

Residents worried over West Reserve-U.S. 93 traffic control problems

By ROGER HOPKINS
The Daily Inter Lake

Within the next five years, the dream of valley commuters may come true — a four-lane highway between Whitefish and Kalispell.

The project is scheduled for construction in 1992 at an estimated cost of \$12 million. However, highway department officials warned Thursday that funding problems could put the new road on hold indefinitely.

The proposed 10.6-mile expansion of U.S. 93 from the end of the four-lane north of Kalispell to the junction with Montana 40 south of Whitefish was the subject of a public meeting in Kalispell.

The immediate concern of many of the 100 people at the meeting, however, was the intersection of U.S. 93 and West Reserve Drive.

Vern Borden, Missoula district construction engineer for the Department of Highways, said problems at the intersection are recognized. He said a four-way traffic signal will be installed there within the next 15 months.

Bill Leingang replied, "That's a cop-out." Leingang presented a petition that he said was signed by 200 residents of the Mountain Villa Apartments and Country Estates subdivision. They asked the de-

partment for immediate improvement of the intersection.

"I see no reason why we have to wait until the 1990's," Leingang said, suggesting that a slower speed be enforced or that the intersection receive a higher priority for signals.

Borden said national studies show that restricting speeds does not slow people down. "We're doing the best we can as fast as we can."

"If we bow to political pressure and build on a number-10 priority, and an accident happens at numbers 1-9, every lawyer in the country will have us in court."

The overall four-lane project will include widening the highway from two 12-foot lanes and 6-foot shoulders to four 12-foot lanes and 8-foot shoulders. The bridge over the Stillwater River will be replaced and the height of the roadway increased there.

Residents agreed that will improve visibility. But others, including Rep. Richard Nelson, R-Kalispell, said the hill just south of West Reserve Drive needs to be lowered for the benefit of those trying to cross the highway.

Nelson said an overpass above West Reserve Drive with entry and exit ramps is what's needed to improve the intersection. Another person said even a pedestrian underpass beneath the highway for school

children would be a great improvement.

Other suggestions included providing a pedestrian and bicycle path on one side of the highway from the West Reserve intersection to the end of the existing four-lane where a new Flathead Valley Community College campus is planned.

Meeting moderator Dan Bartsch of the highway department said all the ideas raised at the meeting will be considered as the project is planned. But he cautioned that cost will be a limiting factor.

One proposal that would add to the cost, but which Borden said is being given serious consideration, is to extend the four-lane addition beyond the junction of U.S. 40 to Baker Avenue in Whitefish.

"It looks very favorable," Borden said, adding that with five years left to plan the project there is enough time to include that stretch of highway in plans.

Several right-of-way and access questions were raised during the hearing. Bartsch said they will be addressed as the department's right-of-way officials meet individually with property owners. He said the need for additional right-of-way is expected to be minimal.

The need for left-turn lanes will also be addressed in the planning process, Bartsch said.

Project to provide paths for Woodland Park access

The first step toward providing handicapped access to Woodland Park is to be taken sometime this afternoon, when a paving project begins.

And in recognition of the volunteer efforts that have made the Woodland Park Access Project a reality, a free chili feed, music concert and art show are planned at the park pavilion Sunday.

At the same time, a drawing will be held for a \$4,000 wood carving, donated by artist Norman Lewellen as a fund-raiser for the project. Lewellen said Sunday's event is intended to draw attention to the project, sponsored by the Disabled Recreation and Environmental Access Movement.

The access plan calls for paving asphalt trails so that the wheelchair-bound can enjoy the park's amenities, including the picnic

pavilion, lagoon, flower gardens and aviary.

Lewellen said the first 100 feet of the project, from the parking lot near the ball field to the restroom, is to be paved sometime today. Pack & Co. donated the asphalt and paving equipment and McElroy and Wilkin the gravel for the base of the trail.

On Thursday, city park crews dug the trench for the trail and Lewellen helped compact the gravel.

Lewellen cited Sunday's event as an example of the community's volunteer effort in the project. The chili will be prepared and donated by Ivory Bates of The Legacy Restaurant, the Don Lawrence Orchestra is performing, and Jim Clayborn has donated a print for a silent auction.

The event is free, but donations will not be discouraged. Desserts

will be sold, with 10 percent of the proceeds going to the project.

Lewellen said he hopes the project can be completed by the end of next year.

