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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket NO. AB-564

CAMAS PRAIRIE RAILNET, INCORPORATED
-- ABANDONMENT AND DISCONTINUANCE OF OPERATIONS --
IN IDAHO, LEWIS, AND NEZ PERCE COUNTIES, ID

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Camas Prairie RailNet, Incorporated (CSPR or Applicant) has filed an application seeking authority under 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon its railroad line located from milepost 0.0 near Spalding, ID, to milepost 66.8 (end of track), at or near Grangeville, ID, a distance of 66.8 miles traversing the Idaho counties of Idaho, Lewis, and Nez Perce. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the application is approved, 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

The line proposed for abandonment is located in the western part of Idaho, near the boarder with Washington State. The majority of the line (approximately 50 of the 66.8 miles) is located on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation. The area adjacent to the line is rural and sparsely populated with an estimated population of around 7,000 people. The land traversed by the line includes pasture land, rocky, barren canyon terrain, and agricultural land. During the first 25 miles (between milepost 0.0 and milepost 25), the line encounters steep grades, with 3 percent grades over a 13 mile segment.

There are 19 shippers on the line of which only 13 have used CSPR's services during 1998 and 1999. In 1997, 1,571 carloads moved over the line; in 1998 there were 2,010 carloads, in 1999 there were 2,101 carloads, and in the months of January through May, 2000, there were 594 carloads (which were shipped by only 8 of the 19 shippers identified in Appendix G). The major commodities handled were lumber, agricultural products, and propane.

There are 43 wood and steel bridges and trestles located on the line. Four of these structures are over 100 feet long, the longest of which is 1,520 feet long and 280 feet high. The rail line also passes

through six tunnels, the largest of which is 882 feet long. CSPR also identifies one building in its historic report that is over 50 years old on the line.

Other rail service in the area includes the following:

1. Connection with BNSF/UP at Ayer Junction, State of Washington, approximately 80 miles west of Spalding.
2. Connection with the Palouse River and Coulee City Railroad located approximately 30 miles north of Spalding.

The line serves several small communities including Cottonwood, Craigmont, Culdesac, Fenn, Ferdinand, Grangeville, Lapwai, Spalding, and Sweetwater. Of these communities, Cottonwood, Craigmont, Culdesac, Ferdinand, Lapwai, Spalding, and Sweetwater are located on the Nez Perce Reservation.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

CSPR 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. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have verified the record in this proceeding. Also, we have consulted with appropriate agencies and individuals to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental and historic effects of the proposed abandonment.

Because the line proposed for abandonment is partially located on the Nez Perce Reservation, SEA sent certified letters to the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs - Northern Idaho Agency. The letter described the proposal, provided information about the proposed abandonment, requesting the tribes' participation in the environmental review process, and detailed how the tribe could participate in the environmental review process.

SEA also consulted with the following agencies: National Marine Fisheries Service; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Idaho State Historic Preservation Office; Idaho Public Utilities Commission; Idaho Department of Transportation; and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Transportation

CSPR, in its application, states that approximately 2,101

carloads moved over the line during 1999 with 160 inbound carloads, or 8 percent, moving southward from Lewiston. The railroad also states that "all diverted movements of propane, fertilizer, pipe, magnesium chloride, limestone, and approximately one-third of lumber shipments" would also move southward. See Environmental Report at page 2.

US-95 is classified as two lane principal highway that climbs to an elevation in excess of 3,000 feet and is the principal north to south thoroughfare serving the region. Consultation with the Idaho Department of Transportation (ID-DOT)¹ and review of CSPR's application indicates that rail-to-truck diversions of all commodities will move north from Grangeville for three reasons 1) size and weight restrictions on US-95 south of Grangeville, 2) access to rail and barge transport facilities and, 3) access to interstates 80 and 90. ID-DOT states that the subsequent shift from rail-to-truck transport will be concentrated during the fall months, coinciding with harvest and movement of grain, resulting in adverse impacts to roadway infrastructure and safety.

