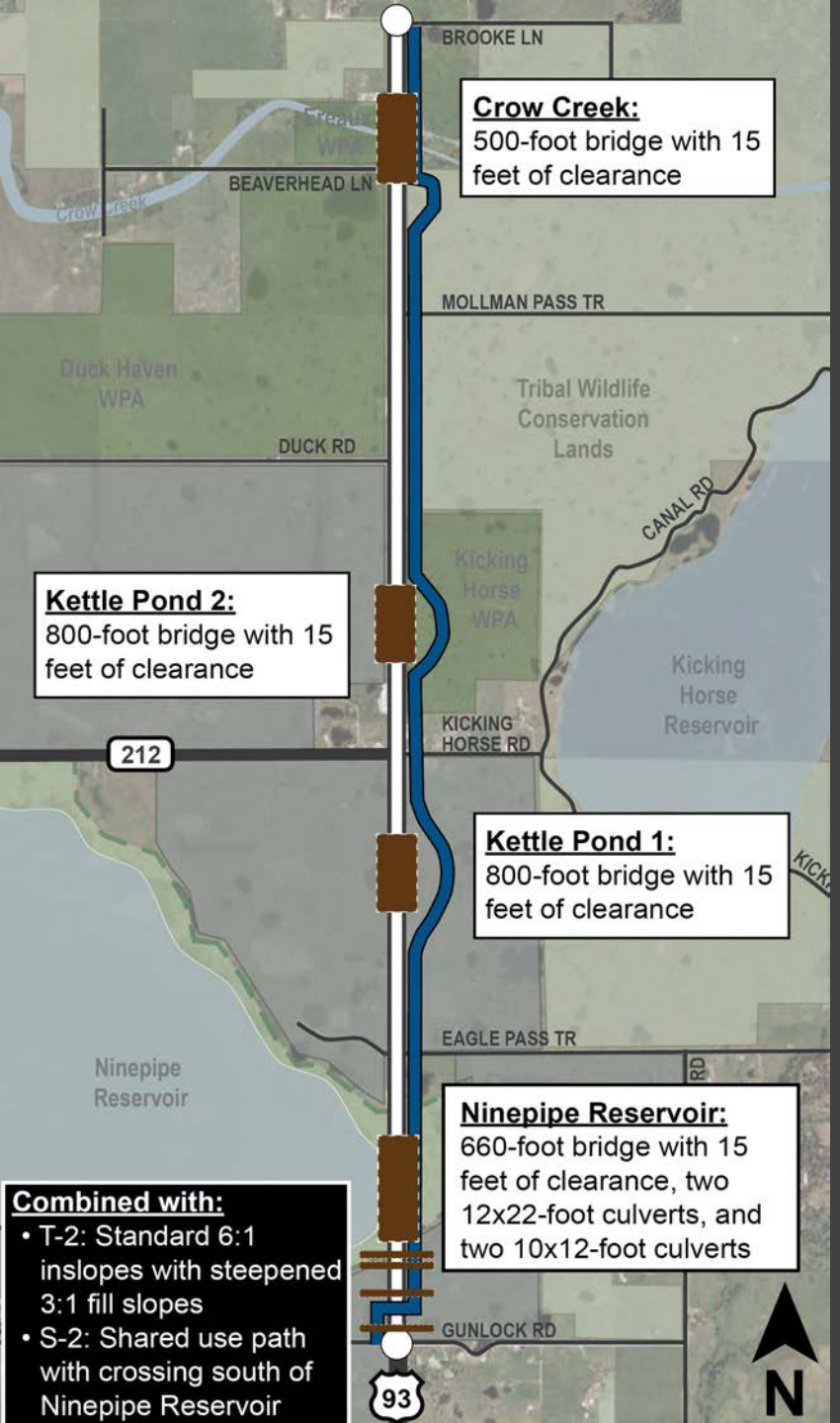
CORRIDOR OPTIONS

Corridor Options

C-1: SEIS Preferred



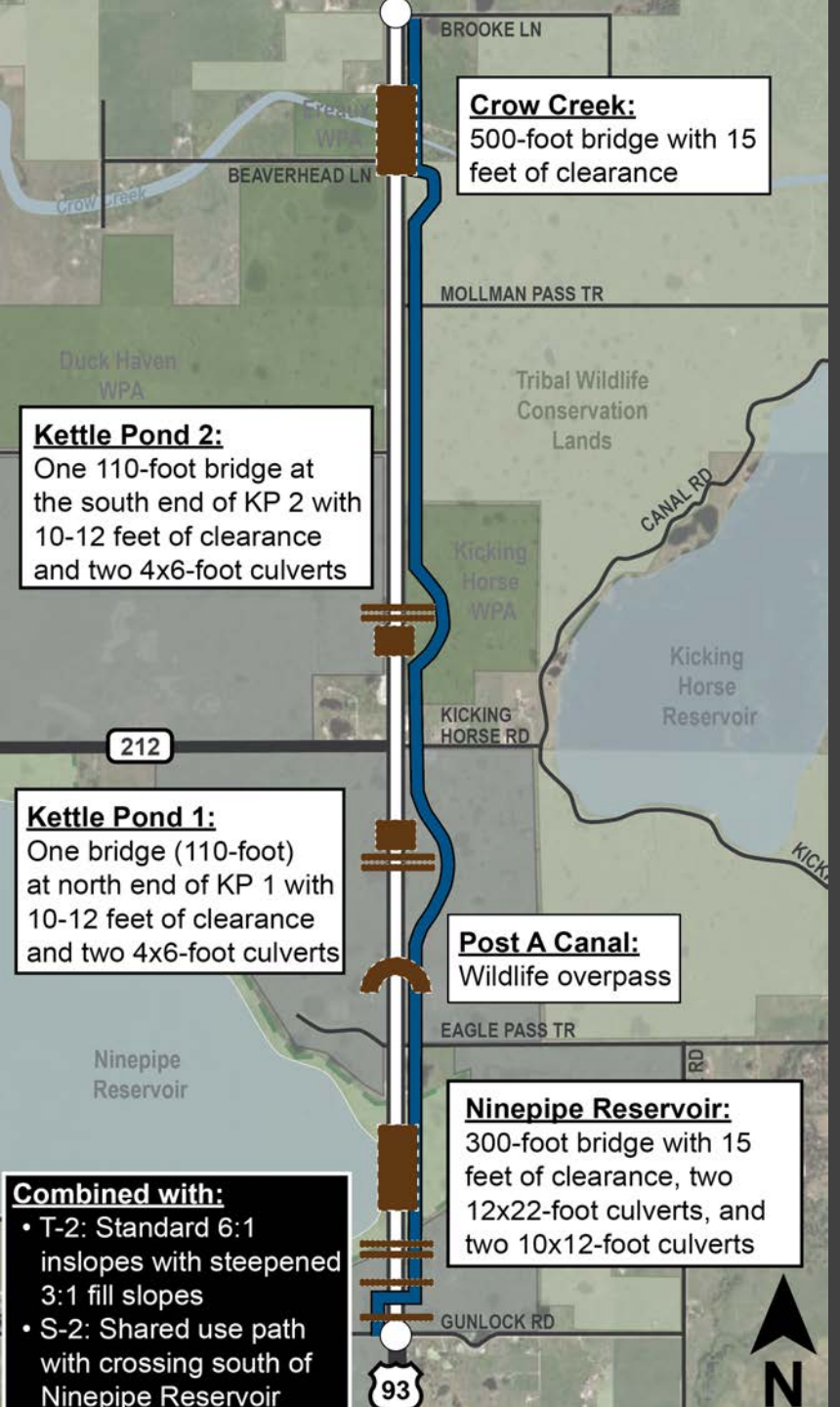
Location	Treatment
Crow Creek	Two bridges (120-foot and 150-foot) with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 2	Two 60-foot bridges with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance, two 4x6 culverts
Kettle Pond 1	Two 60-foot bridges with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance, two 4x6 culverts
Ninepipe Reservoir	Single 660-foot bridge with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance, two 12x22 culverts, two 10x12 culverts



Corridor Options

C-2: Enlarged Crossings

Location	Treatment
Crow Creek	Single 500-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 2	Single 800-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 1	Single 800-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Ninepipe Reservoir	Single 660-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance, two 12x22 culverts, two 10x12 culverts



Corridor Options

C-3: Wildlife Overpass

Location	Treatment
Crow Creek	Single 500-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 2	One 110-foot bridge with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance
Kettle Pond 1	One 110-foot bridge with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance
Post A Canal	Wildlife overpass
Ninepipe Reservoir	Single 300-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance, two 12x22 culverts, two 10x12 culverts

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

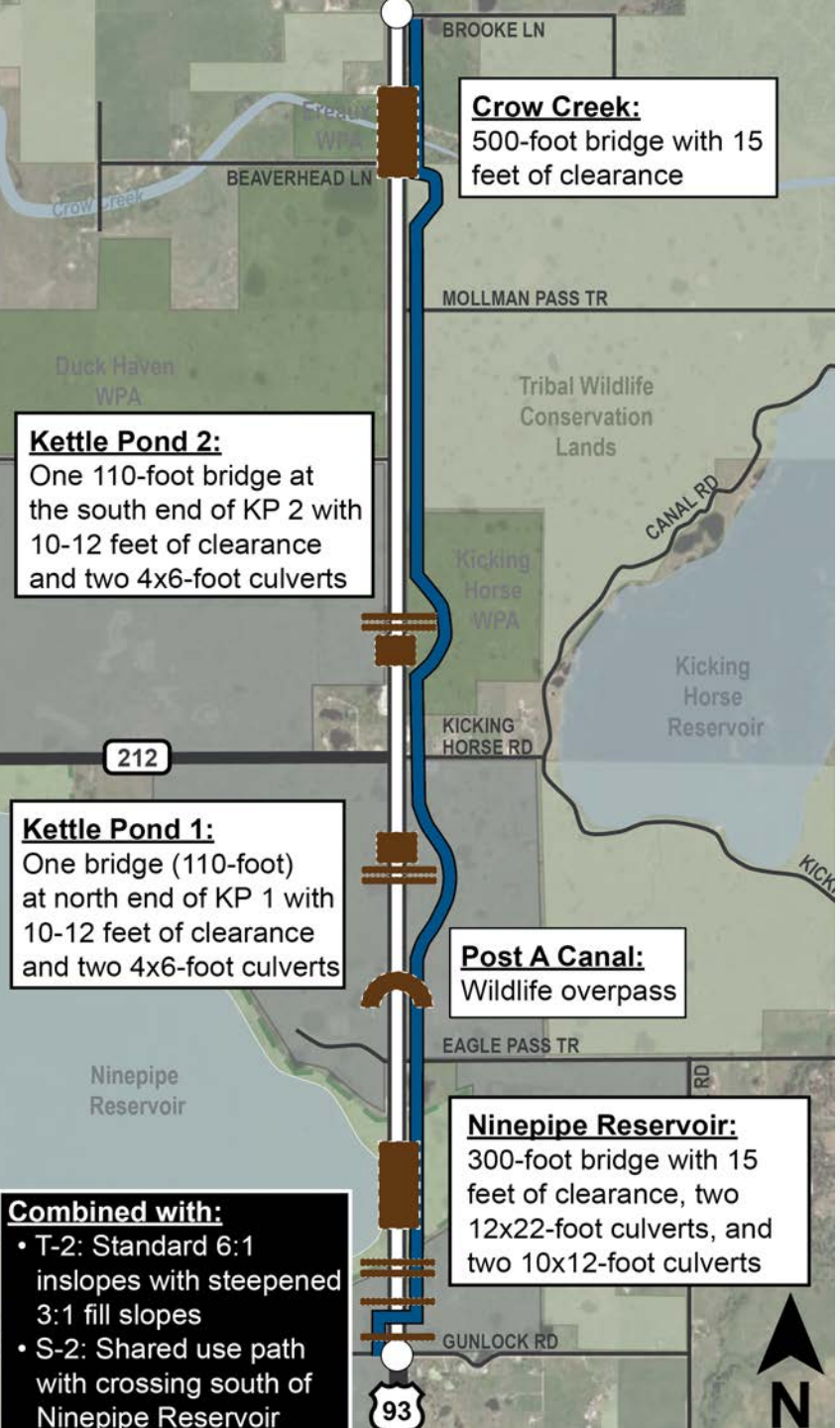
EVALUATION

Screening Criteria

- **Transportation**
- **Ecological Environment**
- **Fish and Wildlife**
- **Human Environment**
- **Constructability**
- **Cost**

