

# The road is a visitor...

## US Highway 93

### through the Flathead Indian Reservation

US Highway 93 traverses the Flathead Indian Reservation, which is located on the west side of the Rocky Mountains in western Montana. The Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille tribes have lived for centuries in this area between the majestic Mission Mountains and the Flathead Valley. They share their home with Grizzly Bear, White-tailed Deer, Mule Deer, Pronghorn, Rocky Mountain Elk, Painted Turtles, Bighorn Sheep, and numerous fish and bird species.

Through a series of negotiations culminating in a Memorandum of Agreement, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation (CSKT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) agreed that a new, safer highway needed to be constructed across the Flathead Reservation. Two consulting firms, Skillings-Connolly, Inc., and Jones & Jones Architects and Landscape Architects, were brought in to help develop a collective vision of what this new highway would be. Skillings-Connolly helped facilitate that process by overseeing preliminary engineering, while Jones & Jones developed design concepts and guidelines based upon the premise that the road is a visitor that responds to and is respectful of the Spirit of Place. Spirit of Place proved to be a key issue in the negotiations, for it includes more than just the road and adjacent areas—it consists of the surrounding mountains, plains, hills, forest, valley, and sky, and the paths of waters, glaciers, winds, plants, animals, and native peoples. Understanding and respecting the Spirit of Place provided inspiration and guidance that led to design solutions uniquely suited to the special qualities of the tribal lands.

*“Traditions teach that land, wildlife, and people are all deeply connected. A highway is not just a highway. Decisions about the highway are decisions about the land, made for seven generations of people that belong to it.”*

Tony Incasola, Tribal Cultural Spokesman, CSKT, St. Ignatius

*“The words in the agreement are about rebuilding a road, but the process leading up to it was about rebuilding trust, honor, and mutual respect among governments.”*

Fred Matt, CSKT Tribal Council Chairman

*“The old people are speaking to the generation to come through me, that’s my responsibility.”*

Marcia Pablo, Director of Cultural Resources, CSKT

*“We should each go beyond our jobs, take responsibility to speak for this place, and take responsibility for what we impact.”*

Lloyd Irvine, Council Member from Pablo, CSKT

*“US 93 will be one of the most environmentally friendly highways ever designed in Montana.”*

Loran Frazier, MDT District Administrator, Missoula

*“This is not your father’s highway project.”*

John Stromnes, *The Missoulian*

Guidelines developed in the Memorandum of Agreement represent an unprecedented level of environmental protection in road design and a new cooperative attitude between state, federal, and tribal interests. Instead of cutting across the scenic landscape in a straight line, the reconstructed highway is designed to respond to cultural and natural resources and to give the driver a new perspective of the land and its inhabitants.

*“The groundbreaking approach to safety and environmental sensitivity of the U.S. 93 project marks a new era in Montana highway construction.”*

Judy Martz, Governor of Montana

Wildlife crossings, habitat restoration, and the reintroduction of native plants will help maintain and restore wildlife connectivity across the corridor. Visitor centers and interpretive overlooks will provide opportunities for travelers to rest, relax, and learn more about the Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille people and their homelands. New passing lanes and intermittent widening of the highway will improve safety. Restored wetlands, complete with indigenous plants, will further habitat protection. Signage will be written in Kootenai, Salish, and English and feature a logo of Coyote, the legendary hero of the tribes.

*“Jones & Jones proved to be the midwife that brought to life the ‘Spirit of Place’ in the road design.”*

John Stromnes, *The Missoulian*

DESIGN TEAM	CLIENT TEAM
Skillings-Connolly transportation engineer and primary consultant	The Montana Department of Transportation
Jones & Jones landscape architect and alignment designer	The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation
Midwest Research Institute traffic engineer	The Federal Highway Administration

