

# **Bigelow Gulch Road/Forker Road Urban Connector Spokane County, WA**

## **Reevaluation**

**March, 2015**

On April 8, 2008 the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on the proposed Bigelow Gulch Road/Forker Road Urban Connector project. This was based on the original Environmental Assessment (EA) that was completed in January 2006 and revised November 2007. Since the FONSI is six years old and Spokane County is planning on moving forward with another phase of the project, a re-evaluation of the project EA is required by FHWA per 23 CFR 771.129(c).

### **Proposed Project**

The proposed project has not been modified from the proposed action in the environmental assessment. Phase 1 of the proposed action (the far westerly phase) was constructed in 2008. This construction mirrors the proposal in all aspects.

### **Elements of the Environment**

#### **Right-of-Way Acquisition**

The total footprint area of the project has not changed. The original EA document stated that a total of 166 acres of property would be impacted. Approximately 101 acres were expected to be acquired as right-of-way, and 65 acres were identified as temporary easement areas.

The property impacts of the corridor have remained the same. Property rights still need to be obtained on a total of approximately 166 acres of property to accommodate the construction, maintenance and operation of the corridor. The same 101 acres of right of way are still required, including the displacement of nine residences and five outbuildings, and the purchase of six remnant parcels along the alignment. The 65 acres of temporary easement areas will now be acquired as permanent easements. It was decided that permanent easements would be needed to prevent property owners from altering the side slopes in a manner that could harm the road. To date Spokane County has acquired property rights on a total 63.493 acres.

A review of all property acquisition activities on the corridor revealed deficiencies in the right of way acquisition processes in the areas of: real property valuation; relocation assistance; advisory assistance and project management. Based on Spokane County's compliance with the terms of the remedial action plan contained in the Memorandum of Agreement, FHWA issued a project-specific qualified right of way certificate.

#### **Recreation Resources (Section 4(f))**

The measures for Section 4(f) from page D-11 of the April 2008 – Finding of No Significant Impact and Final 4(f) Evaluation are:

Spokane County will hire a Recreational Architect to assist East Valley School District with the remodeling of the sports fields to mitigate the affected facilities. These mitigation measures are anticipated to include the following but may be modified through ongoing discussions with the District:

1. Addition of an exit-only at the high school to Wellesley Ave. to improve bus movement;
2. Relocate the northeastern ball field and unmarked practice football field at the middle school;
3. Plan regarding pedestrian tunnel or pedestrian bridge between the middle and high school with the school district;
4. Providing additional (1.4 acres) for the middle school along its northern property line to provide additional land for recreational resources and offset the Section 4(f) use of the existing sports field;
5. Conduct necessary geotechnical studies to address soils and groundwater conditions; and
6. Ensure that alternative parking is an element of planning, design, and construction if so desired by the School District.

Spokane County has recently been in contact with East Valley School District and there are no changes in the use of the impacted resource. There have been no changes to the project or the required mitigation.

### **Environmental Justice**

A review of all the available census data did show an increase the minority populations in the area however minority populations are still relatively small. Total minority populations in the project area average less than 10%. The census tracts on each end of the project have minority populations just above 10% (11.2% and 10.43%). This is still a relatively small proportion of the population and is consistent with the Spokane County minority population percentage of 10.28%.

The project largely traverses a rural landscape with ties to urban areas at each end. The census tracts with the highest minority population percentages are on the ends of the project. These tracts extend farther into urban areas where most of the people live. This indicates that the minority communities are located beyond the project limits and will not be disproportionately affected. A detailed look at the environmental impacts of the project demonstrated that there is no disproportionate effect on these populations. See Appendix A.

### **Noise**

Although there are changed circumstances that could potentially affect the noise analysis, the 2007 EA and the FONSI noise analysis was validated. The two potential changes that could affect the noise impact analysis are: 1) large increases in projected traffic volume and 2) new residences or other new receptors. In the first case, a review of the traffic modeling shows only minor changes in current projected traffic volumes for 2040 from 2025 projected volumes used by the 2007 noise analysis (2007 EA). Analysis of the 2040 traffic volumes indicates that the majority of the traffic in the project area would be lower than the traffic volumes modeled for design year 2025 in the original EA. The only projected increase from 2007 analysis is 9.14% on the segment east of Argonne; this segment is in a rural setting where most of the homes are set back from the road and are spaced too far apart for mitigation to be feasible.