Rail-to-Truck Diversions

SEA's preliminary analysis of 1999 carload data (base year), indicates that 2,101 railcars would be diverted to trucks. The proposed abandonment, if approved, would result in 11,766² additional trucks or 23,531 additional truck trips annually. When the additional trucks are calculated on a per day basis, an estimated 48 trucks (96 truck trips) per day result during a 240 day year.³ It is important to note that SEA is assuming an empty backhaul, which means that approximately 96 trucks per day will be traveling on US-95. Review of Attachment A, Carloads by Station, in the CSPR's application indicates that during 1999, 28.8 percent of all railcars originated or terminated between Grangeville and Fenn, 12.2 percent originated or terminated between at Cottonwood, and the remaining 58.9 percent originated or terminated between Cottonwood and Spalding. In analyzing transportation impacts, SEA used the communities of Fenn, Cottonwood, and Spalding as benchmarks for comparison because those are areas for which SEA was able to obtain the most current annual average daily traffic (AADT) information.

To further analyze the potential impact of the additional truck traffic, SEA calculated the percent increase in new truck traffic

¹Telephone consultation with Ron Kerr, ID-DOT, Rail Planner.

²SEA used a conversion of 5.6 trucks per railcar - railcars carry 100 tons and most trucks can carry 18 tons.

³240 workdays result when weekends and holidays are subtracted from a 365 day year.

based on the origination or termination of railcars, as outlined above. SEA determined that the percent increase in ADT, based on a 240 day year (48 new truck trips per day in each direction) would result in the following:

Community	1999 AADT ⁴	Estimated New Trucks	Percent Increase in ADT
Fenn	2,727	13.8	0.5 ⁵
Cottonwood	4,689	5.9	0.1
Spalding	10,284	28.3	0.3

Seasonal Movement of Agricultural Commodities
(Rail-to-Truck Diversions)

To address concerns regarding the seasonal movement of agricultural commodities and concentration of additional truck traffic, SEA requested that CSPR submit information regarding the number of carloads moved by month from 1998 to present. Review of this submission indicates that the largest movement of railcars occurred during the months of September through December of 1999, resulting in 881 railcars.⁶ SEA determined that 4,934 trucks would be required to move the 881 railcars. SEA then recalculated the estimated increase in ADT during the months of September through December as shown below.

Community	1999 AADT	Estimated New Truck Trips - 4 Month Season (80 working days)	Estimated New Daily Trucks	Percent Increase in ADT
Fenn	2,727	1420	17.8	0.7
Cottonwood	4,689	602	7.5	0.2
Spalding	10,284	2,906	36.3	0.4

Summary of Transportation Impacts

⁴Based on information obtained from ID-DOT, the 1999 annual average daily traffic (AADT) on this segment of US-95 varies from a low of 2,727 vehicles near Fenn to 4,689 vehicles near Cottonwood and 10,284 vehicles near Spalding.

⁵Example: 1) Percentage of new traffic passing through Fenn: 0.288 percent x 48 trucks = 13.8 trucks; 2) Percent increase in ADT: (13.8 new trucks / 2,727 1999 AADT) x 100 = 0.5 percent increase in ADT.

⁶Months of September through December reflect months of increased seasonal movement of agricultural commodities.

As stated earlier, Applicant indicates that the following modes of transport are available for commodity transport: 1) barge service near Lewiston, 2) connections to other railroads - BNSF/UP approximately 80 miles west of Spalding at Ayers Junction, Washington State or Palouse River and Coulee City approximately 30 miles north of Spalding and, 3) connections to interstates - Interstate-80 located approximately 144 miles southwest of Spalding at Pendleton, Oregon or interstate 90 located approximately 104 miles north of Spalding at Spokane, Washington.

In discussions with SEA, ID-DOT has stated that the railroad's analysis fails to take into consideration that seasonal variations occur in commodity movement. That is, the agricultural commodities moved by CSPR are concentrated during the months of September through December. The numbers of trucks moving during this timeframe could, according to ID-DOT, significantly impact US-95.

Additionally, the Cities of Cottonwood and Lapwai have submitted a letters indicating their concern that additional truck traffic and salvage operations would result in significant damage to local infrastructure and highway/rail at-grade crossings that would be left in disrepair. See Environmental Report, Appendix B, Letter from Barbara D. Greene, Mayor, City of Cottonwood and Appendix C, Letter from Dawn N. Huntley, Mayor, City of Cottonwood.

Although the transportation of grain is not expected to be substantially inhibited by the loss of the subject line because of the availability of other modes of transportation, greater demands would be placed on the existing roadways and transportation system. Based on information gathered to date, SEA believes that highway safety would not be significantly compromised because, as noted earlier, the estimated increase in additional trucks (based on a 240 day year) would be less than a one percent increase in ADT for any community along US-95 for that portion between Grangeville and Spalding.

