

Bypass would bite deeply into creek, NICAN says

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Group places markers to illustrate project's impacts to Sand Creek

SANDPOINT -- Foes of the proposed Sand Creek Byway have stretched out surveyor's tape in the creek to show people what's at stake if the project is allowed to proceed.

"It's an eye-opener for folks," said Liz Sedler, executive director of the North Idaho Community Action Network as she looked out over Sand Creek on Monday.



--Photo by KEITH KINNAIRD
Liz Sedler, executive director of the North Idaho Community Action Network, eyes markers in Sand Creek.

The citizen group arranged for markers to be placed depicting how much of the creek will be eaten up by the Idaho Transportation Department's highway rerouting project.

A line of yellow and blue flagging near the eastern shoreline is intended to show where a wall will be erected to support the highway, NICAN said. A stream of white flagging skirts the same shoreline, but juts far into the creek channel, nearly touching the western edge of it.

The white tape, NICAN asserts, represents how far fill will extend into the creek.

The group, which is leading the fight against bypass, based its measurements on Day-Glo orange markers the state had placed to show the highway's centerline.

"The locations of the highway wall and the extent of the fill were based on information from ITD's engineering plans and maps, which was then used to measure from ITD's centerline stakes, ensuring accuracy," said Sedler, who argues the department has consistently downplayed the project's visual impacts.

But state highway officials are dubious of NICAN's representations of where infrastructure and fill will be placed.

"I would take it with a big grain of salt," said Barbara Babic, ITD's District 1 spokeswoman.

Yellow stakes are also visible in the creek, but they denote only property boundaries related to the state's acquisition of right of way. The boundaries needed to be delineated for appraisal purposes, Babic said.

The flagging done by NICAN caught the attention of downtown business owners, particularly the ones opposed to the project.

"I think that it is something that people should look at," said Kevin Nye, co-owner of Outdoor Experience. "It would be a really good thing for people to take some time and go look at while it's down there."

The group plans to pull its stakes and flagging up in a few days.

Another downtown business owner, Peter Mico, points out the creek area is undergoing something of a renaissance. His business, Spud's Rotisserie & Grill, in addition to the Sand Creek Grill and other businesses have invested in improvements designed to showcase Sand Creek.

"They're putting a stake in the heart of this development that's going on down there and I don't know to what end. To put it where they're going to put it and they way they're going to do it just seems irresponsible to the future of our little town," he said.

Mico expects the project will radically change Sandpoint by diminishing its unique identity and charms.

"When we come out the other end, I think you're going to see a changed community," he said. "There are several effects of this that I don't think we're going to see until it's all done, and I don't think it's going to be good for the community we know and love."

Larry Glahe of Glahe & Associates, which was contracted by the state for the project's survey work, came down to the creek Monday to see where NICAN had placed its markers. Though skeptical of NICAN's measurements, Glahe conceded the group might not be too far off the mark in its representations, provided it used fresh information and calculated properly.

Glahe emphasized ITD has been up front with the community.

"It really has never been an issue of us hiding where things are going to be and where they're not going to be," he said.