Enterprise photos by Shawn Raecke

Park County road crew worker Wayne Bowman, of Livingston, operates equipment used to fill holes on Mill Creek Road in Paradise Valley, Wednesday morning.

ROAD WORK AHEAD

MILL CREEK ROAD SURFACE PRESERVATION PROJECT APPROVED

By Natalie Storey
Enterprise Staff Writer

Some have joked that the potholes in Mill Creek Road are big enough to fish in.

Those holes will soon be fixed and other improvements to the road will be made if the federal government comes through with $1.7 million in Federal Lands Access Program grant monies it has promised Park County.

Kristen Galbraith, the Nittany Grantworks grant writer who submitted the funding request, said she was notified late last week that the county's Mill Creek Road Surface Preservation project had been approved.

Park County Commissioner Marty Malone, who lives near Mill Creek Road and who often receives complaints about its surface, said the potholes aren't quite big enough to fish in, but the road needs the improvements that the grant will make possible.

"Mill Creek Road is an important road for recreationalists all year long, and it's important to have a safe road for the people that use it," Malone said.

Mill Creek Road begins near reference point 39 on U.S. Highway 89 South and continues through the East River Road for about 12 miles, according to a county project update. The roadway runs through Custer Gallatin National Forest and provides access to trails in the Mill Creek drainage, the Snowbank Campground and several church camps and U.S. Forest Service cabins.

Park County road crew worker Colby Guse, of Clyde Park, drives the dump truck that pulls the "Dura Patcher" along Mill Creek Road as his co-worker Wayne Bowman operates the equipment and fills the holes, Wednesday morning.

The Federal Lands Access Program is intended to provide transportation facilities in areas that are adjacent to or located within federal lands, according to the program's website. It is funded by appropriations from Congress.

The program provides money for public roads, transit systems and other transportation facilities, emphasizing high-use recreation sites and supplementing local resources, the website says.

As part of the grant, Park County will contribute about $270,000 to the project, Galbraith said.

The Mill Creek project will include chip sealing and crack sealing six miles of the asphalt surface of the road and stabilizing the existing gravel surface of the road after the asphalt ends, Galbraith said. There will also be shoulder and bridge deck repairs, parking improvements, improvements in signs and new pavement markings.

It's likely the project won't begin until next spring, but it could begin as early as October, she said.

Parks Frady, Park County public works director, said crews are working to patch some of the potholes now, but a larger-scale project is needed to preserve the road.

Mill Creek road is currently in "fair" condition, Frady said. It has the most traffic of all the county roads that provide access to U.S. Forest Service land, with an average of 161 trips on the road a day year-round. During the summer, about 350 trips are made on the road each day.

Commissioner Clint Tinsley said the county has 70 miles of asphalt roads to maintain and that it costs about $35,000 a mile to chip seal and fix them.

The county budget has about $100,000 built in to maintain roads, but that's not nearly enough, Tinsley said.

"It's nice to get grant funds to help us achieve goals of repairing our asphalt roads," he said. "Without those funds we wouldn't be able to do that."

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