

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Sun River Bridge Replacement Project

MT FLAP BOR 2980(1)

Teton and Lewis & Clark Counties, Montana

This Finding of No Significant Impact is submitted pursuant to:

42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c)

Decision

The Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), 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), has determined that the selected course of action for construction of a new single-lane bridge across the Sun River will have no significant impact on the human or natural environment. The selected course of action is described as the Preferred Alternative in the *Sun River Bridge Replacement Project Environmental Assessment* (EA) (FHWA, January 24, 2024), hereafter referred to as the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative and its mitigation measures meet the stated purpose and need of the project while minimizing impacts to the human and natural environment. A review of the EA and comments received by Cooperating and Participating agencies during early coordination activities were considered in this decision. No public comments were received during the EA public review period from February 1 to March 8, 2024. Comments were received on March 12, 2024 by the USBLM. Those comments have been addressed in the attached EA Errata.

The EA was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which considers the effects of projects carried out by a Federal agency, or which invoice Federal funding, require a Federal permit, or occur on Federal land, must of their actions on the quality of the human environment. The project is being financed through Montana Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) funding. FHWA is the Federal lead agency for NEPA compliance. In addition to NEPA compliance, FHWA will complete the project design, issue a construction contract, and administer construction.

Selected (Preferred) Alternative

The Selected Alternative will construct a new single-lane bridge approximately 250 to 300 feet downstream of the existing Sun River Bridge crossing the Sun River. The project is located in Section 36 of Township 22 North, Range 9 West and Section 31 of Township 22 North, Range 8 West, approximately 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.

Construction of the Selected Alternative will place a new single-lane bridge approximately 250 to 300 feet downstream of the existing bridge. The single travel lane would provide a 14-foot roadway width and 1-foot shoulders on each side for a total curb-to-curb width of 16 feet. The new bridge

ends would be placed at the top of the river canyon on the west side and slightly below the top edge of the river canyon on the east side. The bridge length is estimated at approximately 455 feet and would consist of three bridge spans fitted with curbing and guardrail. The forecasted main span crossing the river would be 175 feet long, and the two side spans would each be 140 feet long. Two new approach roadways totaling approximately 1,300 feet in length and 22 feet in width would connect the new bridge to tie into existing roadways on either side of the Sun River. Construction of the Selected Alternative is expected to last approximately two years.

A Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for listing the existing bridge on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) was issued in 1985 by the Keeper of the National Register. Since that time, changes to the bridge have led the bridge owner, USBR, to determine that the bridge no longer retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance. The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) does not concur with this determination, and USBR intends to pursue a final determination with the Keeper of the National Register.

Following construction of the Preferred Alternative, the existing bridge would no longer be needed for vehicular access across the Sun River. Removal of the existing bridge is therefore desired by cooperating agencies to minimize ongoing maintenance needs and eliminate risks associated with the aging structure.

If the existing bridge is determined to not be eligible for listing on the NRHP and sufficient funding is available, the steel superstructure would be removed. To minimize impacts to the river and the existing siphon buried below the streambed directly adjacent to the bridge, the existing concrete piers would be allowed to remain standing in their current locations and would continue to be maintained in place. If the existing bridge is determined eligible, the existing bridge and access roadways would remain in place under the ownership of USBR. Concrete barriers and signage would be used to block vehicular access across the bridge due to safety concerns and weight limitations. Routine maintenance would be required to preserve the bridge in place.

Construction activities will include:

- Clearing vegetation
- Earthwork including excavation (with some areas of minor potential rock blasting), embankment construction on the east side of the river, and grading of the roadbed
- Connection to private roads on the east side of the canyon
- Construction of bridge abutments and Mechanically Stabilized Earth (MSE) wall
- Concrete foundation and bridge pier installation
- Bridge girder splicing (if needed) and placement
- Access road restriction or obliteration (if pursued)
- Existing bridge removal (if pursued)
- Revegetation

Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative

The EA analyzed the effects of the Selected Alternative on numerous resources, including: transportation; land use, farmland, forestland, right-of-way, and utilities; social/economic changes and environmental justice; air quality, noise, and energy; soils and geology; water resources, water quality, and floodplains; wetlands; fish, wildlife, and vegetation; cultural resources; recreation; hazardous materials; visual quality; and cumulative effects.

