Who is sponsoring this project?

The project is a collaborative effort between the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) and Brown County. The project is funded using state monies that are set-aside to improve accesses to and from DNR facilities like State Parks and State Forests.

Why does access need to be improved to Yellowwood State Forest (YSF)?

Access to the recreational areas of YSF are via Yellowwood Road and Yellowwood Lake Road. Both roads flood even during moderate rain events, especially when the ground is already saturated. Many culverts are undersized, which contributes to the flooding. Yellowwood Lake Road is prone to erosion due to its proximity to Jackson Creek and requires frequent maintenance such as grading and work to keep the two fords passable. These factors hinder visitors’ access to the state forest and create a safety concern for those needing to leave the state forest; especially if in an emergency situation.

IDNR is planning campground improvements and enhancements to the YSF infrastructure. Improved access to Forest facilities will help draw additional visitors and accommodate larger recreational vehicles. Similar investments in park infrastructure have historically resulted in significant boosts to park revenue. Increased use of this facilities will also translate into additional economic benefits for Brown County businesses.

Is public involvement an important component of this project?

A local stakeholder group, the Yellowwood Lake Watershed Group, began discussing ways to improve the roadways due to their apparent impact on sedimentation of the Jackson Creek watershed. Their 2006 report recommended many of the improvements being implemented with this project, such as culverts in place of the fords, paving sections of Yellowwood Lake Road, and replacing undersized or deteriorating culverts. Public outreach was a significant factor of the study with numerous “Watershed Days” held.

IDNR hosts annual open houses that discuss various programs and initiatives for YSF, and this road project had displays and handouts at their 2008, 2011 and 2014 events.

A public information meeting was held on July 18, 2013 at the Brown County Junior High School in Nashville, Indiana. The meeting lasted from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm and offered the opportunity for the public to meet with the INDOT, IDNR, and Brown County officials to review and provide input on the project. Comments were accepted during the meeting and leading up to August 5, 2013.

What are the limits of the project?

The project will begin at the SR 46 and Yellowwood Road intersection. It will improve Yellowwood Road to the “T” intersection at Yellowwood Lake Road. The improvements will continue north along Yellowwood Lake Road and end at Lanam Ridge Road. Some portions of Yellowwood Lake Road will be exempted from the project (see further Q&A).

Is the entire 6-miles of Yellowwood Road and Yellowwood Lake Road being rebuilt?

About 2.5 miles of the two roadways will be reconstructed down to their base (or 38% of the total project area). Another 2.6 miles will receive an asphalt overlay, providing a paved surface between SR 46 and the north end of Yellowwood Lake. The remaining 1.4 miles, all segments along Yellowwood Lake Road, will not receive any work.

The decision to leave portions of Yellowwood Lake Road unimproved was in responses to public comments heard at the July 2013 public meeting. Local citizens expressed concern with paving the entirety of these roads as the gravel surface promotes slower speeds and deters noisy motorcyclists.

Will the improvements widen the roadway?

For the 2.6 miles being overlaid, no widening will take place. For the 2.5 miles being re-built, the roadway lane widths will be modestly widened to 11' lanes for Yellowwood Road and 8' for Yellowwood Lake Road. Two-foot shoulders will be added to protect pavement from deterioration near the edge and provide extra clear space for larger vehicles or pedestrians.

How much of the improved roadway is on new terrain?

About 95% of the length of the improvements will remain on the existing road alignment. Two short, 300’ segments will go off existing alignment on Yellowwood Road to soften 90-degree turns just east and southwest of the Salt Creek crossing. A 600’ realignment of Yellowwood Lake Road is needed at the southern ford crossing. Finally, a 2,800’ segment of Yellowwood Lake Road will be realigned to the west side of Jackson Creek.

This portion of the valley is flatter and many of the trees have...
been cleared by the power company, and will protect the road bed better from future erosion by Jackson Creek.

What are the cost estimates?

The current construction cost estimate is $6.57 million. Almost 43% of those costs are for improvements at the Salt Creek crossing. This area is particularly complex due to the length of bridge needed to prevent upstream flooding, the geometry of the “T” intersection nearby, and the rising terrain on the west side of the bridge.

Were environmental studies completed for the project?

INDOT completed a State Environmental Assessment that considered the project’s impact to the natural, physical and cultural resources. This document was approved on October 17, 2014.

Will local cemeteries be impacted?

None of the three cemeteries will be impacted by the project. Yellowwood Road will be overlaid where it passes Duncan Cemetery with no ground disturbance. No work will occur along Yellowwood Lake Road where it passes Rogers Cemetery. Finally, where Yellowwood Lake Road passes Pogue Cemetery, work will be no closer than 100 feet away.

What are the plans with the two existing Salt Creek bridges?

The abandoned truss bridge was found unsafe for vehicular traffic in the early 1980’s and has continued to deteriorate. Coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer indicated that according to the language of Indiana Code 14-21-1-18, a State Certificate of Approval is not required because the bridge is not owned by the State and is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Therefore, in order to construct the piers for the new bridge, the truss bridge will be removed.

The fairly recently constructed steel grate bridge will be salvaged and revert back to the county’s ownership for use somewhere else. It could not be maintained as part of this project since it will overtop during moderate rain events.

Will streams and trees be impacted by this project?

Even though attempts are continuously made to limit impacts to streams and trees, it is inevitable that there will be some impacts. The US Army Corps of Engineers, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, and IDNR all have jurisdiction through Federal and state law to assure the design minimizes these impacts to the extent possible while still meeting the project’s purpose & need. These agencies also require mitigation efforts to make-up for impacts this project will have. As such, this project will be planting over 2,500 trees near Salt Creek and Jackson Creek as well as rehabilitating 2,455 feet of Jackson Creek. The work along Jackson Creek will reduce bank erosion, leading to decreased sedimentation of Yellowwood Lake downstream.

Is new Right of Way needed for the project?

For 62% of the project length, where the road is being overlaid or exempted, no new right of way is needed. For the remainder, where the road is typically being raised to accommodate new culverts, right of way acquisition is needed. No homes are being relocated for the project. All land acquisition will comply with Federal laws for appraising and buying.

When is construction expected to begin?

The improvements along Yellowwood Road will begin late summer of 2016. A more detailed construction schedule will be developed closer to the beginning of the work. Closure of the Salt Creek bridge is anticipated to occur in 2017 with traffic being detoured via Jackson Creek Road.

Work along Yellowwood Lake Road near Jackson Creek will begin in the late summer of 2017. Closure of the road will be needed to build the culvert where the southern ford currently exists. Traffic will be detoured using Dubois Ridge Road. The timing of this closure will begin after the Salt Creek bridge work is complete. Accesses to residents and the state forest will be maintained throughout the project.