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State of Washington
Department of Fish and Wildlife

Mailing Address: 1550 Alder Street NW, Ephrata WA 98823, (509) 754-4624, TDD (360) 902-2207

April 23, 2007

WSDOT Rail Office
Attention: Ms. Elizabeth Phinney
P.O. Box 47407
Olympia, WA 98504-7407

Dear Ms. Phinney

SUBJECT: Request for Information and Preliminary Comments; STB Finance Docket No. 34936, Northern Columbian Basin Railroad Project

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) understands that the Surface Transportation Board and Washington State Department of Transportation are proposing to both build a new rail line and improve and/or extend existing track to attract new rail dependent businesses to the Moses Lake region.

Without knowing the exact route the proposed new tracks are going to take, the comments WDFW can offer at this point are only general in nature. According to WDFW's Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) maps, the proposed new tracks between Wheeler and Parker Horn have the potential to impact wetland areas. Both temporary and long term disturbances to these wetlands will require mitigation. If the proposed new rails cross over Parker Horn, a Hydraulic Project Approval permit from the WDFW will be required.

According to the Heritage Point database, burrowing owls have been noted in the past occupying the general area proposed for the railway extension. The burrowing owl is a candidate species for the state endangered list due to their declining population numbers. The proposed railway extension route should attempt to avoid potential burrowing owl habitat and/or mitigate for unavoidable impacts.

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If you have any questions, please contact me at 509-754-4624.

Sincerely,

Eric D. Pentico

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Habitat Program

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