

Chapter 8: Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

Irreversible and irretrievable resource commitments are related to the use of nonrenewable resources and the effects that this use could have on future generations. Irreversible effects primarily result from the use or destruction of a specific resource (such as energy or minerals) that cannot be replaced within a reasonable amount of time. Irretrievable resource commitments involve the loss in value of an affected resource that cannot be restored as a result of the proposed project (such as extinction of a threatened or endangered species).

Large amounts of construction materials, including fill material, sub-ballast, ballast, railroad ties, rail track, tie plates, spikes, anchors, and concrete, would be used to construct either of the proposed alternatives. These materials are not in short supply, and use of these materials would not have an adverse effect on the continued availability of these resources. The land required to accommodate the right-of-way for the proposed new rail line would not be an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources because it could be reclaimed from rail use at some date in the future, if required.

All construction activities would consume fuel, mostly in the form of diesel. This loss of diesel fuel would be irretrievable. Operation of trains on the proposed rail line would also require an irretrievable commitment of fuel resources. However, as documented in Section 4.10, Impacts to Energy Resources, less energy in the form of diesel fuel would be consumed by the operation of two trains a day than by the existing trucks that are hauling coal from the SUFCO mine.

The benefits of this project include improved safety by removing the coal-hauling trucks from the communities, long-term economic advantages for the region, and a reduction in energy resources used for transporting coal. These benefits are anticipated to outweigh the commitment of labor and construction resources.

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