



NEWSLINE

Montana Department of Transportation
mdt.mt.gov



September 2021



Updated Montana Highway Map Available

The updated Montana Highway Map was released this summer. Maps are available at your local Chamber of Commerce. If you haven't picked up your copy, you can get one by calling (800) 847-4868 or online at www.visitmt.com/guidebook.html. Maps automatically come with guidebooks. A PDF version of the map is also available at www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/maps.shtml. If you or someone you know owns a business and would like to promote tourism in Montana, you can chat with a representative to ask for a case of 250 maps. It's all free!

MDT Develops New Media Spots to Support Vision Zero Campaign

The goal of Vision Zero – zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana Roadways – is something MDT and statewide traffic safety partners have been steadily working toward for over a decade through a strategic focus on four key traffic safety disciplines (known as the “4 Es”): Education, Enforcement, Emergency Medical Response, and Engineering. The area of Education focuses on changing beliefs or attitudes about traffic safety while educating the traveling public on why traffic safety behaviors are a personal and vital piece of the puzzle in reducing Montana’s fatal and serious injury roadway crashes.

In support of the Vision Zero goal, MDT runs traffic safety campaigns to inform and educate the traveling public on why everyone has at least “One Reason” to always wear a seat belt when traveling in a vehicle and to only drive sober. This year, MDT’s “One Reason” buckle up and drive sober campaigns have been expanded with the addition of two new messages. “Buckle Up – Enough Reasons,” features Montanans modeling good reasons to wear their seat belts. The message in the “Gratitude” media spot highlights that your friends and family are happy to provide a sober ride whenever you need one – be responsible, just ask. The new messaging spots were both filmed with local actors in Montana with the goal of connecting Montanans to the importance of traffic safety and their “One Reason” to prioritize traffic safety in their lives and travels.

Over time, tactics of shocking or shaming motorists into better behavior have not proven to be an effective traffic safety messaging strategy – particularly with the most resistant, risky drivers! MDT’s “One Reason” traffic safety campaign is in step with a nationwide effort to promote a positive traffic safety culture with strategies fo-



The new media spot “Buckle Up—Enough Reasons” shows Montanans of all ages and backgrounds making the right choice to wear their seat belt.

ocusing on changing beliefs that influence risky driver behaviors. Many states have adopted similar media messages that model safe driving behaviors proven to save lives, such as buckling seat belts, proper use of child safety seats, and always having a sober driver. This positive shift has been the emphasis of Montana’s “One Reason” traffic safety campaigns and reminds all roadway users that they have a personal reason to engage in safe behaviors.

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Federal Surface Transportation Program Status

As Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021 comes to a close, MDT is on track to deliver all planned projects and programs. Along with the end of the FFY, the extension of the FAST Act will expire at the end of September. Both bodies of Congress have made considerable progress toward approving a new multi-year authorization act, with the Senate passing the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) and associated budget resolution in August. As of this writing, the House has considered the Senate budget resolution and is committed to considering IIJA before the end of FFY 2021. The effort and focus on these actions represent Congress’ recognition of the critical need for stable and increased funding in the nation’s transportation programs and infrastructure. However, there are still hurdles to overcome to get a new bill in place, and MDT continues to support Montana’s congressional delegation in its efforts to protect and represent Montana’s transportation programs and funding needs for transportation.

NEWSLINE SUBSCRIPTION UPDATES

Did you know? The Newsline is available by both mail (print) and email (electronically).

Please contact Lauren Eichenfels, Newsline Editor, to add or update your subscription preferences.

➤ **By email:** leichenfels@mt.gov

➤ **By phone*:** 444-7614

➤ ***Please leave a voicemail with your name, phone number, and best time of day to reach you to update your subscription preferences or information.**

New Deputy Director

MDT welcomed a new Deputy Director to the department leadership team this summer. Julie Brown brings 20 years of senior management level experience leading highly successful teams and serving the public sector. Most recently, she served as Regional Vice President of Public Sector Sales and Customer Success with Oracle and has extensive experience serving public sector agencies as well as U.S. state and local agencies, Canadian agencies, Federal Civilian, and Department of Defense. Julie was raised in western Montana and holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Montana State University (MSU). She is also a certified business and leadership coach.



