Glacier National Park
Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park
August 2022

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

PUBLIC SCOPING ***for a proposal to***

Replace the Upper McDonald Creek Bridge and Formalize Parking at Upper McDonald Creek Trailhead

Background—The North Lake McDonald Road provides access between the Going-to-the-Sun Road (GTSR) and the northwest shore of Lake McDonald, including private homes, the Lake McDonald Ranger Station, and access to three trailheads. The road crosses McDonald Creek via the Upper McDonald Creek Bridge (Figure 1).

Originally constructed in 1926, the bridge was reconstructed in 1936 after repeated flood damage. The 1964 flood washed out the bridge, and the existing bridge was built in 1965. Severe flooding in 2006 damaged the bridge, including a crack in a central girder and collapsing piers. Repairs over the years have resulted in short-lived improvements, but the current structural condition of the bridge is considered poor.

In addition to structural issues, the existing bridge has a restricted load capacity (rated for 15 tons) and is inadequate for heavy loads, including fire engines needed for wildland fire control and structure protection, normal construction traffic, and garbage trucks. With the loss of several homes and buildings on the northwest side of the lake during the 2018 Howe Ridge Fire, a bridge that can accommodate necessary traffic and loads is essential. Therefore, replacing the bridge is needed due to progressive failure and to improve vehicle access to private land and National Park Service (NPS) structures and operations on the northwest side of the lake.

Proposal— The existing single-lane bridge and its two in-stream piers would be removed and replaced with a single-lane, clear span bridge with two sidewalks, one on each side. The new bridge would be built approximately 30 feet upstream of the existing bridge (Figure 2), requiring a realignment of the road approaches. The new bridge and approaches would be approximately eight feet higher than the existing bridge.

The existing bridge would continue to be available for NPS and landowner access during construction. The construction area extending approximately 100-feet from the GTSR to the Upper McDonald Creek Trailhead would be closed to public access for the duration of construction. Traffic delays would be minimized as much as possible, with 30 to 60-minute closures expected. Full closures, possibly for 2-3 days at a time, would be necessary at times for safety (such as during crane operations).

A temporary work bridge would be installed upstream of the new bridge site to enable construction and staging (Figure 2). Equipment may also be staged on the old road downstream of the existing west abutment. Up to 12 temporary piles may be installed in-stream to support the existing bridge and temporary work bridge. The temporary bridge and all piles would be removed once the new bridge is built.

No heavy equipment would be used in the stream. The work would be done using equipment from the bank or temporary work bridge. Onsite equipment would include two large cranes. Site clearing would likely occur in late summer/early fall of 2022. Construction is anticipated to begin in the spring of 2023 and be mostly completed by the end of fall, 2023.

Parking for the Upper McDonald Creek Trailhead west of the bridge would also be formalized under this project, likely with 10 delineated head-in parking spaces.