Screening Summary

Screening Criteria		Sub-Criteria		Points	C-1	C-2	C-3
1	Transportation	1a.	Operations	5	3	4	4
		1b.	Safety	5	3	3	4
			Transportation Subtotal	10	6	7	8
2	Ecological Environment	2a.	Hydraulic Performance	5	2	4	3
		2b.	Wetlands	5	2	4	3
		2c.	Surface Water Resources	5	3	4	4
			Ecological Environment Subtotal	15	7	12	10
3	Fish and Wildlife	3a.	Aquatic Accommodations	5	3	3	4
		3b.	Terrestrial Accommodations	5	2	4	5
		3c.	Habitat	5	2	3	4
		3d.	Threatened and Endangered Species	5	2	4	5
			Fish and Wildlife Subtotal	20	9	14	18
4	Human Environment	4a.	Cultural and Recreational Resources	5	3	4	4
		4b.	Visual Quality	5	3	2	2
		4c.	Adjacent Properties	5	1	2	2
			Human Environment Subtotal	15	7	8	8
5	Constructability	5a.	Geotechnical Considerations	5	4	2	3
		5b.	Construction Feasibility	5	3	2	3
		5c.	Construction Impacts	5	3	2	3
		5d.	Construction Requirements	5	2	3	3
			Constructability Subtotal	20	12	9	12
6	Cost	6a.	Cost of Improvements	5	3	1	3
		6b.	Maintenance Needs/Cost	5	3	2	3
		6c.	Cost-Effectiveness	5	2	2	4
		6d.	Fundability	5	3	2	4
			Cost Subtotal	20	11	7	14
			Total Score	100	52	57	70



Preferred Option: C-3

- Typical Section: Steepened fill slopes
- Shared Use Path: Crossing south of Ninepipe Reservoir
- Ninepipe Reservoir: Single 300-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance, 4 culverts
- Post A Canal: Wildlife overpass
- Kettle Pond 1: Single 110-foot bridge with 10 to 12 feet of vertical clearance, 2 culverts
- Kettle Pond 2: Single 110-foot bridge with 10 to 12 feet of vertical clearance, 2 culverts
- Crow Creek: Single 500-foot bridge with 15 feet of vertical clearance

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

- **Feasibility Report Review Period**
  - December 2022/January 2023
  - Will be available at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93ninepipe/documents.aspx
- **Informational Meetings – January 2023**
  - Virtual Meeting
  - In-Person Open House Meeting
- **Address Comments**
- **Finalize Feasibility Study**

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

OPEN DISCUSSION

Questions?

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

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Robert Peccia and Associates

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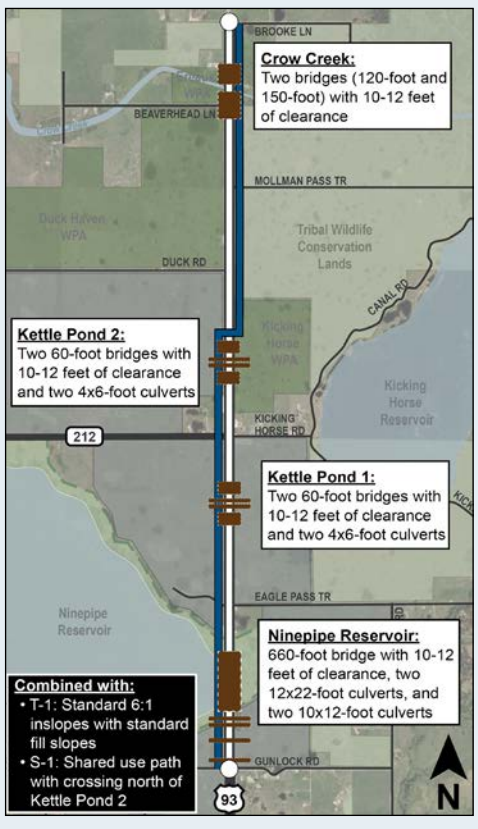
NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY — SCREENING SUMMARY

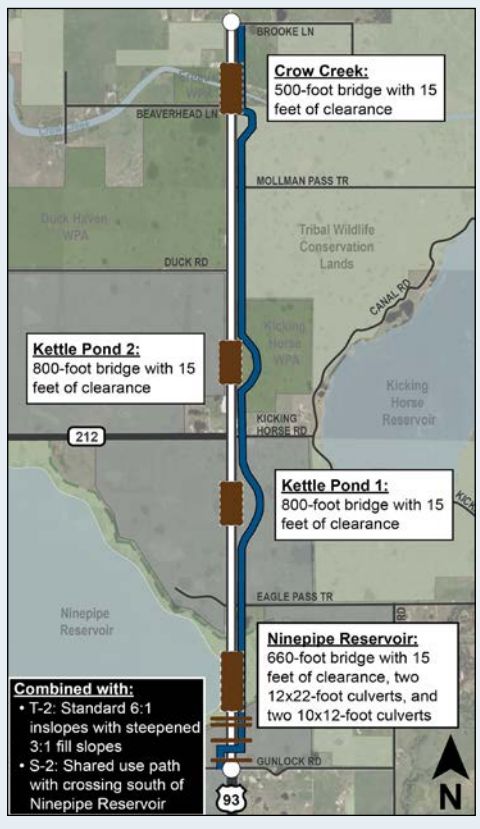
5 — BEST PERFORMANCE

WORST PERFORMANCE — 1

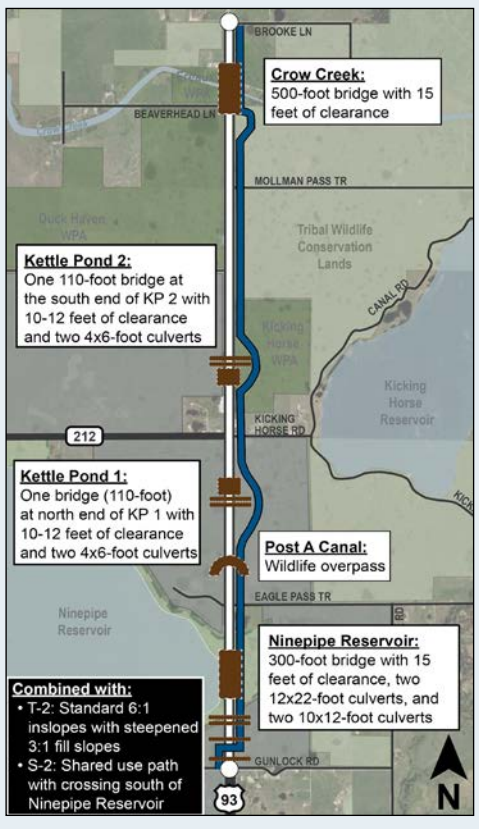
C-1: SEIS Preferred



C-2: Enlarged Crossings



C-3: Wildlife Overpass



SCREENING CRITERION 1: TRANSPORTATION

	C-1: SEIS Preferred		C-2: Enlarged Crossings		C-3: Wildlife Overpass	
1A. OPERATIONS	Marginally improved LOS due to turn bays at intersections. SUP improves non-motorist mobility. SUP alignment connects to planned facilities north and south of corridor.	3	Same as C-1 except SUP alignment may provide better connections to public lands.	4	Same as C-2.	4
1B. SAFETY	Increased shoulder width with rumble strips and flattened slopes help address historic crash trends and provide adequate clear zone and recoverable area. Dedicated SUP improves non-motorist safety. Lower use of wildlife crossing structures expected so less potential for reduction in Wildlife Vehicle Collisions (WVCs).	3	Same as C-1 but steeper 2:1 fill slopes in sensitive areas are non-recoverable. Introduction of guardrail presents an additional roadside barrier. Improved non-motorist safety and comfort due to greater separation from roadway. Improved wildlife crossing options, greater potential for reduction in WVCs.	3	Same as C-2 except more frequent and desirable wildlife crossing options have the potential to further reduce WVCs.	4
SUBTOTAL	6		7		8	

SCREENING CRITERION 2: ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

2A. HYDRAULIC PERFORMANCE	All structures improve connectivity and conveyance capacity. 60-ft kettle pond structures may be too small for adequate hydraulic performance. Two smaller structures at Crow Creek are adequate but not as effective as longer bridges for connectivity and capacity.	2	Structures spanning entire kettle ponds require a greater number of piers in the waterbody but restore full connectivity of ponds. Large, multi-span bridges throughout with higher probability of scour/erosion at in-stream piers.	4	Structures designed to meet minimum hydraulic requirements. Smaller structures at kettle ponds do not restore full connectivity. Fewer bridge spans required, reduces probability of in-stream piers.	3
2B. WETLANDS	Flatter fill slopes and smaller structure openings result in greatest wetland impacts and least potential for wetland restoration at crossing locations.	2	Fewest impacts overall but higher probability of short-term impacts due to larger structures. Greatest benefit at kettle ponds, anticipated wetland restoration at all crossing locations.	4	More impacts than C-2, but less than C-1. Opportunity to restore wetlands at Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek.	3
2C. SURFACE WATER RESOURCES	100% span of Ninepipe Reservoir and 42% span of Crow Creek floodplains. Shorter structures require less fill, less risk of adverse stream or water quality impacts. Stormwater mitigation incorporated.	3	100% span of Ninepipe Reservoir and 78% span of Crow Creek floodplains. Longer structures require more fill and piers in channel, higher risk of adverse stream or water quality impacts. Stormwater mitigation incorporated.	4	100% span of Ninepipe Reservoir and 78% span of Crow Creek floodplains. Smaller structures in some locations compared to C-2, lower risk of adverse stream or water quality impacts. Stormwater mitigation incorporated.	4
SUBTOTAL	7		12		10	

SCREENING CRITERION 3: FISH AND WILDLIFE

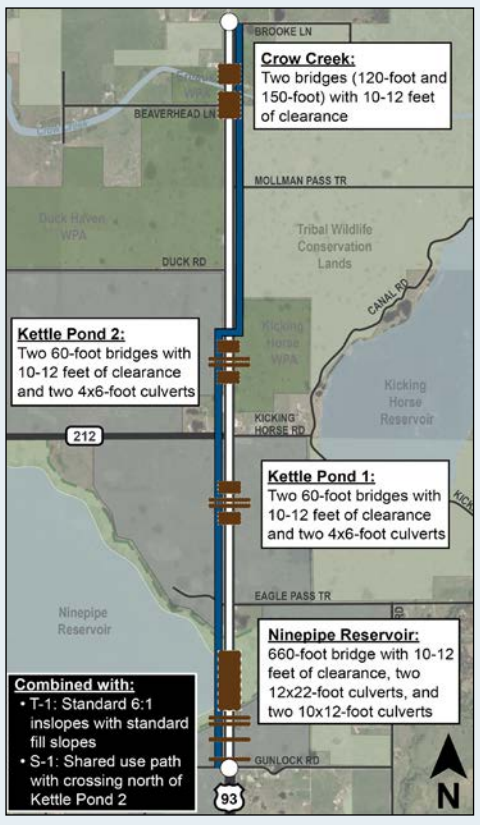
3A. AQUATIC ACCOMMODATIONS	Improvement to passability at hydraulic crossings. Some in-stream construction required, potential risk of fish mortality. SUP adjacent to roadway at major crossings results in wider footprint across waterbodies.	3	Longer structures best restore the hydrologic regime, but at the expense of potential in-stream construction and extensive placement of fill to raise road grade for taller structures. Risk to fish mortality during construction. SUP constructed around sensitive waters.	3	Same as C-2 but potentially less disruption to species in kettle ponds due to smaller structures.	4
3B. TERRESTRIAL ACCOMMODATIONS	Crossings may not be sized appropriately (low clearance, small openings in some locations) for use by larger mammals. Some reduction in wildlife mortality anticipated.	2	Option provides the largest openings at all crossings to meet the wide range of wildlife needs, however, structures over 150 feet may not provide additional benefits. Reduction in wildlife mortality anticipated.	4	Most crossing opportunities, overpass is most attractive to large mammals. Crossings strategically sized to serve the needs of wildlife anticipated to use each crossing. Greatest potential for reduced wildlife mortality.	5
3C. HABITAT	Permanent habitat impacts due to increased roadway width and SUP. Temporary habitat impacts due to in-stream construction and general construction. Improved connectivity at hydraulic crossings.	2	Similar to C-1 but SUP alignment around kettle ponds avoids aquatic habitat while potentially introducing a new barrier if fencing is extended around path. Larger structures provide greater ability to restore habitat connectivity.	3	Similar to C-2 but overpass provides best habitat connectivity for mammals. Smaller kettle pond structures provide less aquatic habitat connectivity but assumed to be adequate for anticipated use.	4
3D. THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES	Underpasses not tall enough to be attractive for grizzly bear crossings, low use anticipated. Bears won't use wet crossings. Minimal improvement to habitat connectivity. Minimal reduction in mortality expected.	2	Larger crossings at Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek provide most attractive grizzly bear crossings and ability to connect habitat. Reduction in mortality anticipated.	4	Overpass combined with appropriately sized underpasses expected to be most effective for grizzly bear passage and reduced mortality. Overpass provides best grizzly bear habitat connectivity.	5
SUBTOTAL	9		14		18	

