



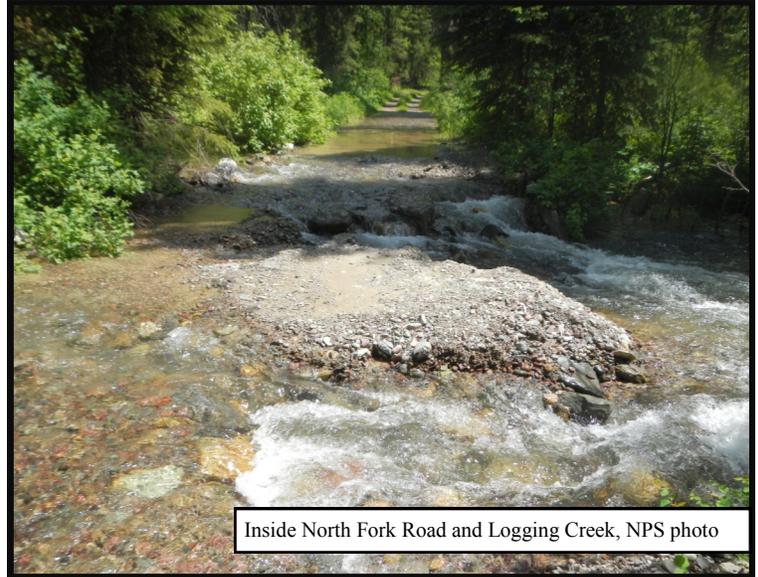
PUBLIC SCOPING for a proposal for
Management of the Inside North Fork Road
Environmental Assessment

BACKGROUND

The inside North Fork Road (INFR) traverses approximately 40 miles from near the south end of Lake McDonald to Kintla Lake near the Canadian border. The road was constructed in 1901 by the Butte Oil Company, and despite improvements over the next 40 years, park records state that the road remained very primitive, and travel by vehicle was impossible at times. The INFR has been maintained as a primitive gravel road, offering visitors motorized access to the North Fork area of the park. The park administratively uses the INFR to access North Fork visitor facilities, campgrounds, and for resource management activities. The INFR also provides access for some emergency events such as lost persons or fire.

In 1996, the INFR was listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its role in the development of the North Fork region and early park administration. The road provided the access for rangers, fire lookouts, trail crews and maintenance workers to get to their work stations.

The INFR has experienced repeated failures and closures since 2006 when major flooding occurred throughout the area. In response, the park has brought in materials to mend damaged areas. These fixes have been short-lived and resulted in deposition of road base and sediment into



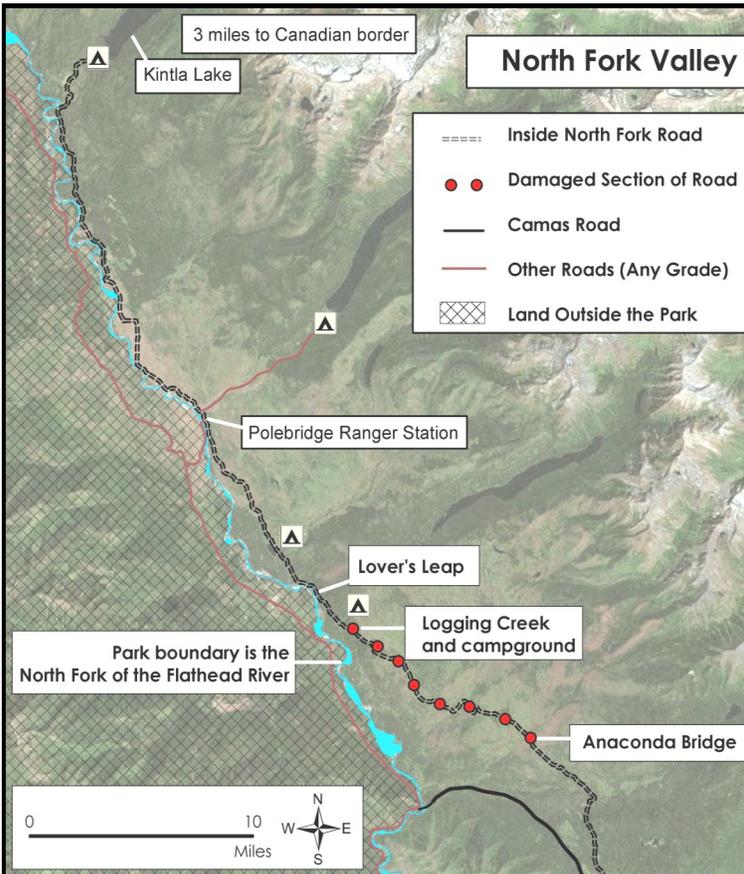
Inside North Fork Road and Logging Creek, NPS photo

waterways, raising concern for fisheries and the health of riparian communities. Since the winter of 2014, the five mile section of the INFR from Anaconda Bridge to Logging Creek has been closed due to flood damage, and near Lover's Leap the river meander continues to erode the river bank up to the edge of the road.

Other issues include the need for culvert additions and replacements along much of the INFR, and new road base is needed from Anaconda to Polebridge. On the nearby Camas road, a short section of the road shoulder needs repair, and additional understructure is needed for the Camas Bridge.

