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Surface Transportation Board
Office of the Secretary, Case Control Unit
1925 K STREET N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

Dear Members:

I oppose the Tongue River Railroad because first and foremost, I am a railroader for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe RR based in Sheridan, Wyo. The TRR will directly affect my home terminal resulting in the loss of approximately 40% of our jobs according to United Transportation Union research. This will cause economic and social hardship for the affected 40% employees plus the impact this will inflict on the Sheridan area's economy. I assume you are aware these are roughly \$50,000 per employee per year jobs. This translates to \$500,000 our area's economy will not receive.

Perhaps a greater tragedy will happen to the Tongue River Valley itself. The land will pay a terrible price. Railroad construction is very intensive, causing millions of cubic yards of earth to be moved in order to construct a right-of-way. This includes skimming tops off bluffs, filling drainages, adding culverts which will not allow drainage

to occur as effectively as nature, increasing sedimentation in the Tongue River itself due to foliage removal and land displacement, disruption of fishing and wildlife patterns, and loss of native vegetation which will be replaced by noxious weeds. One only has to look at existing railroad beds and right of ways to see all these problems. And many problems have not been solved for years.

With the proposal of the "Western Alignment" by the TRR, I feel the original Environmental Impact Statement is no longer valid. In fact, with the BNSF Engineering Dept. getting involved in straightening and leveling the original TRR right of way proposal, the original EIS is no longer the preferred route. After twenty years, that is when the original EIS was studied, a great many changes have occurred. The Montco Mine near Ashland, Mt. has been abandoned, the route has been realigned, and many Montana coal mines in the region are to be played out within ten years. If an EIS is used for a route that is not even to be used, this makes a mockery of the whole process. What is the purpose of having an EIS if it doesn't apply to exactly where the impact is?

Finally, who will benefit from the building of the TRR? Montana ranchers whose property values will drop? Downsizing Montana coal mines that have production expectancies of no more than 10 years? Future coal mines, when natural gas is plentiful and the building of pipelines is less expensive than opening a new mine site?

I think the only potential winners will be TRR investors if this project succeeds. This route will be a shortcut for the BNSF RR to move Wyoming coal to the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes region. Corporate interests, speculators, bankers, and of course lawyers will profit. Individuals, wildlife, and the land will suffer the damages. This project reeks of private gain and public loss. The public will pay in mitigating environmental impacts and the loss of a near pristine valley. This project may be a corporate plan and a public person. I see nothing that serves the public interest.

Both you and I have a chance to save public money, jobs for Sheridan's economy, not displace cowboys and landowners and wildlife, and of course, protect the land and river for reasons more than just human needs. This is a more noble cause than merely profits for corporations and speculators.

Sincerely,
Thomas Wozniak

Suzanne Wallenburg 9/4/98
Notary Public for the State of Montana
Residing at: Billings, MT
My Commission Expires: 4-11-00