His donated carving, for which he said at least \$2,000 worth of raffle tickets have been sold, will provide funds to build an additional 200 feet of asphalt trail within the next two to three weeks, Lewellen said.

Getting the first 100 feet completed was important "to get people enthused about the project" and give them an idea of what's planned, he said.

The Kalispell City Council approved the project, stipulating only that the asphalt paths be signed to prohibit bicycles. Lewellen said he expects to see not only wheelchairs on the trails, but families with baby strollers and pedestrians who just like solid footing.

Firefighters battle blazes in Flathead, Kootenai forests

By The Daily Inter Lake and The Associated Press

Smokejumpers are battling a small man-caused fire in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and nearly 200 firefighters are working on a blaze near the Montana-Idaho border on the Kootenai Forest.

Les Mahugh, a forestry technician with the Flathead National Forest, said a seven-acre fire in the Little Salmon Park in the Damnation Creek drainage was reported by a spotting plane Thursday night.

"It burned actively during the night because of some heavy ground fuels," he said this morning.

Mahugh said the fire was started when a campfire was left unat-

tended.

Ten smokejumpers out of Missoula were working the fire and eight more jumpers were enroute to the fire, he said.

Forest Service policy is to let nature-caused fires in wilderness areas burn themselves out when possible. Mahugh said that policy was not being followed with this fire because it is man-caused.

"Jumpers have a line around half of the fire now and hope to have it contained shortly," he said.

Mahugh said Trail No. 80 on the east side of the wilderness may be affected by the fire, and hunters should use caution in the area.

The fire comes at a time when

nearly 80 percent of Flathead Forest fire crews are fighting fires in California. Forest officials have been issuing warnings for forest users to exercise extreme caution because of the high fire danger and shortage of crews.

Steve Jorgenson, fire investigator for the Department of State Lands, said hot, dry weather and afternoon winds are expected in the state this weekend. "That's what we're particularly worried about," he said.

About 200 firefighters were battling a 100-acre blaze Friday in the Kootenai National Forest of northwest Montana.



Exploring kindergarten

Photo By Sai Skog

Andi Kitzmiller and Kristen Skinner were busy today in the mock household in Nancy VanNatta's kindergarten class at Kalispell's Peterson School. Today was the first day for District 5 kindergartners.

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Garbage bear relocated

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK — A lucky male black bear suspected of eating garbage in Glacier Park has escaped the usual sentence of death for the offense.

Instead, it has been captured and relocated inside the park.

Gary Gregory, park resource management specialist, said the bear was captured Wednesday at the north end of Lake McDonald, tagged and relocated in the Railroad Creek drainage area near East Glacier.

He said the bear was one of three in the area. "One of the bears got into a garbage can at a cabin," he said. "We were not positive it was this one, rather than destroying it, we decided to move it."

"We gave the bear the benefit of the doubt," he said. "We hated to destroy the bear when we weren't sure whether it was the culprit."

Gregory said once bears get a taste of human food, they continue to go after it.

"They normally don't get two chances," he said. "Not if we know for sure they are guilty."

Gregory said 581 bears have been captured, tagged and relocated in Glacier Park during the last 29 years.

With hunting season for black bears open in Montana, he cautioned hunters to report the killing of any bears that have numbered ear tags with the initials "GNP" engraved on the tag.

Briefly

Charges studied in death of girl

Tamitha M. "Tammy" Lauman has been identified as the 7-year-old girl who was killed as she pedaled her bicycle to school Thursday morning. Lauman reportedly crossed U.S. 2 west of town directly in front of an oncoming truck.

County Attorney Ted Lympus said it is too soon to say whether any charges will be filed in the accident. The matter remains under investigation.

A witness in a vehicle behind the truck said Walter Ingraham was traveling at about 35 miles per hour on the section of highway posted at a speed of 55.

Lauman, a first grader, was on her way to school when she reportedly crossed the highway to join her brother.

Couple charged in child abuse

A Whitefish area couple have been charged with aggravated assault for allegedly abusing their infant daughter from October 1986 through June 1987.

Stephen and Kathy Beggio appeared in Justice of the Peace Dale Gifford's court Wednesday. A preliminary hearing was scheduled for Oct. 9.

The Beggios' daughter reportedly received serious injuries at the hands of her parents when she was 6 or 7 months old, said Deputy County Attorney Ed Corrigan. The child is now in protective care outside the valley.

Kathy Beggio was released on her recognizance. Bond for Stephen Beggio was set at \$50,000.