It also appears that based on data presented in CSPR's environmental report and consultation with ID-DOT, the proposed abandonment would not result in a significant increase in the chance of traffic accidents, despite the increased number of trucks on the road. Consultation with ID-DOT suggests that an assumed 10 percent increase in commercial traffic would result in no more than one additional collision per year.⁷ Although SEA's analysis is based on all vehicular traffic and not just commercial, we can conclude that the projected increase in truck traffic as a result of this abandonment (less than 1% of current ADT), would not result in a significant increase in the occurrence of traffic accidents.

⁷Consultation with the ID-DOT states that the type of trucks used to haul agricultural commodities are considered commercial vehicles.

Finally, CSPR states that it would remove all 113 highway/rail at-grade crossings located on the line proposed for abandonment. These existing highway/rail at-grade crossings consist of 54 public and 59 private crossings. CSPR states that removing these grade crossings would reduce the number of injuries and fatalities that might otherwise occur.

Following abandonment, shippers would have the alternative of trucking their goods to or from another railhead, to barge, or to and from the ultimate origin and destination. The impact of this movement on US-95 is not expected to have a significant effect on the traffic patterns because the change in ADT represents less than a one percent increase (this also includes seasonal traffic patterns) at any point of entry for the new traffic.

After extensive consultation with ID-DOT, review of CSPR's environmental report, and SEA's own independent analysis, SEA believes that the additional truck traffic would result in some adverse impacts to highway infrastructure and safety on roadways. Based on information currently available, however, SEA believes these impacts would not be significant.

Energy Consumption

As stated earlier, SEA determined that 11,766 trucks would be required to move the rail traffic presently handled on the subject line. SEA's analysis indicates that this would result in 1,571,938⁸ vehicle miles annually. Assuming that trucks use 4 times the amount of fuel as does a train and that a typical truck averages 6 miles per gallon, the new truck traffic would consume an additional 261,990 gallons of diesel fuel annually, which is less than 0.1 percent of the total 225.2 million gallons of diesel fuel consumed annually by motor carriers in the State of Idaho.⁹

Air Quality

The Board has established air quality and noise level threshold levels set forth at 49 CFR 1105.7(e)(5)(ii) and (e)(6). These thresholds are guidelines that are considered, along with other supporting information, to determine whether the air pollution and noise levels generated by rail traffic diverted to alternative modes warrant detailed analysis. The applicable threshold level for an attainment area when assessing air pollution is an increase in rail traffic of at least 100% (measured in gross ton miles annually) or an

⁸SEA determined annual vehicle miles by: 11,766 new trucks x 134 miles (66.8 miles one-way).

⁹Idaho Department of Transportation - Doug Benzon stated that approximately 225.2 million gallons of taxable diesel fuel were sold in fiscal year ending June 30, 1999.

increase of at least eight trains per day on any segment of the rail line, or an average increase in truck traffic of more than 10 percent of the average daily traffic or 50 vehicles a day on any affected road segment.

Consultation with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (ID-DEQ)- Lewiston Office, indicates that the proposed area is an attainment area. To determine whether the air pollution that would be generated by the estimated new truck diversions, we compared the increase in existing AADT on US-95 with the worst case scenario¹⁰--96 trucks per day, round-trip, would traverse the entire segment between Grangeville and Spalding. The results indicate if all of the diverted truck traffic traversed the entire 66.8 miles that there would be a 0.7 percent increase in ADT on the portion of US-95 that carries the least amount of traffic, as measured near Fenn. The corresponding impacts to air quality would also be insignificant.

Noise Impacts

The project area is primarily agricultural consisting largely of grain farmers. In most of this area, the major noise source is traffic on local roads, train operations, and horn noise. The diversion of the agricultural traffic from rail to truck would likely have only a minor impact on ambient noise levels in this area. Train horn and wayside noise (that is, the noise generated by the operation of the train rather than by the sounding of the horn) would be eliminated.

Noise disturbances during salvage operations would be short-term. The noise generated from salvaging equipment would generally be less than from trains that currently travel along the line. The additional truck traffic on affected roads would result in insignificant increases in noise levels.

