

PRIMITIVE ROADS STUDY

This work will enable a broad understanding of the primitive roads network that serves the Okanogan region, its characteristics, and key issues and opportunities associated with this uniquely rural element of the regional transportation system.

Of the 1,376 miles of roads Okanogan County owns, 726 of those miles – 53 percent – are gravel roads. Of these, 571 miles are designated as Primitive Roads. Thousands of additional miles of Primitive Roads are owned by the Colville Tribes, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, as well as the Bureau of Land Management, and the National Forest Service.

This **Primitive Roads Study** will establish the only comprehensive profile of the region’s primitive roads regardless of ownership, identifying in a searchable GIS database key characteristics and enabling coordinated mapping among agencies. Building on this baseline network the study will identify and evaluate measures to improve coordination and collaboration between agencies in managing this rural asset.

Primitive Roads are unpaved and they don’t adhere to standard street designs with which most people are familiar. They are not maintained on any kind of regular basis and at some times of the year they may be impassable. They are a uniquely rural category of roads and as such, are often dismissed in some circles as unimportant. Yet they play a vital role in the rural transportation system in terms of access to public lands, transport for resource-based industries, and emergency access and route redundancy.

In the introduction to the County Road Administration Board’s 2016 Gravel Roads Study, it’s noted:

There is possibly nothing more representatively iconic of rural Washington State or, perhaps of rural America than is the simple line of an unstriped, unpaved road hugging the land contours as it stretches through large, open spaces and reaches towards a distant horizon...this kind of road is not just emblematic of the history of surface transportation in our state, but is very much a functioning part of the system as it exists today, and will remain an important part of it for many future years.



Primitive roads serve a number of different purposes with wide-ranging expectations and constraints, and are governed by the policies of vastly different and independent agencies. This study will lay the foundation for a common understanding of this important component of the regional transportation system and potential strategies to improve management and coordination between agencies. It will assist in prioritizing some of these roads for preservation and maintenance as they serve vital roles in safety.