In 2014, the park contracted an engineering firm to analyze options for road repairs at Anaconda and Logging Creeks, and Lover's Leap. The study considered several options at each location and made recommendations, including the following: At Anaconda, reroute the road onto the hillside to the east; at Logging, combine several approaches including raising the road on fill material, inserting multiple relief pipes under the road, and putting an elevated, vented ford at the southern crossing; and near Lover's Leap, reroute the road to the east to circumvent the main area of erosion and other small trouble spots. The engineering firm's cost estimates for repairs near Anaconda and Logging Creeks, and Lover's Leap, range from a total of \$682,000 to \$735,000.

Given the issues near Anaconda Bridge, Logging Creek, and Lover's Leap, and the extent of other needed repairs, as well as costs associated with repair and maintenance of the roads, the park is considering the overall future of the INFR and is proposing to prepare an EA for the project.



(Continued)

RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

The park's General Management Plan (1999) calls for preservation of the area's wild character and rustic visitor facilities. The INFR provides access to four primitive auto campgrounds and several trailheads. Rustic developments are surrounded by recommended wilderness.

Cultural and Ethnographic Resources. Native people have had strong ties with the valley since roughly 10,000 years before Anglo settlement. Today, the Bitterroot Salish, Pend d'Oreille and Kootenai tribes still retain oral histories of the area, reflecting important and varied use of the area. Ethnographic and archeological study of the North Fork area continues.

Natural Resources. The INFR traverses and offers motorized access to important habitat for wildlife and fisheries, including riparian areas along the river, numerous creeks, and lakeshores.

- Riparian habitat supports the richest biodiversity and species density of any habitat type. Areas just north of Anaconda Bridge and near Logging Creek are of particular concern because roads crossing riparian areas can cause interference with natural hydraulic

functions, as well as contamination and sedimentation that impact riparian communities and fisheries. The riparian habitat near the river and streams in this area is dynamic, and its overall health depends on seasonal flooding and unimpeded stream function.

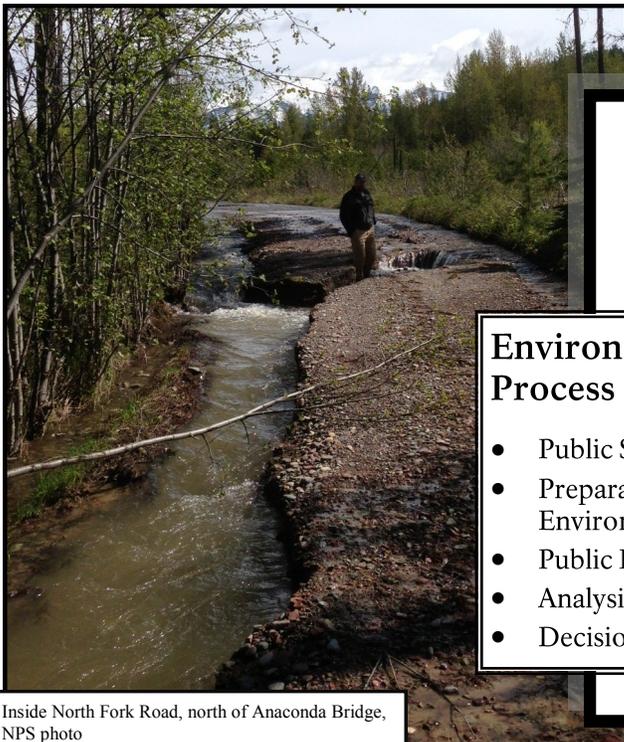
- Bull trout, a federally listed threatened species, and westslope cutthroat trout, a state listed species of concern, utilize riparian habitat near the North Fork of the Flathead River, including federally designated critical habitat for bull trout. Logging Creek provides feeding, migration, and other habitat uses for bull trout and is also important for migratory westslope cutthroat trout. Although Anaconda Creek is not known to support bull trout, it is an important spawning and rearing stream for both migratory and resident westslope cutthroat trout. Road failures near Anaconda Bridge and Logging Creek are causing localized stream habitat degradation, with the potential to adversely impact bull trout critical habitat. Additionally, frequent washouts at McGee Hill pose concerns about excess sediment in westslope cutthroat trout habitat in Fish Creek.

Issues Identified to Date

- Future health of fisheries and riparian communities
- Limited opportunities for visitor access
- Impacts to cultural resources
- Impacts on recommended wilderness
- Need for emergency access

Objectives:

- Develop a sustainable management approach for the inside North Fork Road.
- Improve natural stream function in riparian areas and reduce adverse impact on fisheries.
- Continue to offer rustic and primitive recreation opportunities, consistent with management goals in the North Fork.



Inside North Fork Road, north of Anaconda Bridge, NPS photo

Public Comments During Scoping

Your comments will help identify other issues and alternatives to be evaluated in the planning process.

You will have another opportunity to comment after the EA is complete.

Environmental Assessment Process Overview:

- Public Scoping
- Preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA)
- Public Review of the EA
- Analysis of Public Comments
- Decision Document

Please post your comments online at:

www.parkplanning.nps.gov/InsideNorthForkRoad

Or send your comments to:

Superintendent, Glacier National Park
Attn: Inside North Fork Road
PO Box 128
West Glacier, MT 59936

Please provide comments by
August 3, 2015