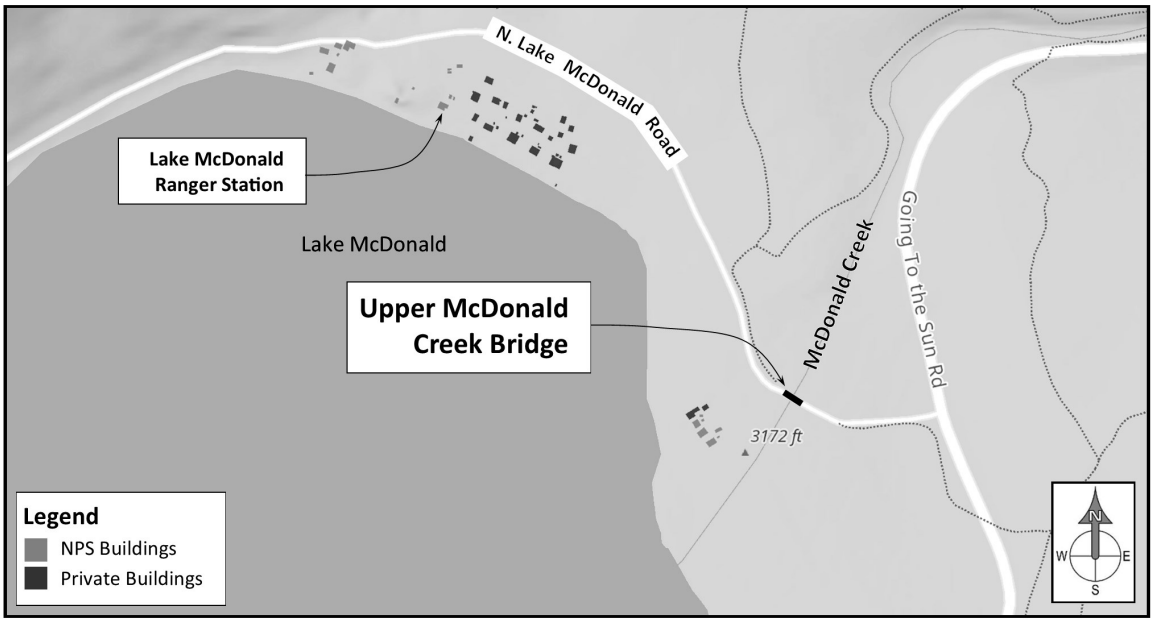

Figure 1: Location of the Upper McDonald Cr. Bridge

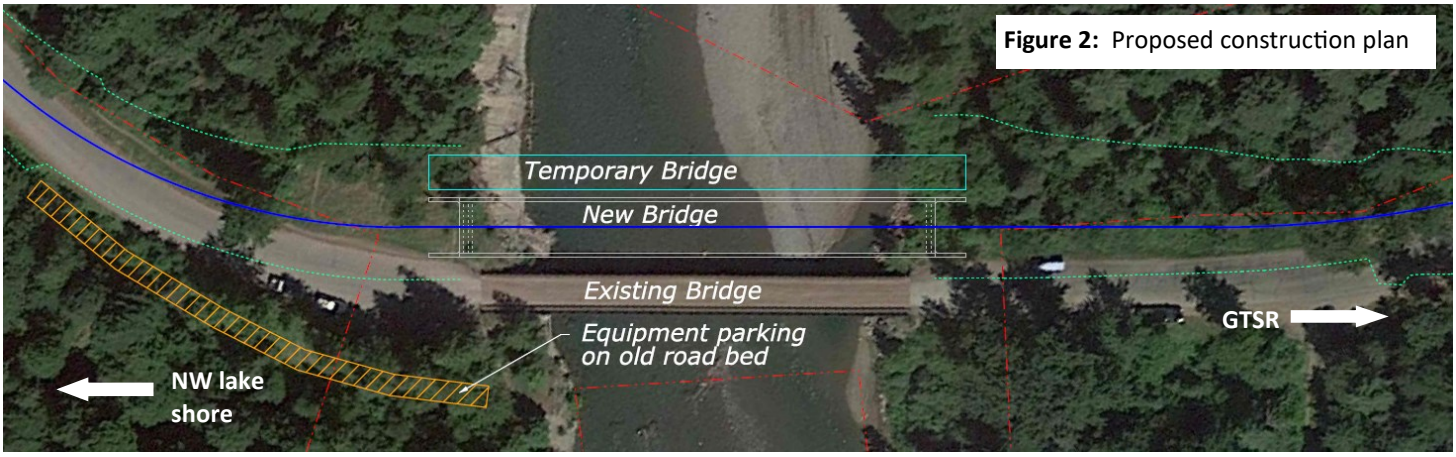

Figure 2: Proposed construction plan

Impacts and Environmental Compliance

The National Environmental Policy Act

Replacing the Upper McDonald Creek Bridge with a new bridge slightly offset from the existing location and alignment was approved under a categorical exclusion in May of 2021. However, the submitted workplan had greater than anticipated impacts on landowner access. The project has been redesigned to further shift the location of the new bridge to enable increased administrative access across the existing bridge during construction.

The park believes the redesigned project could still be categorically excluded and would not require preparation of an environmental assessment (EA). Public scoping is being conducted based on the redesign to determine if there is any other information or additional concerns the park is not aware of that might result in the need for an EA.

Impacts and mitigation measures to date:

- Minor sedimentation.
  Erosion and turbidity control would be in place.
- Permanent impact of approximately 0.7 acre.
  Approximately 0.9 acre would be restored, including existing roadway and temporary bridge approaches and staging areas.
- Removal of an estimated 60 trees 6-inch dbh or larger (including 11 at 20-inch dbh or larger) and 50 or more young, regenerating cedar and hemlock.
  Tree removal would be minimized as much as feasible, sensitive species would be salvaged for replanting as feasible.
- Noise would temporarily disrupt natural soundscapes.
- Fish and wildlife could be disturbed or displaced by construction noise and activity.
  Vegetation would be removed outside the bird nesting season.

PLEASE POST COMMENTS BY AUGUST 30, 2022

Online at: *https://parkplanning.nps.gov/UMCBridge*

Or send comments to:

Superintendent, Glacier National Park
Attn: UMC Bridge Replacement
PO Box 128
West Glacier, MT 59936

A public meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 23rd, 5pm, Park Headquarters, Community Building.

The National Historic Preservations Act

The Upper McDonald Creek Bridge is a contributing historic feature to the North Lake McDonald Road and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Removing the bridge would be an adverse effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with the park's determination of effects on March 3, 2021, and a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the park and SHPO was fully signed on July 13, 2021. The MOA outlines measures to mitigate the adverse effect, including Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documentation, interpretation on the park website, and a wayside exhibit on the new bridge. The area of potential effect was inventoried for archeological resources in 2020. The current proposal would not change the design of the new bridge nor methods for removing the existing bridge, work would occur within the evaluated disturbance limits, and there is no change to the NHPA Section 106 effects determinations.

Endangered Species Act

The park evaluated effects to species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and submitted a biological assessment (BA) to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in accordance with section 7 of the ESA. Construction activities could disturb or temporarily displace grizzly bears and Canada lynx, but effects would not alter the large-scale distribution of either species. Upper McDonald Creek is not known to be a bull trout spawning or rearing stream, but project activities could disturb or displace individual bull trout; effects would not impact bull trout populations or persistence. The work could cause minor, temporary sedimentation that would be unlikely to have a measurable impact on substrate composition. Removing the piers and replacing with a clear span bridge would return the channel to a more natural condition.

The park has determined that the project *may affect but is not likely to adversely affect* bull trout or bull trout critical habitat, Canada lynx, and grizzly bears; and would have *no effect* on Canada lynx critical habitat, water howellia, Spalding's campion, whitebark pine, the meltwater lednian stonefly, and the western glacier stonefly. The USFWS concurred with the park's determinations on March 26, 2021. The current proposal would not change the effects determinations.