



MEETING SUMMARY

CIVIL ENGINEERING / PLANNING / SURVEYING

PROJECT NAME: Sun River Bridge Replacement Project

PROJECT NUMBER: MT FLAP BOR 2980(1)

CONTRACT/TASK: 69056721D000008 / 69056723F00008N

MEETING TYPE: Agency and Public Scoping Meetings

MEETING DATE: May 16, 2023

ATTENDEES: Jennifer Chariarse, WFLHD
Brad Thompson, RPA
Sarah Nicolai, RPA
Agency Representatives/Members of the Public (see attached sign-in sheet)

Agency Meeting

Western Federal Lands (WFL) offered an opportunity for Coordinating Agencies, regulatory agencies (404 and 401 permitting regulators), and Tribal representatives to join an informal agency meeting to discuss the proposed project, potential impacts, and anticipated permitting requirements. Agency contacts received an email notification from WFL inviting them to participate.

Agency Comments

- Tim McNew from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) participated in the agency meeting. USACE and WFL discussed the project scope, including the intent to span the river channel with a new bridge downstream of the existing crossing to avoid impacts to the historic siphon and bridge. No permanent structures or fill are anticipated to be placed in the river channel, however temporary work structures and access may be needed during construction.
- USACE is interested in understanding how the project is funded and if Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds were used to support the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant award.
- USACE anticipates Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) may include Canada lynx and grizzly bear.
- USBLM and USFS may have separate lists of managed species in addition to ESA T&E species that would need to be considered in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. USBOR uses the ESA listing only and does not manage additional species.



406.447.5000



3147 Saddle Dr. Helena, MT 59601



www.rpa-hln.com

HELENA / KALISPELL / BOZEMAN

- USACE is in the process of developing a new ordinary high-water mark (OHWM) delineation process, with a supporting manual and data sheets. USACE would be interested in hearing any feedback from application of this new process.
- Delineation of the OHWM may be challenging to identify since the Sun River water elevation is controlled by reservoir operations.
- USACE does not regulate vehicular traffic in water bodies. No permit would be needed for geotechnical rig access within the river.
- USACE permitting authority under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act may be triggered by construction of a temporary work bridge in the river. WFL intends to address this scenario in the EA to make this option available to a contractor if needed to support construction activities.
- WFL noted four Tribes to date have expressed interest in the project, including the Assiniboine / Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and Little Shell-Chippewa. The Northern Cheyenne Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) responded by email requesting a cultural resources review ¼-mile outside the Area of Potential Effect (APE), and the other three interested Tribes asked to receive project updates and project documentation. No Tribal representatives attended the meetings.
- Further coordination with agencies will be needed to confirm required permits for the project. WFL will serve as the project applicant for all federal permits. Greenfields Irrigation District could potentially serve as the project applicant for any state permits not required by federal regulation.
- Katie Vivian from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) attended the public meeting and asked what will happen to the existing bridge and how it will be maintained if it remains in place. MFWP is concerned about potential impacts to fish from falling debris if the bridge is not properly maintained. Lewis and Clark County confirmed they are not interested in taking ownership or maintenance responsibility of the existing bridge. The project team would prefer not to impact the existing bridge as part of the current project because any action would likely be considered an adverse effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). In addition to the time required to address a Section 106 finding, demolition or rehabilitation of the existing bridge could impact the existing siphon and costs may exceed available funding. Resolution of what will happen to the existing bridge is anticipated to be determined separately from the project to construct a new bridge.
- Brett Blumhardt from the North Central Montana District-USBLM expressed interest in requesting assistance from WFL in developing the USBLM decision document due to staffing challenges. The USBLM National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planner position is currently vacant.
- Regular meetings with the federal Cooperating Agencies are desired.

Public Scoping Meeting

A public scoping meeting was held following the informal agency meeting. The scoping meeting was advertised in the *Fairfield Sun Times* on April 27 and May 4, 2023 (see attached affidavit). Additionally, a postcard announcing the meeting was mailed to 84 nearby property owners on May 8, 2023. Agency partners, including the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (USBLM), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS), were invited by WFL to participate in the public scoping meeting and be available to answer public questions. Additionally, attendees from the earlier agency meeting also participated in the public scoping meeting.

A total of 23 individuals signed in at the agency and public meetings including seven agency representatives from USACE, USBLM, USBOR, MFWP, and Lewis and Clark County, as well as representatives from U.S. Senator Jon Tester's office, GID, and the Sun River Watershed Group-Sun River Canyon. Additional individuals attended but did not provide their names on the sign-in sheet.

An open house format was provided. Attendees had an opportunity to read the project newsletter, review project exhibits, speak with project representatives, and provide comments on potential issues and concerns within the project area. No presentation was provided.