**Table 1: Comparison of Projected Traffic Volumes**

<b>Roadway Segment</b>	<b>2025 Design Hour Volumes</b>	<b>2040 Design Hour Volumes</b>	<b>Change from 2025 to 2040</b>
<b>West of Argonne</b>	1380	1316	-4.16%
<b>East of Argonne</b>	1250	1364	9.14%
<b>Forker/ Sullivan</b>	1900	1589	-16.35%
<b>Argonne South</b>	1185	1138	-3.97%

The second change is the addition of five (5) new residences along the corridor since the original study. These new dwellings are all over 400 ft. away from both the current and proposed alignment. All of the new homes are set back further than adjacent existing homes that were determined to have no noise impacts. The area is rural and low density and the changes are minimal from the conditions during the 2007 study. These new homes will see no noise impacts because they are set back farther from the road than adjacent homes modeled in the 2007 study which were previously determined to have no impacts. No additional noise modeling is recommended. See Appendix B.

### **Air Quality**

The only potential for change to this element was the revised traffic projections (see table above in the Noise section). These volumes decreased within segments that contained CO maintenance areas (west of Argonne and Forker/Sullivan). Therefore projected air quality within the CO maintenance areas will be better than what was modeled in the 2007 EA and the findings in the 2007 EA are confirmed. See Appendix C.

### **Floodplains**

While the project has not changed, there have been several changes in the flood plain mapping and ordinances in both Spokane County and the City of Spokane Valley. These changes are documented in detail in the appendix. The largest change is the designation of a floodway along the Forker Road alignment. This change was administrative- the floodplain has always been there but now its designation has changed to “floodway” status so that it has stricter development standards. This floodplain will be impacted as defined in the original proposal, but in accordance with the new floodway requirements these impacts will be mitigated with the end result being no loss in flood flow capacity. See Appendix D.

### **Endangered Species**

A full review of the threatened and endangered species was performed and an update to the biological assessment accomplished. See Biological Assessment Addendum Report in the Appendix E. The conclusion reached was that the proposed action will have no effect on the ESA-listed species.

## Farmland

No changes on this element.

## Wetland

Following the FONSI in 2008 Spokane County has performed full stream assessment and wetland delineation for the corridor. The results of this design level analysis are detailed in the attached Wetland and Stream Assessment Summary Report. See Appendix F. On the regulatory side of the equation there have been several changes to the rules governing the treatment of wetland impacts, again the details are provided in the attachment. The result is that the total wetland impacts have been refined to 2.51 acres compared to the original estimate of 6.36 and are summarized below:

**Table 2: Summary of Wetland Areas**

	<b>2007EA</b>	<b>Current</b>
<b>Wetland</b>	0.71 ac.	1.02 ac.
<b>Wetland Buffer</b>	5.65 ac.	1.49 ac.
<b>Total</b>	6.36 ac.	2.51 ac.

These impacts are still planned to be mitigated in the areas defined and following the mitigation commitments detailed in the FONSI.

## Historic Properties (Section 106)

A review of all of the properties along the proposed alignment of the corridor showed that 26 additional properties became eligible for historic review in the last 7 years. All of these properties were surveyed and reports reviewed by the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. None of these properties were found to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. See Appendix G.

## Geology and Soils

The physical project and the materials it is to be built in have not changed.

## Groundwater Resources

The original EA discusses how potential impacts to groundwater quantity and quality within a shallow basalt aquifer could occur, specifically if blasting is required. In concert with the proposed action, all stormwater generated from the roadway (including previously untreated areas) will be treated for quality and managed to minimize peak flows consistent with the Spokane County Stormwater Guidelines and the most recent Eastern Washington Stormwater Manual. Appropriate temporary and permanent BMPs will be in place to manage stormwater and commit to water well protection. These resources and mitigations have not changed.