No significant impacts to these resources were identified. These findings are based on the evidence and conclusions set forth in the EA, which is incorporated by reference here.

Table 1 summarizes the environmental consequences of the Selected Alternative by each evaluated resource.

Table 1. Summary of Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative by Resource

Environmental Resource	Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative
Transportation	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor adjustments at approach roadways in the Project area would be needed to allow for new road connections. • Bridge approach roadways would no longer include switchbacks and sharp curves. • Emergency services would have improved access across the Sun River without concerns about weight limit restrictions.
Land Use, Farmland, Forestland, Right-of-Way, and Utilities	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During construction, access to public and private properties on the east side of the Sun River may be modified or adjusted as new connections to the approach roadway alignment are developed. • FHWA will secure any temporary construction occupancy permits required for staging areas within the APE. The Contractor would be responsible for obtaining any temporary construction occupancy permit that may be required for staging areas outside of the APE. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor adjustments at approach roadways in the Project area would be needed to allow for new road connections. • Approximately 3.6 acres of new right-of-way would need to be acquired including 0.4 acre from one USBLM parcel and 3.2 acres from one private parcel owned by Klick and Robinson, LLC for the new roadway. • One power pole would need to be relocated on the west bridge approach. • The existing river gauge would need to be relocated if the superstructure of the existing bridge is removed.

Environmental Resource	Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative
Social/Economic Changes and Environmental Justice	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief travel delays would occur due to the presence of construction equipment using local roadways. • Short-term economic benefits will result from construction activities. • An increase in demand for local housing, goods, and services will occur during construction. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents would not be displaced, buildings or other developed improvements would not be directly affected, and existing residential areas would not be isolated or divided. • No disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on Environmental Justice communities would occur. • New development in the vicinity of the Project area is not anticipated due to no additional roadway capacity and no new access to parcels. • The road’s viability as an emergency service route would be restored. • There would be no significant impact on the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the population of the Project area. • Long-term economic benefits may be provided to the economies of Augusta, Choteau, and Fairfield.
Air Quality/Noise/Energy	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased dust, noise levels, and energy consumption from construction activities and equipment would occur during construction. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No violations of air quality standards or significant noise impacts by regional vehicle emissions, noise, and fuel consumption, or any changes in traffic patterns are anticipated.
Soils and Geology	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If left unprotected, areas of ground disturbance could be prone to erosion. • Soil disturbance could facilitate the spread of noxious weeds, and soil compaction can increase surface erosion. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term erosion and drainage capabilities of soils may be altered from the creation of new slopes or steepening of existing slopes. Minor blasting is not anticipated but may potentially be required and would permanently impact a small portion of the area’s geology.

Environmental Resource	Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative
Water Resources, Water Quality, and Floodplains	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction activities (including placement of temporary fill, limited construction vehicle water crossings prior to temporary stream diversion installation, minor potential blasting, and storing, operating, and maintaining equipment) could impact water quality by introducing sediment and/or pollutants into the river. • Vegetation removal, soil disturbance, and soil compaction during construction could potentially affect water quality in the Project area. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanning the canyon and placing bridge abutments outside of the ordinary high water mark (OHWM) and the floodplain would avoid permanent impacts to the river below the OHWM. • Vehicle pollutants associated with minimal increased vehicular traffic that are carried by stormwater have the potential to enter the Sun River.
Wetlands	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary vegetation impacts would occur in staging, laydown, and construction access areas. Additionally, temporary effects on pollinators and dust covering leaves would temporarily impact vegetation during construction. • Work bridges and in-water work could create temporary water quality impacts and change fish habitat in a localized area. • Habitat will be temporarily cleared during construction. • Noise and visual disturbance from use of heavy equipment could directly result in mortality or injury of small animal species and may cause wildlife to avoid the construction area. • Improperly stored food or petroleum products could attract bears and other wildlife. • Project activities have the potential to affect lynx, grizzly bear, and wolverine due to noise and disturbance from construction equipment. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent vegetation impacts would occur due to construction of the new road and approaches. • The Project could result in direct wildlife mortality and altered habitat in the immediate Project area. • Removal of the existing bridge would potentially result in minor additional direct wildlife mortality. • Invasive plants and noxious weeds could spread into previously non-infested areas.

