

October 13, 2011

Director Tim Reardon
Montana Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

Dear Director Reardon

Upon reading of the Montana Department of Transportation's recent decisions to both ban snowmobile and OHV activity within MDT right of way in the Lincoln area and prohibit Lincoln's annual Fourth of July Parade, I am requesting the immediate postponement of these decisions until a full public hearing with the Lincoln community is complete.

According to today's Great Falls Tribune, Mr. Tony Strainer, a representative of your department announced a decision to end recreational use of borrow pits along MT Highway 200, an activity that has been allowed for over 50 years. As I'm sure you are aware, thousands of recreationists flock to the Lincoln area every year to take advantage of the region's wealth of OHV and snowmobile riding opportunities. This activity provides an important boost to the Lincoln community's economy that is struggling after the long-term decline of natural resource jobs and the recent recession. The dramatic economic impacts of this decision are too drastic to be made without involving the people it will impact most.

While the borrow pit decision without public involvement is a stunning blow to this community, when I learned that it followed your agency's decision last summer to end Lincoln's annual Fourth of July Parade, I was shocked. If you've ever travelled through Lincoln, you understand that Highway 200 serves as the town's Main Street and very few side streets exist. While I would certainly question the need for preventing the town from having a short parade celebrating our nation's independence, my greater concern is the apparent unilateral process utilized by your agency. Again, I ask that you cancel this decision until a transparent public hearing is held in Lincoln to let citizens assist your Department in finding a solution that will allow this annual event to continue.

Montana citizens have a right to be involved in their government. These unilateral actions by your agency are truly disappointing, will have harmful economic impacts on the community, and deserve your immediate attention. As a member of the Montana Legislature's Revenue and Transportation Interim Committee, I will also be contacting Chairman Roy Hollandsworth to place these decisions on the agenda for our next meeting on December 8th. Please provide for the committee a full report on your agency's actions to rectify these issues impacting the citizens of Lincoln.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Essmann". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "E".

Senator Jeff Essmann