Solid and Hazardous Waste

ID-DEQ has expressed concern regarding storm and surface-water discharge due to salvage activity. ID-DEQ requests that CSPR consult with ID-DEQ to determine if a permit for surface and storm-water discharge is required prior to salvage activity, and to implement Best Management Practices for salvaging in areas with potential soil and erosion problems. ID-DEQ also requests that the CSPR develop a plan that will prevent hill slope mass wasting and/or landslides resulting from rail bed abandonment.

Native American Consultation

¹⁰Assumed concentrated seasonal movements - September through December.

SEA has sent certified letters to the Nez Perce Tribal Chief, the Director and Archaeologist of the Nez Perce Resource Center, and the Supervisor of the Bureau of Indian Affairs - Northern Idaho Agency describing the proposed abandonment and requesting their participation in the environmental review process.

In addition, CSPR states that the Nez Perce Tribe has indicated that they are investigating acquisition of the line for continued movement of freight or for recreational purposes. See Environmental Report page 5.

Cultural and Historic Resources

The Idaho Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) considers that abandonment of the proposed rail line would have an adverse effect on historic properties, and has identified the entire railroad corridor as being eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act, 36 CFR Part 800 Criteria A and C. The SHPO has also recommended that an archaeological and historical survey of the entire rail line be completed.

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has informed SEA that 23 geodetic station markers may be affected by the proposed abandonment. NGS requests that it receive not less than 90 days' notification in advance of any salvage activities that may affect the markers in order to plan for their relocation.

Biological Resources

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has stated that consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, is not necessary based on facts presented to date.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Idaho Fish and Game have indicated that the steelhead trout is classified as a threatened species. The NMFS has also preliminarily recommended that a Biological Assessment be completed before it can comment on any potential impact. Additionally, on February 16, 2000, the NMFS published final rules regarding the designation of critical habitat for the steelhead (50 CFR Part 226). The final rules identify critical habitat in the Idaho counties of Idaho, Lewis, and Nez Perce.

Water Resources

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Region 10) has concluded that since the proposed abandonment will disturb soils equivalent to over 5 acres, that CSPR should obtain coverage under Phase I National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System storm water regulations pursuant to 40 CFR 122.26.

CONDITION

SEA recommends that the following condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. Based on the National Marine Fisheries Service's preliminary recommendation that a biological assessment would be required to continue consultation, we recommend that a condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority prohibiting the railroad from salvaging or disposing of the entire right-of-way until completion of the Section 7 process of the Endangered Species Act, 16, U.S.C. 1531.
2. If salvage operations are expected to destroy or disturb any of the 23 geodetic station markers listed in Appendix G of Camas Prairie RailNet, Incorporated's Environmental Report, the railroad shall notify the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Geodetic Survey in not less than ninety days prior to commencement of such operations.
3. In the opinion of the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), the entire rail line is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. We, therefore, recommend imposition of the following condition: Camas Prairie RailNet, Incorporated shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the entire rail line until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.
4. The City of Cottonwood, Nez Perce Reservation, has expressed concern regarding the impact of salvage activities on existing highway/rail at-grade crossings. Accordingly, we recommend that Camas Prairie RailNet, Incorporated consult with the City of Cottonwood's Highway Engineer prior to conducting salvage activities at or near grade crossings.
5. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 10, has expressed a concern regarding the discharge of stormwater resulting from the disturbance of more than 5 acres of soil. Therefore, we recommend that Camas Prairie RailNet, Incorporated consult with the U.S. EPA and secure all necessary permits, under 40 CFR 122.6, prior to initiation of salvage or disposal activities.
6. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (ID-DEQ) has expressed concern regarding storm and surface water discharge and potential soil and erosion problems resulting from abandonment activities. We recommend that Camas Prairie RailNet, Incorporated consult with the ID-DEQ regarding all

required discharge permits and plans to prevent hill/slope mass wasting prior to initiation of salvage or disposal activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended conditions, we conclude that, 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

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.

The ID-DOT and the City of Lapwai question the CSPR's conclusion that the right-of-way is not suitable for alternatives uses. The ID-DOT is presently evaluating potential alternatives while the City of Lapwai proposes that the rail line, if abandoned, be available for other uses, including a multi-use trail.