Environmental Resource	Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative
Cultural Resources	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excavation for the bridge abutments could expose buried archaeological resources. An inadvertent discovery plan will be in place and construction work halted in the area if resources are found. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct effects.
Recreation	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recreational access to the Sun River and the areas immediately surrounding the Project site would be restricted from approximately June through November to ensure public safety. Noise and potential traffic delays associated with construction equipment may affect recreational access and users' experiences. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor conversion of Federal land to roadway right-of-way would occur from development of the new approach roadways. Maintained consistent access and improved safety to recreational opportunities in the surrounding area and to Federally managed lands would be provided.
Hazardous Materials	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential disturbance of unknown hazardous materials in the soils could occur. Accidental spills of hazardous materials used during construction could occur. Depending on testing results, release of asbestos and lead-based paint could occur if the steel superstructure of the existing bridge is removed. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None. There are no known hazardous material sites located within the Project area.
Visual Quality	<p>Temporary construction effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction equipment, workers, materials, and staging area would add new elements into existing views. Viewers would perceive a temporary decrease in visual quality. <p>Direct and indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct impacts on the visual quality of the area would result from the construction of a new bridge. Views from adjacent land parcels and access roadways would include two parallel bridge structures.
Cumulative Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None.

Wetlands Determination

In accordance with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, the proposed project and its wetlands impacts have been closely evaluated. A delineation was performed on May 23, 2023 and no wetlands were identified in the project study area. As a result of the Selected Alternative, no wetlands will be impacted.

Basis for Decision

The Selected Alternative meets the purpose and need for the project because it will:

- Provide safe access across the Sun River to the surrounding Federal lands, irrigation facilities, local residences, and other destinations in the vicinity.
- Provide service continuity for a variety of Federal, State, and local agencies including USBR, USBLM, USFS, GID, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (MDNRC), and Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks (MFWP), whose personnel use the crossing to access and maintain public lands and irrigation infrastructure including Gibson Dam, the Diversion Dam, Pishkun Supply Canal, and the Pishkun Canal Siphon.
- Provide access to local residents and outfitters who access privately held ranches, homes, cabins, and range land and would support public access to Federal, State, and local lands used for recreation, including the Sun River, Gibson Reservoir, public campgrounds, trailheads, guest ranches, hunting areas, and fishing access sites.
- Provide access to local law enforcement and emergency response vehicles for fire-fighting activities and by the Sun River Watershed Group and the Rocky Mountain Front Weed Roundtable for weed control and management activities.
- Address the existing outdated design, safety hazards, and weight limitations of the existing Sun River Bridge that pose a threat to continued user access.

The Selected Alternative, in combination with the mitigation measures described in Chapter 6 of the EA, will not result in significant impacts on the environment.

Public Involvement

Resource and regulatory agencies, tribal governments, adjacent property owners, and the general public were engaged to provide information and to obtain feedback on the project. Chapter 4 of the EA provides a summary of the project's public, agency and tribal outreach activities that were conducted prior to release of the EA.

On February 1, 2024, FHWA published a Notice of Availability that the EA was available for review and comment. The Notice of Availability for the EA, including notification of the comment period and public open house, were placed in a local newspaper, the *Fairfield Sun Times*. Copies of the EA were publicly available at the Lewis and Clark County Library in Augusta, Montana and available on the FHWA Project website at <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/projects/mt/flap-bor-2980-1>.

As stated in the Notice of Availability, the comment period on the EA started on February 1, 2024 and ended on March 8, 2024. During the comment period a public open house for the project was held on Wednesday, February 28, 2024, from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm, at the Augusta Community Center. No comments were received during the open house. No other agency or public comments were received during the comment period. USBLM comments received on March 12, 2024 have been addressed per the EA Errata attached to this FONSI.