Public Comments

- No written comments were received at the meetings.
- A member of the public expressed concern if this project represents the best use of public funds given the high cost and relatively low usage of the crossing. The transportation cost for detours is much lower and seems more appropriate than the cost to build a new bridge structure. The same member of the public expressed concern about the indirect and cumulative effects of building a new bridge, including the potential to increase traffic and development in the area, direct and indirect impacts to wildlife, increased pressure on public lands, and potential impacts to the historic canal and Pishkun Canal Road, which is not a public road.
- Multiple members of the public expressed support for the project, including adjacent and nearby landowners. Attendees noted the new bridge will provide a safe, reliable crossing for continued access to public and private lands and irrigation facilities.
- Multiple members of the public were interested to learn which alignment was identified as the preferred alternative for consideration in the EA. Support was expressed for the longer structure, shorter access roadways, and reduced switchbacks under Alternative 8. No opposition to Alternative 8 was voiced in relation to the other alternatives.
- Multiple members of the public indicated they expect minimal impacts to wildlife given the steep, rocky terrain in the immediate project vicinity, which limits wildlife habitat and access to the river.
- One member of the public indicated they expected minimal cultural resources to be identified in the immediate project vicinity.
- The owners of the private parcel on the east side of the bridge that will be directly affected by the project voiced support for the project. They were interested in the construction schedule and offered to provide staging areas, housing, and material sources for the project.

Attachments

- Attachment 1: Meeting Sign-in Sheets
- Attachment 2: Affidavit of Publication
- Attachment 3: Postcard
- Attachment 4: Newsletter #1
- Attachment 5: Public Scoping Meeting Exhibits

SIGN-IN SHEET

SUN RIVER BRIDGE AGENCY MEETING

May 16, 2023
at the Augusta Community Center

* Please Print Legibly

| Name | Address/Agency | Email |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Tim McNew | USACE 100 Drill Ave | Timothy.M.McNew@usace.army.mil |
| 2 Brett Blunhardt | North Central MT DIST BLM (Lewistown) | bblunhardt@blm.gov |
| 3 Morgan Himmet | BOR - MTAO Billings | mhimmet@usbr.gov |
| 4 Jeff Baumberger | Reclamation - Billings | jbaumberger@usbr.gov |
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SIGN-IN SHEET

SUN RIVER BRIDGE PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

May 16, 2023
3:30 to 5:30pm
at the Augusta Community Center

* Please Print Legibly

| Name | Address/Agency | Email |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 Amanda Casey | U.S. Senator Jon Tester | amanda-casey@tester.senate.gov |
| 2 CHRIS RECHTOLD | 1155 Sunnyside Rd. Diamond Branch | chris@diamondbranch.com |
| 3 Cory W. CLAUSSEN | DCI ENGINEERS MISSOULANA | CCLAUSSEN@DCI-ENGINEERS.COM |
| 4 Rick Hanson | US. Bureau of Reclamation | rdhanson@usbr.gov |
| 5 Leo T. Tash | 560 19th Rd NW. Choteau MT 59422 | Leo.tash@gmail.com |
| 6 Nancy Gilbert + Greg Gilbert | 2600 Moilume Gulch Rd Augusta MT | tgilbert@sletteninc.com |
| 7 TRACY WENDT | PO BOX 7312 BF 59405 | TRACY@SUNRIVERWATERSHED.ORG |
| 8 KAT GOLAS / VINCE ARENAS | Box 52 augusta | KATHARINEGOLAS@GMAIL.COM |
| 9 Kathy Robinson | Box 575 Augusta MT, 59410 | Kathyrobinson@hotmail.com |
| 10 Nan Karlin | LC County | nkarlina@lccountymt.gov |
| 11 Tom Blossom | Fairfield, MT | |
| 12 Katie Vinn | FWP | KVinn@mt.gov |
| 13 DOUG HABERMANN | Sun River Watershed Group - Sun River Canyon | DougHabe56@gmail.com |
| 14 Mule Moyn | P.O. Box 609 Augusta, MT 59410 | |
| 15 Bonnie J. Dale | P.O. Box 63 Fairfield MT 59436 | |
| 16 Bill Norris | 321 Ramble Inn Rd. Fort Shaw, 59443 | srreds@3Rivers.net |
| 17 Mike Degen | Power MT. | GID commissioner |
| 18 | | |
| 19 ERLING A. JUEL | GID | erling@gid-mt.com |
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AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

STATE OF MONTANA
COUNTY OF TETON

Amy Thomas, being duly sworn, deposes and says:
That she is the proprietor, printer, or business manager
of the Fairfield Sun Times, a weekly newspaper of gen-
eral circulation, printed and published in Fairfield, Teton
County, Montana, and that the notice annexed:

(Attached at right)

has been correctly published in the regular and entire

issue of every of said paper for 2

consecutive said weeks, commencing on the

27 day of Apr., 2023

and ending on the 4 day of May 2023.



