



U.S. 93 – FLATHEAD INDIAN RESERVATION, MONTANA

The National Trust for Historic Preservation included the Flathead Indian Reservation on its 1997 list of Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places to help draw national attention to the Montana Department of Transportation's plan to widen 56 miles of U.S. 93 through the reservation, and to support the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' contention that the proposed four-to-five lane highway posed a major threat to the social, environmental and cultural well-being of the reservation.

The section 4(f) prohibition against the use of historic places for highways unless no prudent and feasible alternative exists was one of several factors in the controversy. From 1984 to 1996, the Montana DOT pressed the case for the four-lane highway, while the Tribes supported less costly and less intrusive improvements to the existing two-lane highway. The result was a stalemate. Eventually, in 1998, Montana DOT and the Tribes reopened negotiations and adopted a new approach to seeking consensus on the project's design on ways to minimize impacts to cultural and aesthetic values.



On December 20, 2000, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed by the Federal Highway Administration, the Montana DOT and the Tribal Council. The MOA laid out the concepts for how the highway alignment would be developed, how traffic would be managed, and how people, wildlife and roadway aesthetics would be protected in order to preserve the Spirit of Place.

Montana's adoption of context-sensitive design techniques and bold approaches to public and stakeholder involvement in decision-making throughout the life of the project are worthy of the greatest commendation. In all probability, without Section 4(f), the outcome for U.S. 93 would have been very different.