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SERVICE DATE - DECEMBER 14, 2001

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AB - 290 (SUB-NO. 217X)

NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY - ABANDONMENT - AT LONG SPUR
JCT., IN BUCHANAN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

BACKGROUND

Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NSR) filed a notice of exemption pursuant to the Board's regulations at 49 CFR 1152.50. The notice of exemption is for abandonment of its line of railroad lying between Mileposts LS-0.0 and LS-0.4 at Long Spur Jct. to the end of track in Buchanan County, Virginia. Authority for discontinuance of operations of this line was granted in ICC Docket No. AB-290 (Sub-No. 102X), served September 25, 1990. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption 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 the following 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: Department of Transportation, National Park Services, National Geodetic Survey, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Historic Resources, National Park Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Coastal Zone Management.

Transportation

Traffic has not moved over this line for two years. There will be no diversion of rail traffic to motor carriage.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (CORPS) advised that the proposed work does not fall within the CORPS jurisdiction. No CORPS permit would be required. The CORPS notes that NS should obtain all required state and local authorizations before proceeding with the project. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) indicated two endangered and/or threatened species, the Indiana Bat and the Virginia Spiraea, have been documented in an adjacent county and may occur in Buchanan County. The Virginia Department of Conservation Recreation Division of Natural Heritage advises that available information does not indicate the presence of any natural heritage resources. In the event that these species are encountered during salvage of the line, NS shall consult with the USFWS pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, 16 USC 1531 et seq. USFWS advises to minimize impacts to Buchanan County's valuable aquatic resources, the NS implement should implement strict erosion control measures during land disturbing activities. If strict erosion control measures are taken, the Service believes the proposed action will have no effect on federally listed species. NS is not aware of any critical habitat that would be destroyed or modified as a result of the proposed abandonment.

HISTORIC

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources has determined, based on the information provided, the proposed actions will not effect properties eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places. If there are any planned activities which could disturb or destroy any geodetic station markers discovered on the line, the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) should be contacted, NGS requires not less than 90 days' notification in advance of such activities in order to plan for their relocation.

CONDITIONS

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) indicated two endangered and/or threatened species, the Indiana Bat and the Virginia Spiraea, have been documented in an adjacent county and may occur in Buchanan County. The Virginia Department of Conservation Recreation Division of Natural Heritage advises that available information does not indicate the presence of any natural heritage resources. Although these species are unlikely to occur within the right-of-way, in an abundance of caution, we recommend that in the event that these species are encountered during salvage of the line, NS shall consult with the USFWS pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, 16 USC 1531 et seq. USFWS advises to minimize impacts to Buchanan County's valuable aquatic resources, the NS implement should implement strict erosion control measures during land disturbing activities. If strict erosion control measures are taken, the Service believes the proposed action will have no effect on federally listed species.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date and subject to the recommended condition, 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 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.

TRAILS USE

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, to the attention of Phillis Johnson-Ball, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB- 290 (Sub-No.217X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Phillis Johnson-Ball at (202) 565-1530.

Date made available to the public: 12/14/01.

Comment due date: January 02, 2002.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

MAP TO BE SCANNED