Julie Brown, MDT Deputy Director

Join us in welcoming Deputy Director Brown to MDT!

MDT Provides Local Transit Providers with \$3.6 Million for Capital Investments

MDT is investing \$3.6 million for local transit equipment and infrastructure. Vehicles ranging from 5-passenger mini conversion vans to a 45-passenger commercial bus will be added to fleets around the state. Infrastructure projects include one new transit facility in Custer County and one transit facility upgrade in Valley County. Twenty local transit providers will benefit from these capital investments.

Applications are awarded based on funding availability and through a competitive process where requests are ranked by greatest need. Reliable transportation is important to quality of life in a large state like Montana, and MDT has concentrated on a coordinated process that encourages agencies across the state to work together to pool resources to better serve the transportation needs of their communities. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Adam Kraft at 444-6120 or akraft@mt.gov.

November 1 Deadline Approaching for BaRSAA Funds

Cities, Towns, and Counties don't miss out on your allocated BaRSAA funds. Submit your request for your funds using Webgrants at <https://funding.mt.gov/index.do>.

The **request must include:**

- The amount of BaRSAA funding sought
- An adopted resolution to request and accept the funding including the source of the local matching funds
- A description of the road or bridge construction, reconstruction, maintenance, or repair project

More information is available on the MDT website: www.mdt.mt.gov/roadbridge/

Need help submitting your request? Call MDT at 444-9131.

Questions on the BaRSAA program can be directed to the Montana League of Cities and Towns or the Montana Association of Counties. Additional information is also available on the MLCT and MACO websites:

<https://mtleague.org/resources/>
<https://mtcounties.org/resources-data/barsaa/>

Local Transit Partnership and Community Support Reason to Celebrate in Havre

North Central Montana Transit (NCMT), a partnership between Havre-based nonprofit Opportunity Link Inc., Hill and Blaine Counties, and the Rocky Boy and Fort Belknap Transit Systems, held an appreciation celebration on July 16, 2021. The celebration was hosted by Opportunity Link Inc. as a thank-you to local partners and to celebrate the addition of two new busses to its fleet. For many, NCMT's services enhance the livability and vitality of the region by providing opportunities for access to critical health care, education, and employment.

NCMT receives its annual funding from MDT through a cost reimbursement agreement, which requires NCMT to provide matching funds from community support (i.e., individual donations, partnerships, or sponsorship from local organizations). Through these efforts to secure matching funds, as well as support and contributions from the community, NCMT is able to provide vital transportation services for the residents of northcentral Montana.



MDT Transit Supervisor, Adam Kraft, and MDT Transit Planner, Eric Romero, joined NCMT's Appreciation Celebration held on July 16, 2021. Also pictured are the Board of Directors and staff of Opportunity Link, Inc.

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The primary audiences for these campaigns continue to be motorists with the highest tendency to engage in unsafe behaviors, like not wearing a seat belt or driving impaired. In fatal and serious injury crashes, unrestrained occupants (no seat belt worn in a vehicle where one is available) are still in the 45-50% range, showing there is more work to be done in educating Montanans on the importance of always buckling up. The new "Buckle Up – Enough Reasons" media spot continues this education with an emphasis on how wearing a seat belt every time you travel in a vehicle can save your life. Whether you're a teen getting behind the wheel for the first time or drive every day for work, seat belts are the best defense against injury or death in a crash for ALL Montanans.

Despite rising fatalities in Montana this year, there is good news to support the impact of these media efforts - the majority of Montana's population is engaging in safe driving habits. More Montanans are buckling up than ever before, according to the annual observational seat belt count (2020). The observed seat belt use numbers have increased from mid-70 percentile usage in the mid-2000s, to almost 90% in the last two years.

Involvement of alcohol-impaired drivers in fatal and serious injury crashes has also declined over the last decade; however, the percentage of these crashes per Montana's population, compared to other states, still ranks Montana at the top of the national list. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), during 2018 (data used for determination) Montana's alcohol-impaired driving fatalities per 100 million Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) were .58 as compared to .33 for the national average. There is much room for improvement in addressing this behavior-driven cause of death on our roadways. The new "Gratitude" media spot aims to continue to educate Montanans about the fatal consequences of driving impaired, while also reducing the perceived stigma or fear of asking a friend or family member for a sober ride home. Planning for a sober ride in advance is always the best practice, but a safe ride home is always the priority – you just have to ask!