Permits and Approvals

Required permits and approvals will be obtained prior to construction. The following permits and approvals are expected to be required for implementation of the Selected Alternative:

Permit/Approval	Permitting/Approval Agency
National Historical Preservation Act and Section 106 Approval	Montana SHPO
ESA Section 7 Consultation and USFWS Letter of Concurrence	USFWS
Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit – Nationwide 33	USACE
Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Policies Act	FHWA WFL
Section 401 Water Quality Certification	MDEQ
Section 402 NPDES General Construction Stormwater Permit	MDEQ
Special Use Permit for Staging Areas	USFS
Right of Way Permit	USBLM
Floodplain Permit	Teton County

Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), FHWA as the Federal lead agency assessed the environmental impacts of the proposed project. The EA was prepared in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA Regulations set forth in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500 to 1508, including the guidelines for determining the significance of proposed Federal action (40 CFR 1508.27), and with FHWA Regulations contained in 23 CFR Part 771. The proposed project also conforms with all applicable Federal statutes and executive orders.

The FHWA has determined that the Selected Alternative will have no significant impact on the human environment. This FONSI is based on the referenced EA and related documentation, which has been independently evaluated by FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. Comments received through the public involvement and EA review process were considered in this decision. The EA provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement is not required by section 102(2)(C) of NEPA or its implementing regulations. The FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the incorporated EA.

RECOMMENDED BY:



Jennifer Chariarse, Acting Environmental Manager

3/27/2024
Date

APPROVED BY:



Dan Donovan, Chief of Business Operations

3.27.2024
Date

Sun River Bridge Replacement Project
Teton and Lewis & Clark Counties, Montana

MT FLAP BOR 2980(1)

March 27, 2024

Errata Sheet

Comments were received from the United States Bureau of Land Management (USBLM) – State Office Lands and Realty Program following the close of the public comment period that warrant the preparation and distribution of an errata sheet on the above-referenced Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. This sheet will become part of the project file.

EA Errata

Comments Received March 2024

United States Bureau of Land Management – State Office Lands and Realty Program

Legal Consistency Review

Comment		Response	Errata (Additional Information for the EA)						
1	A BLM ROW needs to be included for the road as well as the one bridge abutment.	Reference to USBLM right-of-way for the road and eastern bridge abutment are hereby incorporated in the EA, as described in Errata items 2-6.							
2	Table 5-1 lists required permits but doesn't mention a BLM ROW	USBLM ROW is hereby included in Table 5.1 of the EA.	<p><u>Table 5.1</u> [Insert new row as follows]</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Permit/Approval</th> <th>Lead Responsibility/Applicant</th> <th>Permitting/Approval Agency</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Right-of-Way</td> <td>FHWA WFL</td> <td>USBLM</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Permit/Approval	Lead Responsibility/Applicant	Permitting/Approval Agency	Right-of-Way	FHWA WFL	USBLM
Permit/Approval	Lead Responsibility/Applicant	Permitting/Approval Agency							
Right-of-Way	FHWA WFL	USBLM							
3	Table ES-1 – Legal review recommended revising the first bullet under Transportation for Direct and Indirect Effects to state “Minor adjustments at approach roadways in the Project area to would be needed allow for new road connections.”	The Executive Summary of the EA has been updated with the new recommended language.	<p><u>Executive Summary, Table ES-1</u> [Revise Transportation as follows]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Minor adjustments at approach roadways in the Project area to would be needed allow for new road connections.</u> 						
4	Table ES-1 - 3.6 acres of new ROW required over BLM and private lands. The acreages need to be broken out for BLM vs. private.	The Executive Summary of the EA hereby specifies acreage according to ownership.	<p><u>Executive Summary, Table ES-1</u> [Revise Land Use, Farmland, Forestland, Right-of-Way, and Utilities row as follows]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 3.6 acres of new right-of-way would need to be acquired <u>including 0.4 acre from one USBLM parcel and 3.2 acres from one private parcel owned by Klick and Robinson, LLC for the new roadway.</u> 						

