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SERVICE DATE - FEBRUARY 6, 1998

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

DECISION AND NOTICE INTERIM TRAIL USE OR ABANDONMENT

Docket No. AB-397 (Sub-No. 1X)¹

TULARE VALLEY RAILROAD COMPANY--ABANDONMENT
EXEMPTION--IN KINGS AND TULARE COUNTIES, CA

STB Docket No. AB-397 (Sub-No. 4X)

TULARE VALLEY RAILROAD COMPANY--ABANDONMENT--
EXEMPTION--IN TULARE COUNTY, CA

Decided: February 3, 1998

In Docket No. AB-397 (Sub-No. 1X), by decision served March 24, 1994,² the ICC granted Tulare Valley Railroad Company (TVR) an exemption under 49 U.S.C. 10505 from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903-04 to abandon 29.5 miles of rail line: (1) between milepost 0.3 at Corcoran and milepost 15.1 at Tulare, and (2) between milepost 23.8 at Visalia and milepost 38.5 at Cutler, in Kings and Tulare Counties, CA.³ The exemption became effective on April 23, 1994, subject to employee protective conditions. On May 3, 1994, a decision and notice of interim trail use or abandonment (NITU) was served that reopened the proceeding to implement interim trail use/rail banking under 49 CFR 1152.29 and provided a 180-day period for TVR to

¹ These proceedings are not consolidated. A single decision is being issued for administrative convenience only.

² Notice of the exemption was published in the Federal Register on March 24, 1994 (59 FR 14000).

³ The March 24, 1994 decision also imposed several environmental conditions requiring: (1) TVR to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all sites and structures on the line that are 50 years old or older until completion of the section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f; (2) TVR to consult with the California Environmental Protection Agency, State Water Resources Control Board Office, prior to engaging in any salvage activities; and (3) that no salvage activities shall begin until the requirements under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1536, have been completed. By decision served July 29, 1994, the section 7 (Endangered Species Act) condition, imposed in the decision served March 24, 1994, was modified to read: In order to limit the effect on any Federally listed threatened and endangered species, the Tulare Valley Railroad Company must confine its salvage activities to the railroad's right-of-way.

negotiate an agreement with American Trails Association (ATA). On April 20, 1995, ATA notified the Board that an interim trail use/rail banking agreement had been timely reached.

On April 22, 1997, ATA filed a request for partial vacation of the NITU served May 3, 1994. By decision served May 14, 1997, the NITU was modified and vacated with respect to the line segment between milepost 0.3 at Corcoran and milepost 12+5055 at the west side of Inyo Avenue in Tulare, in Kings and Tulare Counties, CA, a distance of 12 miles.

In STB Docket No. AB-397 (Sub-No. 4X), TVR filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152, Subpart F--Exempt Abandonments to abandon approximately 5 miles of railroad from milepost 15.1 at Tulare, to milepost 20+1191.3 at Loma, in Tulare County, CA. A notice of the exemption was served and published in the Federal Register on August 20, 1996 (61 FR 43117). On September 17, 1996, a decision and notice of interim trail use or abandonment (NITU) was served, which authorized a 180-day period for the City of Tulare (City), to negotiate an interim trail use/rail banking agreement with TVR for the right-of-way involved in this proceeding. The negotiation period expired on March 18, 1997.⁴ On March 26, 1997, a NITU was served, which authorized a 180-day period for ATA, as a new negotiation party, to negotiate an interim trail use/rail banking agreement with TVR for the 5-mile line of railroad.

By decision served December 19, 1997, the proceedings were reopened and the segment between milepost 12+5055 and milepost 17+3025, the decision and notices of interim trial use served May 3, 1994, and March 26, 1997, were vacated and the City of Tulare was authorized to replace ATA as the new trail user over the involved right-of-way, effective on December 19, 1997.⁵

On January 28, 1998, ATA filed a notice of intent to terminate trail use for the right-of-way between milepost 38.5 at Cutler and milepost 27+4200 at Visalia, a distance of approximately 11 miles in Tulare County, CA, in Docket No. AB-397 (Sub-No. 1X), and between milepost 20+1191.3 near Loma and milepost 17+3025 in Tulare, a distance of approximately 3 miles in Tulare County, CA, in STB AB-397 (Sub-No. 4X), pursuant to 49 CFR 1152.29(d)(2). ATA requests that the NITUs as to these line segments be vacated as of February 13, 1998.

A NITU authorizes a carrier either (1) to negotiate and enter into a trail use/rail banking agreement with a qualified trail user or (2) to abandon the line if no agreement is reached during the

⁴ The September 17, 1996 decision imposed a 180-day public use condition, that expired on March 18, 1997. The decision also imposed an endangered species condition under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1536. That condition was removed by decision served October 18, 1996.

⁵ The NITU issued on March 26, 1997, in STB Docket No. AB-397 (Sub-No. 4X) evidently led to a trail use agreement between TVR and ATA that covered at least the segment between milepost 15.1 and milepost 17+3025 because the City's filing indicates that this segment has been in ATA's possession since April 1997.

negotiation period set out in the NITU. See 49 CFR 1152.29(d)(1). Here, ATA requests that trail use as to these segments acquired by ATA be terminated. ATA's request complies with the Board rule applicable to such modification. Under the circumstances, TVR may fully abandon the line between milepost 38.5 at Cutler and milepost 27+4200 at Visalia, and between milepost 20+1101.3 near Loma and milepost 17+3025 in Tulare, effective February 13, 1998.

This decision will not significantly affect either the quality of the human environment or conservation of energy resources.

It is ordered:

1. This proceeding is reopened.
2. The decisions and notices of interim trail use served May 3, 1994, and March 26, 1997, are vacated with respect to the line segments between milepost 38.5 at Cutler and milepost 27+4200 at Visalia; and between milepost 20+1191.3 near Loma and milepost 17+3025 in Tulare and TVR may abandon the line segments.
3. This decision is effective on its service date.

By the Board, David M. Konschnik, Director, Office of Proceedings.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

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