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY — SCREENING SUMMARY

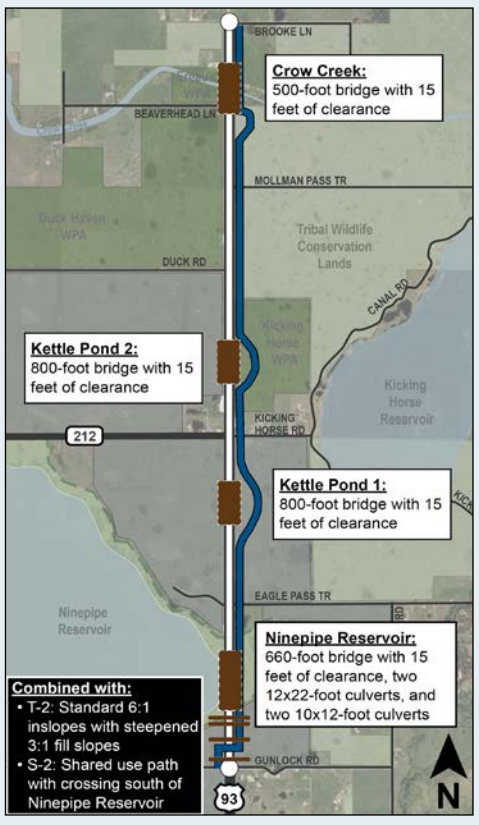
5 — BEST PERFORMANCE

1 — WORST PERFORMANCE

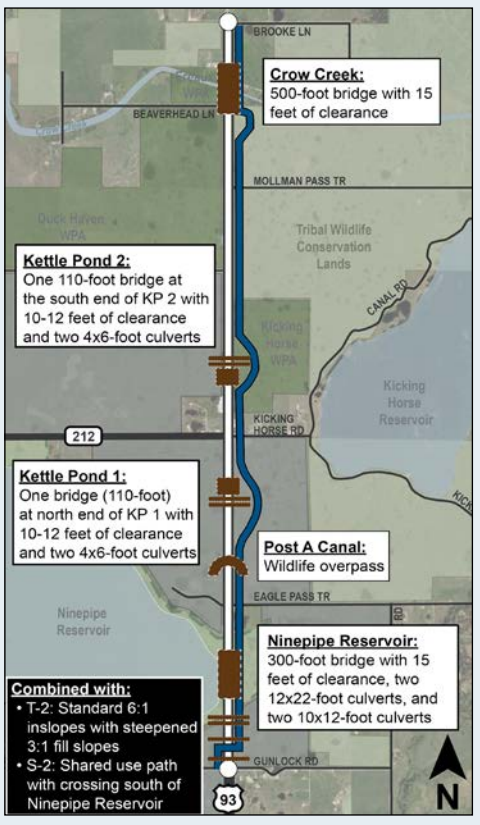
C-1: SEIS Preferred



C-2: Enlarged Crossings



C-3: Wildlife Overpass



	C-1: SEIS Preferred		C-2: Enlarged Crossings		C-3: Wildlife Overpass	
SCREENING CRITERION 4: HUMAN ENVIRONMENT						
4A. CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES	Adverse impacts to Ninepipe Cultural Property, potential Section 4(f) impacts to Ninepipe NWR, WMA, and WPAs, moderately offset by enhancements to wildlife accommodations and improved wetland connectivity, which are culturally valued.	3	Adverse impacts to Ninepipe Cultural Property, potential Section 4(f) impacts to Ninepipe NWR, WMA, and WPAs, and potential impacts to stagecoach route substantially offset by enhancements to wildlife accommodations and improved wetland connectivity, which are culturally valued.	4	Adverse impacts to Ninepipe Cultural Property, potential Section 4(f) impacts to Ninepipe NWR, WMA, and WPAs, and potential impacts to stagecoach route substantially offset by enhancements to wildlife accommodations and improved wetland connectivity, which are culturally valued.	4
4B. VISUAL QUALITY	Temporary construction impacts, permanent impacts due to roadway grade raise and wildlife fencing.	3	Temporary construction impacts, permanent impacts from wildlife fencing and greatest roadway grade raise compared to C-1 and C-3.	2	Temporary construction impacts, permanent impacts due to roadway grade raise and wildlife fencing, new overpass structure.	2
4C. ADJACENT PROPERTIES	One directly impacted building and access impacts south of Creekside Lane. Impacts to Ninepipes Lodge/Museum parking lot and access. Access impacts to Mission Mountain Viewpoint and residence. Reconstruction of Beaverhead Drive required. Approximately 31.6 acres would need to be acquired.	1	One indirectly impacted building and access impacts south of Creekside Lane. Impacts to Ninepipes Lodge/Museum parking lot and access. Access impacts to Mission Mountain Viewpoint and residence. Reconstruction of Beaverhead Drive required. Approximately 34.7 acres would need to be acquired.	2	One indirectly impacted building and access impacts south of Creekside Lane. Impacts to Ninepipes Lodge/Museum parking lot and access. Access impacts to Mission Mountain Viewpoint and residence. Reconstruction of Beaverhead Drive required. Approximately 35.7 acres would need to be acquired.	2
SUBTOTAL	7		8		8	
SCREENING CRITERION 5: CONSTRUCTABILITY						
5A. GEOTECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	Moderate geotechnical challenges due to 660-ft bridge at Ninepipe Reservoir and 120-ft/150-ft bridges at Crow Creek.	4	Most geotechnical challenges due to 660-ft bridge at Ninepipe Reservoir, 800-ft bridges at kettle ponds, 500-ft bridge at Crow Creek, and steepened fill slopes throughout corridor.	2	Moderate geotechnical challenges due to 300-ft bridge at Ninepipe Reservoir, 110-ft bridges at kettle ponds, 500-ft bridge at Crow Creek, and steepened fill slopes throughout corridor.	3
5B. CONSTRUCTION FEASIBILITY	Moderate construction challenges due to 660-ft bridge at Ninepipe Reservoir.	3	Most challenging to construct due to 660-ft bridge at Ninepipe Reservoir, 800-ft bridges at kettle ponds, 500-ft bridge at Crow Creek, and steepened fill slopes.	2	Moderate construction challenges due to 300-ft bridge at Ninepipe Reservoir, 110-ft bridges at kettle ponds, 500-ft bridge at Crow Creek, and steepened fill slopes.	3
5C. CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS	Moderate construction impacts, with travel likely maintained on routes parallel to US 93 within construction limits. Some travel delays expected due to reduced speeds in work zones.	3	Greatest construction impacts due to largest structures. Some travel delays expected due to reduced speeds in work zones. Adjacent detours needed around kettle ponds.	2	Moderate construction impacts, with travel likely maintained on routes parallel to US 93 within construction limits. Some travel delays expected due to reduced speeds in work zones. Adjacent detours needed around kettle ponds.	3
5D. CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS	Permitting, additional environmental documentation, and mitigation would be required.	2	Permitting and additional environmental documentation would be required. Reduced wetland mitigation compared to C-1.	3	Permitting and additional environmental documentation would be required. Reduced wetland mitigation compared to C-1.	3
SUBTOTAL	12		9		12	
SCREENING CRITERION 6: COST						
6A. COST OF IMPROVEMENTS	Lower cost compared to C-2.	3	Highest capital costs.	1	Lower cost compared to C-2.	3
6B. MAINTENANCE NEEDS/COSTS	Maintenance for SUP and new structures.	3	Maintenance for SUP and new structures (longer than C-1).	2	Maintenance for SUP and new structures, minimal maintenance for overpass, opportunity for shared responsibility.	3
6C. COST EFFECTIVENESS	Similar cost to C-3 but with fewer benefits and more impacts.	2	Moderate impacts, moderate environmental benefits, 1.5 times the cost of C-3.	2	Greatest wildlife accommodation benefits, moderate environmental benefits, moderate impacts, lowest capital costs.	4
6D. FUNDABILITY	Somewhat more likely to be funded compared to C-2 due to higher BCR. Low potential for partnerships.	3	Lower likelihood of funding due to low BCR.	2	BCR favors funding. Potential partnership opportunity with MFWP for overpass.	4
SUBTOTAL	11		7		14	
TOTAL SCORE	52		57		70	

APPENDIX 1G:

Public Comments Outside Review

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

No.	Date/Name	Comment
01	Gina Johnson 7/8/2021	Hi Sarah: I received your correspondence in regards to the Ninepipe Corridor. I have sent my permission slip. I do have a couple of questions: Will there be any my land taken for this project and the main concern is if a TURN-LANE is a possibility for in front of the business. I own S & S Sports and we have semi's every day coming into the business along with customers. It would be a huge safety consideration with the increasing traffic. Thank you for your time and consideration. Gina Johnson
02	Crista Couture 7/20/2021	It is WAY overdue to have widening and multiple lanes on 93 North between Missoula and Polson. We are locals and on the Arlee Volunteer Fire Department and are so tired of seeing fatalities throughout our reservation!!
03	Thomas Emerald 8/3/2021	Will a turn lane be provided at Brooke Lane? Right now, this stretch of US 93 is striped as a passing zone. My property is on Brooke Lane. Coming southbound on US 93 and taking a left onto Brooke Lane is at your own risk. Many times before making a turn, I've checked my mirrors and I'm being passed from behind. Across from Brooke Lane to the west is Car Services, and they also have a lot of traffic turning into their business. Traveling northbound on US 93, it is dangerous to lake a left-turn into thie business. If there isn't enough room for a turn lane, could MDT at least remove the passing lane striping at this intersection?
04	Gina Johnson 9/23/2021	Hello Scott: Thank you for the information. As stated before, I own S & S Sports 3 miles south of Ronan. My only request would be for a turning lane into my business. We have multiple semi-trucks and delivery trucks coming into our store daily. The turn lane would be a huge safety factor. Thank you for allowing the input. Gina Johnson
05	Angela Mock 9/24/2021	This stretch of highway has long been in need of turn lanes, passing lanes, safe animal crossings, animal fencing, and widening. I hope to see these many aspects addressed. Thank you.
06	Kathie Newgard 9/24/2021	In my opinion, it would be a mistake to do any improvements with out making HWY 93 a 4 lane road from Missoula to Kalispell. Especially from St. Ignatius to Polson. Should also have center turn lane. Too many accidents too many lives lost. Passing lanes don't work as people going 45mph speed up to 80 as soon as they get to a passing lane, then slow back down to 45 when passing lane ends. Thank you for letting me comment.
07	Kristie Nerby 9/24/2021	This highway corridor kills and wounds humans continually. Just yesterday there was a near miss head on with a truck vs. motorcycle due to the trucks driver making a really bad choice to pass. About two hours later in almost the same spit there was an actual accident. This is the daily fear we all live with when having to use the highway. Some locals try to blame it all on out-of-town drivers but that is not true. It is a local driver problem as much as anything. Please help our community and save lives. Thank you for your consideration. Cheers! Kristie Nerby
08	Amanda Hodges 9/24/2021	Accidents are common on hwy 93 across from Allentown due to insufficient turn lanes (none) and excessive speed on a 2 lane 70 mph road. Try heading south on hwy 93 and trying to make a left turn into the restaurant and motel parking lot.
09	Debbie Fangsrud 9/24/2021	The Ninepipe Corridor construction is long over due. There are far too many serious wrecks. The bare minimum would be a turn lane. Best would be four lanes with a turn lane.
10	Andrea Lund 9/24/2021	Ninepipes is in desperate need of a turning lane, please hurry this along before more people die. I go there almost everyday and risk my life trying to turn. This place has been a business my entire life and still no turning lane, I am 55. Thank you for the opportunity to express my feelings on this matter.
11	Angela Marquez 9/25/2021	Just the other day my niece was involved in a accident right in front of Ninepipes. She was waiting to turn into the establishment to report to work. Someone not paying attention hit her from behind. I thank God no one hit her from the other direction because I don't think it would have been a good outcome. I also live off of Eagle Pass Trail and I cringe when I have to turn off. It doesn't matter if I put my blinker on a mile away people don't care. They try to go around on the left. This area has been a death trap forever and I think it's time to get fixed. I wish I could send you a picture of my nieces car. Not only does she work 2 jobs but she is also attending college.
12	Barbara Bartell 9/26/2021	I live on Olsen Road.and I am wondering what king of access would I have to Highway 93. What other access are you talking about or are you?
13	Richard Janssen 9/30/2021	Jacquelyn, Thank you for the Tribal Council presentation today. I believe the root of the questions for the remaining segments of US Highway 93 is why they haven't been completed as of yet. The construction projects begin in 2000 and we still have segments not completed. What I heard today, was that CSKT would look for a grant when this was a partnership with MDOT and FHA. Is that correct? For now, I , along with Scott Johnston, our roads program manager and PE, with Whisper Camel Means, our Wildlife Program Manager will be our contacts. Dan Decker of our legal department will join as well.
14	Ron Blacic 2/7/2022	We need to stop studying this issue and start the project. White crosses are being added every year and the wildlife carnage is unacceptable. Minimum, lower the speed limit! Very cost effective and results are instant. This appears to be a no brainer! Why is the speed limit 70 MPH, at a business location and access road to Hwy 93(eagle canyon)?