Amy Thomas, Fairfield Sun Times

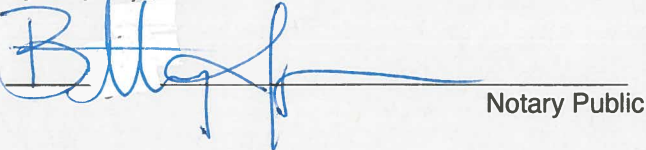
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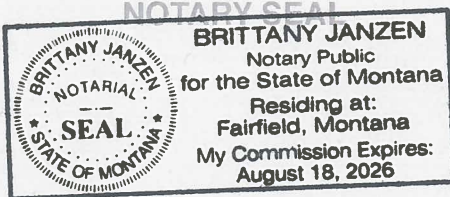
State of Montana, County of Teton,

Subscribed and sworn/affirmed to before me

this 21st day of April, 2023,

By Amy Thomas.


Notary Public



PUBLIC NOTICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT – SCOPING NOTICE

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is developing a project to replace the Sun River Bridge in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (USBLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Greenfields Irrigation District (GID). FHWA will serve as the lead agency in preparing the Sun River Bridge Replacement Environmental Assessment (EA). As an initial step, FHWA is conducting a scoping process to identify potential issues and concerns that could affect project evaluation or decision making. **Project Location:** The project is located 73 miles west of Great Falls, 19 miles west of Augusta, and 0.75 mile downstream from the GID Diversion Dam near Gibson Reservoir in Montana. The bridge crosses the Sun River and spans the boundaries of Lewis and Clark County and Teton County.

Lead Agency and File Number: FHWA, file number MT FLAP BOR 2980(1)

Purpose of the EA: The EA will be part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, which considers the beneficial and adverse effects of federal, federally funded, and/or federally permitted projects on the quality of the human environment. The EA will evaluate a No Build Alternative that would result in no improvements and a Preferred Alternative that would provide a new crossing over the Sun River.

Project Description: FHWA, in cooperation with partner agencies, proposes to replace the existing single-lane structurally deficient bridge with a new bridge meeting current design and safety standards. The project would provide service continuity for a variety of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as residents, outfitters, law enforcement, and emergency responders. The existing Sun River Bridge is structurally deficient and functionally obsolete. Its poor condition and outdated design pose safety hazards and limitations to users. A new bridge is needed to provide a crossing over the Sun River that safely and reliably accommodates all users.

Public Scoping Meeting: FHWA will host an open house meeting on **Tuesday, May 16, 2023, from 3:30 to 5:30 PM** at the **Augusta Community Center**, 132 Main Street, Augusta, MT, 59410. Attendees will have an opportunity to review project exhibits, speak with project representatives, and provide comments on potential issues and concerns within the project area. No presentation will be provided. All public comments will be considered during the EA development process.

Comment Submission: Please send comments or questions to Jennifer Chariarse, Environmental Specialist at FHWA, at jennifer.chariarse@dot.gov or (360) 619-7700.

Published in The Fairfield Sun Times
April 27 and May 4, 2023. MNAXLP

RPA

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

STATE OF MONTANA
COUNTY OF TETON

Amy Thomas, being duly sworn, deposes and says:
That she is the proprietor, printer, or business manager
of the Fairfield Sun Times, a weekly newspaper of gen-
eral circulation, printed and published in Fairfield, Teton
County, Montana, and that the notice annexed:

(Attached at right)


has been correctly published in the regular and entire

issue of every of said paper for 1

consecutive said weeks, commencing on the

11 day of May, 2023

and ending on the 11 day of May 2023


Amy Thomas, Fairfield Sun Times

JURAT

State of Montana, County of Teton,

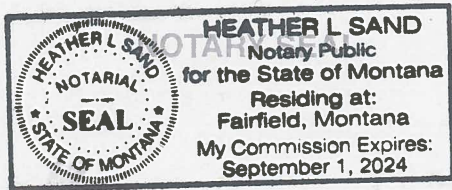
Subscribed and sworn/affirmed to before me

this 24 day of May, 2023,

By Amy Thomas.



Notary Public



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Published in the Fairfield Sun Times, May 11, 2023. MNAXLP

RPA ~~DOT~~

GET **INVOLVED!**

JOIN US

FOR THE

SUN RIVER BRIDGE
PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING!



May 16, 2023
3:30-5:30 PM



Augusta Community Center
132 Main Street
Augusta, MT, 59410



Learn more at: highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/projects/mt/flap-bor-2980-1

Join us on **Tuesday, May 16** between **3:30pm and 5:30pm** at the **Augusta Community Center** to learn more about the **Sun River Bridge Replacement Project**.

Attendees will have an opportunity to review project exhibits, speak with project representatives, and provide comments on potential issues and concerns within the project area. Please note, no presentation will be provided.