As portions of Bigelow are in the sole source aquifer, EPA recently reviewed the proposed project and determined that the project will not have a significant adverse impact on the Spokane Valley Rathdrum Prairie Sole Source Aquifer. See Appendix H.

In following up on the 2007 EA mitigation commitments, in December 2008, Spokane County conducted a water well baseline assessment of 51 wells located within 1,000 feet of the new Bigelow Gulch Road roadway alignment project in Spokane County, Washington. The assessment was preliminary to the Bigelow Gulch Phases 1-3, between Havana Street and Argonne Road. The purpose of the assessment was to provide a pre-construction snap-shot of the baseline water well conditions for post- construction comparison. Higher risk wells adjacent to Phase 1 were also sampled prior to construction as part of this assessment.

## Streams

A full stream assessment has been completed for all phases of the project in preparation for permitting the construction of the corridor. The results of this assessment are summarized in Appendix F. The County has kept up-to-date with the regulatory changes and performed this assessment under the most current regulatory framework. The County Critical Areas Ordinance has undergone several changes over the past six years (these changes are also detailed in Appendix F). Because of these changes, comparisons of anticipated impacts are difficult to summarize. Table 3 below provides a summary comparison.

**Table 3: Summary of Stream Impacts**

	2007 EA	Current
<b>Stream Length</b>	4,250 LF	5,021 LF
<b>Riparian Buffer</b>	7.5 acres	9.61 acres

This more detailed survey, associated with the design level analysis, was performed under the current regulatory framework and with more intensive field investigation. The changes from 2007 EA noted above are due to reclassification of resources, not new resources discovered. That is with more detailed on-site investigation, some wetlands identified in the 2007 EA are now classified as only streams/ponds and some streams now also have associated wetlands.

The mitigation site proposed in the 2007 EA will still accommodate the necessary compensatory mitigation for stream and riparian buffer impacts in accordance with the most recent update to the Spokane County Critical Areas Ordinance. Also the documented benefits to water quality still apply.

## Vegetation and Wildlife

There have been no changes to this element, with the exception to the Endangered Species Act listings noted above.

## Land Use and Displacement

A review of land use along the proposed Bigelow Gulch/Forker Road Corridor Project found that the landscape is still dominated by large agricultural farms being actively used for production of wheat, alfalfa and produce. Agricultural land is interspersed with occasional clusters of 5-acre residential tracts. Most houses and farmsteads are set back 100 to 200 feet from the existing roadway as reported in the 2006/2007 EA.

A comparison of the 2006 and 2013 Google aerial photos shows no change in land use. The 2007 Zoning map which per the 2007 EA was consistent with the 2007 County Comprehensive Plan designations was

compared with the current 2014 Zoning and Comprehensive maps. There were no differences. The current City of Spokane Valley boundary, zoning designation of Low Density Residential, and the current Urban Growth Area boundary is consistent with that provided in the 2006/2007 EA. See Appendix I for 2014 and 2007 Zoning maps.

Conclusion is that there have been no changes in land use between those studied in the 2006/2007 EA and the present.

The property impacts of the corridor have remained the same. Property rights still need to be obtained on a total of approximately 166 acres of property to accommodate the construction, maintenance and operation of the corridor. The same 101 acres of right of way are still required, including the displacement of nine residences and five outbuildings, and the purchase of six remnant parcels along the alignment. The 65 acres of temporary easement areas will now be acquired as permanent easements. To date Spokane County has acquired property rights on a total 63.493 acres.

### **Transportation**

The regional transportation model was used to predict future traffic. This model is developed and maintained by the Spokane Regional Transportation Council and includes all regionally significant projects that are reasonably foreseeable. The minor changes in traffic projections are detailed in the appendix. The LOS, safety, and freight movement analysis for both the action and no action alternatives remain unchanged with these new projections. See Appendix J.

### **Visual Quality**

There have been no changes that affect this element.

### **Parks and Recreation**

The only effects occur to the section 4(f) property noted above. There have been no changes to the project or the required mitigation.

### **Social and Economic Elements**

There have been no changes in the project area or in the project itself that affect this element.

### **Hazardous Materials**

There have been no changes in the project area or in the project itself that affect this element.