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## Crews repair Fish Creek Road blowout

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Resident questions lack of maintenance

COCOLALLA -- Part of Fish Creek Road collapsed Sunday, severing road access to some 30 families for about eight hours.

The collapse was reported shortly before 1:30 p.m. It occurred about a mile from Fish Creek Road's intersection with the south end of Cocolalla Loop.

"We had it opened to one-way traffic at 9:30 last night and then we came back today and got it opened to two-way traffic. We were done and out of there by about noon," Chuck Spickelmire, Bonner County Public Works' Road & Bridge director, said on Monday.



--Photo by KEITH KINNAIRD  
Residents watch as Bonner County Public Works crews tip fill material into a wiped out section of Fish Creek Road on Sunday.

A 12-inch culvert where the unpaved road gave way became either partially or completely plugged, causing water to forge new paths around the blockage and wipe out a 25- to 30-foot section.

"It's the warm weather, the rain and the runoff," said Bob Howard, director of Bonner County Emergency management.

Three lengths of 24-inch culvert were installed and then armored with rock, Spickelmire said.

As dump trucks tipped fill into the hole on Sunday afternoon, neighbors who live beyond the closure gathered at the work site.

Some wondered aloud what amount of speed it would take to clear the hole Dukes-of-Hazzard style and who was to blame for the blowout.

Resident Jay Omundson feels the collapse was the result of poor maintenance.

"They used to keep the ditches open and the road has never been so good just because it was allowed to properly drain," he said on Monday.

"If it were ditched and had reasonable drainage, there's no question it would not have blown out."

Fish Creek Road is an obstacle course of potholes, washboards and mud boils, said Omundson, who has lobbied county officials to repair the road only to be told funding is scarce and that the road's actually in relatively good shape.

Bonner County maintains more than 700 miles of road, more than half of which are unpaved.

"We have many miles of road that need to be repaired," Spickelmire said.

Omundson questions whether money the county devotes to emergency repairs wouldn't cover the cost of routine maintenance and takes issue with traffic counts determining the priority the road improvements projects.

"I pay the same taxes as everybody else. We've had no real attention on the road for at least 10 years, other than a grader twice a year," he said.