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**SERVICE DATE - MARCH 19, 1998**  
**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD**  
**WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

NO. AB-303 (SUB-NO.14X)

WISCONSIN CENTRAL LTD.  
- ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION-  
IN WOOD COUNTY, WISCONSIN

**BACKGROUND**

In this proceeding, the Wisconsin Central Ltd. 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 railroad line located between Milepost 22 and Milepost 22.75 northwest of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, a distance of .75 miles in Wood County, Wisconsin. 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.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The railroad 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. 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 investigated the record in this proceeding. Also, we have contacted appropriate agencies and individuals to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed abandonment. Contacts have included the Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District, the Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, the County of Wood, Office of Planning and Zoning, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. EPA, Region 5, and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

**CONDITIONS**

We recommend that no environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5 has expressed concerns about the proper decommissioning of the line and salvage of the material, the impact of the decommissioning process on the surrounding environment and the future use of the property. Wisconsin Central Ltd. responded by stating that it intends to remove all rail and track materials from the right-of-way and reuse them wherever possible. Wisconsin Central Ltd. Further stated that it intends to plow the rails and ties out of the ballast which will preserve the integrity of the earthen structure underneath the track and will prevent soil erosion and storm water runoff. In response to future use of the right-of-way Wisconsin Central Ltd. explained that the purpose of the abandonment is to provide Superior Cranberry Creek Landfill, Inc., which owns property on both sides adjacent to the line, with the opportunity to purchase property on which the line sits for further expansion of its landfill operations.

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, 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**

If abandonment and salvage of the rail line does take place, the right-of-way may not be suitable for other public use. The Wood County Office of Planning and Zoning has already informed the Wisconsin Central Ltd. that the line, in their view, was not suitable to bicycle or other pedestrian uses. 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**

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has informed

Wisconsin Central Ltd. that it has no interest in acquiring the line as a recreational trail. 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. 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 Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 848, 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, Room 711, Washington, DC 20423-0001, to the attention of Scott Decker, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-303 (Sub-No. 14X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Scott Decker at (202) 565-1531.

Date made available to the public: **March 16, 1998.**  
Comment due date: **March 30, 1998.**

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

Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary

MAP TO BE SCANNED