

CHAPTER 8 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

NEPA guidelines request that EISs address the irreversible and irretrievable commitment of natural resources. The irreversible commitment of irretrievable resources for this project is anticipated to be minimal. The most substantial commitment of irretrievable resources would be in the form of human effort (i.e., employable labor) associated with the construction and operation of the proposed rail line. However, this commitment could be viewed as a positive impact because of the jobs created and/or maintained, particularly in this rural area and stagnant economy.

Construction of the proposed rail line would require the commitment of a large volume of construction materials, including concrete for bridges and culverts, corrugated metal piping for drainage features, fill material, sub-ballast, ballast, railroad ties, rail track, tie plates, spikes, and anchors. RJCP estimates that approximately 57,000 to 60,000 railroad ties and 3,800 to 4,000 tons of rail would be required to construct the proposed rail line, depending on which route to Munson is selected for the Western Segment. However, not all of these construction materials would be considered irreversibly committed, as many could be recovered and recycled for other uses at a future date.

Regarding energy resources, construction of the proposed rail line would require the commitment of an irretrievable volume of fuel, mostly in the form of diesel fuel. Additionally, the operation of trains over the rail line would result in an irretrievable volume of fuel. The projected annual fuel consumption for round-trip operation on the proposed rail line is estimated to require 94,349 gallons of fuel per annum.

The land required to construct the rail line, including the 9.3-mile Eastern Segment and the associated Snow Shoe Multi-Use Rail Trail, would not be considered an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources because (much like the former railroad) it could be retired from rail use at some future date and converted to prior or other uses. If the rail line is no longer needed, the right-of-way could be converted back to a trail. The Snow Shoe Multi-Use Trail could be expanded beyond its current length if both the Eastern and Western Segments were enrolled in the rail banking program. Such a scenario would enable the Snow Shoe Multi-Use Rail Trail to extend beyond its current western terminus near the Black Bear Run Bridge.

Given the anticipated minimal limits of disturbance associated with the new right-of-way, along with the dynamic characteristics of natural systems, most, if not all, of the direct impacts to natural resources (i.e., wetlands, watercourses, vegetation, etc.) would not be considered an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. This conclusion is based on the former railroad bed itself, which has grown in with vegetation (where ATVs are excluded) and has actually created many of the adjacent/tracksides wetlands as a result of adverse drainage conditions from failing stormwater features (e.g., silted-in drainage pipes, collapsed culverts, un-maintained drainage ditches, etc.).

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