TRAILS USE

A request for a certificate of interim trail use (CITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 30 days of filing of the application. 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) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 848, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

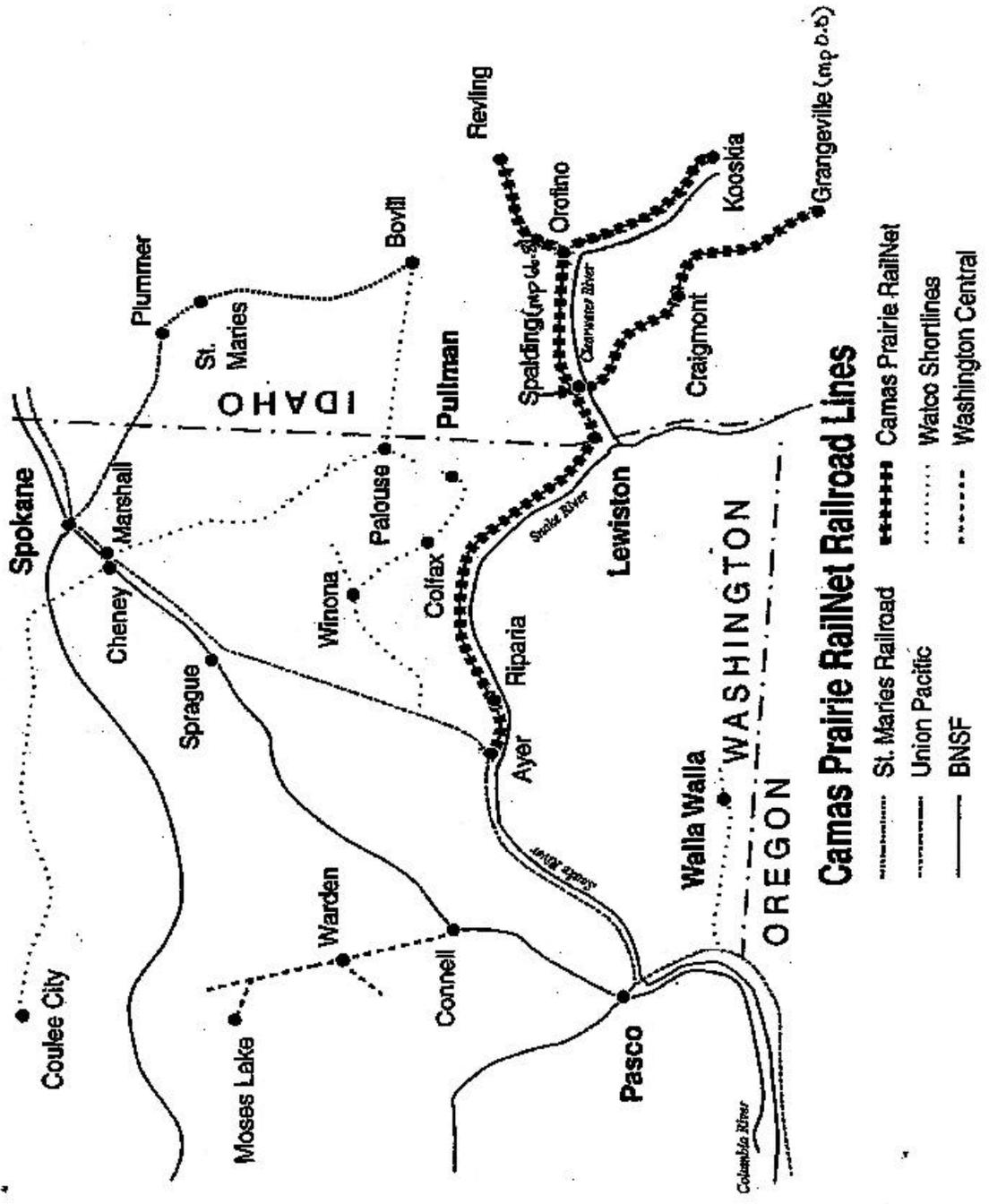
If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Troy Brady, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-33 (Sub-No. 140) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Mr. Brady at (202) 565-1554.

Date made available to the public: June 28, 2000.

Comment due date: July 27, 2000.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary



Camas Prairie RailNet Railroad Lines

- St. Maries Railroad
- Union Pacific
- BNSF
- Camas Prairie RailNet
- Watco Shortlines
- Washington Central