- Learn more about the goal of Vision Zero for Montana: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/about.shtml>
- Learn more about the research behind MDT's messaging to reach the "risky driver:" <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/trafficsafety-reactance.shtml>

For more information on the "One Reason" campaign or MDT's NHTSA-funded traffic safety programs, contact Highway Traffic Safety Supervisor, Janet Kenny, at 444-7417 or jakenny@mt.gov.

MDT is committed to Vision Zero—zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana roadways.

Check out the new "Buckle Up—Enough Reasons" and "Gratitude" impaired driving campaign spots on MDT's YouTube page, @MontanaDOT:

- Gratitude: <https://youtu.be/HjiZ6i1akt0>
- Buckle Up—Enough Reasons: <https://youtu.be/3m53QQRUYJE>



MCS Officer Recognized for Life-Saving Actions in Crash

Corporal Sara Lubke of MDT's Motor Carrier Services (MCS) Division was awarded the Meritorious Service Award by the Honorable Governor Greg Gianforte this past June for her heroic, life-saving actions. Based out of Shelby, Corporal Lubke was the first to arrive on the scene of a crash in May 2021 involving four vehicles (commercial and passenger) near Conrad on I-15. During the ceremony, the Governor commented on the tragic loss of two lives in this crash, and how Corporal Lubke's actions in the line of duty played a critical role in preventing additional fatalities due to the crash.

MDT is proud to be staffed by many dedicated, hard-working Montanans like Corporal Lubke, and her service to the traveling public exemplifies the department's commitment to safety and Vision Zero. Congratulations on the well-deserved award!

Pictured from left to right: Governor Greg Gianforte, MCS Corporal Sara Lubke



SAVE THE DATES OCTOBER 4 & 5

2021 Annual Transportation Safety Meeting

Delta Hotels Helena Colonial
2310 Colonial Drive, Helena, MT

Montana's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan

This event will bring together local, tribal, state, and federal safety partners and other safety stakeholders to assess Montana's progress in reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries. Hear about coordinated efforts, media campaigns, and safety programs and projects focused on improving driver behavior and reducing risk of fatalities and serious injuries on Montana's roadways.

The agenda is under development and will be posted at www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp-meetings.shtml

For additional information, please contact Pam Langvedavis at plangvedavis@mt.gov or 444-7646 .



National Teen Driver Safety Week: October 17-23, 2021

National Teen Driver Safety Week takes place October 17-23, 2021. This event, now in its 14th year, is committed to raising awareness of teen driving safety issues.



Parents and guardians can help ensure their teen is practicing safe behaviors while driving.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), motor vehicle crashes are the second leading cause of death for teens in the United States. In Montana, there have been 145 teen fatalities over the last five years. Of those, 57% were unrestrained. In addition, teens account for over 4,400 crashes each year.

Parents play an important role in helping ensure their teen drivers take smart steps to stay safe on the road. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) gives parents tips on how to talk about safe driving behaviors with their teens and address the most dangerous and deadly driving behaviors for teen drivers: alcohol, lack of seat belt use, distracted driving, speeding, and driving with passengers. To learn more, visit <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving>.



MDT Awarded Grant to Address Teen Driver Safety and Speeding

Ford Driving Skills for Life (DSFL) and the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) announced in July that the Montana State Highway Traffic Safety Office (MDT) was selected to receive a \$18,000 grant to work with Montana Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) chapters to create a speeding safety message for the 2021-2022 school year. Learn more about the grant at <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/partner-initiatives/DSFL>.

MDT also partners with FCCLA, which is a student organization for young men and women in Family and Consumer Sciences education through grade 12. There are 65 chapters across Montana. Through this partnership, chapters are given an opportunity to apply for funding to develop peer-to-peer traffic safety campaigns in their schools and communities. The peer-to-peer and community projects target seat belt usage, distracted driving, drowsy driving, and impaired driving. Montana FCCLA has provided more traffic safety outreach to rural schools than any other project in the state.

