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SUMMARY

The near tripling of train traffic in the vicinity of Princeton/LeClaire, Iowa will adversely affect migrating waterfowl, migrating Bald Eagles and residents living near the train tracks. The draft EIS has not adequately addressed impacts to migrating waterfowl, Bald Eagles, or individual landowners. Individual landowners will receive no compensation for increased noise, reduced access to property, or the reduced quality of life by living near a train track that is to become an industrialized zone. The EIS should address these issues satisfactorily.

3.6 - Noise and Vibration

Even if the Board imposes these mitigation measures, however, OEA expects that the Proposed Acquisition would result in unavoidable adverse noise impacts

The Noise Control Act of 1972 establishes a national policy to promote an environment for all Americans free from noise that jeopardizes their health and welfare. This Act recognized the stress that can be placed upon humans and wildlife alike by excessive noise pollution. The analysis of noise and vibration in the draft EIS does not give adequate treatment to the additive, compounding and cumulative effects of a near tripling of train traffic along urban, residential and wildlife areas. The impacts from an occasional train can be absorbed by the surrounding community, but continuous repetition of train traffic will lead to increased stress, anxiety, and reduced quality of life. In the case of wildlife, habitat abandonment may take place. The proposed mitigation will not significantly reduce the noise, vibrations, and blocked access from increased train traffic.

3.11.3.1 – Wildlife

OEA expects that the potential increase in train noise along existing rail lines would not significantly affect wildlife because any animals living near active rail lines have likely already become habituated to train noise over many years of regular exposure to such noise.

The Mississippi River Flyway is one of the most important migratory bird corridors in the world. As Audubon's Christmas Bird Count and the Mid-Winter Bald Eagle surveys can attest, the Mississippi River in Iowa along the affected corridor explodes with waterfowl during migration. These birds are not habituated to train horns blaring and will flush from shoreline areas affected by such noise. Since they are migrating, they are in dire need of rest and food. Every flushing event takes away energy needed for migration and survival.

The same can be said for Bald Eagles along the affected Mississippi River Flyway. Thousands of Bald Eagles funnel into the open waters of the Mississippi River to feed and rest during migration. These eagles are not habituated to train horns blaring and will flush with a passing train. An occasional train allows eagles to re-perch and use those trees for resting and feeding. Continuous traffic and blasting of train horns would render the eagle perching habitat unusable for the entire affected Mississippi River corridor, from Muscatine to McGregor, Iowa – almost 200 miles of shoreline! Because of the scope of this impact, it is likely that increased traffic from the train merger will disturb bald eagles. The U.S Fish & Wildlife Service defines “disturb” as follows.

Disturb means to agitate or bother a bald or golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, based on the best scientific information available,

(1) injury to an eagle,

(2) a decrease in its productivity, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior, or

(3) nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior.

50 CFR 22.6 “Disturb”