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**Bob Vosen, District Administrator
Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
PO Box 7039
Missoula, Montana
59807**

AUG 06 2021

Ravalli County Commissioners

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August 6, 2021

Subject: Serious Concerns Regarding Stretch of Highway 93 South of Darby, Montana and Request for Speed Limit Reduction

Dear Mr. Vosen;

We appreciate your attention to an urgent highway issue. For background, my husband and I have been full-time residents in our home at 327 Chief Joseph Trail, Darby for over nine years. We first started frequenting the Bitterroot Valley over 33 years ago and were second homeowners here for 20 of those years. We all have seen many changes over this time including one of the most worrisome: the increase in traffic and impacts to our highways not designed to handle high traffic volumes.

Our "country" highways with frequent intersecting roads are no longer experiencing light traffic flow. These high-speed, one-lane highways are increasingly more dangerous to navigate. Particularly with our young inexperienced drivers, impaired drivers etc.

This letter is specifically to address growing concerns over a stretch of Highway 93 which starts south as it exists the Town of Darby and continues to Mile Marker 28. The speed limit increases abruptly from 45 miles per hour to 70 miles per hour as you leave Town and continues south.

This abrupt increase in speed may have been appropriate many years ago however it is now dangerous with the rapidly growing volume of commuters, new residents, and tourism. This is compounded by the traffic generated from tourists viewing the property where the "Yellowstone" television show is filmed. We certainly applaud the tremendous positive economic impacts "Yellowstone" has had on our valley and state. However, the increase in traffic stops at the private gate at Chief Joseph Ranch, where the show is filmed, has become very dangerous. We, as well as many of our friends, family and surrounding property owners along this stretch have seen the daily traffic stops of folks taking pictures at the Chief Joseph Ranch gate. For this reason, our Chief Joseph Acres Home Owners Association (adjacent to the Ranch) recently installed a gate at our entrance to control access due to the escalating number of tourists and folks ignoring our very visible "No Trespassing" signs.

This is no longer an inconvenience but an ever-increasing life safety issue. Many of us have had very near misses with rear-ends, dangerous passing, countless cars pulling to the side abruptly to take pictures, and cars pulling over for fishing access. Folks even

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AUG 8 1981

Ravalli County Commissioners

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August 8, 1981

Subject: Serious Concerns Regarding Stretch of Highway 89 South of Darby, Montana and Request for Speed Limit Reduction

Bob Vossel, District Administrator
 Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
 PO Box 7039
 Missoula, Montana
 59807

Dear Mr. Vossel:

We appreciate your attention to an urgent highway issue. For background, my husband and I have been full-time residents in our home at 827 Chief Joseph Trail, Darby for over nine years. We first started frequenting the Bitteroot Valley over 33 years ago and were second homeowners here for 20 of those years. We all have seen many changes over this time including one of the most worrisome: the increase in traffic and impact to our highways not designed to handle high traffic volumes.

Our "country" highways with frequent intersecting roads are no longer experiencing light traffic flow. These high-speed, one-lane highways are increasingly more dangerous to navigate. Particularly with our young inexperienced drivers, impaired drivers etc.

This letter is specifically to address growing concerns over a stretch of Highway 89 which starts south as it exits the Town of Darby and continues to Mile Marker 28. The speed limit increases abruptly from 45 miles per hour to 70 miles per hour as you leave town and continues south.

This abrupt increase in speed may have been appropriate many years ago however it is now dangerous with the rapidly growing volume of commuters, new residents, and tourists. This is compounded by the traffic generated from houses around the property

where the "Yellowstone" television show is filmed. We certainly applaud the tremendous positive economic impact "Yellowstone" has had on our valley and state. However, the increase in traffic stops at the private gate at Chief Joseph Ranch, where the show is filmed, has become very dangerous. We, as well as many of our friends, family and surrounding property owners along this stretch have seen the daily traffic stops of folks taking pictures at the Chief Joseph Ranch gate. For this reason, our Chief Joseph Acres Home Owners Association (adjacent to the Ranch) recently installed a gate at our entrance to control access due to the escalating number of tourists and folks ignoring our very visible "No Trespassing" signs.

This is no longer an inconvenience but an ever-increasing life safety issue. Many of us have had very near misses with rear-ends, dangerous passing, countless cars pulling to the side abruptly to take pictures, and cars pulling over for fishing access. Folks even

park across the highway and walk across to take pictures or gain access. Additionally, this stretch of highway has multiple curves which absolutely impair visibility. This cannot be continued in a 70 mile an hour zone without eventually causing serious injury or death.

We recently had a very productive conversation with your knowledgeable and professional Maintenance Chief Steve Felix. Steve said we are now seeing "post-COVID" driving behaviors with increased risk-taking and aggression. News sources report the same and we have all witnessed this behavior change. Of course, this also has an impact on already dangerous highways. Having come from government administrative, public safety backgrounds ourselves we understand the studies and justification often needed to effect change. However, we also know that some urgent matters cannot and do not need to wait for studies. One only needs to observe this area to see the dangerous impacts posed throughout a typical day.

We are asking for the 45 mile per hour speed limit be continued from the Town of Darby, south to Mile Marker 28. And the lines be marked as double yellow, no passing. We feel that this is the only logical fix to this very dangerous stretch.

Thank you very much for the work you and your staff do to make Montana highways safer. We know it's not an easy job. We greatly appreciate your attention to this issue and look forward to hearing from your office at your earliest convenience.

Our sincere best regards;

Paul & Denise Benson

Paul and Denise Benson
Owners, Fern Creek Ranch
Chief Joseph Acres
327 Chief Joseph Trail
Darby, Montana 59829
(406) 360-5927

Cc:

Greg Gianforte, Governor, Montana
Jason Ellsworth, Senator, Montana
Michelle Binkley, House Rep. District 85, Montana
Jeff Burrows, Ravalli County Commissioner, Montana
Stephen Holton, Ravalli County Sheriff, Montana
Steve Felix, Maintenance Chief, MDT Missoula
Shane and Angela Libel, Owners, Chief Joseph Ranch, Darby
Steve and Brenda Sampietro, Owners, Toma Trail Chief Joseph Acres, Darby
Jay and Diane Milligan, Owners, Black Elk Ranch, Darby

Additional... highway... this... be... health

We... professional... COV... also... had... the... to...

to see the... to...

We are... Gary... We...

I thank you... We know... and look forward...

Our... best...

Very... yours...

Paul and... Owners... Chief... 527... Gary...

Let... 527... Gary... 527... Gary...