For more information on Montana's safe teen driving efforts, please contact Sheila Cozzie at 444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.

Thanks, MDT!

"Really nice job with the Vision Zero ads. Congrats! I like three ads/PSAs. One is the driver passing a wreck on the highway, then thinking about his young daughter in the back seat. Another is the young men chatting about their plans for the summer. The one I like best is the montage of several individuals, old and young, white and Indian buckling up. It's simple, expressive, representative of Montana's population. Good stuff!" - Glenn P.

Montana Traffic Safety Dates

⇒ **September 19-25, 2021**

Child Passenger Safety Week (National Seat Check Saturday is September 25, 2021)

⇒ **October 2021**

National Pedestrian Safety Month

⇒ **October 4-5, 2021**

Annual Transportation Safety Meeting (CHSP)

⇒ **October 17-23, 2021**

National Teen Driver Safety Week

⇒ **November 24-28, 2021***

Thanksgiving & Holiday Travel—Buckle Up & Drive Sober

⇒ **December 11, 2021—January 3, 2022***

Winter-Holiday Drive Sober Enforcement

Note: A total 595 hours were worked during the FFY2020 Winter Mobilization by 17 participating agencies. 1,325 citations and warnings were issued during this mobilization. For more information, contact Chad Newman at chnewman@mt.gov or 444-0856.

*Strategic Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP) Mobilization Periods

MDT Awards Traffic Safety Grants to Support Vision Zero

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Grants

MDT awarded \$3.05 million in federal grant monies from NHTSA for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022. The grants will address impaired driving, occupant protection, and child passenger safety. The emphasis of this grant program is to improve traffic safety through enforcement and education. Law enforcement agencies are funded for extra patrols to concentrate on seat belt and impaired driving laws. Grants for DUI Courts, a Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor, and the 24/7 Program address impaired driving. Traffic safety education programs continue with the Native American Safe On All Roads (SOAR) program and Buckle Up coalitions. The NHTSA grant opportunity will open January 1 and close March 1, 2022, for FFY23 funds.

<http://mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/grants/>

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Grant Program

Nearly \$1 million in grant funds is awarded through the state funded EMS Grant program annually. The grants are provided to agencies staffed by mostly volunteers, Medicare-level billing providers for ambulances, emergency vehicles, training, equipment, communication, or patient care. The program is awarded through a competitive grant process that opens May 1, annually. For State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022, about \$1 million in funding will be awarded to EMS providers.

http://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/grants_ems.shtml

Contact Janet Kenny at 444-7417 or jakenny@mt.gov for more information.

Back to School Safety

As Montana enters the 2021-2022 school year, back-to-school travel routines require a renewed focus on safety. Pedestrian and bicycle safety for students is critically important, especially for students traveling without adult supervision. Young children walking or biking to school are just starting to develop safety skills and confidence, with many venturing out on their own for the first time in months or the first time at all. Children are also vulnerable when entering and exiting school buses, as well as traveling to and from the bus stop.

To help keep Montana's children safe, motorists can practice the following when driving or riding:

- Watch for children walking or bicycling when backing out of driveways and garages, and when exiting alleyways (particularly in the morning and afternoon and as daylight hours decrease).
- Watch for children in school zones and be aware of nearby school routes.
- Slow down and watch for children at corners and bus stops.
- Be aware of school bus laws: Yellow flashing lights indicate children are preparing to load or unload and drivers should be prepared to stop. Red flashing lights indicate children are loading or unloading and motorists **MUST** stop at least 30 feet from the school bus and wait until red lights are no longer flashing. The motorist must not resume travel until the extended stop-sign arm is retracted and the bus is moving again.

Remember, children are not small adults. A child's peripheral vision is not fully developed. Children also have difficulty determining direction of sound and judging the speed and distance of moving motor vehicles. By being aware, slowing down, and observing traffic laws, you can do your part as a motorist to ensure Montana's children arrive to their destination safely.

Are you a parent or guardian of a child? There's no better time to teach them about pedestrian and bicycle safety! MDT has a wealth of safety and educational resources available online at www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/ or by contacting MDT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator at 444-9273 or MDTBikePed@mt.gov.

