

Chris Taggart

From: Amie Porter <ajporter2@msn.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 29, 2022 9:00 PM
To: Ravalli County Commissioners Office
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Maintaining a paved Lower Woodchuck Road in Florence

Dear Commissioners,

It has been brought to our attention that there is discussion on the returning of several of our Florence roads back to gravel, and not maintaining them as paved. While we understand the need for this consideration from a county budget standpoint, we feel that this may be shortsighted where Lower Woodchuck Road is concerned for the following reasons:

As a property/homeowner on Shadowwalk Trail off of Lower Woodchuck, we pay considerable taxes to the county each year. The road has been paved and maintained by Ravalli County since before we built our home, which is nearly exactly 2 miles from the four-way intersection of Lower Woodchuck Road with 8-mile Road, another road maintained as paved by Ravalli County. With three drivers in my household, the wear and tear on our vehicles would be considerable, and the added cost to repair and maintain them would be excessive.

The number of residents living on Lower Woodchuck road has doubled since the road has been paved, and the usage by non-homeowners continues to increase dramatically. The road has been "patched" numerous times, but not properly; and when fixed well would not show the signs of degradation it currently displays.

Brown's Greenhouse on 5629 Lower Woodchuck Road is a very busy local nursery that provides plants and flowers to many local businesses, and contracts with many well-known nurseries in the Missoula area to provide them with stock for their respective businesses. They have many large delivery trucks and semi-trucks which utilize the road, and a multitude of employees who use it daily . . . not to mention the consumer traffic during the spring and summer months when the greenhouse is open to the public.

Also contributing to the increased usage of Lower Woodchuck Road is the MPG Ranch. Though the address, 19400 Lower Woodchuck Road, is in Missoula County, the ranch creates the most commuter traffic up and down the entire length of the road each day. It employs at least 30 people who drive the road on a daily basis: scientists, researchers, biologists, and environmental ecologists who contribute to the betterment of the Bitterroot Valley. The ranch "hosts thousands of visitors each year since 2010" (<https://www.mpg ranch.com>), including field trips from area schools who tap into the educational resources made available by the MPG Ranch. There is a shooting range which has recently opened, resulting in increased traffic on Lower Woodchuck Road. There are a multitude of large trucks and trailers hauling heavy equipment and supplies to the ranch each week, and an unpaved road would deteriorate very rapidly, making everyone's travel more dangerous and difficult, especially in the winter months.

Allowing the road to be downgraded to gravel status is a demonstration of negative progress. Florence, like the entire valley, is increasing in population. We have a lot to be proud of in our town, and reverting back to a gravel Lower Woodchuck would be a black eye on our community. It would cost the county more money to maintain a dirt road annually, not to mention the negative effects it would have on local property owners, thriving local businesses, and educational entities. Simply put, Lower Woodchuck Road gets entirely too much daily usage to be considered as anything but the northernmost paved road in Ravalli County.

We thank you for your attention and consideration, and appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

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