No.	Date/Name	Comment
15	Andy Koola 2/10/2022	Called because he read an article in the Missoulian which was ran after the public meeting. Was interested in what was being proposed and the timing of improvements. In follow up, the article had some misleading information which noted construction could start this fall.
16	Dave DeGrandpre 2/10/2022	Hello, I live on Leon Road, which is about half-way up Post Creek Hill in the Highway 93 Ninepipes study area. My family and I use the Leon Road / McDonald Lake Road intersection as our primary access to and from Hwy 93, and frequently use other highway intersections in the area. I have three areas of safety concern as you consider highway improvements. 1. Travelling north and turning left onto Leon Road is a safety concern because drivers are often accelerating up Post Creek Hill and reluctant to slow down half way up the hill. Travelling south and turning right onto Leon is even more harrowing, as drivers see a long stretch of road in front of them and want to go fast toward St. Ignatius. Travelling south and turning left onto McDonald Lake Road is probably worse. Neither lane has more than a 2-foot shoulder and the intersections are rather narrow for turning off a highway where the speed limit is 70. Some combination turning and/or passing lanes would be really helpful. 2. The Ninepipes Museum / Allentown Restaurant and Hotel property have way too much uncontrolled area where drivers can turn off, creating confusing and unpredictable turning and travel patterns. The businesses generate a lot of traffic and when highway and visitation traffic volume is high, people take chances and rush out onto the highway, with a fair number of recent bad accidents and fatalities. Some sort of controls or safety improvements seem warranted here. 3. I think a wildlife crossing at Post Creek would be very helpful as I know there is a lot of automobile / wildlife conflict (crashes) in this migration corridor. Finally, I support a bike lane along this stretch of highway, perhaps with some associated turnoffs or facilities to help support our low impact tourism economic base. Thanks for your consideration.
17	Bo Nielsen 2/11/2022	Hello. I believe that the Ninepipe Corridor requires our greatest concern, our most cautious & methodical problem solving approaches, our most intensive inventory of existing natural systems, and thorough assessment of environmentally designed alternatives. I believe that ensuring the health and function of wetland ecosystems is foremost. I encourage site-specific solutions with highway designs that preserve and enhance the functions of these wetlands & wildlife uses. I wonder if we should be considering other alternative locations, other highway configurations, such as split alignments that avoid these wetlands all together.
18	Lane Smyth 2/11/2022	This project is long overdue. I would like a 4 lane highway. Might as well do it while your there fixing it anyway.

No.	Date/Name	Comment
19	Bill and Joni Bick 2/17/2022	Received by Board Of FEB 17 2022 Lake County Commissioners US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Study We applaud the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) for finally addressing the rebuilding of US 93 from 4 miles north of St. Ignatius through the town of Ronan. This project has been divided into three sections called the 3.3 Post Creek segment, the 4.2 Ninepipe segment and the Ronan Urban segment which connects with the already completed 4-lane section north of town and is designed to reduce the horrific traffic problem in the area. The Ninepipe Section due to wetlands, ponds, wildlife and right away acquisition and the Ronan section because of right away acquisition, design and urban sprawl are very complicated and will be very expensive projects. These sections are scheduled to begin possibly this fall. The Post Creek section (Dublin Gulch/ Red Horn Road to Olson/Gunlock Road 3.3 miles) is scheduled for construction sometime in the future and we believe it should be constructed first, as it causes most of the traffic congestion in the Ronan area and is the most unsafe and dangerous section of the highway. The construction delay is caused by the more than 70-year-old Post Creek bridge which is probably in poor condition and has a weight limit restriction placed on it by the MDT. It is also responsible for at least two human traffic fatalities, two grizzly bear deaths and several deer fatalities. The reason the Post Creek section has been delayed is that after 30 years the MDT has been unable to design a new bridge over Post Creek. They are now considering a 200 ft. bridge over a 30 ft. stream. Just south of the bridge and near the beginning of the project is Tribal Wetlands which boarders the highway on the west. This is a major wildlife corridor and home to many animals including the grizzly bear. We boarder the wetlands on the south and have lived on the highway for 45 years. There have been two separate human fatalities and over 30 deer killed on the highway with in 50 yards of our driveway. There should be several wildlife crossings constructed in this area. We propose that the MDT construct the Post Creek hill section first by delaying the bridge portion until a design is reached and building a passing lane on Post Creek hill starting just north of the bridge. This section is the beginning of Ronan's traffic problems. A slow truck or camper climbing the hill creates a string of vehicles (caravan) which is almost impossible to pass given the short passing zones in the 4.2-mile portion to Ronan. It is further delayed by the two traffic lights in town. We have experienced a caravan three miles long after the 4th of July weekend, which was also very bad traffic wise, that began on Post Creek hill. This two-mile section could begin just north of the bridge at the East and West Post Creek intersection and continue to the top of the hill at Olson and Gunlock Roads intersection. It would provide for turn lanes at three major nearly blind intersections with the highway that have at least six human traffic fatalities. The Post Creek hill is by far the most inexpensive portion of the entire project and should have been completed when the Ravalli and Evaro passing lanes were constructed. The following reasons are why we think this alternative would be the least expensive. (1) The right- away purchases would be minimal as the hill is mostly boarded by large sections of farmland, so there would be very few appraisals and landowners to deal with. (2) There are no apparent wetlands. (3) Few wildlife crossings or fencing will be needed as this area is not a major wildlife crossing. (4) Very minimal power line relocation is needed although there appears to be a fiber optic line on the east side of the of the highway. (5) There appears to be no significant cultural areas involved. In closing we would gladly give a tour of the Post Creek Hill area to any reporters, politicians, MDT personnel, tribal officials, or any other interested parties as we have lived on this highway for 45 years and understand the problems associated with this project. We believe that the traffic congestion in Ronan will continue until the Post Creek passing lane is completed. There should be a sign placed at the bottom of the Post Creek hill stating, "Slow Caravan Forming Ahead", until the passing lane is completed.

APPENDIX 1H:

Public Comments During Review

January 6, 2023 - February 6, 2023

NINEPIPE CORRIDOR 93 FEASIBILITY STUDY

No.	Date/ Name	Comment	Response
1	**1/12/2023** **Marcy Ballman**	As Montana tourism increases and more vehicles are travelling this main corridor to Glacier National Park, I'm left wondering why MDT is considering only a passing lane segment in one section and not full 4-lane travel through the entire corridor. Anything less seems short-sighted and with an ever increasing traffic burden the project will be outdated before it has even begun. 4 lanes also seems like the safer option, as people rush to pass during the limited passing sections. I drive this road both directions from Missoula to Polson and back several times a month and this is the scariest section. There are also consistent crashes and fatalities in this section. I urge MDT to consider larger scope for this project that will be sufficient for years to come.	*Thank you for your comment. When environmental documentation was completed in 2008 for this corridor, MDT, the CSKT, and FHWA agreed to maintain a two-lane roadway through the Ninepipe segment to minimize impacts to valued resources, including wetlands, wildlife habitat, and cultural features. The Ninepipe segment will connect with passing opportunities to the north and south.*
2	**1/13/2023** **Scott Harmon**	Good morning, As MDT works toward a final design for US 93 in the Ninepipe area, please include center turn lanes and a northbound right hand (east) turn bay for Eagle Pass Trail, Ninepipes Reservoir, and the Allentown/Ninepipes business and museum complex. Serious accidents have happened there historically, as well as many more minor accidents and close calls. Thank you, Scott Harmon	*Thank you for your comment. MDT is currently in the design process for the Eagle Pass Trail project, which will add a southbound left-turn lane to serve the intersection and provide accommodations for the Allentown/Ninepipes business and museum. MDT will consider other locations for turn lanes if warranted based on safety performance.*
3	**1/14/2023** **Cynthia A Forsch**	Thank you for your great work on the project to both protect and support the Nine Pipes area. I am concerned about the lack of turn lanes on the two lane road. Kicking Horse road, Brooke lane, Creek side lane and S and S sports are all serious trafic control concerns. Left turn lanes to improve safety at these connections to the project would be very important. The proposed turn lane for Eagle Pass trail is only viable if the Nine Pipes lodge is given easy access to Eagle Pass trail.	*Thank you for your comment. Please see response to Comment #2.*
4	**1/19/2023** **Ed Gannon**	I'm away, unable to attend the meetings. One comment is: The bike trail should be placed well away from Hwy 93. There is limited room adjacent due to the wetland and wildlife concerns. Checker board the bike trail west than east of Highway 93. Pave the bike trail county roads as needed between Ronan and St Ignatius. Thank you. Best regards, Ed Gannon Board of Directors, Chairperson Ninepipes Museum	*Thank you for your comment. After crossing from west to east at a location south of the Ninepipe Reservoir, the recommended path alignment would continue on the east side of the roadway through the Ninepipe segment. Separation between the shared use path and roadway would be provided where possible within existing right-of-way by traveling around the east side of the two kettle ponds and the Mission Mountains Viewpoint to improve bicyclist and pedestrian safety and comfort.*
5	**1/19/2023** **John Zarling (via phone)**	John lives in Fairbanks AK part time and also has a home outside of Ronan. He is a retired transportation engineering professor from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. He said he listened to the virtual meeting and read the materials online. He believes there needs to be more consideration to human safety and mentioned the number of white crosses and thinks that there was more concern with wildlife than humans. He is concerned with the number of deaths in this stretch and that the study lacked information that addressed human safety.	*Thank you for your comment. The MDT Eagle Pass Trail project is intended to improve safety by adding a new left-turn lane at the intersection. Future reconstruction of the corridor will also improve human safety through widened shoulders, rumble strips, flattened slopes, dedicated bicycle/pedestrian facilities, and wildlife accommodations to minimize wildlife-vehicle conflicts.*