For more information or to submit comments contact:

Jennifer Chariarse

FHWA Environmental Specialist



jennifer.chariarse@dot.gov

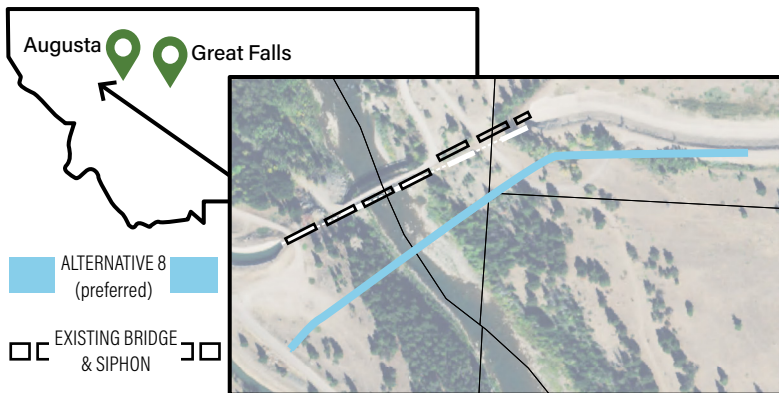


(360) 619-7700

Robert Peccia &
Associates
3147 Saddle Drive
Helena, MT 59601

WHERE IS THE PROJECT LOCATED?

The project is located 73 miles west of Great Falls, 19 miles west of Augusta, and 0.75 mile downstream from the GID Diversion Dam near Gibson Reservoir in Montana. The bridge crosses the Sun River and spans the boundaries of Lewis and Clark County and Teton County.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT?

- The purpose of the proposed project is to replace the existing bridge with a **new bridge meeting current design and safety standards**.

WHY IS THE PROJECT NEEDED?

- The existing Sun River Bridge is structurally deficient and no longer meets today's design standards. The bridge is currently load posted for 5 tons.
- The bridge's **poor condition, outdated design, load limitations, and approach road deficiencies** pose safety hazards and limitations to users.
- Multiple users require a **safe and reliable local crossing** to access public and private lands on both sides of the Sun River.

WHAT IS THE PROPOSED PROJECT SCOPE?

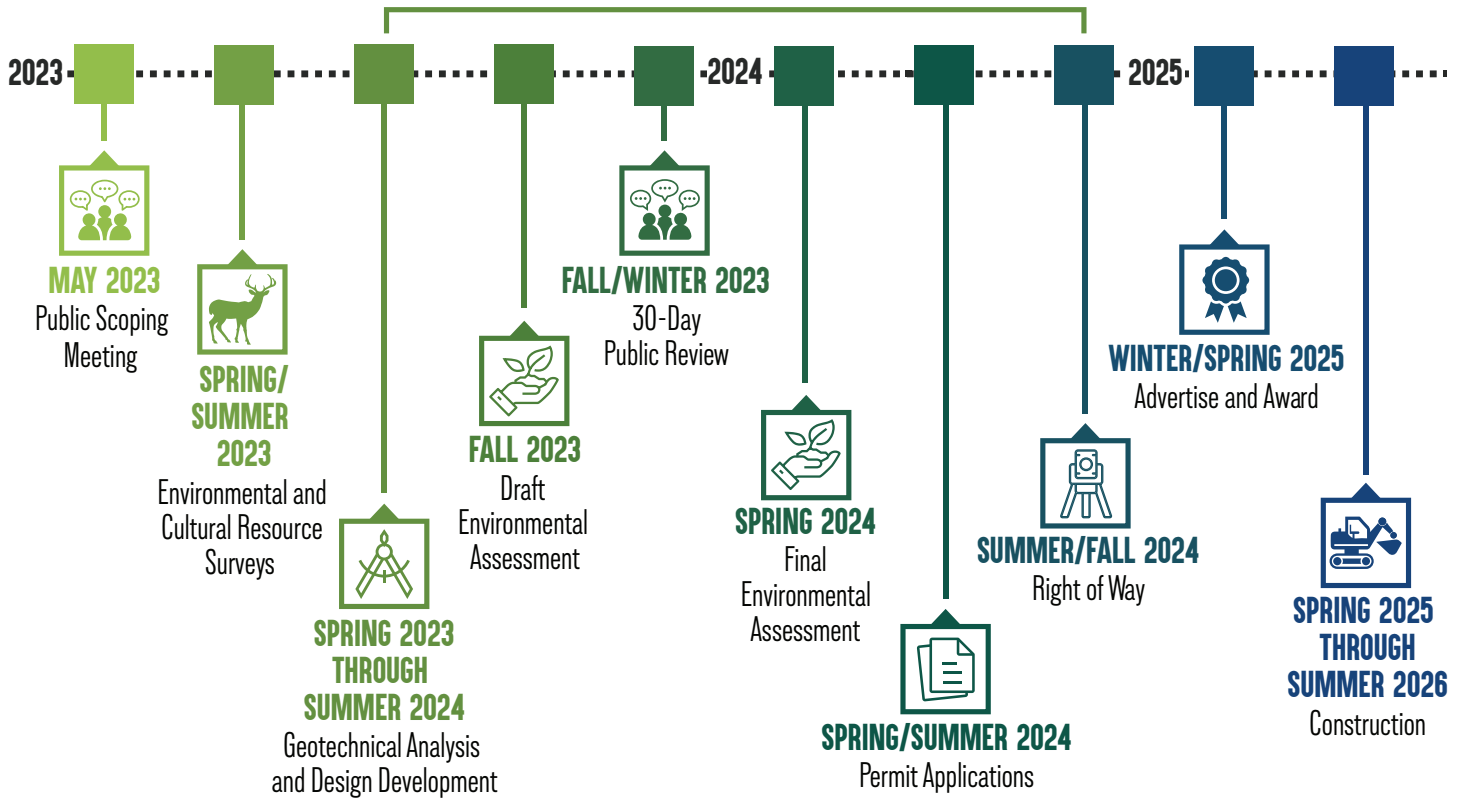
- The project will replace the existing bridge with a **new bridge meeting current design and safety standards**.
- The new bridge would be placed on a new alignment separate from but in proximity to the existing alignment to provide continued access to federal lands, irrigation facilities, and other destinations in the vicinity.

