Fisher River Road Removal
Phase 1 Project Summary

In the early 1960’s, the St. Regis Corporation constructed a segment of logging road immediately adjacent to the Fisher River, near Libby, Montana. Through various changes in land ownership over the years, the road is now owned and managed by Plum Creek. As part of the company’s Native Fish Habitat Conservation Plan (NFHCP), the site was identified as a potential restoration opportunity in 2003. The specific issue with this road is that in several sections, it severely confines the river, and in some cases cut off river meander bends entirely. This confinement of the river is causing accelerated bank erosion, and altering river hydrology. To address this legacy water quality problem, Plum Creek partnered with the Kootenai National Forest and Lincoln County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) in a cooperative restoration project in 2007-2008.

The first phase of this project addressed nearly 4,000 feet of impacted river. The project had several elements:
1. Remove 5,000 cubic yards of road fill material from the Fisher River floodplain;
2. Install two rock “veins” which will prevent the river from eroding into the road removal area until it re-vegetates;
3. Removal of a fish barrier culvert on Smoke Creek;
4. Re-vegetation of the old roadbed, including planting 1200 conifer seedlings (western larch, Engelmann spruce, and lodgepole pine), and 400 native shrubs (willow, alder, dogwood, etc.); and
5. Improved an existing road that the public can use as a bypass. This involved adding rock surfacing and improving road drainage on 5 miles of road.

The road removal project was completed over 13 days in the first half of August 2007 by P&S Contracting out of Libby. During this time, P&S hauled over 400 dump truck loads of road fill to waste areas on either side of the project area. Site re-vegetation work occurred in 2008. The total cost of the project, including re-vegetation and bypass improvements, was $90,000. Of this total, $51,000 was provided by Plum Creek and $39,000 was funded through the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, administered by the US Forest Service.

Since the project was completed in 2008, maintenance of plants by Plum Creek has occurred annually. A large runoff event during the spring of 2008 saw flood flows access the full floodplain for the first time in 50 years.

Additional phases of this project are possible – which would address locations where the road cuts off two major river meanders. Plum Creek hopes that partners can be found to continue this important restoration work.

Project photos and descriptions occur on the following pages.

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Phase I Area – Pre-Project Photographs

Clockwise from top left:
- Looking down Phase I road segment before removal. Note part of road had washed out into the Fisher River in 2002.
- Looking at road in the middle of the floodplain, with the river on the far side.
- Culvert where road crosses Smoke Creek, showing the outlet drop.
Phase I Area – Project Photographs

Clockwise from top left:
- Road fill being loaded into dump trucks;
- Looking across floodplain (see photo on previous page), as roadfill is removed;
- Roadfill being removed near river at south end of project;
- Rock veins being placed in river to prevent near-term erosion of restored reach;
- Completed road removal. Compare with photograph on previous page that showed the road partially washed out.
Phase 1 Area – Removal of Smoke Creek culvert

Clockwise from top left:
- Culvert before removal;
- Culvert partly removed;
- Culvert removed. Rock steps placed in channel and slash filter windrow on disturbed soil;
- One year after project re-vegetation;
Phase I Area – Project Re-Vegetation

Clockwise from top left:
- Conifers planted on road fill storage area. Seedlings have “Vexar tubes” around them to prevent browse by big game;
- Looking across floodplain. Planted shrubs have large black browse protectors on them;
- Overview of floodplain;
Phase I Area – Flood in Project Area in spring 2008

Photos show restoration reach in the midst of a 5-year flood. Water topped over old roadbed, and traveled across the historic floodplain.
Phase I Area – Aerial view of restoration reach taken in 2009