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6	**1/22/2023** **Timothy M Marchant**	I am excited about the US93 Ninepipe Corridor Project. I am especially interested in the shared use bicycle/pedestrian path. US93 has become deadly frightening for cyclists, particularly between Ninepipes Lodge and the 44Bar. A long-held bicycling event, the Tour of the Swan River Valley (TOSRV), which attracted cyclists from all over the nation, had to be discontinued in large part due to unsafe riding conditions of US93. As a director of TOSRV and former president of the Missoula Bicycle Club, I believe improved infrastructure and safer conditions for vehicle-cyclist cooperation, will bring cycling back to western Montana. I like all the options, but C-1 (with shared use path crossing at Kettle Pond 2) is my favorite route. The new shared use path will enhance the local economy, mobilize our workforce with alternative transportation, and improve the health of our citizens and planet.	*Thank you for your comment. MDT has committed to include a separated shared use path as part of a future reconstruction project in the corridor. The final alignment and crossing location(s) would be determined during future design activities.*
7	**1/23/2023** **Kylie Paul**	We've not yet met but I look forward to doing so at some point. I work for the Center for Large Landscape Conservation, a nonprofit organization based in Bozeman working locally, nationally, and internationally on wildlife connectivity and crossing structures. I have also CC'd Jessie Grossman who works for the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative on similar issues. Jessie and I are part of the Montanans for Safe Passage coalition, as well as a local Missoula Regional Connectivity Group, and I serve on the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership steering committee. I've also CC'd Kari Eneas with the CSKT to continue to share this information with her of our interest in this project. And I cc'd Joe Weigand so he may be aware of this idea as well - we connect often in the Missoula Regional Connectivity Group meetings. Jessie and I are interested in helping to coordinate with organizations/agencies that commented during the feasibility study comment period (which we know is still open, and we need to submit comments!), in order to sort out next steps, funding opportunities, and capacity for commitment to the effort, to help the Ninepipes project get implemented. It seems that coordinating a meeting(s) with at least some of those who commented could be a great first step to further channel the energy of the feasibility study, and it seems likely this could be a zoom-style meetings approach at first due to capacity limitations. We wanted to share this idea and our willingness with you all as you're presumably hearing interest from many folks asking how they can help to bring this project forward. Thanks much, Kylie Paul Road Ecologist Center for Large Landscape Conservation	*Thank you for your comment. MDT will continue to coordinate with partner agencies and organizations to identify funding opportunities and advance improvements within the corridor.*
8	**1/24/2023** **Dale Becker**	My name is Dale Becker. During the period of 1989-2021, I served as the Tribal Wildlfie Program Manager for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Starting in the early 990s, my staff and I participated in numerous meetings, field trips and evaluations of needs for wildlife crossing structures on the route of U. S. Highway 93 between Evaro and Polson. I continue to be deeply interested in the process to complete the Ninepipe Section of the reconstruction project.	*Thank you for your comment and continued interest in this corridor.* *The Ninepipe corridor is not included in MDT's current five-year Tentative Construction Program (TCP), and no funding has been secured for design and construction of improvements to the Ninepipe corridor. Previously, MDT issued bonds to finance multiple large*

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8	**1/24/2023** **Dale Becker (continued)**	Through the earlier long and detailed collaborative process, the three governments, through the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) achieved many good results, including the 41 wildlife crossing structures, the wildlife overcrossing structure near Evaro and a host of site-specific wildlife and habitat mitigation design features that are working today. The results are lessening the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions, motorist injuries and mortalities, and maintaining and enhancing safer passage of wildlife across the highway right-of-way and connect habitats on both sides. Given the excellent successes to date, as mentioned above, it has been frustrating to watch the priority of completing construction and good mitigation designs for the Ninepipe Section, particularly the section detailed in the current US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study. Having been involved with both the original EIS and the SEIS processes, it has often been disheartening to see the planning and design for this section continually pushed back to some unmentioned future date. Most recently, after starting a review of the section plans from the SEIS, it still seems like construction continues to be a long way off, with no apparent date for the project to go to the design phase or for completion of construction noted in the study. These concerns stated, I understand the rationale for completion of the feasibility study, as well as to re-evaluate the recommendations of the SEIS. While much of the wildlife information used in preparation of the SEIS is still very relevant, more recent observations and data collected by the Tribal Wildlife Management Program seems to be very useful in some of the changes anticipated in the SEIS and subsequent discussions. I am pleased that the process provides an opportunity to look at this new wildlife activity data for the area, as well as some newer ideas for wildlife mitigation needs and opportunities in the Ninepipe section. I believe that the evaluation of the three options noted in the feasibility study provide a good opportunity to evaluate each. I am pleased that Option C-3 is proposed as the preferred option. I believe that it will provide for an excellent reconstruction plan and mitigation features for wildlife and habitat. It also ranked well with the other factors in the evaluation of the options. I have noted some of the discussion of design features that have been discussed in public comments. One that I studied during my work on the Highway 93 planning in year past was the installation of wildlife fencing to prevent wildlife access onto the highway right-of-way. I strongly believe that it will be very necessary, given the amount of wildlife crossing activity in the Ninepipe section. It will need to be continuous throughout the section to be effective. In some instances, I believe that MDOT will need to seriously consider installation of the fencing around the back sides of existing businesses, dwellings and other private holdings to maintain continuity and effectiveness of the fencing and the ability of the property owners to access their holdings with minimal hindrance. I realize that does not fit well with MDOT's usual mode of construction along rights-of-way, but I stress the need to consider the idea.	*projects in the US 93 Evaro to Polson corridor. Repayment of these bonds severely limited MDT's ability to improve and maintain other roadways within the Missoula District. Further, MDT has determined that bonding is not an appropriate funding option at this time given inflation and high interest rates.* *Grant opportunities present the only potential opportunity to implement a reconstruction project for the Ninepipe segment within the next 10 years. MDT will be working with partner agencies and advocacy organizations to identify potential grants and other funding opportunities that may be used to advance a project. Improvements to the US 93 corridor are a priority for MDT, CSKT, FHWA, and other partners.* *Section 4.2.4 of Appendix 5-Screening Report provides a more detailed discussion of fencing considerations. Wildlife fencing would be included as part of any future reconstruction project to maximize the effectiveness of wildlife structures. Specific fencing design would be developed during future design phases. MDT fencing must be installed within the MDT right-of-way or within a permanent MDT maintenance easement. Fencing outside MDT right-of-way and easement areas could be initiated by partner agencies, non-governmental organizations, or other interested groups in coordination with individual property owners.* *In response to comments received during the comment period and during study collaboration efforts, MDT has included a new discussion of design considerations in Section 5.1 of the document. The items referenced in your comment are addressed in this new discussion.*

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8	**1/24/2023** **Dale Becker (continued)**	Another fencing issue related to the number of access points along the section right-of-way, including private access driveways, field access points, county roads and Montana Highway 212. I am aware that the Tribal Wildlife Management Program staff and some of their cooperators have worked with MDOT staff to experiment with the feasibility of design features that will prevent or lessen the possibility of larger wildlife, such as grizzly and black bears, to access the right-of-way. I am hopeful that some of thee features can be included in the final designs for the project. In addition, past discussions of wildlife fencing along the highway corridor have elicited concerns about the potential for collision with the fencing by waterfowl and upland gamebirds. Several years ago, I discussed this concern with some of my wildlife colleagues who were very knowledgeable about those species. Each indicated that they were not concerned that these types of collisions would be a serious issues, and it they were at certain locations, designs for marking the fencing to provide better visibility for approaching flying birds were possible. I am aware that MDOT has indicated that the agency stance is that the cost of the wildlife mitigation designs for this Ninepipe section reconstruction should be funded primarily through grants, presumably from federal government and non-governmental organizations. While I support this preference, I feel that it will involve a huge effort to make it a reality. It almost seems, from the statements that I heard at the recent public comment Zoom meeting, that future progress toward moving the project to design and construction phases is completely dependent upon this approach. I might note that when the remainder of the Highway 93 reconstruction was planned, MDOT utilized the sale of bonds to fund a major portion of the projects. I am curious as to why that is not being considered as a funding source for the Ninepipe section. In conclusion, I strongly support the findings of the feasibility study and the draft Preferred Option, but with the questions noted above in mind. I would sincerely appreciate a response to these questions. I commend the very detailed work of all of those involved with the study and the process leading up to this point. Sincerely, Dale Becker	
9	**1/26/2023** **Hilary Cooley**	The US Fish and Wildlife Service appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the draft feasibility Plan for Ninepipes. We are pleased that the draft Plan incorporates recommendations from agency biologists into its preferred alternative. If implemented, the preferred alternative, C-3, will reduce direct grizzly bear mortality and support grizzly bear movement to the Ninemile Demographic Connectivity Area, an area designated to support bear recolonization of and recovery in the Bitterroot Recovery Zone, which is currently unoccupied. When in the design stage, we urge attention to several construction features which we know are crucial for bear use. Bears are unlikely to use underpasses that are encompassed by water. We recommend incorporating at least 40 feet of dry ground under the Post Creek and Ninepipe bridges. Steep overpass structures, similar to the Evaro overpass, are also unlikely to be used by grizzly bears, particularly family groups. We	*Thank you for your comments and support of this study.* *In response to comments received during the comment period and during study collaboration efforts, MDT has included a new discussion of design considerations in Section 5.1 of the document. The items referenced in your comment are addressed in this new discussion.*

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9	**1/26/2023** **Hilary Cooley (continued)**	recommend constructing the Post A Canal overpass to incorporate adequate security cover and a flat top, with a line of sight across the structure. Finally, we recommend fencing the entire length of the project area, as well as south to Post Creek to funnel wildlife to the safe crossing structures. We strongly support the preferred alternative and stand ready to collaborate with Montana Department of Transportation and other partner agencies and organizations to expedite project implementation. Thank you for your consideration of this important project and opportunity to express our support. Hilary Cooley, PhD Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator USFWS	*MDT will continue to coordinate with USFWS and other partner agencies to address specific wildlife accommodation details during future design activities.*
10	**2/1/2023** **Ryan Lutey**	Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study from Gunlock Road to Brooke Lane in the Mission Valley. We support the intent of the project to improve highway 93 with wildlife crossing structures. The Vital Ground Foundation is an LTA-accredited land trust. Our mission is to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations for future generations by conserving wildlife habitat and by supporting programs that reduce conflicts between bears and humans. Based in Missoula, Montana and working throughout the northern Rocky Mountains, we envision a permanently connected landscape that ensures the long-term survival of grizzlies and the many native species that share their range. Vital Ground holds conservation easements and owns land throughout northern Idaho and Montana and has been invested in habitat protection for over 30 years. To date we've protected and enhanced over 683,000 acres in the northern Rockies, with a particular focus on improving wildlife connectivity between ecosystems and preventing conflicts between bears and people. The Vital Ground Foundation's 2018 Habitat and Conflict Inventory and Prioritization (HCIP) highlighted the need for habitat protection in the Mission Valley to support connectivity between the Northern Continental Divide and Bitterroot grizzly bear recovery areas and to buffer large protected areas of habitat such as the Mission Mountain Tribal Wilderness. Vital Ground's HCIP is the result of surveys with more than 60 biologists from state, federal, and tribal agencies and consideration of current, large-scale connectivity models for grizzly bears. Transportation routes, such as US highway 93, can be significant barriers to wildlife movement. Additionally, collisions with wildlife, specifically grizzly bears, not only impede recovery of the species, but also cause damage to personal property and impacts the safety of those traveling the highway. In the last 25 years nineteen grizzly bears have been killed by vehicles in the proposed stretch of US highway 93. We strongly support the installment of adequately sized wildlife crossing structures to improve safe wildlife passage and human safety. As a land trust The Vital Ground Foundation has the tools to protect land, and we would encourage MDT to contact us if there are	*Thank you for your comments and support of improvements to the Ninepipe corridor. MDT will continue to coordinate with partner agencies and organizations to identify funding opportunities and advance improvements within the corridor.*

