

## 16. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

This chapter presents the Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) analysis of the effects of potential environmental impacts on low income and minority populations that would be expected from construction and operation of the proposed Northern Rail Extension (NRE). Section 16.1 describes applicable regulations. Section 16.2 describes the affected environment. Section 16.3 describes the impact assessment methodology and impact conclusions.

### 16.1 Applicable Regulations

Executive Order (EO) 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations*, directs Federal agencies to:

[P]romote nondiscrimination in Federal programs substantially affecting human health and the environment, and provide minority and low income communities access to public information on, and an opportunity for public participation in, matters relating to human health or the environment.

EO 12898 also directs agencies to identify and consider “disproportionately high and adverse” human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low income communities, and provide opportunities for community input in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, including input on potential effects.

After the issuance of EO 12898, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) prepared *Environmental Justice Guidance Under the National Environmental Policy Act* to assist Federal agencies in meeting their environmental justice commitments under NEPA (CEQ, 1997). This guidance provides the following definitions of the terms “minority” and “low income community” in the context of environmental justice analysis. Minority individuals are members of the following population groups: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, and Hispanic. A low income community is one found to be below the poverty thresholds from the Bureau of the Census. CEQ has oversight for the Federal Government’s compliance with EO 12898 and the NEPA process, with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) serving as the lead agency responsible for implementation of the EO.

The Surface Transportation Board (STB or the Board) has not issued rules or guidance specifically addressing environmental justice.

While EO 12898 applies to agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), it technically does not apply to independent agencies like the Board. Nonetheless, SEA has evaluated the potential for high and adverse impacts to determine if they would be borne disproportionately by minority or low income communities.

### 16.2 Affected Environment

The region of influence for environmental justice encompasses the regions of influence for the other resource areas that could potentially affect minority and low income populations. The administrative areas that contain these populations are the Southeast Fairbanks census area, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, and more specifically the communities along the alternative rail segments (see Figure 15-1 for a visual representation of communities within the region of influence).

## **16.2.1 General Population Characteristics for the Project Area**

Under the proposed action, the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) would build and operate a new rail line south of the community of North Pole and ending south of the community of Delta Junction. Tables 16-1 and 16-2 list year 2000 demographic data for Alaska, the Southeast Fairbanks census area, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, and nine communities that are crossed by or directly adjacent to the proposed NRE. The communities and residences in the Fairbanks North Star Borough portion of the project area are low density, suburban areas rimming the communities of Fairbanks, North Pole, and Eielson Air Force Base (AFB), or rural agricultural and subdivision communities. These areas have smaller than state or Borough average minority populations and higher than state average low-income populations (see Tables 16-1 and 16-2). The communities in the Southeast Fairbanks census area portion of the project area are small, sparsely populated communities with residences dispersed over a wide area. These communities generally have lower than state or Census Area percentages of minorities and higher than state percentages of low-income residents.

## **16.3 Environmental Consequences**

### **16.3.1 Methodology**

SEA established a sequential five-step methodology to evaluate environmental justice impacts. Some of these steps were not triggered because the conditions for further analysis were not met.

- Step 1: SEA would identify the high and adverse health and environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives.
- Step 2: If high and adverse health and environmental impacts were identified, SEA would identify the environmental justice populations located in the project area.
- Step 3: SEA would assess whether the high and adverse health and environmental impacts would affect environmental justice populations.
- Step 4: If high and adverse health and environmental impacts would occur to environmental justice populations, SEA would define the spatial distribution of these populations relative to the area of effect for the identified impact.
- Step 5: SEA would assess environmental justice populations relative to the identified area of effect to determine whether the high and adverse impacts would be disproportionately borne by these populations.

### **16.3.2 Analysis of Impacts**

For Step 1, SEA assessed whether any high and adverse health or environmental impacts to human populations would occur as a result of the proposed NRE. SEA identified no potential high and adverse impacts to human populations in the project area. Chapters 3 through 15 and 17 through 19 of the EIS contain the analyses SEA used to reach this conclusion.

**Table 16-1**  
**Demographics in the Project Area by Location, 2000**  
**Percent of Total Population**

	Total Population	White	Black or African American	Alaska Native or American Indian	Asian	Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Two or More Races	Hispanic or Latino <sup>a</sup>	Minority Population <sup>b</sup>
Alaska	626,932	69.3	3.5	15.6	4.0	0.5	1.6	5.6	4.1	32.4
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	6,174	79.0	2.0	12.7	0.7	0.1	0.7	4.8	2.7	22.6
Delta Region										
Big Delta	749	95.5	0.1	1.5	0.5	-	-	2.4	2.5	7.1
Delta Junction	840	91.4	1.1	4.0	1.0	-	0.1	2.4	0.8	9.3
Fort Greely	461	65.7	19.7	1.3	1.3	2	3.7	6.3	15.4	42.3
Fairbanks North Star Borough	82,840	77.8	5.8	6.9	2.1	0.3	1.7	5.4	4.2	24.0
Fairbanks	30,224	66.7	11.2	9.9	2.7	0.5	2.4	6.6	6.1	35.8
Eielson AFB	5,400	81.7	9.4	0.6	2.1	0.2	2.1	3.9	5.8	20.5
Harding-Birch Lakes	216	93.5	-	-	-	-	1.4	5.1	0.5	6.9
Moose Creek	542	88.4	3.7	2.2	1.3	0.4	0.9	3.1	3.0	12.9
North Pole	1,570	81.0	5.7	3.6	2.6	0.4	1.1	5.6	3.8	20.6
Salcha	854	87.8	1.6	3.9	0.9	0.2	1.3	3.9	2.8	13.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

<sup>a</sup> Individuals who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race; the sum of the other percentages under the "Percent of Total Population" columns plus the "Hispanic or Latino" column therefore do not equal 100 percent.

<sup>b</sup> Minority population, for the purposes of this analysis, is the total population for the U.S. Census designated place minus the non-Latino/Spanish/Hispanic white population.

**Table 16-2**  
**Individuals and Families below the Poverty Level in the Project Area: Number and Percentage of Population by Location, 1999**

	Families		Individuals	
	Number in Poverty	Percentage of Total Population	Number in Poverty	Percentage of Total Population
Alaska	10,270	6.7	57,602	9.4
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	183	12.4	1140	18.9
Delta Region				
Big Delta	10	7.9	197	30.0
Delta Junction	23	12.3	163	19.4
Fort Greely	14	11.6	45	10.4
Fairbanks North Star Borough	1,137	5.5	6,206	7.8
Fairbanks	538	7.4	3,002	10.5
Eielson AFB	72	5.1	310	6.0
Harding-Birch Lakes	-	-	-	-
Moose Creek	20	11.0	54	9.4
North Pole	23	6.2	139	8.7
Salcha	-	-	31	3.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

As a result of this absence of high and adverse impacts to human populations, Steps 2 through 5 of SEA's impact assessment methodology were not conducted.

### **16.3.3 No-Action Alternative**

The No-Action Alternative would involve the continued use of existing rail lines at current levels and the continued transport of people and cargo via road (see Chapter 2). This alternative would result in no change to health or environmental conditions and would, therefore, cause no new impacts to environmental justice populations.