

December 3, 2004
Bones Brothers Ranch
Box 505
Birney, MT. 59012

Surface Transportation Board
Case Control Unit
Washington, D.C. 20423
Attn: Ken Blodgett
STB Docket No. FD 30186 (Sub-No. 3)

As the deadline for comments approaches, we once again wonder if our concerns about the proposed Tongue River Railroad will be heard. Since 1980 this ranch has participated in the comment process for the proposed railroad with little obvious effect. Although we are truly concerned about the effects of this railroad to our livelihood, we feel that the Surface Transportation Board has not heard the public on this issue. The findings of this Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and the previous impact statements on TRR I or TRR II do not indicate an understanding of the Tongue River Railroad's impacts to our lives, businesses or the landscape of the Tongue River Valley.

Despite 24 years of studies, there has not been any attempt at actually building a railroad. Surely the Surface Transportation Board is as tired of Mike Gustafson and his investor bilking schemes as we are. If you do decide to give this railroad the go ahead, we ask that a new 3-year deadline be given to the company to complete the project and that this time the Surface Transportation Board will adhere to this decision. We've seen the route changed countless times over the past and would like to be able to get on with the future planning of our operations.

Having the prospect of an ever-changing railroad going through our ranch has reduced our property values and made planning an impossibility. An unending time frame and a route that is as changeable as this one, is an injustice to those of us whose land and livelihoods are affected by this railroad.

We live in an area of seclusion and quiet, where we don't lock our doors, and we are accustomed to stopping in the middle of the road to visit with a passing motorist. The school is only attended by 7 kids in all 8 grades combined. Neighbors help each other and everyone knows everyone else. The impacts from this proposed railroad will change our quiet life – a life we value highly. Many transient workers will be employed in our area during the construction of this railroad (should it actually be built) straining the limits of our small school. The increase in traffic will endanger our safety and, combined with the ever-increasing Coal bed methane traffic, make our roads extremely hazardous. We have no law enforcement to speak of now and our safe way of life is threatened. A wildfire may only burn an average of 90 acres (as noted in the DSEIS), which may actually benefit rangeland, but if the fire reaches our family, home or livestock, lives may be lost as well as generations worth of labor. The number of crossings without over or

underpasses will make getting to Sheridan hazardous; and in the case of an emergency; life threatening. The increase in noise, air and water pollution will be detrimental to our cattle ranching business and our health. Clearly this railroad will be detrimental to wildlife, aquatic life and our way of life. This is also an area that is rich in historical and cultural resources. For example, our ranch (Bones Brothers Ranch) was recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These historic and cultural resources will be irreparably harmed by this railroad. It is simply wrong that our livelihood is threatened by this speculative project.

“Come up with a better product and the world will beat a path to your door!” If this were the case, the “super compliant coal” in Southeastern Montana would have already had a railroad built to it. The coal available through the Otter Creek tracts was always available for lease through the Federal government. Other Coal Mining Companies hold leases along the proposed route, but none have been developed. The Draft SEIS won’t look at the cumulative impacts from these potential mines, yet claim that they are necessary for the success of the Tongue River Railroad. At best, this logic bespeaks incompetence; at worst, it is dishonest.

We were disappointed by the Board’s recent decision of Oct. 21, 2004 to not disclose the financial assets of The Tongue River Railroad Company, Inc. Before this company receives another permit it should have to prove that it can finance this project and this information should be public.

It is clear from your previous decisions and the finding of this DSEIS that you will give the TRRC the permit to build on “The Western Alignment.” We ask that if you do this that you give them a time limit to build the entire railroad and that they not be allowed to change the route with out some process.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Terry Punt *Jeanie Alderson*

Terry Punt and Jeanie Alderson
Bones Brothers Ranch