

6. Public Involvement

6.1 Introduction

The North Shore Road Project has over a 60-year history related to the construction of the Fontana Dam in western North Carolina. For decades prior to the onset of the EIS and official start of the public involvement program, the public and media have commented on issues surrounding the North Shore Road and the land that is now included in the EIS study area. This has included petitions and letters written to the NPS and other government agencies. As demonstrated through previous and current public participation, there is a strong interest in this project among numerous people with various viewpoints, both locally and nationwide.

Public involvement is an essential component of the EIS, supporting the informed decision-making process. It is integral in selecting appropriate study alternatives, analyzing potential impacts, and fulfilling NEPA requirements. In accordance with NEPA, the NPS and the FHWA developed an extensive public involvement program for the North Shore Road EIS to keep the public informed and to collect public input for the duration of the project.

The North Shore Road Public Involvement Program is open and inclusive. Key public involvement points included the following:

- The proposed North Shore Road has been a divisive factor for too long and needs resolution.
- The public decision-making process associated with NEPA will provide a framework to evaluate all reasonable alternatives for resolving the government's obligation in the 1943 Agreement.
- The program is committed to keeping the public and interested parties as informed as possible throughout the process.
- Flexible, open, and continuous public involvement will be conducted in accordance with NEPA and NPS policies.

The North Shore Road Public Involvement Program included a variety of media to inform the public on the status of the EIS planning process and to solicit and incorporate public feedback. It included numerous public meetings at multiple locations, social advertisements in local newspapers, national press releases, a comprehensive mailing list for project newsletters, and an interactive project website.

This chapter provides a summation of the public involvement activities that occurred during the North Shore Road Public Involvement Program.

Refer to Impacts to the Human Environment, Section 4.2, (specifically in Community, Section 4.2.2; Visitor Use and Experience, Section 4.2.5; and Cultural Resources, Section 4.2.8), for more information regarding impacts to the publics associated with this project.

6.2 Media Strategies

A variety of media strategies were developed to update the public on the status of the EIS planning process and to collect public input. The wide range of local and national interest required disseminating information

to a larger audience through mass media. The following details the media used to inform the public and solicit public input.

6.2.1 Mailing List

The project mailing list was initially developed with the NPS by compiling all known key project contacts, including people who previously had expressed interest in the project; local interest groups; conservation groups; resource and regulatory agencies; other federal, state, and local government representatives; and tourism associations. The federal, state, and local governments included: city/county officials from Swain and Graham counties; other North Carolina and Tennessee local government board members and commissioners; federal government elected officials; and state government elected officials. The initial project mailing list breakdown is shown in Table 6-1.

Table 6-1. Initial Project Mailing List

Project Interest Group	Number of Individuals
Public	830
Conservation Interest Groups	59
Resource & Regulatory Agencies	47
Other Federal, State, & Local Government	61
Tourism	11
Total	1,008

As of February 2005, the project mailing list included 8,026 individuals (Table 6-2). The people that were added since the initial listing are individuals who signed in at one of the public meetings, provided comments, or requested addition to the mailing list by phone, e-mail, writing, or direct contact. The decrease in the number of federal, state, and local government contacts from the initial mailing list to the current mailing list can be attributed to consolidation of contacts from each agency receiving information. In addition, some people requested to be removed from the physical mailing list and requested to only have their contact information on the e-mail list.

Table 6-2. Current Project Mailing List (as of February 2005)

Project Interest Group	Number of Individuals
Public	7,833
Conservation Interest Groups	41
Resource & Regulatory Agencies	66
Federal, State, & Local Governments	60
Tourism	11
Media	7
NPS	8
Total	8,026

In addition to the project mailing list, an e-mail list is maintained. Approximately 4,120 addresses are on the project's e-mail list. The total number on the list includes those that prefer both methods of mailing (hard copy and electronic), those who prefer only electronic correspondence, contacts who submitted comments via e-mail, and those that checked the e-mail preference on their hard copy comment sheets.

Mailing list contacts receive project newsletters and other pertinent distributions throughout the duration of the project. The mailing lists are updated weekly, based on comments, e-mails, and information forwarded from the NPS and the FHWA.