HISTORY

- The Sun River Bridge was **originally built in 1916** by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation as part of the Sun River Project. Its primary purpose at the time was to support and convey an 8-foot-diameter **wood-stave siphon pipe** across the Sun River.
- The original design intended for lightly loaded vehicles to travel across the upper truss chord of the single-lane structure, primarily to support Greenfields Irrigation District maintenance duties, although it has also been used by the public since it was constructed.
- In the 1940s, the wood-stave siphon was removed and replaced with a **buried, cast-in-place concrete siphon** that passes under the Sun River channel and remains in place today.



WHAT IS THE PROJECT TIMELINE?



WHO ARE THE PROJECT PARTNERS?

FHWA is developing the project in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (USBLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Greenfields Irrigation District (GID).



Greenfields
IRRIGATION DISTRICT

CONTACT

For more information
or to submit comments:



JENNIFER CHARIARSE
FHWA Environmental Specialist



Public comments will be considered to better understand potential issues, concerns, opportunities, and constraints. To submit comments, view documents, and to learn more about the project, please visit:

highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/projects/mt/flap-bor-2980-1

WELCOME

TO THE **SUN RIVER BRIDGE** PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

May 16, 2023 - 3:30 to 5:30pm at the Augusta Community Center

WHAT IS THE **PURPOSE** OF THE PROJECT?

- ✓ The purpose of the proposed project is to ensure continued safe transportation access across the Sun River.

WHY IS THE PROJECT **NEEDED**?

- ✓ The existing Sun River Bridge is structurally deficient and no longer meets today's design standards. The bridge is currently load posted for 5 tons.
- ✓ The bridge's **poor condition, outdated design, load limitations, and approach road deficiencies** pose safety hazards and limitations to users.
- ✓ Multiple users require a **safe and reliable local crossing** to access public and private lands on both sides of the Sun River.

WHAT IS THE **PROPOSED PROJECT SCOPE**?

- ✓ The project will replace the existing single-lane structurally deficient bridge with a **new bridge meeting current design and safety standards**.
- ✓ The new bridge would be placed on a new alignment separate from but in proximity to the existing alignment to provide continued access to federal lands, irrigation facilities, and other destinations in the vicinity.

SUBMIT COMMENTS TO:

