



E1-426



## North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Charles R. Fullwood, Executive Director

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary  
Attention: Troy Brady  
Surface Transportation Board

**FROM:** Marla Chambers, Highway Projects Coordinator  
Habitat Conservation Program, NCWRC *Marla Chambers*

**DATE:** November 17, 2003

**SUBJECT:** Railway abandonment exemption request by Norfolk Southern Railway Company for rail line between Gastonia and Dallas/Gebo, Gaston County. Docket No. AB-290 (Sub No. 240X).

Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NS) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment and discontinuance of operations of the rail line located between Gastonia and Dallas/Gebo in Gaston County, North Carolina. Staff biologists with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) have reviewed the information provided. These comments are provided in accordance with the provisions of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 401, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661-667d.) and the North Carolina Environmental Policy Act (G.S. 113A-1 through 113A-10; 1 NCAC 25).

NS proposes to abandon a 5.0-mile long segment of rail from HG-47.0 to HG-52.0, which was taken out of service in February 2003 because of its deteriorated condition and safety concerns. This segment crosses the South Fork of the Catawba River, Little Long Creek, Long Creek and passes through 100-year flood plains and wetlands associated with these waterways. The North Carolina Division of Water Quality classifies the South Fork of the Catawba River as WS-IV and the streams as Class C. It is NS's policy to remove all bridges and culverts as part of the proposed abandonment, unless otherwise stated. It appears that the bog turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), federally listed as Threatened due to Similarity of Appearance and state listed as Threatened, has been observed in the project area. In addition, the City of Gastonia has expressed interest in conversion of the right-of-way into a recreational trail.

We will not object to the abandonment providing any demolition or disturbance along the segment obtain and follow required state and local government approvals and

Norfolk Southern Railway Abandonment  
From Gastonia to Dallas/Gebo, Gaston Co. 2

November 17, 2003

permits, including sediment and erosion control and Clean Water Act permits and certifications. Any bridge or culvert removal should ensure that streams are restored to their natural, pre-impact condition. This work should include removing fills, re-connecting flood plains and restoring native riparian vegetation. Conduct bog turtle surveys in appropriate habitat and complete consultation with NCWRC and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service prior to any disturbance. Impacted wetlands should be restored if practicable. We recommend that these corridors be converted to local park trail systems, if appropriate, and that natural habitat restoration be provided using native vegetation along the corridor whenever possible. Coordinate with the City, safety inspectors and resource agencies regarding the potential for retaining bridges or culverts in relation to possible trail development.

We recommend consultation with a professional NCWRC biologist to discuss native planting schedules and any proposed reclamation activities. Wildlife biologist, Jack Mason can be reached at 828/396-5363. Additional planting suggestions and plant supply sources may be obtained from Stewardship biologist, Elizabeth Hughes at 828/274-3646.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this project. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact me at 704-485-2384.