Make Sure Your Child is in the Right Seat

Car seats and boosters provide protection for infants and children in a crash, yet car crashes are a leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 13. According to various reports from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and technicians in the field, car seat, booster seat, and seat belt misuse rates vary from 74-90%. That is why it is so important to choose and use the right car seat correctly every time your child is in the car.



Make sure your child is in the right car seat for their safety!

The Child Passenger Safety (CPS) program is fundamental in minimizing deaths and injuries to children on Montana's roads. National statistics show that child safety seats reduce the risk of fatal injuries by 71% for infants and 54% for toddlers in passenger vehicles. Booster seat use reduces the risk of serious injury by 45% for children aged 4-8 years when compared with seat belt use alone.

Caregivers can visit a certified CPS technician in locations throughout the state to double-check that car seats are properly installed. CPS technicians are car seat experts who have taken a national certification course with curriculum written by NHTSA in collaboration with National CPS Board and Safe Kids Worldwide. They learn proper car seat installation options, vehicle differences, harnessing procedures, and more.

To find a CPS technician, go to <https://cert.safekids.org/> or www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats#installation-help-inspection.

To help keep children safe on our roads, NHTSA is sponsoring National Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Week from September 19-25, 2021. Throughout the state, CPS Technicians will be holding car seat checkup events where parents and caregivers will receive education and hands-on assistance.

If you are interested in becoming a certified CSP technician, visit <https://cert.safekids.org/become-tech>.

For more information on Montana's CPS program, contact Janet Kenny at 444-7417 or jakenny@mt.gov.

Safe Driving Around School Buses

→ You should allow a *minimum* of 30 feet between your vehicle and a school bus making a passenger stop. But what might 30 feet look like?

2 Car Lengths

2.5 Snow Plows

3 Bison Lengths

22.5 Road Cones

October is National Pedestrian Safety Month

In 2020, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) designated October as National Pedestrian Safety Month, making pedestrian safety the focus of the month as part of its continuing efforts to improve safety for vulnerable road users. October 2021 is the second year for this important safety period and is a great opportunity for Montanans to remember that at some point in our day, "we are all pedestrians." Watch for more messaging promoting National Pedestrian Safety Month this October on MDT's website (www.mdt.mt.gov) and social channels. You can also find safety tips and resources for non-motorized travel and transportation year-round online:

www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/

New Research Projects, Pooled Fund Participation for FFY 2022

Did you know MDT solicits for research ideas annually? Although research ideas can be submitted at any time by anyone, the Research Section formally solicits for research ideas beginning in February for Stage 1: Research Ideas, due March 31. In March and early April, champions are identified, literature searches are conducted, and the champions determine which projects will move forward to Stage 2. Research ideas without champions do not move forward. Stage 2: Research Topic Statements, are due April 30. Between May and August, based on available funds, the MDT high-level Research Review Committee (RRC) and District Administrators determine which projects resulting from this annual solicitation, pooled funds, and other partnering projects will move forward.

(Learn more at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/research_review.shtml.)

These projects along with the continuing projects make up the next year's work plan. New projects selected for the 2022 Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) include four new research projects and participation in two new pooled fund projects.

For FFY 2022, the following new projects were moved forward to the Technical Panel stage:

- Aging Conditions for Hot Mix Asphalt Cracking Test: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/aging-hot-mix.shtml>
- Development of P-Y Curves for Analysis of Laterally Loaded Piles in Montana: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/pycurves.shtml>
- Evaluate MDT Electrified Wildlife Deterrent Mats: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/deterrent-mats.shtml>
- Organization and Analysis of Measurement While Drilling (WMD) Data: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/mwd.shtml>

For FFY 2022, participation in the following new pooled fund projects was approved.

- Building Information Modeling (BIM) for Infrastructure: <http://www.pooledfund.org/Details/Solicitation/1547>
- Pavement Structural Evaluation with Traffic Speed Deflection Devices (TSDDs): <https://www.pooledfund.org/Details/Study/637>

To learn more about MDT's research solicitation, visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/unique/solicit.shtml> or contact Susan Sillick at ssillick@mt.gov or 444-7693 for more information.