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10	**2/1/2023** **Ryan Lutey (continued)**	opportunities to work together on protecting land within the project area to ensure this project is successful at both a local and regional scale. The Vital Ground Foundation is committed to conserving and restoring grizzly bear habitat, and the Montana Transportation Department is a vital partner in this effort. We appreciate and value the work of MDT to solve wildlife and transportation issues, and we look forward to continuing to work together on this important goal. Thank you for considering our comments and suggestions.	
11	**2/2/2023** **Yollanda Mays**	For the project Ninepipe on Mt. US Hwy 93. Please consider option 4. This will do the least amount of damage to our reservation fowl/wildlife population.	*Thank you for your comment. The feasibility study identified three potential options for improvements to the Ninepipe corridor. Of these, Option C-3 was identified as the preferred option based on its ability to provide the best balance of wildlife accommodations that would attract the greatest use, minimize impacts to adjacent lands and valued resources, improve constructability, and reduce cost.*
12	**2/5/2023** **Bill & Joni Bick**	We want to go on record as opposing the Ninepipe Corridor section of Highway 93. This section needs to be rebuilt, but with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) being short of funding it is apparent the funding should be applied to the Postcreek Corridor instead, which would be less expensive and less hazardous, to humans and wildlife. The reasons are: 1. The Postcreek community is a congested area with several businesses, three of which require semi-trucks to turn on and off the highway for access, while traffic can legally travel at 70 miles an hour in the busy area. 2. There are no safety shoulders for disabled vehicles to get out of traffic in case of an emergency. (This summer a semi-truck overturned just before the 90-year-old Postcreek bridge, and the highway was blocked for several hours with very limited by-pass opportunities available) 3. The Postcreek section has four dangerous intersections with poor visibility and accident history in each area. 4. The nearest safe northbound passing area north of St. Ignatius is a distance of four miles and there is limited passing opportunities in the Ninepipe section also. 5. The two passing zones in the Postcreek area are very limited. The first very short zone beginning just before the 90-year-old bridge with virtually no safety shoulders and includes a business (Hunts Timbers sawmill) requiring access for semi-trucks in center of the zone. The second passing zone appears to be a longer one, but again has limited safety shoulders and the top third is an uphill grade with limited visibility due to a dip in the highway. Traffic has to compete with southbound traffic going at an increased downhill speed. 6. The 90- year-old Postcreek bridge is a major wildlife crossing area with several grizzly bear and many deer and other wildlife killed in the last few years. In conclusion, the MDT with very limited funds, is pushing the more expensive Ninepipe section, ahead of the Postcreek section. The Ninepipe section requires three long bridges, an expensive wildlife overpass, and several large wildlife access culverts. The Postcreek section has one bridge and possibly two wildlife culverts. The	*Thank you for your comment.* *MDT recognizes the importance of addressing the portion of US 93 south of the Ninepipe segment. MDT is currently in the design process for the Post Creek Hill project from Red Horn Road (RP 37) to Gunlock Road (RP 40.3), which would connect to the Ninepipe segment. Although the Post Creek project is proceeding, issues relating to high groundwater and soft soils have posed challenges during the design phase.* *Due to the issues experienced in the Post Creek segment, MDT conducted a feasibility study of the Ninepipe segment to determine if similar challenges extended to the north. The purpose of this study was to determine if reconstruction would be feasible in terms of impacts, costs, and construction. Three options were considered for the study. The study determined that all three reconstruction options would likely be feasible to implement. Option C-3 was preferred due to lower costs and lower overall impacts coupled with optimized wildlife accommodations. See response to Comment #8 regarding wildlife fencing, funding status, and next steps for the Ninepipe corridor.* *MDT prioritizes construction projects based on need, available funding, and construction feasibility. While MDT*

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12	**2/5/2023** **Bill & Joni Bick (continued)**	approximate 2-mile hill section does not pass through any wetlands with very little expensive right-of-way to purchase. We have seen no tentative plans for the Postcreek Corridor. In the last 30 years the MDT has been unable to design a bridge over Postcreek or even provide a location for the bridge in the appropriate 100 yards available. The MDT is now using the available funds on the Ronan North Project, which has had no known human or wildlife fatalities. It appears the most congestion is in the Ronan South area and begins north of St. Ignatius because of limited passing opportunities in the approximately 13 miles of HWY 93. especially during the high traffic summer months and bad roads in the winter.	*recognizes the need to reconstruct the entire US 93 corridor, the Post Creek and Ninepipe segments are more complex and costly compared to the Ronan segments. Additional feasibility evaluations and engineering analyses have been required for these segments in order to address their unique challenges.* *CSKT in partnership with MDT and others have submitted an application for grant funding to support improvements in the US 93 corridor. Completion of this feasibility study is expected to strengthen future grant applications and streamline future project development and is not an indication that MDT is prioritizing the Ninepipe segment over the Post Creek segment.*
13	**2/6/2023** **Erin Edge**	Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study. Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) is a national non-profit conservation organization founded in 1947 focused on conserving and restoring native species and the habitat upon which they depend. We submit the following comments on behalf of our over 2 million members and supporters nationwide. We have focused our comments based on impacts to grizzly bears. Grizzly bears use riparian corridors and other habitat in the project area. In the last 25 years, nineteen grizzly bears were killed by vehicles in the project area. This highway is increasingly busy. The Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) grizzly bear population has the potential to be a source population for connectivity between ecosystems and establishment of a population of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem. Highway 93 is fragmenting habitat and leading to mortalities that could become a barrier to grizzly bears moving towards the Bitterroot. This important project has the potential to improve landscape permeability in the area. Defenders supports wildlife accommodations made for grizzly bears in option C-3. This option includes a 500ft bridge with 15 feet of clearance for Crow Creek, a revised Post A Canal wildlife overpass and 15 feet of clearance for the Ninepipe Reservoir. Ideally the Ninepipe Reservoir would be a 660-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance as discussed in C-2. These mitigations should improve the ability for grizzly bears to cross this highway segment. To increase the likelihood of success, we also ask that fencing be used for the entire length of the project area and south to Post Creek. Erin Edge Senior Representative, Rockies and Plains Program Defenders of Wildlife	*Thank you for your comments and for your support of this study.* *Through coordination with multiple Tribal, federal, and state resource agencies and other wildlife experts, Option C-3 was developed and selected as the preferred option in part due to its ability to optimize wildlife accommodations, particularly for grizzly bears.* *Please see response to Comment #8 regarding fencing considerations.*
14	**2/6/2023** **Jessie Grossman** **Kylie Paul**	On behalf of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative and Center for Large Landscape Conservation, please accept these comments on the US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study.	*Thank you for your comments.* *See response to Comment #8 regarding wildlife fencing. MDT*

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14	**2/6/2023** **Jessie Grossman** **Kylie Paul (continued)**	Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) is a non-profit organization with a mission to connect and protect habitat from Yellowstone to Yukon so people and nature can thrive. We work with Indigenous communities and governments; local, state, and federal governments; scientists; and NGOs and businesses to advance local, regional, and global conservation objectives. Y2Y is a landscape-scale, collaborative, and science/knowledge-based organization. Transportation infrastructure is essential to our nation's economy, the safe transport of people and goods, as well as promoting safe passage for wide ranging wildlife. We have long collaborated to help make roads safer for people and wildlife that provides benefits in all these areas. The Center for Large Landscape Conservation (CLLC) enhances the resilience of nature and communities by conserving, restoring, and strengthening ecological connectivity. Based in Bozeman, Montana, our non-profit organization works regionally, nationally, and internationally to catalyze collaborative conservation at scale. We provide science and policy expertise to address the growing issue of habitat fragmentation so that wildlife can move safely across large landscapes. For Montanans, implementing this project would offer increased safety for drivers and pedestrians, jobs, economic vitality, and responsive environmental protection. Overall, we are strong supporters of this project and would like to see it move forward as quickly as possible. The preferred alternative (C-3) is an excellent option and Y2Y and CLLC support MDT moving forward with this alternative. There are, however, a few important improvements that should be made to ensure this project is effective for providing safe passage across US 93 for people and wildlife. There are many excellent aspects to alternative C-3, and for the purpose of brevity we focus our recommendations on additions and changes we would like to see. **Recommendations:** <u>Fencing and access points (electric gates, etc.) are critical for project effectiveness.</u> Without adequate fencing, this project may be a bad investment, waste of taxpayer money, and will fail to meet the stated purposes of increasing safety, reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions, and improving passage for wildlife. Fencing associated with wildlife crossing structures is only briefly mentioned and vaguely referenced in the feasibility study, yet it is a critical element of the design and effectiveness of wildlife crossings. Wildlife crossing structures alone, without adequate fencing, are not effective at keeping people safe on roads and reducing large mammal mortalities (Rytwinski et al. 2016). We recommend the entire length of the project area have associated fencing and appropriate access points, such as electric gates, and that this important project component be added as a design element in the feasibility study. <u>At least 40 feet of passable dry ground is necessary and crucial for both the Crow Creek and Ninepipe Bridges.</u> Research shows that dry ground is necessary for grizzly bear use of wildlife crossing structures. For both the Crow Creek and Ninepipe bridges, the 15 feet of vertical clearance recommended in alternative C-3 aligns with the science, however, it must be paired with 40 feet of passable dry ground below during all seasons for these structures to	*recognizes that appropriate fencing is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of crossing structures.* *The need for 40 feet of passable dry ground at the Crow Creek and Ninepipe Reservoir structures was identified through the study process during collaboration with Tribal, federal, state resource agencies and other wildlife experts. Additionally, the need for an overpass to be designed according to updated standards was also identified through the study process.* *In response to comments received during the comment period and during study collaboration efforts, MDT has included a new discussion of design considerations in Section 5.1 of the document. The items mentioned in your comments are now summarized in this new section, which is to be used as a resource and reference for future design efforts.* *MDT recognizes the desire to advance a project in this corridor. MDT conducted the feasibility study in part to better position corridor projects for available grant funding. MDT will continue to coordinate with partner agencies and organizations to identify funding opportunities and develop improvements for the Ninepipe segment of US 93.*

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14	**2/6/2023** **Jessie Grossman** **Kylie Paul (continued)**	function optimally (Clevenger and Huijser 2011). We suggest this detail be added into the study as a necessary component of the project design. <u>The Post A Canal overpass must be designed to have a line of sight across the structure to effectively support passage for grizzly bears, especially females with cubs</u>. The Post A Canal overpass is in a critical location for human safety and grizzly bear passage, as many grizzly bears have both crossed the highway and been struck by vehicles and killed at this location. New research since the construction of the Evaro overpass indicates that a different design would be more effective for supporting grizzly bear passage, especially for females with cubs. Individual bears and family groups are 3-5 times more likely, respectively, to use overpasses compared to underpasses *when correctly designed.* An overpass in this location is clearly the best option to reduce collisions and support wildlife passage, and we recommend it is designed using the updated standards (Ford et al. 2017) which include an oval opening with minimal peak/a flat top to provide a line of sight as well as plenty of security cover via vegetation or other means. <u>Funding should be pursued and secured to complete this project as soon as possible.</u> We are in a time of great opportunity to fund and implement transportation projects, and MDT can benefit from the public resources available (see https://arc-solutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/IIJA-Wildlife-Infrastructure-Funding-Guide_FINAL.pdf) to reconstruct this portion of US 93 to make it safer, address an environmental conservation need, partner across agencies and jurisdictions, and reduce the financial burden of this project to the state. During the January 11th, 2023 informational meeting it was shared that this project is currently outside of MDT's 5-year funding window and the feasibility study states that no funding has been identified at this time to complete this project. This project has been studied, assessed, and reassessed by MDT for decades. There is a clear need and overwhelming public support for this project. We strongly recommend MDT work in partnership with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and other agencies and private partners to secure funding for this project as soon as possible. Ample opportunities exist to pursue funding for this project through federal funding programs, and Y2Y and CLLC would be happy to work alongside MDT to help identify and pursue these funding sources. It would be detrimental to public safety, wildlife well-being, Montana's economic vitality and quality of life, as well as unnecessarily costly to the state of Montana, for another 10+ years to go by without implementing this project that is so needed, well studied, and broadly supported. On behalf of Y2Y and CLLC, we thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments and look forward to supporting this project however we can. Jessie Grossman Manager of Landscape Connectivity, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative Kylie Paul Road Ecologist, Center for Large Landscape Conservation	

