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SERVICE DATE - AUGUST 20, 1999

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**DOCKET NO. AB-290 (Sub. No. 206X) - Norfolk Southern
Railway Company - Abandonment -
Between Bluffs Junction and Troy Junction in
Madison County, Illinois**

BACKGROUND

In the above entitled proceeding, Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NS) has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of its line of railroad between Mileposts A-130 at Bluffs Junction and A-20.5 at Troy Junction, a distance of 7.5 miles in Madison, County, Illinois. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

According to NS, the land use along the rail line is abandoned vacant suburban land. NS further states that it has tentative plans to convey the right-of-way for use as a trail.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

NS 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. NS served the environmental and historical reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. We have reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marion, Illinois Suboffice, (US FWS) has advised NS that the Indiana bat utilizes trees in this type of setting and requests that, as a part of salvage operations, no tree clearing should occur between April 1 and September 30 . US FWS also advises that the eastern prairie fringed orchid is often found in remnant prairie tracts along undisturbed rights-of-way, and that if the orchid is found, further consultation would be necessary to protect this threatened species.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has advised us that it is concerned with the disposal of old wood cross ties and other treated wood materials.

CONDITIONS

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

To address the concerns expressed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marian, Illinois Suboffice (US FWS), concerning the endangered Indiana bat and the threatened eastern prairie fringed orchid, NS shall (1) be prohibited from salvage operations from April 1 through September 30; (2) cease salvage operations, if the eastern prairie fringed orchid is found, and consult further with US FWS and abide by US FWS conditions for the preservation of the orchid.

To address the concerns expressed by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency NS, prior to any salvage operations, shall consult with that agency and develop an acceptable method of disposing of old wood cross ties and other treated wood materials.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, subject to the recommended condition, and as currently proposed, 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

If abandonment and salvage of the rail line does take place, 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 Surface Transportation 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 Surface Transportation Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of exemption in the Federal Register. However, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so. 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) 565-1592 or mail inquiries to the Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Washington, DC 20423, to the

attention of Dana White, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-290 (Sub No. 206X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board. Questions regarding this environmental assessment should be referred to Dana White at (202) 565-1552.**

Date made available to the public: August 20, 1999.

Comment due date: **September 3, 1999 (15 days).**

By the Surface Transportation Board, Elaine K. Kaiser,
Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

PLEASE SCAN MAP