MDT's Aeronautics Division: Air Search and Rescue

In 1945, the Montana Aeronautics Division was charged with the responsibility of public safety relating to aviation, the promotion of aviation, and the coordination of state and federal agencies engaged in aviation operations within the state.

The Aeronautics Division is responsible for air search operations pertaining to civil aircraft within the state of Montana. The Air Force Rescue Coordination Center is responsible for search and rescue operations involving military and air carrier aircraft within the United States.

Responsibility for operations pertaining to aircraft search and rescue in Montana may be broken into two categories: the Montana Aeronautics Division and county sheriff's offices. The Montana Aeronautics Division is responsible for the air search for missing aircraft, assists Flight Service Stations with overdue aircraft, and is responsible for locating Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) broadcasts within the state. Missing persons and the performance and coordination of ground searches are the responsibility of the respective county sheriff's offices in Montana.

Montana Aeronautics accomplishes the requirements of the air search operations by utilizing Montana volunteer pilots and their aircraft, as well as State aircraft and pilots. Montana is divided into 14 districts, each comprised of three to eight counties. In each of the 14 districts are a volunteer coordinator and co-coordinator to assist the Division in the planning and operations of the search. To learn more about the Aeronautics Division, please visit www.mdt.mt.gov/aviation/.

MDT is undertaking a feasibility study of the Ninepipe segment of US Highway 93 (US-93) from Gunlock Road (Reference Post [RP] 40.0) to Brooke Lane (RP 44.5). The main objective of the US-93 Ninepipe Feasibility Study is to evaluate the feasibility of the previously identified Preferred Alternative based on an analysis of onsite conditions experienced in the corridor. This study will be a collaborative process between MDT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), resource agencies, and the public. Robert Peccia and Associates has been contracted to assist MDT in the completion of this effort.

In 1996, MDT completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for US-93 from Evaro to Polson, which includes the Ninepipe Corridor. However, the FEIS and Record of Decision (ROD) did not provide specific design details for a section of the corridor that includes the Ninepipe section. In 2008, MDT, FHWA, and CSKT completed a supplemental EIS (SEIS) for the Ninepipe/Ronan Section of US 93 (RP 37.1 to 48.3). This SEIS and ROD identified a preferred alternative (PA) for development in the rural portion of the corridor, which includes the Ninepipe section. The PA configuration consists of a two-lane roadway, wildlife crossing structures, and a separated bicycle/pedestrian path. Additionally, in 2016, a SEIS re-evaluation was completed for the urban segment of the Ninepipe/Ronan corridor (RP 44.6 to 47.2). The Ninepipe segment was not addressed during this re-evaluation, however.

Since these previous environmental documentation efforts have been completed, MDT has developed multiple projects in sections of US-93 adjacent to the Ninepipe corridor. Multiple challenges have arisen during project development relating to constructability due to environmental factors, impacts, and costs.

The US-93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study is being completed in an effort to proactively identify and address the likely constraints that will be experienced as a result of project nomination and development in this corridor. During this study, MDT is first evaluating geotechnical constraints, hydraulic considerations, wetland impacts, cultural influences, and right-of-way needs. Corridor-specific screening criteria will be developed to determine if the PA from the 2008 SEIS is viable in terms of impacts, construction costs, and feasibility considerations.

The findings of this study will assist MDT in future project development decisions. Additionally, the study has been designed in a way that will allow for information obtained during the analysis of onsite conditions to be used during future environmental re-evaluation of the Ninepipe segment, should a project be advanced from this study.

This study began in June 2021 and is scheduled to be completed by November 2022 (18 month timeframe). During the course of the study, there will be a review of relevant onsite conditions, evaluation of the feasibility of the PA based on the observed onsite conditions, and final feasibility study documentation. The study is designed to facilitate public and agency involvement throughout its lifespan, and multiple meetings will be held with the general public, resource agencies, stakeholders, and our CSKT Tribal partners.

