



EI-31289

Northcoast Environmental Center

PO Box 4259

Arcata, CA 95518

Re: Support for Railbanking

Dear Surface Transportation Board Members,

We are writing to voice our support for the Great Redwood Trail and to ask the Surface Transportation Board to please set a timeline to complete the railbanking process to move this project towards fruition. It is our opinion that it is not necessary to pause the larger railbanking process to confirm the legal status of two terminal segments of the farthest reaches of the rail line. That will happen in due time, in the meantime, the public is eager to start using the trail for recreation and trail transport, both of which should be considered "compelling public purpose(s)."

There is enormous public support on the North Coast for railbanking and the proposed Great Redwood Trail and it came as a shock to many of us that this popular project could be derailed by a last-ditch effort to revive the railway for freight travel. Neither the North Coast public nor the Eel River Canyon's geology will support the unprecedented levels of freight rail traffic that would be required to finance reconstruction and maintenance of a railroad from Willits to Humboldt Bay. The North Coast Railroad Company, L.L.C's claim of "being capitalized to the tune of \$1.2 billion" would still fall short of the funding necessary to rehabilitate rail lines that have twisted, eroded and fallen apart in the decades since they were last used to haul freight. The estimated price of building the Great Redwood Trail is between \$1 and \$5 billion, and that is with significantly lower weight-bearing requirements and clearance than freight trains would require. An alleged \$1.2 billion will not be enough to get this rail line in working condition and fix the sections that have all but fallen into the

Eel River, which is a water source for tens of thousands of residents of Sonoma and Humboldt Counties.

Please set a timeline and continue the railbanking process. Public support for the Great Redwood Trail vastly outweighs support for out-of-state, fossil-fuel interests looking to make a quick buck in a dying industry.

Thank you,

Caroline Griffith

Co-director, Northcoast Environmental Center