

Slope stabilization project begins

By LYNNETTE HINTE Daily Inter Lake | Posted: Saturday, October 8, 2016 10:00 pm

The stabilization of a slump-prone bluff near Village Greens golf community in Evergreen will begin next week.

About 18,000 cubic yards of gravel and dirt from the Glacier Rail Park in Kalispell will be hauled in to build up and stabilize the deteriorating bluff that threatens seven homes on Whitefish Stage Road, according to a press release from the Flathead County Economic Development Authority.

Schellinger Construction Company of Columbia Falls will handle the soil hauling.

The proposed mitigation will consist of four design elements: drainage improvements, a gravel buttress, granular backfill slope support and some flattening of the slope brow, accompanied with revegetation and reseeding.

“By buttressing the failing slope and intercepting the water we should be able to mitigate further decline of the bluff,” Schellinger Project Manager Mark Cyr said.

Cyr expects construction to last approximately 45 days.

The Flathead County commissioners in August awarded a contract for the project work — not to exceed \$945,000 — to Schellinger Construction of Kalispell and Tetra Tech of Missoula. The two firms submitted a team proposal, with Tetra Tech handling the design and engineering and Schellinger doing the construction work.

Homeowners whose property adjoins the slump area have been working for six years to find a way to stabilize a section of the bluff that first collapsed in 2010. A second slide occurred in June 2014 following record rainfall.

After the homeowners were successful in getting a \$400,000 slope stabilization mitigation grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which included a \$102,000 match from the homeowners, the project was stymied when the commissioners declined to serve as the sponsoring government agency because of liability concerns. Two homeowners then sued the county and a district judge ordered the county to follow through with the federal grant.

When the project cost increased to \$1.2 million, the county applied for and won an additional \$798,000 from FEMA, which includes an innovative in-kind 25 percent match from property owners valued at about \$180,000.

Homeowners worked with the Flathead County Economic Development Authority to get the fill dirt from the Glacier Rail Park project at an in-kind cost of \$10 per yard.

Homeowners also chipped in an additional \$23,500 beyond their original cash match for the FEMA grant.

“Leveraging the value of the soil was instrumental in receiving additional overrun funding from FEMA,” homeowner Scott Gearhart said. “I am really proud of how far we have come. We put aside a lot of

differences and looked at creative solutions to get to this point.”

Kim Morisaki, project manager for the economic development authority, said her organization recognizes the additional benefits of the agreement.

“Removing the excess dirt and gravel will lower the overall cost of developing the rail park, creating a win-win for all parties,” Morisaki said.