Children harassed by men in car

Flathead County officials are seriously regarding a report from five children Thursday that some men ordered them to get into a car.

According to sheriff's department spokeswoman Corky Derby, five children were walking on West Reserve Drive to a convenience store when they were approached by two dark-skinned men in an old four-door sedan. The vehicle stopped on the street and backed up to where the children were walking.

Derby said two girls ran into the store. A passenger in the car ordered the other three children to get into the car. They also fled into the store.

Derby said earlier in the day, a carload of dark-skinned men hassled some girls on Main Street and threatened them. The girls retreated into the vehicle of a friend.

The vehicle in the latter incident was described as a red El Camino. Derby said both incidents are under investigation.

Tie-plant clean-up project calls for burying ponds

By RICK HULL

The Daily Inter Lake

SOMERS — Hazardous waste was the topic Thursday evening, but Somers residents were more concerned about weeds.

The meeting at the Somers School gym was a combination public hearing and informational meeting on plans to seal off two creosote waste storage ponds at the former Somers tie plant. Because the problems occurred after 1976, the state, rather than the federal government, is in charge of this portion of the clean-up.

The tie plant, which processed well over 50 million railroad ties in its 85 years of operation, is a national priority "Superfund" clean-up site because of creosote contamination. Creosote compounds in extremely low concentrations can cause cancer in laboratory animals.

The plan calls for pulling the

plastic liners out of the ponds, salvaging as much of the liner material as possible, and dumping the rest back in, said Lena Blais, environmental engineer from the Burlington Northern's consulting firm.

A bulldozer will push the berms that form the pond walls into the ponds, and once the area is graded flat, it will be covered with 2 feet of clean soil, she said. A 3-inch asphalt cap will keep the creosote in and the rainwater out.

Rather than putting the cap underground and covering the site with soil and plants, the asphalt will go on the surface so cracks can be detected and sealed, she said.

"We've all worked pretty hard to get this plan, and we think it's a winner," said Blais.

Barb Jones, of the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, defended burying

we ponds, rather than digging them out to achieve a "clean closure."

Since groundwater in the area is contaminated, it would be fruitless to remove only the contaminated dirt, said Jones. The soil contamination is at low levels, she added.

In addition, a clean closure would require finding a way to dispose of large amounts of contaminated soil. At its Paradise plant, the BN is experimenting with using bacteria to consume the creosote compounds in the soil. But large-scale use of the method has yet to be approved, she said.

The site may be off-limits well past the 30-year monitoring period, Jones said. But there is also the possibility that technology may offer a permanent cure within 10-15 years, she said.

Bob Foley of the Somers Sewer and Water District made the only public comment during the official

hearing. He asked that any planning consider the need for water and sewer lines to cross the tie plant property.

There have been no written comments, said Robert Solomon, hearings officer. Thursday's hearing marked the close of the official 30-day comment period.

Somers residents were more vocal during the informational portion of the hearing.

Morey Grove, operator for the Somers water system, had several concerns. The major problem, he said, is the weeds that have grown up around the abandoned tie plant buildings and pose a fire danger to transformers serving the water pumps. Others in the audience also complained about danger from the weeds and buildings.

Tom Patnode, from Glacier Park Co., the property management subsidiary of the railroad, agreed to

take care of the weeds. A contractor will come in the next two weeks to look at tearing down the buildings, he added.

"I agree with you, if I was a kid here, that's where I'd be snooping around," Patnode said.

Besides creosote, zinc contamination has been discovered in an adjoining slough. Testing is concentrating on areas where zinc-treated ties had been stored, said Blais.

Ken Daley, a former employee at the plant, surprised officials when he said that ties that had been stored at the tie plant were hauled off and buried elsewhere. He offered to point out the site after the meeting.

The hazardous waste clean-up at Somers is currently split between state and federal jurisdiction, said Stephanie Wallace of the U.S. Environmental Protection Office in

Helena.

But that may change soon. Congress amended the "Superfund" act, giving states more power. Once the BN and EPA reach an agreement on a clean-up plan, the responsibility for overseeing the cleanup may be turned over to state officials.

The action will mean Somers will no longer be a national priority toxic waste site, she said.

"It's not a change in the actual clean-up, it's a change in the law that will affect that clean-up," Wallace said.

Completion of the federally-mandated portion of the clean-up has been delayed while questions about possible zinc contamination of waterfowl are answered, she said.

While the ponds will be filled in this spring, the federal portion of the clean-up will not start before the end of 1988, she said.