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15	**2/6/2023** **Christopher Servheen**	I write to you on behalf of the Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF). We are Montana's oldest and largest statewide conservation organization, founded in 1936 by dedicated hunters, anglers, conservationists, and landowners. Today we represent a diverse group of public land users and advocates who regularly and actively travel on and appreciate the lands surrounded by US 93. We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Montana Department of Transportation's US 93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study. MWF recognizes the importance of properly managing the landscape encompassed in this project and the key role that public involvement and local collaboration plays in this process. MWF's key priorities are the protection of wildlife, wildlife habitat, and public access to public lands. We acknowledge the project scope lies within the Flathead Indian Reservation, home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), and we appreciate the Tribe's input and guidance throughout the process so far. With Montana's growing population and increased traffic on roadways, wildlife corridors are imperative to preserving wildlife connectivity, as well as ensuring the safety of wildlife and vehicles on the road. Our comments are geared toward finding a balanced approach that encompasses scientifically-based land and wildlife management to create effective crossing opportunities for wildlife, including grizzly bears, minimize losses and/or degradation of wetland and riparian habitats around Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge and Kicking Horse Reservoir, maintain public access in the area, and enhance human safety. Corridor Options: In this feasibility study, MWF sees Crow Creek crossing as the highest priority for grizzly bear connectivity and recommends a 500-foot bridge with 15 feet of clearance, as depicted in C-2 and C-3 corridor options. We see this as the priority crossing because the highest frequency of observed crossings by GPS-collared bears and vehicle-killed bears are recorded around Crow Creek (Fig 1). MWF also supports the construction of a bridge east of Ninepipe Reservoir, based on data collected by GPS-collared grizzly bear crossings and vehicle mortalities in the direct area (Fig 1). This bridge would ideally have at least 13 feet of clearance and be 600 feet in length to ensure dry passable ground is maintained for grizzly bears and other terrestrial wildlife to utilize the crossing, as depicted in C-2. While there is a low likelihood of grizzly bear passage in wetlands, we support the effort to locate a wildlife overpass at the proposed location of Post A Canal wildlife overpass, depicted in C-3. We are concerned about the potential issues due to its current narrow size. MWF would like to see the Post A Canal overpass improved to have an oval opening with minimal peak to increase line of sight for grizzly bears to utilize this crossing. We are aware that the wetlands bisected by the existing highway have been unconnected for decades, adversely impacting waterfowl and other birds, turtles and small mammals, resulting in deleterious impacts on the wetlands. While Kettle Pond 1 and 2 are not high	*Thank you for your comments and your support of this study.* *Please see responses to Comment #14 regarding design details associated with crossing structures.* *The specific dimensions reflect extensive coordination with Tribal, federal, and state resource agencies and other wildlife experts to identify crossing structures that would best accommodate target species in each identified location. It was determined that an overpass combined with a 300-foot-long structure at the Ninepipe Reservoir would be appropriate to accommodate grizzly bear crossings in these areas.* *Please see response to Comment #8 regarding fencing considerations.* *Widened shoulders were a key typical section element incorporated at the time of the 2008 SEIS to improve human safety while maintaining a two-lane configuration. Widened shoulders are included in all options considered for the study. The recommended Option C-3 includes steepened fill slopes to minimize the reconstructed roadway footprint.* *When a future project advances in the corridor, MDT will collaborate with partners to identify the most appropriate design elements for the shared use path and to minimize impacts to adjacent nesting habitat.*
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15	**Christopher Servheen (continued)**	priorities as potential grizzly bear crossings, we realize that other species will utilize passage across the right-of-way. For all these proposed structures to perform to their maximum potential, MWF recommends fencing the entire length of the project area to guide animals to these desired crossings. Longer fences (>5km) correspond to a greater reduction in mortality (84.1% reduction) compared to shorter sections (<5km; 52.7% reduction) (Huijser et al. 2016). We realize that fencing along the highway will be considered and plans for it will be developed during the design planning for the project. Given the significance of the wildlife habitat in this area, we suggest that serious consideration be given to extending wildlife fencing around existing developments such as businesses that have right-of-way frontage. We realize that such designs are generally not standard practice in highway construction planning, but we feel that the effort is a win-win opportunity for effective wildlife fencing and long-standing local businesses. In addition, we urge careful and detailed consideration of how breaks in wildlife fencing along the right-of- way to accommodate access roads can be designed to prevent wildlife access onto the highway, especially that which might involve bears. We understand that topic is currently being studied. Typical Section Options: MWF believes maintaining the natural and cultural resources of the area is imperative. Preserving wetland habitat and minimizing sediment delivery and turbidity in streams is at the forefront of our vision for this project. We see the potential value of widening the roadway shoulders to prevent collisions; however, we do not think the sediment deposits and pollutants into the waterways that would come widening shoulders makes this a worthwhile component to the overall project. Instead, MWF would like to see resources directed towards tall fences on either side of the roadway. This would divert animals from the road all together; where widening the road shoulder would provide additional recovery area but can only potentially reduce collisions. If typical sections are widened, we would like to see steepened fill slopes, as depicted in T-2, so there are fewer adverse impacts on fish and wildlife. Shared Use Path Options: For shared use path options, MWF is in support of constructing a non-motorized path and underpass alongside US 93, which would increase public access and provide a safer bicyclist route in the area. Aligning with our vision for minimal wetland and riparian disruption in the project, we would recommend this path be constructed on the east side of the highway, as illustrated in S-2 and S-3, and utilize existing roadbeds when possible. We also acknowledge the potential proximity this proposed trail has to nesting birds in Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, and request that measures be taken to minimize human disturbance. This may be in the form of a seasonal closure during spring nesting season, which is common at other wildlife refuges across the state, including Warm Springs Ponds. Conclusion: We thank the Department of Transportation, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Federal Highway Administration for their thorough consideration and collaboration in all aspects of this proposal. We are aware that this is a complex project site with many	

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15	**2/6/2023** **Christopher Servheen (continued)**	issues; however this area has been studied since the early 1990s, and the Tribes have been stressing the need for the completion of this section throughout the process. MWF sees high potential in this project for wildlife connectivity, safe public access, and a decrease in wildlife-vehicle collisions in the US 93 corridor. We hope our suggestion for a fence along the highway is considered to help guide wildlife through these corridors, and effective grizzly bear crossings are installed. From all the proposed options, MWF sees typical section 2, shared use path 2 or 3 (whichever is more financially feasible from a right-of-way and underpass prospective), and corridor 2 as excellent options going forward with the project. Given the timeframe and scope of the project, it is imperative for MDOT to fund the needed wildlife mitigation improvements and set a targeted start of construction and completion date. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project and we look forward to staying engaged as this project progresses. Christopher Servheen, Ph.D. President and Board Chair Montana Wildlife Federation	
16	**2/6/2023** **Séliš-Ql̓ispé Culture Committee** Confederated **Salish & Kootenai Tribes**	We're grateful for the dramatic improvements in wildlife features in both Alternative 2 and 3, compared to the 2008 preferred alternative. We commend all who worked on those aspects of the study, including Wildlife Program staff members in the CSKT Natural Resources Dept. We appreciate that the highway is remaining on the existing alignment rather than introducing major impacts to alternative routes. We also appreciate the implicit recognition that safety improvements (reduction in accident rates and severity) can be achieved without resorting to multiple lane configurations. We would note that the Highway 93 safety audit completed in 2015 confirmed that the improved segments of Highway 93 (both the Super 2 and multilane segments) all resulted in significant improvements in safety. This is consistent with the perspective expressed by CSKT elders from the very beginning of the Highway 93 issue: make safety improvements while minimizing or even reversing damage to the environment, keeping in mind not just the needs of the next ten years or even 50 years, but our obligations to those who may be here 500 years from now. We have the responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that they inherit a place as healthy, abundant, and beautiful as what was handed down to us by the ancestors. We do have several comments. **1. Prioritize cultural and environmental protection over cost considerations** As has been exhaustively documented, the highway bisects a place that is an ecological treasure of international significance, at the level of a national park, home to numerous endangered and threatened species and/or species of concern. Those species include grizzly bears, trumpeter swans, gray wolves, bald eagles, and others.	*Thank you for your comments.* *1. MDT recognizes the importance of wetlands, wildlife habitat, and individual wildlife species within the US 93 corridor both from an ecological perspective and from a cultural resources perspective. The study acknowledges the cultural value of the landscape and its elements. Specifically, Screening Criterion 4a considers impacts to the Ninepipe Cultural Property, enhancements to wildlife accommodations, and improved wetland connectivity in the context of cultural importance and values.* *The preferred option (C-3) would provide 15 feet of vertical clearance at the 500-foot-long Crow Creek and 300-foot-long Ninepipe Reservoir structures to accommodate large animals (such as grizzly bears). A 110-foot-long bridge with 10-12 feet of vertical clearance would be provided at each of the kettle ponds to accommodate smaller species. These dimensions reflect extensive coordination with Tribal, federal, and state resource agencies and other wildlife experts to identify crossing structures that would best accommodate target species in each identified location. Through the coordination process, it was determined that larger animals would*

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16	**2/6/2023** **Séliš-Qĺispé Culture Committee** Confederated **Salish & Kootenai Tribes (continued)**	What can sometimes be forgotten is that for CSKT people and especially for our elders, these are not just environmental or natural resources. They are also cultural resources of irreplaceable, priceless value. They are the spiritual foundation of the Indigenous cultures of the Flathead Indian Reservation, whom the U.S. Government promised the reservation as a refuge for our "exclusive use and benefit," in the words of the 1855 Treaty of Hellgate. We realize that cost cannot be ignored. However, this is a long-awaited, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address past damage and get things right. In the long run, no one will care whether the selected alternative cost more or less than another alternative. They will care whether we have honored the resource to the very best of our ability, and delivered something that works well for both human beings and wildlife. While we greatly appreciate and support the planned wildlife overpass in Alternative 3, we also urge that the study allow for adjustments in other wildlife structures based on ongoing study and consideration of the issues by wildlife experts, as more studies continue to refine our understanding of what would best repair the ongoing damage caused by this roadway. According to the materials provided at the Ninepipe Open House, in Alternative 3, the Ninepipe Reservoir bridge is 300 feet long with vertical clearance of 10 to 12 feet, as opposed to Alternative 2's bridge length of 660 feet with 15 feet of clearance. The Ninepipe Open House materials also state that in Alternative 3, the two kettle pond bridges are 110 feet with 10 to 12 feet of clearance (supplemented by two culverts), while in Alternative 2, they are 800 feet long with 15 feet of clearance. Numerous studies have indicated the value for wildlife of long bridges with high clearance. We are concerned about the radical differences between these options and would advocate for whichever plan is assessed as best for wildlife by CSKT wildlife experts—even if it costs more. That should include contiguous fencing and adequate height of dry ground. We would ask whether these considerations merit the development of a fourth alternative with compromise bridge lengths (e.g., 450 feet), ensuring adequate clearance etc. **2. The complete omission of sound impacts** The feasibility study omits any mention of expected sound impacts, even though these would be extensive and there would be certain important differences between the various alternatives. It is a particularly glaring omission because sound impacts were a big part of the PDEIS, DEIS, and FEIS for Highway 93 in the 1990s, and a major area of concern for the CSKT, the Flathead Resource Organization, and other commenters. An enormous literature exists relating to this issue, much of it the product of studies conducted since the Highway 93 agreement was reached in 2000: analyses of the impact of sound on human communities and wildlife, including grizzly bears and songbirds; the exponential increase in decibel levels as paved surfaces are widened, and especially with bridging; and various ways of mitigating such impacts.	*be more likely to cross in the Ninepipe Reservoir and Crow Creek areas compared to the kettle ponds, which would provide crossing accommodations for turtles and smaller mammals. Option C-3 was developed as a compromise option to incorporate an overpass along with optimized undercrossings to accommodate targeted species. During future project development activities, MDT will coordinate with Tribal representatives and other agencies and organizations to apply the most current research and guidance relating to design and placement of wildlife accommodations.* *2. Permanent traffic noise impacts can result from changes to the horizontal or vertical alignment of a highway or the addition of through-traffic lanes. A change in horizontal alignment or the number of travel lanes is not included in the preferred option (C-3). Study of noise impacts resulting from changes in the vertical alignment and in traffic patterns would need to be addressed as part of updated environmental documentation for any future reconstruction project in the corridor. If permanent noise impacts are identified, MDT would need to consider and evaluate mitigation strategies against any additional impacts they may create. A full listing of topics that would need to be evaluated in a future environmental document has been added to Section 5.1.* *3. Installation of interpretive signage or markers within the Ninepipe segment will be considered during coordination between the CSKT and MDT as part of future project development activities.* *Reduction of vehicle speeds was not recommended in previous environmental documentation or in this study due to the function of US 93 as part of the National Highway System (NHS). Speed limits on Montana highways are outlined in Montana Code Annotated 61-8-303. Statutory speed restrictions on existing roadways may be modified by the Montana Transportation Commission if recommended in a speed study, which*