JENNIFER CHARIARSE

FHWA Environmental Specialist



jennifer.chariarse@dot.gov

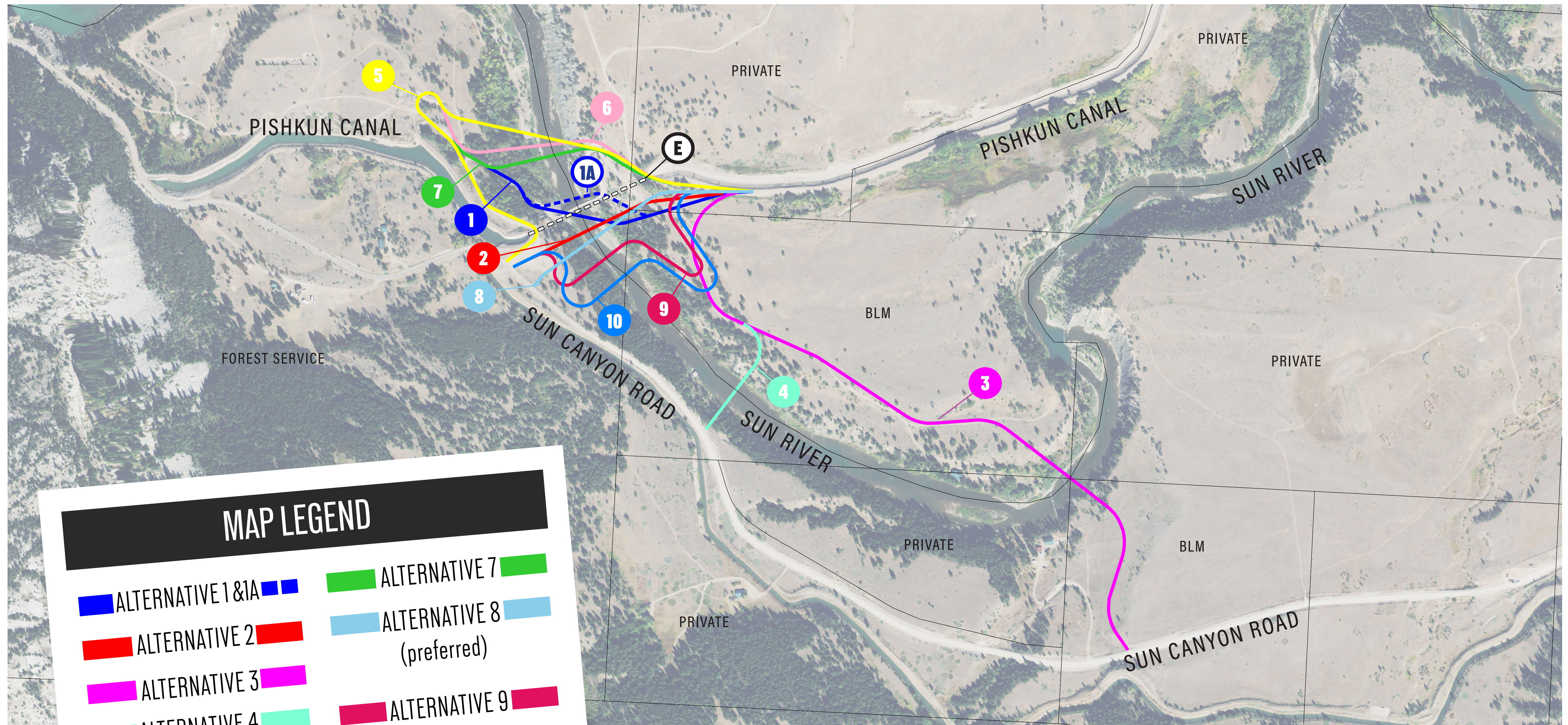


(360) 619-7700



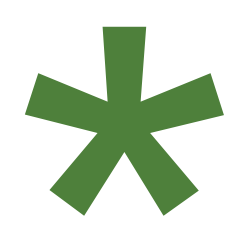
VICINITY & PREVIOUS ALTERNATIVES MAP

SUN RIVER BRIDGE



MAP LEGEND

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| ALTERNATIVE 1 & 1A | ALTERNATIVE 7 |
| ALTERNATIVE 2 | ALTERNATIVE 8 (preferred) |
| ALTERNATIVE 3 | ALTERNATIVE 9 |
| ALTERNATIVE 4 | ALTERNATIVE 10 |
| ALTERNATIVE 5 | EXISTING BRIDGE & SIPHON |
| ALTERNATIVE 6 | |



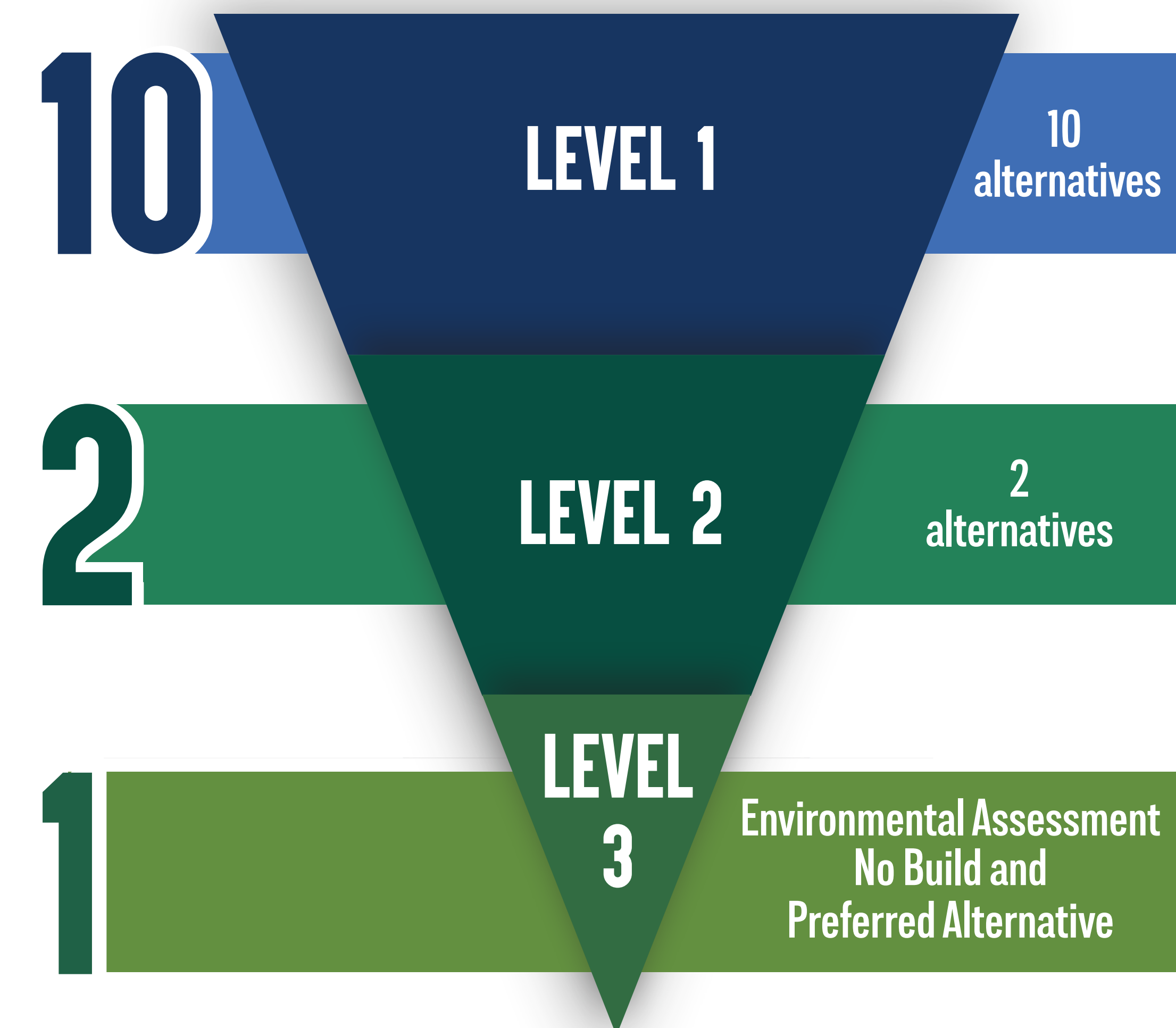
Original alignments and supporting information are drawn from the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) for Sun River Bridge Replacement, June 2019. Alternatives 8 and 10 are subject to change during the project development process.