Additional information regarding the US-93 Ninepipe Corridor Feasibility Study, including how to have your voice heard and stay informed, can be found on the study webpage:

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

A Most Interesting Scenic Drive: Black Otter Trail

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

My grandparents' house in Billings faced Black Otter Trail in Billings Heights. Located just off Airport Road/Montana Highway 3, the 2.8-mile scenic road provides spectacular views of Billings, Sacrifice Cliff, and the Beartooth and Pryor mountains from the top of the rimrocks. The road is anchored on the east end by Kelly Mountain and originally wound its way to the Range Rider of the Yellowstone statue at Billings Logan International Airport. The road, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, passes through an area steeped in history. I've spent a good part of my life watching traffic on the trail and, occasionally, driving it (sometimes not very safely). Its a deep-rooted part of my life, but it was only lately that I learned the history of the road and was fortunate enough to obtain an original Black Otter Trail marker.

The 1930s was the first golden age for automobile tourism in Montana. It was during that turbulent decade that the Montana Highway Department developed a tourism program that included highway maps, the roadside historical markers, and the port of entry stations, among other things. Lewis and Clark Caverns and the Little Bighorn Battlefield became important tourist attractions, and both the Beartooth Highway and Going to the Sun Road opened to traffic. Many places, like Billings, developed plans to draw tourists to their communities. In 1936, Yellowstone County received money from the New Deal Works Progress Administration (WPA) to develop roads in the county, including a scenic road atop the Billings rimrocks.

Designed by Yellowstone County Surveyor Charles E. Durland, the road stretched from Kelly Mountain on the east end of the rims overlooking the fairgrounds westerly to the airport. It opened in 1928 with a loop encircling Skeleton Cliff. Observers on the loop could see seven mountain ranges in the Billings vicinity. WPA crews started work on the road in March 1936 and built about thirty percent of the road before a lack of funding forced the WPA to abandon the project; they never returned. Yellowstone County furnished the materials and construction equipment. In 1937, the Billings City Council completed construction of the road. When completed, the trail included turnouts at scenic and historic points. Guard walls and retaining walls composed of native sandstone kept traffic on the road and prevented motorists from taking the quick way to the base of the rims. Historical markers echoed the appear-



Postcard view of the Black Otter Trail in Montana (1937)



Original trail marker for the Black Otter Trail (c. 1937) recently acquired by the author

ance of the Montana Highway Department's roadside markers; they were composed of log support posts, concrete bases faced with stone, and wood boards. Concrete pyramids veneered in cobblestones held metal pipes with telescopes mounted on them. In many ways, the new trail was a smaller facsimile of the Going to the Sun Road. Importantly, the trail also incorporated the grave of Luther S. "Yellowstone" Kelly. Kelly became a renowned scout for the U.S. Army during the Indian Wars. When he died in 1928, he specified he be buried on top of the rimrocks overlooking his beloved Yellowstone Valley.

The Tourist Committee of the Billings Commercial Club, the predecessor of the Chamber of Commerce, took charge of the promotion of the scenic road. In 1938, the committee named the road Black Otter's Trail, "in honor of an Indian chief who was buried near the grave of Yellowstone Kelly." Unfortunately, Black Otter appears to be an invention developed by the Commercial Club. There is no evidence, including from Crow tribal elders, that Black Otter ever existed. Regardless, the club began to distribute tourist folders with maps in 1938 with Black Otter Trail on them. The folders touted the historical sites motorists could see and visit. These included Kelly's gravesite, the Place of Skulls, the old site of the steamboat port of Coulson, and Boot Hill Cemetery.

In 1944, the club sponsored a contest to stimulate interest in the trail during World War II. The goal of the contest was "to secure ideas and designs for appropriate landscaping and furnishings" for the postwar period. The winner, famed landscape artist LeRoy Greene, received a war bond for his suggestions about landscaping the road.

Over the years, however, the original intent of Black Otter Trail faded. Chronic vandalism caused the Chamber of Commerce to remove the telescopes and historical markers in 1962. The trail was the site of parties, nefarious activities, and had become generally neglected. Since the 1990s, however, Black Otter Trail has experienced a renaissance. The road has been incorporated into the Swords Park Trail and Yellowstone Kelly gravesite. Refurbished in 2017, Black Otter Trail once again provides motorists and pedestrians spectacular views of the Yellowstone Valley and passes through an area steeped in Montana history.

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MDT Wants Your Comments On New Projects

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, please visit www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/proposed_proj.pdf, www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.shtml, or call (800) 714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT Project Analysis Manager, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or email them to mdfstip@mt.gov.

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