

20557 @URFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD'
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT -NOV 4' 1996

NO. AB-6 (SUB-NO. 378X)
and No. AB-6 (SUB-NO. 207)

ABANDONMENT OF SOUTH ABERDEEN TRackage (MP 1.82 TO MP 3.00) AND A LINE
OF RAILROAD FROM
SOUTH ABERDEEN (MP 3.00) TO MARKHAM (MP 13.26)
IN GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY, WASHINGTON

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Burlington Northern Railroad Company has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10505 seeking exemption from the requirement of obtaining prior approval and authorization of the Board under 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of additional trackage referred to as South Aberdeen trackage located between MP 1.82 and MP 3.00, and confirmation or extension of abandonment authority previously granted for its line of railroad between South Aberdeen (MP 3.00) and Markham (MP 13.26), a total distance of 11.44 miles in Grays Harbor County, Washington. 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.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

Two customers have used the South Aberdeen trackage and the South Aberdeen to Markham line during the last ten years. These customers are Weyerhaeuser which operates a sawmill in South Aberdeen and Ocean Spray Cranberries which operates a cranberry processing plant at Markham. During the ten year period from 1985 through 1994 Weyerhaeuser shipped a high of 274 cars of lumber on BN in 1985 and a low of 32 cars in 1991. The average for the ten year period was 101 cars shipped per year on BN. Over the same period Ocean Spray received a high of 193 carloads of corn syrup in 1994 and a low of 35 in 1995. No further traffic moved over this line following the embargo of the UP bridge over the Chehalis River on April 7, 1995. The line runs along the south side of Grays Harbor between South Aberdeen and Markham. This is a wooded to open rural area adjacent to tidal

1 Formerly the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). The ICC Termination Act of 1995, Pub. L. No. 104-88, 109 Stat. 803 (the Act), which was enacted on December 29, 1995, and took effect on January 1, 1996, abolished the ICC and transferred certain functions and proceedings to the Surface

Transportation Board.

flats. The rail grade is flat with about two curves per mile in the line. State Highway #105 runs adjacent to the line at many locations and is a popular tourist route to the ocean beaches a few miles beyond.

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 Dept. of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, State of Washington, Department of Ecology, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State of Washington, Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

The Washington State Department of Ecology indicates that the removal of bridge structures, decks, and piling, leaving the bridge abutments in place, may require a short-term water quality modification (WQM). This department also states that salvage activities must ensure that there is no resulting diminishment of flood water conveyance or rise in 100-year flood levels.

The Washington State Department of Fish and wildlife (WDFW) has informed the Board that a Hydraulic Project Approval will be required for portions of the project that occur over or adjacent to the water. Furthermore the WDFW states that the railroad crosses numerous creeks which are important spawning streams for coho salmon and cutthroat trout, and some of which support runs of chum salmon and steelhead trout. The railroad is also built on intertidal wetlands of Grays Harbor which are critical habitat for a wide variety of species, and specifically for migrating subyearling salmonids. The line also parallels a half mile of WDFW wildlife refuge land, and crosses an additional 65 acre parcel between Indian and Stafford Creeks, which has a Bald Eagle nest located nearby.

CONDITIONS

The Washington State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation (SHPO) has indicated that an archaeologically sensitive area exists west of the Neushkah River. The SHPO recommends that no disturbance occur off the existing ballast when salvaging track material. The SHPO requests documentation that this recommendation is being followed by providing before and after photographs from fixed photo points. The railroad states that all salvage operations are being conducted by private contractors, who must comply with all federal regulations

concerning items of archeological significance. Pending resolution of these issues, we recommend

that the following condition **be** imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority: **BN shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the archaeologically sensitive area west of the Neushkah River until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.**

In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Western Washington regional office has identified fur Federally **listed species** within the study area: the Bald eagle, the Brown **pelican**, the Peregrine falcon and the Western snowy plover. **Therefore, the railroad shall not engage in any salvage activities on the line until the Section 7 process under the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1536, has been completed.**

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 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 the petition for exemption in **the Federal Register**. **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 Assistance (OPA) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPA directly at (202) 927-6184, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, office of Public Assistance, Room 4412, 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, Room **2221**, Washington, **DC 20423**, to the attention of Scott Decker, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-6 (Sub No.378X) ' in all correspondence addressed to the Board. If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Scott Decker at (202) 927-6396.**

Date made available to the public: October 30, 1996.

Comment due date: December 4, 1996.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

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