

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

Dossie Overfield, Chairman
Lloyd Thiel, Vice Chairman
Lee Livingston, Commissioner
Scott Mangold, Commissioner
Scott Steward, Commissioner



Park County, Wyoming
Organized 1911

Original Park County Courthouse
Cody, Wyoming
Completed 1912

February 7, 2023

Gardiner Chamber of Commerce

Attn: Terese Petcoff, Executive Director
Mike Skelton, President
Sarah Ondrus, Vice President
Mike Keller, Treasurer
Directors: Chelsea Deweese, Amanda Hagerty, Brian Koski, Debbie Mackey, Trina Smith, & Billie Taylor

Cc: Pete Hallsten, WYDOT District 5 Engineer
William Fogarty, MDOT District 2 Administrator
Cam Sholly, Yellowstone National Park Superintendent
Shaleas Harrison, Park Access Recommendation Committee
Bert Miller, Protect Our Plug Member

RE: Park County, Wyoming position regarding snow plowing on Highway 212 (ie, "the plug")

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have been made aware of recent conversations and at least one meeting regarding ideas and plans for snow removal as it relates to Highway 212 (Beartooth Highway). In particular, we want to address snow removal for the +/- 13 mile stretch of Highway 212 between Cooke City and the junction of Highway 296 (Chief Joseph Highway). In reviewing the minutes from the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce meeting on November 16, 2022, the following statement was made.

"Based on a current cost estimate provided by Park County, Wyoming, which has agreed to plowing in the event that there is an agreement met between the two States (Montana and Wyoming) would be no more than \$60K."

Somewhere along the way, these words have been taken out of context and are not factual. Our County Engineer (Brian Edwards) was asked in the early Fall of 2022, through Commissioner Dossie Overfield (Chair of Board of County Commissioners) to review our cost tracking information for snow removal activities up in the Sunlight/Crandall, Wyoming area including the short section of Highway 212 between the Junction and Pilot Creek. At that time, the damage to the Highway between Gardiner and Cooke City was still being discussed between local, state, and federal officials including provisions for keeping the Highway open east of Cooke City to the Junction. Specifically, the focus and priority at the time, involved making sure the citizens of Cooke City could get in and out during this winter. Park County offered internal cost tracking information in good faith to be compared with other estimates for the purpose of what was understood to be a "feasibility study". This information was provided with the understanding that Park County's cost estimates would be compared with others that provide snow plowing maintenance in the region including Yellowstone National Park, WYDOT, and MDOT. This combined information could then be used for planning to assist stakeholders involved with the maintenance of Highway 212.

Park County Public Works Department (PCPWD) tracks actual costs for labor and equipment to plow snow on various County Roads in the Sunlight & Crandall areas as well as the +/- 4.8-mile section of Highway 212 between the Junction and Pilot Creek. Park County, Wyoming currently plows snow at the Pilot Creek snowmobile parking area as well as the 4.8-mile section of Highway 212 as part of a *Memorandum of*

Understanding (MOU) between Park County, Wyoming State Department of Parks and Cultural Resources, and the USFS Shoshone National Forest.

Our Public Works Department (PCPWD) compiled information indicating that Park County spends between \$3,000 and \$6,500 per mile to plow roughly 18.3 miles in the Crandall & Sunlight areas. All but the +/- 4.8 miles (Junction to Pilot Creek) involve snow removal on gravel roads. On October 3, 2022, Brian Edwards sent an email to Forrest Kamminga (Wyoming State Trails Program Manager) summarizing cost estimates based on the County's actual costs. A follow up email was provided to Shaleas Harrison (Park Access Recommendation Committee) on October 6, 2022, in response to her email. Edwards provided and qualified the estimates in the email by acknowledging that the County employs a seasonal operator that lives in Crandall which reduces costs. Edwards also stated that the County maintains the roads normally with just a motor grader with plow. On a "bad year", Park County will deploy additional personnel and equipment including a dozer and snowplow. Edwards stated that the County does not maintain a truck mounted snowplow in the area (ie, added cost). Edwards went on to say,

"Really, our costs are all over the place because it just depends on how much snow falls, how much wind we get, etc. I would say that \$3,000 to \$6,500 would be a reasonable estimate (normal to heavy years). I have heard that the plug from Pilot Creek to Cooke City gets really bad (lots of snow) in the winter. You may want to use the \$5,000 to \$6,500 per mile for a normal year for that stretch of road."

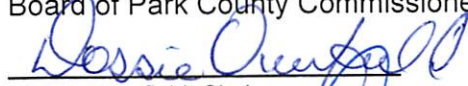
It is understood that Yellowstone Park and WYDOT have indicated that their costs to plow the same stretch of road would be much higher than our engineer's estimate when considering the added cost of equipment storage/staging, lodging, per diem, etc.

At no time did Edwards offer on Park County, Wyoming's behalf that we would be willing to or agreeable to "plowing the plug". Such an agreement would require approval by the Board of Park County Commissioners (BOCC) through a formal action and would likely receive significant public scrutiny. The fact that a section of the plug lies within the State of Montana's jurisdictional limits further complicates the issue from this County's perspective. Again, ultimately any such decision rests entirely with the BOCC with coordination/assistance by other local, state, and federal stakeholders.

Obviously, the Beartooth Highway including winter activities in the Cooke City area also impacts Park County, Wyoming. Our sympathies and support for Cooke City, Yellowstone Park, and surrounding areas will continue along with other stakeholders as these areas work towards full recovery from the 2022 flooding.

Sincerely,

Board of Park County Commissioners


Dossie Overfield, Chair


Lloyd Thiel, Vice Chairman


Lee Livingston, Commissioner


Scott Mangold, Commissioner


Scott Steward, Commissioner

ATTEST

Colleen Renner, County Clerk

7 Feb. 2023
Date