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16	**2/6/2023** **Séliš-Ql̓ispé Culture Committee** Confederated **Salish & Kootenai Tribes (continued)**	Sound impacts from Highway 93 already carry to the face of the Mission Mountains, which was given protection by the Tribal Council in 1982 as the first Tribal Wilderness designated in the United States. It is a place of the highest cultural importance— protected so that it can continue serving as an ecological and cultural refuge. It is intended to provide solitude and quiet. Yet traffic noise already diminishes that core value. What will happen if those impacts are doubled or tripled? Personnel at the Open House commented that sound impacts will occur with all alternatives so do not need to be addressed at this stage, but rather during design. That is an inadequate response. The feasibility study should at the very least acknowledge that these impacts will be major, and that the project should expect major costs in mitigating or addressing them. **3. Designating this as a special highway segment and managing it accordingly** We encourage designating this segment as a special 2.5 mile stretch of Highway 93. We would suggest a name such as the Ninepipe Wildlife Parkway. It could be marked with visual gates or entrances at either end with prominent signs, reinforced with visual clues for drivers, including special sign designs and distinctive colored pavement. These and other widely recognized strategies for shaping “driver expectation” would make it more feasible to also designate this short stretch as a reduced speed segment, strictly enforced, as is done in every town traversed by Highway 93. Reducing the speed limit would have major benefits: improved safety (especially when bridges have icy conditions), reduced wildlife mortality, more opportunities for drivers to enjoy the scenery, and dramatic reductions in sound impacts (slowing speed is by far the least expensive way of mitigating sound impacts). The downside would be minimal: if speeds were reduced from 70 to 50 mph for this short 2.5-mile stretch, it would only increase travel times by 55 seconds. Less than one minute. **4. Anticipating issues with traffic during construction** The feasibility study does not acknowledge or consider the likely major impact of traffic trying to evade construction delays by moving onto county roads. Personnel at the open house essentially said there was nothing that could be done about that problem. That’s probably not true, but in any case, it should not be answered glibly without research. The impact on residents of the Mission Valley—as well as the wildlife crossing those county roads—could be massive. In addition, there could be significant deterioration in air quality due to dust. MDT should know that the Flathead Reservation is designated a Class 1 air quality area, and projects should not be undertaken in ways that will degrade that air quality. The feasibility study should acknowledge this issue and at least pledge to address it.	*is completed by MDT at the request of local government officials.* *4. During construction, paved temporary detours and temporary bridge structures parallel to US 93 within the permitted construction area along with access modifications will be required to move traffic through the project area. MDT will not sign county roads as official detour routes. During construction, MDT will strive to reduce travel delays and keep US 93 traffic on the US 93 route. MDT and their contractors will use an active dust mitigation process to minimize air quality impacts.* *As a future project proceeds, MDT will address the specific details of maintaining traffic during construction, including considerations relating to detour routes and associated air quality impacts. These potential impacts and associated mitigation commitments will be evaluated in updated environmental documentation for the Ninepipe segment (as outlined now in Section 5.1 of the study).* *5. The 1996 FEIS and the 2008 SEIS analyzed the Ninepipe segment in the context of connections to the broader US 93 corridor. As determined in previous environmental documentation, the Ninepipe segment of US 93 will remain a two-lane highway connecting to wider segments with passing opportunities to the north and south. The scope of this feasibility study was limited to the immediate Ninepipe segment with the understanding that a new environmental document will need to be prepared for any reconstruction project moving forward. At that time, the full range of environmental resources will be evaluated, including any land use changes and secondary and cumulative impacts in connection to other segments of the highway corridor.* *Although MDT funds cannot be used for non-highway-related investments, there may be potential opportunities with partner agencies and other interested organizations to preserve*

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16	**2/6/2023** **Séliš-Qĺispé Culture Committee** Confederated **Salish & Kootenai Tribes (continued)**	**5. Addressing growth impacts** In the 1990s, the core reasons for the concerns of many people over MDT's original four and five-lane plans for Highway 93—including the CSKT, the FHWA, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Flathead Resource Organization—were its secondary and cumulative impacts: namely, the growth-inducing effects of radical highway expansion, with the end result being both a degraded environment and the same traffic problems but on a bigger and more intractable scale. (Those concerns have since become even more widely documented and accepted; see, for example, the recent major story in the New York Times, Widening Highways Doesn't Fix Traffic, So Why Do We Keep Doing It?"—https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/us/widen-highwaystraffic.html) That is one reason why the 2000 Memorandum of Agreement contained commitments to protecting areas from development; ultimately, the MOA led to the development and implementation of complimentary CSKT and Lake County plans to control and direct growth. The Ninepipe Feasibility Study, however, does not even mention this central issue. In part that might be because this segment will add no additional driving lanes. However, the Ninepipe piece connects to segments both north and south that do include changes in lane configuration. How is MDT analyzing the cumulative and secondary impacts, and what is being included in these transportation plans to address them? This is an even bigger concern given that Lake County, a few years ago, gutted its Density Map and Growth Plan. While the CSKT have continued to follow their visionary land use plan, on fee lands, developers and subdividers are now essentially unfettered. We would offer the reminder that this issue and other secondary and cumulative impacts were why the CSKT and others demanded—successfully—that the MDT must analyze the whole 93 corridor project, not just individual segments (as was done with the initial project, called "Ravalli North," beginning in the late 1980s). Ultimately, that's what prompted the full EIS process under NEPA. Given that history, and the far-reaching impacts on the CSKT as a sovereign nation and a distinct and imperiled cultural community, it is particularly egregious that the Ninepipe Feasibility Study contains no analysis of how it connects to other segments, how the Highway 93 system as a whole will function, and what the larger, long-term, secondary and cumulative impacts will be. Not only should the issue be considered or at least referred to, but also the study should acknowledge that considerable resources will need to be earmarked to address those impacts, including securing remaining open lands for protection or putting in place conservation easements.	*open lands or implement conservation easements.*
17	**2/6/2023** **Thompson Smith and** Karin Stallard	We are writing to comment on the Ninepipe Feasibility Study. We attended the Open House, watched the zoom the next day, and read some of the documents made available online.	*Thank you for your comments.* *MDT worked closely with Tribal, federal, and state resource agencies and other wildlife experts to arrive at*

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17	**2/6/2023** **Thompson Smith and** Karin Stallard **(continued)**	We live one mile east of Highway 93, near the intersection of Gunlock Road and Marsh Creek Road, and have been at this residence since 1991. We are not only extremely familiar with the specific area of this project, but have also been engaged with transportation issues on the Flathead Reservation since the 1980s, largely through the Flathead Resource Organization. FRO worked hard on the matter and was honored throughout that time to be led by the Chairman of our Board of Directors, Dr. Joe McDonald. We worked closely with a diverse group in this area, including farmers, ranchers, teachers, and tribal elders, as well as then-CSKT Chairman Mickey Pablo. FRO developed a detailed plan for the Ninepipe segment that closely approximates Alternative 2. We appreciate that the Ninepipe plan includes strong wildlife components, remains on its current alignment, and includes an extension of the bike-ped path. We appreciate that MDT has pursued a mutually respectful working relationship with the CSKT. This could become one of the greatest wildlife-transportation pieces of infrastructure in the nation—if certain key modifications and additions are implemented. We support having the wildlife overpass as described in Alternative 3 (as long as it is accompanied by sufficient fencing). However, we would urge you and others involved to reexamine whether Alternative 3's dramatically shorter bridges, with less head clearance for larger animals, would be as effective as the more expensive options in Alternative 2. If longer bridges are advisable, we would suggest that building something less than ideal to lower the budget might seem advisable now but would be short-sighted. We only have the chance to do this once, so let's do it right. We are surprised at the study's failure to even mention sound impacts, which are already a major ongoing impact from the highway. We regularly hear traffic (especially large trucks) at our place. In certain weather conditions and seasons, the sound carries even further across the valley. In recent years, a number of excellent studies by biologists have further documented the effects of traffic noise on wildlife (songbirds, grizzlies, etc.). It would be important to know how much you think traffic noise will be amplified by wider pavement and bridging and what the repercussions will be for both people and wildlife. There are many ways to mitigate sound impacts. At the open house we were told that would be addressed in the design stage. That's good, but the issue should also be mentioned as part of this plan. That's because those impacts may differ between the various alternatives. Some of the sound reduction methods are costly and involve significant berming or other strategies, so it is appropriate that the plans should be researched, selected, and integrated into the plan, and it should be explicitly stated that this should be anticipated as a significant cost of the project. The cheapest and most effective way to reduce sound is to require slower traffic speeds. This can be done with good design of the roadway (demarking the Ninepipe segment as a special reduced speed zone, with prominent signs and other visual markers) and with strict enforcement. Landscape architects and driver expectations experts could be enlisted to help.	*Option C-3, which optimizes wildlife accommodations. The intent of this option was to accommodate large animals (such as grizzly bears and ungulates) at locations where they are known to cross the highway. Option C-3 includes a variety of crossing structure types (including culverts, bridges, and an overpass) spaced throughout the corridor to best meet the crossing requirements for target species and to minimize conflicts between animals and vehicles. Partner agencies voiced support for Option C-3 based on consideration of tradeoffs and constraints affecting this corridor.* *The focus of this study was to determine the feasibility of the preferred alternative identified in the 2008 SEIS and to consider potential modifications to better meet the project purpose and need. All three options considered for the study would remain on the existing horizontal alignment and would maintain the two-lane roadway configuration with widened shoulders. It was determined that all three options are likely feasible to implement. This finding enables MDT to move forward in identifying funding sources and proceeding with next steps in the project development process.* *Please see response to Comment #16 regarding noise impacts.* *Please see response to Comment #16 regarding vehicle speeds.* *Please see response to Comment #16 regarding maintenance of traffic during construction.* *On page 3, the feasibility study references the 1996 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) completed for the portion of US 93 between Evaro and Polson. The Record of Decision (ROD) did not provide specific design details so MDT, CSKT, and FHWA agreed to prepare a supplemental environmental study of the Ninepipe/Ronan section to further explore possible alternate alignments and perform a detailed study of highway impacts, which*

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17	**2/6/2023** **Thompson Smith and** Karin Stallard **(continued)**	Furthermore, enforced slower speeds would also be the most effective way to improve safety, especially on icy winter bridges. And slower speeds would reduce mortality for any wildlife that manage to get around the fencing systems. The Ninepipe segment is only 2.5 miles long, so a reduction in speed would add minimal time for drivers. Many of our neighbors along Marsh Creek and Gunlock Roads asked at the Open House if traffic would be detoured during construction. We were all relieved that it will not be. However, when we asked about voluntary detouring—people using county roads to evade the construction delays—we were told there was nothing that could be done. We do not believe that to be accurate. We would ask that MDT research what the options are to address that certain problem and the many problems that can be expected to ensue, including dust, accidents, impacts on people walking / running, etc. The 2.5-mile Ninepipe segment is part of the 53-mile Evaro to Polson Project. Nowhere does this seem to be acknowledged, or explained in terms of how MDT envisons the larger project working as a transportation / community / wildlife system. Many people and organizations, including FRO and the CSKT, worked hard in the early 1990s to compel an analysis of the whole project. Now it seems re-segmented, with no perceived need to say how adjoining segments will effect Ninepipe, or vice versa. The most obvious example is that a passing lane is planned for Post Creek Hill, ending right before Gunlock Road. How is that going to work in terms of the function of the Ninepipe segment? The bigger concern, however, is the absence of any mention of the issue that lay at the heart of the Highway 93 struggle in the 1990s: the tendency of highway expansion to exacerbate problems of uncontrolled growth. MDT explicitly acknowledged that in the MOA. We are concerned that has been forgotten. If this plan seeks to invest tens of millions of dollars in wildlife infrastructure, as it should, then it should also include commitments and plans and strategies to prevent the destruction of habitat. Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and for the good things that are already in this plan.	*resulted in completion of the 2008 SEIS. Decisions made as part of previous environmental documents (including the horizontal roadway alignment and the roadway lane configuration) have been carried forward as a starting point for subsequent projects and for the Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study. Project development along the US 93 corridor has proceeded in segments to achieve reasonable project lengths reflecting funding availability and construction sequencing requirements.* *Instead of a four- or five-lane section throughout the entire corridor, previous environmental documentation identified a two-lane configuration with periodic passing lanes as the best way to meet the safety and operational needs of the highway while minimizing impacts to adjacent resources. This decision has been carried forward in all subsequent projects and studies. In the Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study, steepened fill slopes and adjustments to the shared use path were incorporated in the preferred option (C-3) to further minimize impacts to wetlands and wildlife habitat.* *Please see response to Comment #16 regarding land use changes and secondary and cumulative impacts.*