SCREENING LEVEL 1

SUN RIVER BRIDGE

| ALTERNATIVE | LOCATION | BRIDGE LENGTH (feet) | DISTANCE ABOVE WATER SURFACE (feet) | APPROACH ROAD LENGTH (feet) | LEVEL 1 RESULT |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1/1A | 0-75 feet downstream | 275-350 | 23 | 5,100 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to maintain traffic on existing bridge during construction • Potential risk of damage to siphon and road overtopping from canal spillway • Challenges for future siphon access and maintenance |
| 2 | 100 feet downstream | 600 | 75 | 400 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less favorable bridge angle compared to Alternative 8 (which was forwarded to Level 2) |
| 3 | 3,500 feet downstream | 500 | 40 | 3,700 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive impacts to private property and the environment from approach road construction • High relative cost to other alternatives |
| 4 | 1,300 feet downstream | 480 | 80 | 1,400 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts associated with new roadwork on the east approach • High relative cost to other alternatives |
| 5 | 500 feet upstream | 520 | 60 | 5,400 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential risk of damage to siphon • Greatest impacts to fishing and camping areas • High relative cost to other alternatives |
| 6 | 400 feet upstream | 500 | 55 | 5,400 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential risk of damage to siphon • Negative impacts to fishing and camping areas • High relative cost to other alternatives |
| 7 | 350 feet upstream | 350 | 32 | 5,400 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential risk of damage to siphon • Excessive impacts to private property and the environment from approach road construction |
| 8 | 200 feet downstream | 520 | 68 | 580 | FORWARDED for level 2 evaluation |
| 9 | 350 feet downstream | 400 | 56 | 2,000 | DISMISSED due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High relative cost to other alternatives |
| 10 | 500 feet downstream | 380 | 45 | 2,125 | FORWARDED for level 2 evaluation |

SCREENING PROCESS



* Original alignments and supporting information are drawn from the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) for Sun River Bridge Replacement, June 2019. Alternatives 8 and 10 are subject to change during the project development process.

SCREENING LEVEL 2

SUN RIVER BRIDGE

CRITERIA

Environmental Impacts

Potential impacts to wetlands/streams, vegetation, endangered species, general wildlife and fish species, and cultural and historical resources