6.2.2 Newsletters

Project newsletters were sent to recipients on both mailing lists at major project milestones. Each newsletter contained information relating to that phase of the project, a project location map, and contact information. During the preparation of the DEIS, five issues of the project newsletter were distributed.

The first project newsletter was sent in February 2003. It introduced the project, discussed the EIS process, invited the public to attend the scoping meetings, and requested comments. The issue included a summary of the project's history; draft purpose and need statement; concept alternatives from the past; past agency and public positions; and the proposed study area.

The second project newsletter was sent in July 2003. The newsletter included an overview of the project; a review of public involvement activities; information on the existing conditions; a map of the project study area; an invitation to the second series of public workshops; and a solicitation of comments.

The third project newsletter was distributed in January 2004. It provided a project overview; discussed the preliminary alternatives and screening criteria; requested participation at the public workshops; and encouraged public input.

The fourth project newsletter updated the public on the alternatives recommended to move forward for detailed study in the DEIS. It was distributed in September 2004.

A fifth newsletter which announced the public workshops for the Impact Analysis Phase was mailed in January 2005.

For those on the project's e-mail list, an e-mail notice was sent to all contacts with a link to the newsletter on the project website.

6.2.3 Website

A website (www.NorthShoreRoad.info) was developed to provide information to the public concerning project history, the status of the EIS planning process, and current project details. Through an e-mail link (www.NorthShoreRoad.info/comments.htm), the interactive website is also used to collect public comments and requests to be added to, or deleted from, the project mailing list. The website is updated as major milestones are met, and covers information from the public meeting handouts. It also includes public

involvement notices; a project location map; archived project newsletters; reports; and links to GSMNP, NPS, and FHWA websites. After comments are summarized from each meeting series, comment summaries are posted to the website for public review.

6.2.4 Other Document Locations

Reports posted online were also available for viewing at local libraries and NPS visitor centers. Viewing locations included the following: Asheville, NC, Pack Memorial Library; Bryson City, NC, Marianna Black Library; Charlotte, NC, Charlotte Mecklenburg County Main Library; Cherokee, NC, NPS Oconaluftee Visitor Center; Gatlinburg, TN, Anna Porter Public Library and NPS Sugarlands Visitor Center; Knoxville, TN, Lawson-McGee Library; Raleigh, NC, Cameron Village Regional Library; and Robbinsville, NC, Graham County Public Library.

6.2.5 Press Release and Public Announcements

Information concerning the project and the public meetings was provided to the following newspapers through press releases: *The Smoky Mountain Times*, Bryson City, North Carolina; *The Cherokee One Feather*, Cherokee, North Carolina; *The Mountaineer*, Waynesville, North Carolina; *The Sylva Herald*, Sylva, North Carolina; *Asheville Citizen Times*, Asheville, North Carolina; *The Smoky News*, Waynesville, North Carolina; *The Mountain Press*, Sevierville, Tennessee; *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Knoxville, Tennessee; *The Daily Times*, Maryville, Tennessee; and other major newspapers in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

Announcements were also placed on the following websites: www.nps.gov/grsm, www.efl.fhwa.dot.gov, and www.NorthShoreRoad.info. All interested individuals, organizations, and agencies were invited to attend meetings and comment orally and/or provide written comments or suggestions for each phase of the project, the planning process, and the public involvement efforts.

6.2.6 Social Advertisement

Information regarding the public meetings was also provided to the following local newspapers through a social advertisement: *The Smoky Mountain Times*, Bryson City, North Carolina; *The Cherokee One Feather*, Cherokee, North Carolina; *The Sylva Herald*, Sylva, North Carolina; *The Mountaineer*, Waynesville, North Carolina; *Asheville Citizen Times*, Asheville, North Carolina; *The Smoky News*, Waynesville, North Carolina; *The Mountain Press*, Sevierville, Tennessee; *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Knoxville, Tennessee; *The Daily Times*, Maryville, Tennessee; and *The Graham Star*, Robbinsville, North Carolina. Due to an increase in public interest in central North Carolina, social advertisements were also included in *The Charlotte Observer*, Charlotte, North Carolina; and *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, North Carolina, after the first series of public meetings.