

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD***Washington, DC 20423**Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration*

February 5, 2009

Ms. Judith Bittner
State Historic Preservation Officer
Department of Natural Resources
Office of History and Archaeology
550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1310
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3565

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 35095 - Section 106 Process for the Alaska Railroad Corporation's Petition for Exemption to Construct and Operate a Rail Line Extension to Port MacKenzie, Alaska

Dear Ms. Bittner:

In a letter dated June 19, 2008, the Surface Transportation Board (Board) initiated the Section 106 consultation process with your office pursuant to 36 CFR 800, for the proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension. The purpose of this letter is to provide additional information about the alternative routes currently under consideration, and planned next steps in the cultural resource assessment process.

Background / Project Description

The Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is the office within the Board responsible for preparing the appropriate documentation for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. SEA is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension, including consideration of potential impacts to cultural resources. ICF International is serving as the independent third-party consultant to assist SEA with the EIS. Stephen R. Braund & Associates (SRB&A) is the cultural resources subcontractor to ICF International.

The proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension would connect Port MacKenzie to the existing ARRC rail system at a point between Wasilla and north of Willow, Alaska. The extension would require construction of between approximately 30 and 45 miles of new railroad track within a 200-foot right-of-way (ROW). Ten segments that form eight possible alternative routes are currently being considered. The longest alternative route currently under

consideration would connect to the existing ARRC rail line north of Willow, near Mile 190 of the George Parks Highway, and the shortest would connect to the rail line near Mile 167 of the George Parks Highway. Possible stream and river crossings include the Little Susitna River, Lake Creek, and Willow Creek as well as other small streams, depending on the specific alternative route. The proposed rail extension also would cross local roads, recreational trails, pipelines, and utilities. Additional elements of the proposed project include a siding along the existing rail line, and railroad support facilities including a terminal facility in the port district, access roads and communication towers.

The enclosed project overview map and United States Geological Survey (USGS) 1:63,360 Quadrangles (based on Anchorage B-8, C-8, Tyonek B-1, C-1, and D-1) depict the general area of the project and the alternative routes currently being considered as well as assist in delineating the Area of Potential Effect (APE) of the planned project [36 CFR Part 800.11(d)(1)]. The alternative routes pass through the following township and range sections:

- Township 14 North, Range 4 West, Sections 5, 7, 8, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 26, and 27 (Anchorage B-8 and Tyonek B-1)
- Township 14 North, Range 5 West, Sections 1, 12, and 12 (Tyonek B-1)
- Township 15 North, Range 4 West, Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 20, 29, and 32 (Anchorage B-8 and Tyonek B-1)
- Township 15 North, Range 5 West, Sections 3, 10, 11, 12, 15, 22, 26, 27, 35, and 36 (Tyonek B-1)
- Township 16 North, Range 3 West, Sections 3, 9, 10, 16, 20, 21, 29, and 30 (Anchorage B-8 and C-8)
- Township 16 North, Range 4 West, Sections 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, and 34 (Anchorage B-8 and Tyonek B-1)
- Township 16 North, Range 5 West, Sections 1, 4, 5, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 34, and 36 (Tyonek B-1 and C-1)
- Township 17 North, Range 3 West, Sections 1, 2, 6, 11, 12, 14, 23, 26, and 35 (Anchorage C-8)
- Township 17 North, Range 4 West, Sections 1, 2, 10, 11, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29, 30, and 31 (Anchorage C-8 and Tyonek C-1)
- Township 17 North, Range 5 West, Sections 5, 8, 9, 16, 21, 28, 32, and 33 (Tyonek C-1)
- Township 18 North, Range 3 West, Sections 20, 21, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, and 35 (Anchorage C-8)
- Township 18 North, Range 4 West, Sections 3, 10, 11, 14, 23, 26, and 35 (Anchorage C-8)
- Township 18 North, Range 5 West, Sections 3, 9, 10, 16, 20, 21, 29, and 32 (Tyonek C-1)
- Township 19 North, Range 5 West, Sections 2, 3, 10, 15, 22, 27, and 34 (Tyonek C-1 and D-1)
- Township 20 North, Range 4 West, Sections 19, 30, and 31 (Tyonek D-1)
- Township 20 North, Range 5 West, Sections 35 and 36 (Tyonek D-1)

Cultural Resources Review To Date

Initial examination of the Alaska Heritage Resource Survey (AHRs) records revealed 43 documented cultural resource sites within one mile of the alternative ROW routes, one of which has been found eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). SRB&A is completing a review of the AHRs files, a review of previous surveys in the vicinity of the APE, and a review of available literature pertaining to the project area. SEA is also initiating consultation with potential Consulting Parties on this project, including Native American tribal organizations, to identify resources in the area.

If you have any questions about the project please do not hesitate to contact Dave Navecky, SEA Project Manager, at 202-245-0294, or Alan Summerville, ICF International Project Manager, at 703-934-3616.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victoria Rutson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Victoria" and last name "Rutson" clearly distinguishable.

Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

cc: Alan Summerville, ICF International
Stephen R. Braund & Associates

Enclosures: Figures 1-6

 Alaska Railroad Track

23 January 2009

Figure 2
Proposed Project, Tyonek D1

Proposed Alternative

 Willow

 Alaska Railroad Track

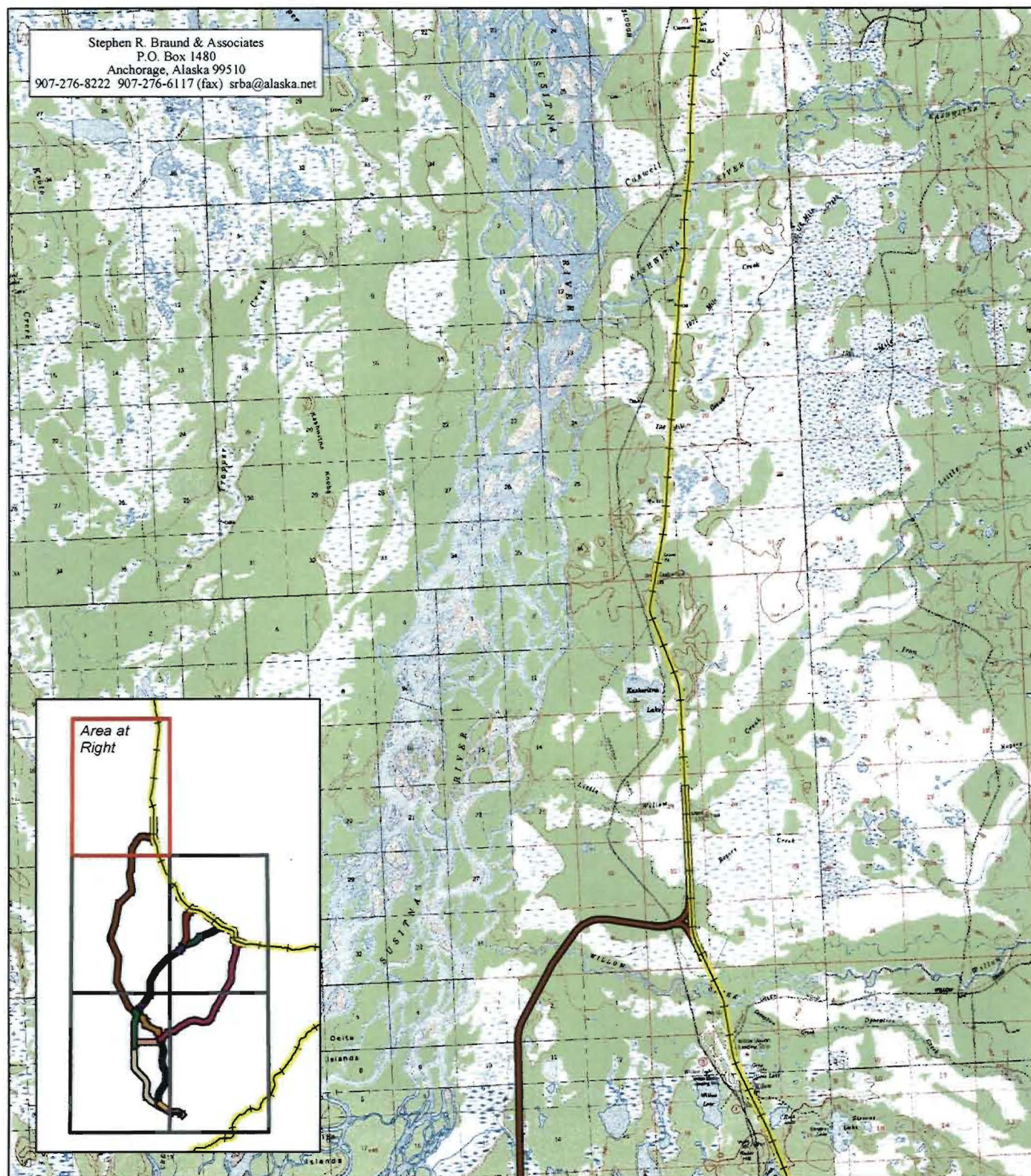
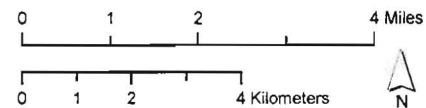


Figure 3
Proposed Project, Tyonek C1

Proposed Alternative

— Houston

— Willow

— Alaska Railroad Track

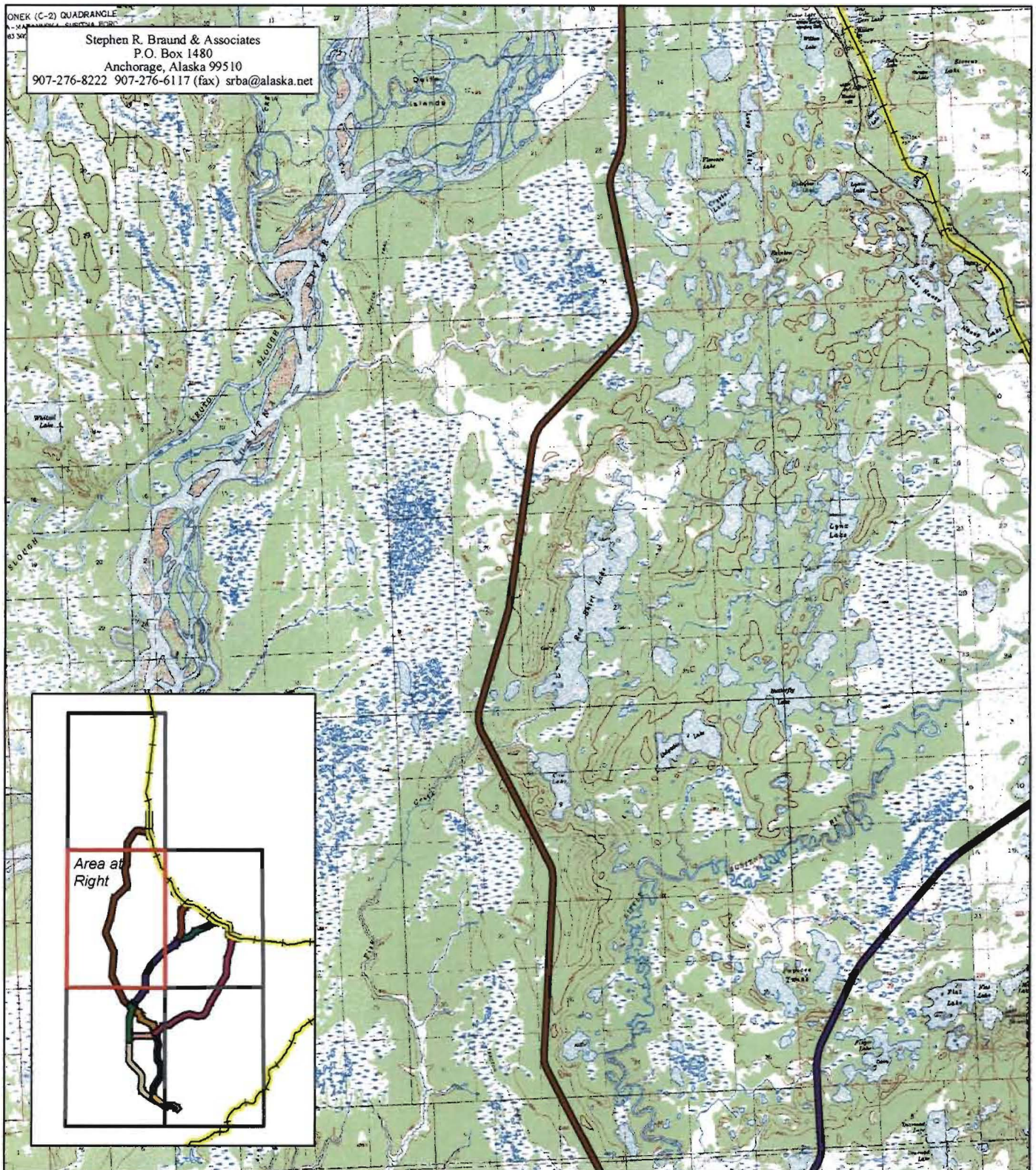
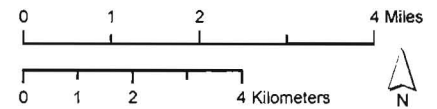


Figure 4: Proposed Project, Tyonek B1

Proposed Alternative

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
|  Big Lake |  Houston |  Mac East Terminal Reserve |
|  Conn 1 |  Mac East |  Mac West Terminal Reserve |
|  Conn 2 |  Mac West | |
|  Conn 3 |  Willow | |

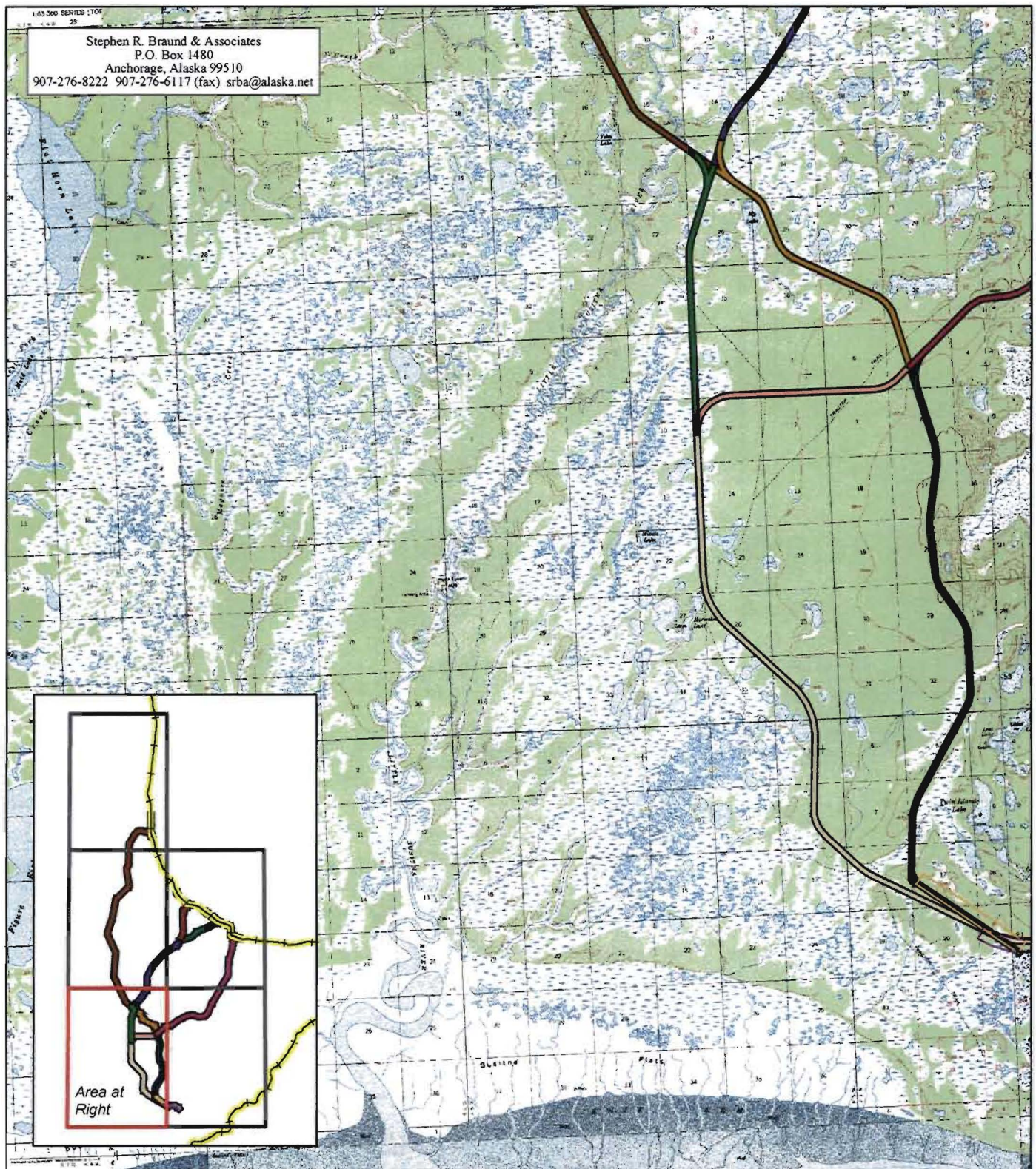
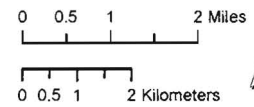


Figure 5
Proposed Project, Anchorage B8

Proposed Alternative

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Big Lake |  Mac East Terminal Reserve |
|  Mac West |  Mac West Terminal Reserve |

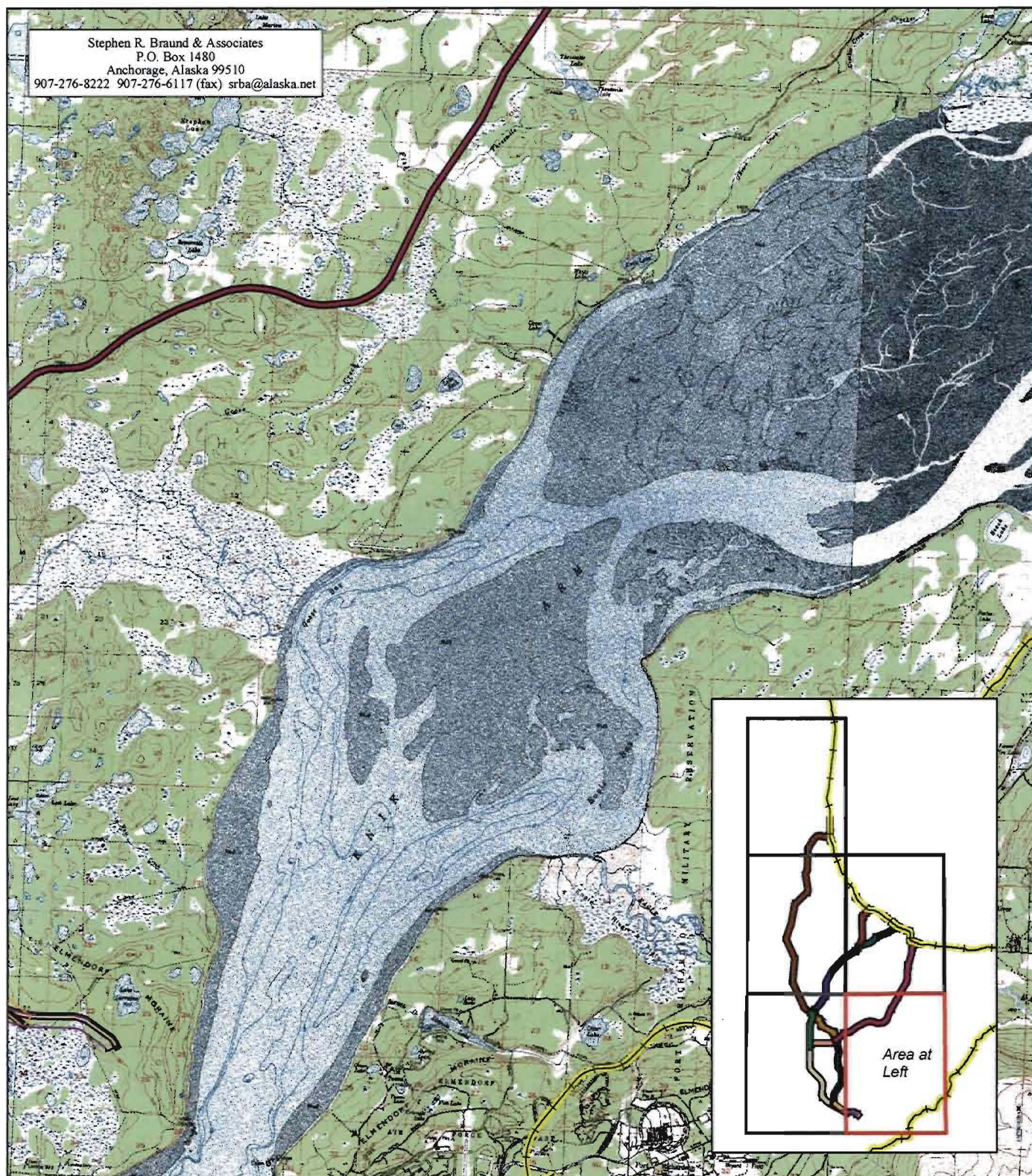
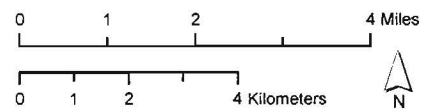


Figure 6 **Proposed Project, Anchorage C8**

Proposed Alternative

— Big Lake — Houston North —+— Alaska Railroad Track
— Houston — Houston South

