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State of Indiana
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Division of Water

AB-290-11-16
EI-2643
KB

Early Coordination/Environmental Assessment

DNR #: ER-12406 **Request Received:** October 2, 2006

Requestor: Barnes and Thornburg, LLP
Richard H. Streeter
750 17th Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20006

Project: Proposed abandonment of approximately 3.2 miles of railroad between MP UV0.0 and MP UV2.8 and between MP Z09.6 and MP Z010.5; Docket No. AB-290 (Sub-No. 286)

County/Site info: St. Joseph

Regulatory Assessment: The Indiana Department of Natural Resources has reviewed the above referenced project per your request. Our agency offers the following comments for your information and in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Natural Heritage Database: The Natural Heritage Program's data have been checked. To date, no plant or animal species listed as state or federally threatened, endangered, or rare have been reported to occur in the project vicinity.

Fish & Wildlife Comments: The following is a basic list of guidelines to consider when planning trails in or around potential fish, wildlife, or botanical resource habitat within the floodway:

1. Stay in or adjacent to existing right-of-ways.
2. When designing or constructing a trail, disturb as narrow an area as possible to help minimize negative impacts to fish, wildlife, or botanical resources.
3. Do not focus only on the direct impact of the trail's width; also consider the trail's impact to the surrounding habitat. Poorly routed trails can fragment larger habitat areas and reduce the overall usefulness of the site to fish, wildlife, or botanical resources (1 large habitat block is better than 2 small habitat blocks).
4. Align a trail along or near an existing man-made edge rather than routing a trail through a larger undisturbed area (around a woodlot's edge rather than through the middle of it, etc.).
5. Make use of previously disturbed or degraded areas that have the potential to be restored or enhanced by trail construction (railroad corridors, etc.), rather than impacting a previously undisturbed area.
6. Avoid unnecessary stream crossings. Instead, make use of or modify existing stream crossings or avoid crossing the stream altogether.
7. Avoid perpendicular fragmentation of riparian areas (streamside habitat). Instead, route the trail parallel to the stream and make use of existing edges (the landward edge of the riparian habitat).
8. Avoid sensitive fish, wildlife, or botanical resources; trails may negatively affect species that require specific natural conditions (vegetation, light levels, moisture, etc.) that are altered as a result of trail construction.
9. Screen sensitive wildlife habitat from the trail corridor. Vegetation, topography, fences, or walls can help reduce the impact of noise and line of site disturbances of trail users on sensitive wildlife.
10. Path lighting in natural habitats such as stream and riparian corridor crossings, forests, and wetlands can negatively affect the circadian rhythm of nocturnal wildlife and disorient night-migrating birds. Pathway lighting should be the lowest wattage available in these areas, shielded to cast light mainly on the path (no light cast upwards or in a wide arc). Lighting in these areas should be turned down or off during the periods of lowest or no use. If lighting is already installed and unshielded it should be retro-fitted.

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11. Any plantings in the aforementioned areas should be locally native species, not exotic species or horticultural varieties.

We recommend that these guidelines are followed for the portion of the abandoned rail lines that will be converted into a trail.

Contact Staff:

Christie L. Stanifer, Environ. Coordinator, Environmental Unit

Our agency appreciates this opportunity to be of service. Please do not hesitate to contact the above staff member at (317) 232-4160 or 1-877-928-3755 (toll free) if we can be of further assistance.



Jon W. Eggen
Environmental Supervisor
Division of Fish and Wildlife

Date: December 19, 2006