Historic Structures

Risk of potential impacts to existing bridge, siphon, and canal



Constructability

Geotechnical stability and associated risks



Right-of-way Impacts

Quantity and cost of required right of way, associated landowner impacts



Schedule

Amount of time required to complete design and construction










Financial Feasibility

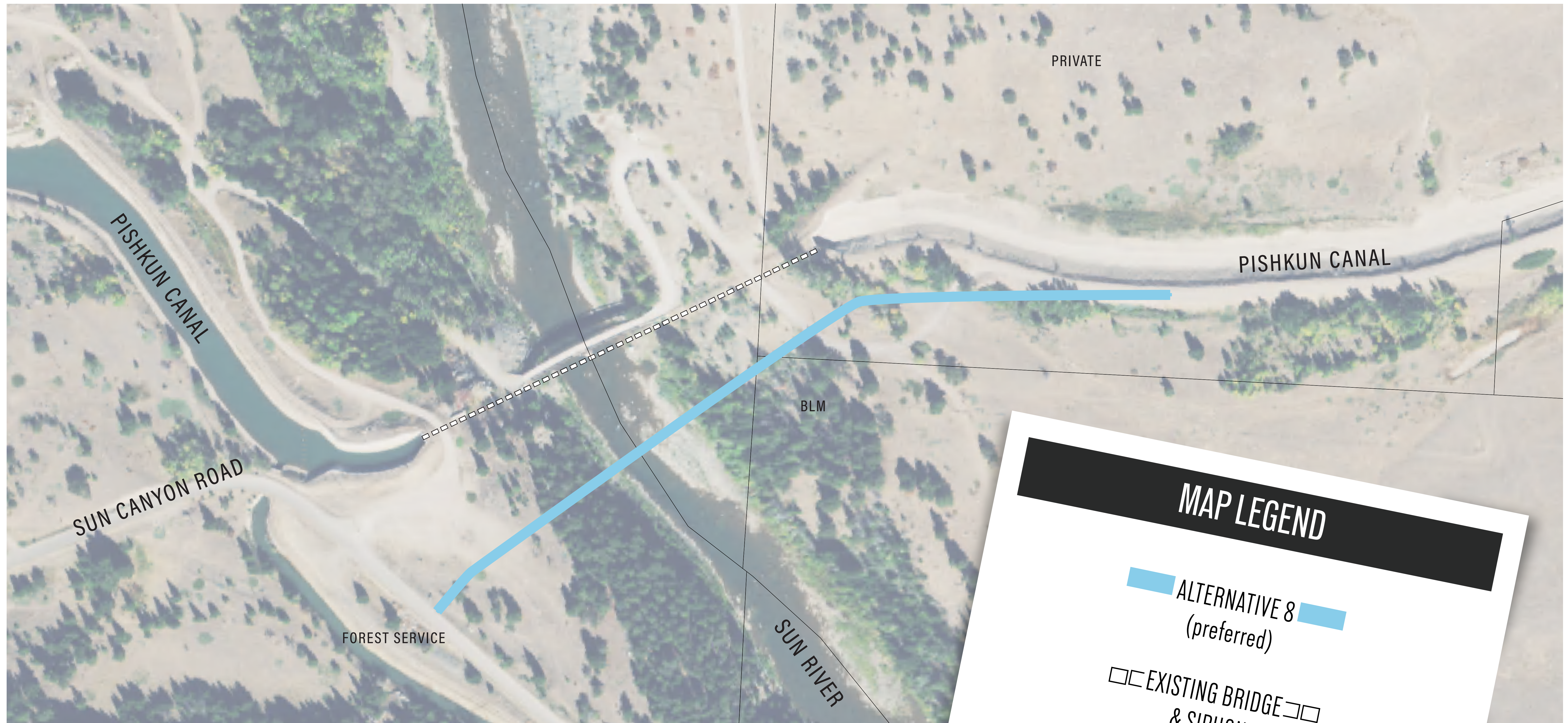
Total estimated construction costs



- A full circle indicates the alternative best meets the criteria
- ◐ A half-full circle indicates the alternative partially meets the criteria.
- An empty circle indicates the alternative fails or is least able to meet the criteria.

| CRITERIA | ALTERNATIVE 8 (Current Design as of May 2023) | ALTERNATIVE 10 (Current Design as of May 2023) |
|---|--|---|
|  Environmental Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vegetation: 1,350 feet of new road. ● Wetlands: No impacts ● Wildlife: Noise/disturbance from bridge construction ● Cultural: Less potential from small area of disturbance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vegetation: 2,000 feet of new road. ○ Wetlands: No impacts ○ Wildlife: Noise/disturbance from bridge construction and rock blasting ○ Cultural: Increased potential from greater area of disturbance |
|  Historic Structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New bridge constructed 300 feet away from historic structures ● No approach road work requiring blasting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◐ New bridge constructed 500 feet away from historic structures ◐ Approach road work requiring blasting |
|  Constructability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conventional road construction methods ● Open work site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specialty road construction methods ○ Difficult bridge access for equipment and materials |
|  Right-of-way Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4.1 acres, 3 parcels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◐ 5.0 acres, 3 parcels |
|  Schedule | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accelerated schedule due to shorter approach roadways and concurrent road and bridge construction; two partial construction seasons anticipated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◐ Lengthened schedule due to longer approach roadways, blasting, and delayed bridge abutment access; two full construction seasons anticipated |
|  Financial Feasibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$9 million | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ \$15 million |
|  Recommendations | <p>PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE for EA</p> | <p>DISMISSED from further consideration</p> |

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE MAP



SUN RIVER BRIDGE

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

SUN RIVER BRIDGE