EA Errata

Comments Received March 2024

United States Bureau of Land Management – State Office Lands and Realty Program

Legal Consistency Review

Comment		Response	Errata (Additional Information for the EA)
5	<p>Section 1.3 NEPA Compliance: needs to list the authorities for BLM. Insert this language: page 4, section 1.3 NEPA Compliance:</p> <p>The BLM Lewistown Approved Resource Management Plan has been reviewed to determine if the Proposed Action conforms to the land use plan as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-3. Under section 501 of FLPMA (Public Law 94-579-October 21, 1976, as amended), the Secretary, with respect to the public lands, are authorized to grant, issue, or renew rights-of-ways over, upon, under and through such lands.</p>	<p>Requested additions are hereby included in the EA.</p>	<p><u>1.3 NEPA Compliance</u></p> <p>[Insert new paragraph as follows]</p> <p><u>The BLM Lewistown Approved Resource Management Plan has been reviewed to determine if the Proposed Action conforms to the land use plan as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-3. Under section 501 of FLPMA (Public Law 94-579-October 21, 1976, as amended), the Secretary, with respect to the public lands, are authorized to grant, issue, or renew rights-of-ways over, upon, under and through such lands.</u></p>
6	<p>Table ES-1 – Legal review recommended revising the first bullet under Transportation for Direct and Indirect Effects to state “Minor adjustments at approach roadways in the Project area to would be needed allow for new road connections.”</p>	<p>Requested addition to Executive Summary table added to text of EA</p>	<p><u>3.1.3 Direct Effects (Transportation)</u></p> <p>[Insert sentence at end of first paragraph]</p> <p><u>The Preferred Alternative would require minor adjustments at approach roadways in the Project area to allow for new road connections to public and private properties.</u></p>

EA Errata

Comments Received March 2024

United States Bureau of Land Management – State Office Lands and Realty Program

Legal Consistency Review

Comment	Response	Errata (Additional Information for the EA)
7	<p>The Summary, Introduction, 2.2 Preferred Alternative, 3.2.1 Affected Environment: Land Ownership and Right-of-Way, 3.2.3 Direct Effects: Land Ownership, Right-of-Way, and Property Access <u>all</u> need to mention the BLM ROW.</p> <p>Section 3.2.1 already references existing USBLM right-of-way.</p> <p>Reference to USBLM right-of-way needed has been revised in the Executive Summary under Errata item 3.</p> <p>Reference to USBLM right-of-way needed is hereby included or revised in the Introduction, Section 2.2, Section 3.2.1, and Section 3.2.4 of the EA.</p>	<p><u>1.1 Introduction</u> [First paragraph, insert new sentence as follows] <u>The new approach roadway and eastern bridge abutment would require 0.4 acre of USBLM right-of-way.</u></p> <p><u>2.2 Preferred Alternative</u> [Insert new sentence as follows] New Bridge <u>The eastern bridge abutment would be located within USBLM right-of-way.</u></p> <p>[Modify as follows] New Approach Roads The approaches would require approximately 20,000 cubic yards of earthwork along with approximately 3.6 acres of new right-of-way acquisition, <u>including 0.4 acre from one USBLM parcel and 3.2 acres from one private parcel owned by Klick and Robinson, LLC,</u> to allow for the new road connection through public and private property.</p> <p><u>3.2.1 Environmental Consequences – preferred Alternative</u> [Modify as follows] Approximately 3.6 acres of new right-of-way would need to be acquired <u>including 0.4 acre</u> from one USBLM parcel and <u>3.2 acres from</u> one private parcel owned by Klick and Robinson, LLC for the new roadway.</p> <p><u>3.2.4 Mitigation Measures</u> [Insert new bullet as follows] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Obtain 0.4 acre of right-of-way from USBLM</u> </p>
8	<p>Table 6-1 Project Commitments and Conservation Measures: Land Use, Farmland, Forestland, Right-of-Way, and Utilities - Needs to mention the BLM ROW</p> <p>The requested addition is hereby included in Table 6-1 of the EA.</p>	<p><u>Table 6-1 List of Project Commitments and Conservation Measures</u> [Insert new bullet as follows] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Obtain 0.4 acre of right-of-way from USBLM</u> </p>