Department of Public Works
County of Butte

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Butte County
Superior Court
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Sharol Strickland Clerk
By K. Mortensen Deputy
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John Welton, Foreman
Butte County Grand Jury

Subject: Response to January 28, 2010 letter

Dear Mr. Welton:

This letter is in response to your January 28, 2010 letter requesting to know what steps have been taken to further the improvement of the Doe Mill-Garland route since 1994 and estimated time required to implement the findings. The Doe Mill-Garland route was discussed in Recommendation 2 of the response to 2008/09 Grand Jury Report, "Wildfire and Safety Consideration for Butte County General Plan 2030. Response 2 is copied below for reference.

Recommendation 2 – Review the limitations of Forest Road 171 such as traffic speeds, volume of cars, and fire prone area and consider other feasible evacuation routes. Additional roads for evacuation of the Upper Ridge, such as Doe Mill Road, should be investigated.

This recommendation has been implemented. Public Works worked with BCAG on reviewing the proposed FH 171 route and improvements. In addition, BCAG completed a study in 1994 entitled, Feasibility Study of State Route 191 Extension in Butte County, which evaluated alternate emergency routes from the upper ridge, including Doe Mill–Garland route. The study determined that the Doe Mill-Garland Road route if developed to standards would provide improved emergency access to the Upper Ridge.

The 1994 study provided cost estimates to improve the Doe Mill-Garland Road Route that ranged from $3.9 to $4.5 million to re-grade the route only (which would maintain the road as gravel), and replace the bridge on the Forks of Butte Creek to $28-$87 million to fully reconstruct the route as a paved road and replace the bridge. This range included several bridge replacement alternatives ranging from $9.7 to $45 million.

Doe Mill Road between Powellton and Garland is approximately 7 miles in length and is part of the original 700 mile long Ponderosa Way built by the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) crews in the early 1930's. The original Ponderosa Way stretched from Kern County to Shasta County. In 1949, the federal government turned over, through a Special Use Permit, the road maintenance responsibilities to the California Division of Forestry (CDF). CDF maintained this section of road until the late 1990's when they terminated the Special Use Permit.

This 7 mile section of Doe Mill Road (Ponderosa Way) has never been accepted into the County maintained road system and thus the maintenance responsibilities are to the property owners who own the road. This non County maintained road status prohibits the County from expending public road funds on this roadway. In addition, this private road status often makes it ineligible for public funding and grants similar to what we have been able to do on the FH 171 project between Inskip and Butte Meadows. Finally, the County has a long standing policy to not accept additional roads into our system unless they are brought up to County Standards first. As noted in my original response to recommendation 2 (above), the 1994 BCAG study determined it would be extremely expensive to improve and bring this roadway up to standards.

With this being said, there has been certain steps taken to further the improvement of this road. In 2008, the County, Butte County Resource Conservation District (RCD) and the Lassen National Forest (LNF) received a grant to make certain water quality improvements to Humboldt Road and Doe Mill Road. The County and LNF worked on Humboldt Road which is a County maintained road going through the National Forest. The RCD worked with the California National Guard to work on the northern section of Doe Mill Road by re-grading the road and placing water bars and new culverts to reduce soil erosion.

In addition, with the assistance of Congressman Herger's office, we have been successful in having the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recognize and take ownership of the bridge crossing Butte Creek. I have recently heard that the BLM is actively looking for funding to replace this structure.

Butte County will continue to look for opportunities to improve this roadway. However given the status of the road (non County maintained) and the uncertainty of funding, I can not provide you with any estimate of time to implement the 1994 BCAG study recommendations as you requested.

Sincerely,

Mike Crump

Mike Crump, Director

cc; Board of Supervisors
Scott Tandy, Interim CAO