

BADLANDS CONSERVATION ALLIANCE
A VOICE FOR WILD NORTH DAKOTA PLACES

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June 29, 2012

Chad M. Orn
ND Department of Transportation
608 E. Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505-0700

RE: STIP Amendment – US HWY 85 Preliminary Engineering to consider upgrading US Highway 85 between I-94 and south of Watford City to a four lane roadway.

Dear Mr. Orn:

Badlands Conservation Alliance is submitting public comments on an amendment to the 2012-2015 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for inclusion of Preliminary Engineering to consider upgrading US Highway 85 between I-94 and south of Watford City.

BCA has concerns that the ND Department of Transportation (NDDOT) may be considering construction of a four lane that would trespass on land within the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The North Unit is valued and admired for its natural undeveloped qualities. Of the two larger units of the Park, the North Unit has historically seen the least intrusion by outside disturbance, and therefore, it has been the selected destination for many. Recent industrialization and increased traffic in the area have diminished the quality of that experience. A four-lane highway would cause further direct and indirect impacts to the North Unit, which is unacceptable.

Long X Divide and Lone Butte, two roadless areas immediately south of the North Unit, are included in a citizen proposal for Wilderness, with the aim of permanently protecting a small portion of the Little Missouri National Grassland from industrial development. These areas are currently managed by the US Forest Service for their high-level natural qualities and are among the last parcels that qualify for Wilderness designation. Any attempt to thread a four lane roadway through the needle's eye of the existing Hwy 85 would significantly threaten these areas.

We would agree with the ND Department of Transportation that safety issues are a grave concern on this stretch of road. However, the \$3.5 Million cost estimated for this project would be better spent improving the current roadway or in developing a comprehensive plan that takes into account North Dakota's unique landscape and assesses the many cumulative oil impacts all ready in play throughout this sensitive area.

The proposed amendment is a significant action. Public notice has been strikingly narrow in scope. BCA insists that the amendment be dropped or delayed until such time that NDDOT has effectively engaged the many ND citizens having an interest in the proposed amendment. BCA asks to be informed of any further proposals or actions on this matter.

Respectfully,



Jan Swenson, ED
Badlands Conservation Alliance