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SERVICE DATE - SEPTEMBER 8, 1997

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-33 (SUB-NO. 113)

**Union Pacific Railroad Company
- Abandonment and Discontinuance of Trackage Rights -
In Natrona and Converse Counties, WY
(Casper Branch)**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Union Pacific Railroad Company has filed an application seeking authority under 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon and discontinue operations over its railroad line located between milepost 590 and the end of the line at milepost 607.80 near Casper (Air Base), a distance of 17.8 miles in Natrona County, Wyoming. In addition, UP is seeking discontinuance authority of its trackage rights over Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad from UP milepost 532.5 near Orin to UP milepost 600.00 near Casper, a distance of 67.5 miles in Natrona and Converse Counties, Wyoming. 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 over the abandoned portion of the line and discontinue operations on the portion of the line over which UP has trackage rights.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

Approximately 15 shippers used the line proposed for abandonment in 1995, 1996, and the first three months of 1997. Outbound commodities include bentonite clay, scrap iron or steel, and scrap paper. Inbound shipments consist primarily of industrial sand, iron or steel pipe, billets, cement, bentonite crude, ball clay, crushed clay, crude clay, barium sulphate, chemicals, wire rope, and road equipment. Switch traffic commodities consist of scrap iron or steel.

The 1995 volume of 903 rail carloads would equate to 3612 loaded trucks, using a 1 to 4 ratio of rail to truck. The 1996 volume of 1113 rail carloads would yield 4452 trucks. If

abandonment authority is granted, the railroad would close 23 road crossings. Traffic currently moving by rail over the line proposed for abandonment can either be diverted to truck or handled by rail on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line.

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 consulted with 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 Region 8 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service; National Geodetic Survey; Wyoming State Historic Preservation District; and the Office of City Manager of Casper, Wyoming.

CONDITIONS

The National Geodetic Survey has identified 48 geodetic station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore, **Union Pacific Railroad Company shall notify NGS at least 90 days prior to engaging in salvage activities to plan for relocation of these markers.**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers states that it is unable to determine whether the proposed abandonment would require Department of the Army authorization. The Corps states that the railroad would need authorization if any bridges must be removed from over waterways (including intermittent). We, therefore, recommend that **the Union Pacific Railroad Company consult with the Corps if the railroad plans to remove any bridges over waterways.**

The Field Supervisor of the Wyoming State Office of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) states that bald eagles, other raptors, or migratory birds may be affected by the proposed abandonment. **FWS requests that the railroad coordinate with the Wyoming State Office prior to doing any work in the project area. We recommend a condition to this effect be imposed.**

The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Division has not completed its assessment of the potential impact of this project on historic resources. Accordingly, a condition is recommended requiring that the **Union Pacific Railroad shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all sites and structures on the right-of-way that are 50 years old or older until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.**

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.

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) 565-1545, 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 Victoria Rutson, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-33 (Sub No. 113) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Ms. Rutson at (202) 565-1545.

Date made available to the public: September 3, 1997.

Comment due date: October 2, 1997.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary