



SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration

February 6, 2009

Ms. Ann Rappaport
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office
605 West 4th Avenue, Rm G-61
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 35095, The Alaska Railroad Corporation – Petition for Exemption to Construct and Operate a Rail Line Extension to Port MacKenzie, Alaska

Dear Ms. Rappaport:

We are writing you to initiate Section 7 consultations under the Endangered Species Act associated with a proposed rail line project in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska.

Project Description

The proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension would involve the construction and operation of a new rail line connecting the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Port MacKenzie in south-central Alaska to a point on the Alaska Railroad Corporation's (ARRC) existing main line between Wasilla and north of Willow, Alaska (see enclosed map). ARRC has stated that the proposed rail line would provide freight services between the Port and Interior Alaska. Major elements of the proposed rail extension would include between 30 and 45 miles of new railroad track; a 200-foot-wide right-of-way; crossings of local roads, streams, trails, and utility corridors; sidings; and ancillary facilities. The anticipated train traffic would be two trains daily on average, with one train of 40 to 80 freight cars per day traveling in each direction.

Construction and operation of the proposed rail line requires authorization from the Surface Transportation Board (STB). A decision by the STB would be a "major Federal action" under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the STB has assumed the lead agency role in the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed project. The STB's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is the office within the agency responsible for preparing the EIS as well as the agency's compliance with other Federal environmental statutes and regulatory programs.

Section 7 Consultations

SEA is requesting information regarding the presence of threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat in the project area. A review of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) Consultation Guide Map for the Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office indicated that no listed species or designated critical habitats are found in the project area. Please confirm the accuracy of our determination in writing to:

David Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001
Attention: STB Finance Docket No. 35095

Mr. David Navecky is the SEA Project Manager for the project. ICF International is serving as SEA's independent third-party consultant, assisting with the ESA Section 7 consultation. Mr. Alan Summerville is ICF's Project Manager for the project.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the project, please do not hesitate to contact Dave Navecky at 202-245-0294 or Alan Summerville at 703-934-3616. Thank you for your assistance.

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

