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SEA

SERVICE DATE – JUNE 29, 2007

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket No. AB-570 (Sub-No. 2X)

**Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad, Inc. – Abandonment Exemption –
in Latah County, ID**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad, Inc. (PRCC), filed a petition of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of a line of railroad in Latah County, ID. The rail line proposed for abandonment extends 0.2 miles from milepost 85.91 to milepost 86.11 within the City of Moscow, ID (Line). A map depicting the Line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Environmental Assessment (EA). If the petition becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

PRCC has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. PRCC served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) has reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

Diversion of Traffic

According to PRCC, the Line traverses an urban area that has an adequate road and highway network. Until recently, there was one shipper on the Line, Moscow Idaho Seed Company (Idaho Seed). Idaho Seed processed and warehoused peas and lentils for sale around the world. In 2005, PRCC transported 44 carloads for Idaho Seed. This amount decreased to a single carload in early 2006. Shortly afterward, Idaho Seed sold its facilities to a commercial developer thus eliminating the Line's lone shipper and any need to provide rail service. There are currently no other active shippers on the Line and all former overhead traffic has been rerouted over a parallel rail line.

Salvage Activities

Impacts from salvage and disposal of a rail line typically includes removal of tracks and ties, removal of ballast, dismantling of any bridges or other structures that may be present on the rail right-of-way, and regrading of the right-of-way. Salvage may be performed within the right-of-way, or if necessary, via the construction of new access points to the right-of-way.

As part of this abandonment, PRCC states that it would salvage all rail and rail ties from the Line. PRCC also states that the Line contains a single bridge which is 50 years old or older. This bridge and the associated land underneath it are owned by the Gritman Medical Center, which is located nearby in the City of Moscow.

In a letter dated November 28, 2006, Mr. Richard Sims, State Conservationist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) states that the area in which the Line is located is not subject to the Farmland Protection Policy Act.

In a letter dated December 5, 2006, Mr. Jeffery Foss, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office (FWS), states that it has not identified any issues that indicate that consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, is warranted.

PRCC also states that it believes the proposed abandonment will not adversely affect any wildlife sanctuaries, refuges or National or state parks or forests.

In a letter dated December 19, 2006, Mr. Hudson Mann, Acting Regional Administrator, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), makes the following comments: 1) water quality will need to be fully addressed since the Line crosses and is adjacent to Paradise Creek, which has been identified by the State as an impaired waterway; 2) the Line is adjacent to a known site that has been mitigated for hazardous materials; and 3) a Section 402 Storm Water national Pollution Discharge Elimination Permit and accompanying Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan may be needed prior to any salvage activities.

PRCC states that it will voluntarily consult with DEQ prior to initiating salvage activities. However, SEA will recommend that the Board impose a condition requiring PRCC to consult with the DEQ to ensure that DEQ's concerns are addressed. Furthermore, SEA will recommend that PRCC submit the results of its consultations in writing to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis prior to the onset of salvage operations.

In a letter dated January 24, 2007, Mr. Duane Mitchell of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Walla Walla District (Corps), states that because the proposed abandonment will not involve any discharge of dredged or fill material below the ordinary high water mark of Paradise Creek or in wetlands that a permit will not be required.

In an e-mail dated March 29, 2007, Mr. Simon Monroe, National Geodetic Survey (NGS), identified two geodetic station markers that may be located in the project area. Therefore, SEA will recommend that the Board impose a condition requiring PRCC to notify the NGS at least 90 days prior to beginning salvage activities in order to plan for the possible relocation of the geodetic station markers by NGS.

SEA believes that any air emissions associated with salvage operations would be temporary and would not have a significant impact on air quality. Noise associated with salvage activities would also be temporary and should not have a significant impact on the area surrounding the proposed abandonment.

Based on all information available to date, SEA does not believe that salvage activities would cause significant environmental impacts.

HISTORIC REVIEW

PRCC acquired this Line from the Burlington Northern Railroad Company in September 1996. As stated above, the single bridge on the Line that is 50 years old or older is owned by Gritman Medical Center. Consequently, PRCC is not in possession of engineering drawings or other detailed information regarding the bridge. Furthermore, PRCC states that it believes that if the abandonment is approved, and following consummation, Gritman Medical Center intends to remove the bridge as part of its planned expansion.

PRCC states that it believes that the bridge is of common design and construction and is therefore not likely to be of historical significance. PRCC also states that it does not believe that there are any known archeological resources located within proximity to the proposed abandonment.

PRCC served the historic report on the Idaho State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c).¹ In a letter dated December 1, 2006, the SHPO states that Line itself and the single bridge may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The SHPO also states that salvage of the rail, track materials, and ties will result in no adverse effect. SEA notes that at the time the Historical Report was provided to the SHPO, it was not known that the bridge and underlying right-of-way was owned by Gritman Medical Center.

We have reviewed the report and the information provided by the SHPO and concur with the SHPO that the Line's right-of-way, with the exception of the single bridge, its associated right-of-way, rail, track materials, ties, may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of

1 Guidance regarding the Board's historic preservation review process is available on the Board's web site at <http://www.stb.dot.gov/stb/environment/preservation.html>.

Historic Places. Therefore, SEA will recommend that the Board impose a condition requiring PRCC to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the rail right-of-way itself with the exception of the single bridge, its associated right-of-way and the salvage of the rail, track materials and ties, until the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f, has been completed.

SEA conducted a search of the Native American Consultation Database at <http://home.nps.gov/nacd> to identify Federally recognized tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area and identified no tribes that may have an interest in the proposed abandonment. The database indicated that the following two tribes may have an interest in the proposed abandonment: 1) Coeur D' Alene Tribe of the Coeur D' Alene Reservation and 2) Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho. SEA will ensure that each tribe receives a copy of this EA for its review and that the tribe is added to the service list for this proceeding.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. **The Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad, Inc. (PRCC), shall consult with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to ensure that DEQ's concerns regarding PRCC's existing right-of-way and salvage activities are addressed. Furthermore, PRCC shall submit the results of these consultations in writing to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis prior to the onset of salvage operations.**
2. **The Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad, Inc., shall notify the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) at least 90 days prior to beginning salvage activities in order to plan for the possible relocation of the geodetic station markers by NGS.**
3. **The Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad, Inc., shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of its rail right-of-way (with the exception of the bridge owned by Gritman Medical Center) until the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f, has been completed.**

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, SEA concludes that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended condition is imposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services (OPS) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPS directly at (202) 245-0230, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this Environmental Assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Troy Brady, who prepared this Environmental Assessment. Environmental comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's web site, www.stb.dot.gov, by clicking on the "E-FILING" link. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-570 (Sub-No. 2X) in all correspondence, including e-filings, addressed to the Board.** If you have any questions regarding this Environmental Assessment, please contact Troy Brady, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 245-0301, fax at (202) 245-0454, or e-mail at Troy.Brady@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: June 29, 2007.

Comment due date: July 30, 2007.

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment