



SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration

February 5, 2009

SEE DISTRIBUTION LIST

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

To whom it may concern:

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) proposes to build a rail connection to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's port at Port MacKenzie – referred to as the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension. A license from the Surface Transportation Board (STB) is a prerequisite for the construction and operation of the proposed rail line by ARRC. As part of the process for considering whether to grant such a license, the STB has initiated the Section 106 consultation process for the project with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), under the National Historic Preservation Act. The purpose of this letter is to ask the assistance of your organization in identifying cultural resources in the Port MacKenzie project area, and to learn whether your organization is interested in participating as a Consulting Party in the Section 106 process for the project.

Background

The Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is the office within the STB responsible for preparing the appropriate documentation for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act as well as 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 (see attached figures). 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.

Cultural Resources Review

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 the sites 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 near the Area of Potential Effect (APE), and a review of available literature pertaining to the project area. The STB is initiating consultation with potential Consulting Parties on this project, including Native American tribal organizations. A field survey and additional consultations with local Native groups, the SHPO, and other interested parties will be completed, as warranted. Interested parties will be kept informed of any new field activity.

Ways You May Choose to Participate

The attached form provides you with several options on how you may choose to participate in ongoing consultations. The STB also requests your assistance in identifying cultural resources in the proposed project area. Please refer to the attached figures depicting the project area including the alternative routes. We are requesting information about places that you believe could be affected by the proposed project so that we can consider impact avoidance strategies. If you have information regarding cultural resources that could be affected by the proposed project, please identify and describe the subject properties, and return that information with the enclosed form. We also would be pleased to discuss with you any confidential concerns you may identify, as well as project details.

Your timely response will greatly assist us in incorporating your concerns into the EIS. For that purpose, we respectfully request that you complete the enclosed consultation options form and forward it to SEA within thirty days of your receipt of this correspondence. If we do not receive a response from you by March 16, 2009, we will assume that you have no concerns regarding historic properties that could be affected by the proposed project.

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. Thank you for your time and efforts in assisting us.

Sincerely,



Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

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

Enclosures:
Figures 1-6
Project Consultation Options Form

Distribution List:

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**Options for Consultations with the Surface Transportation Board
Regarding the Alaska Railroad Corporation's Proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension**

[Name of Organization]

Requested Consultation Status

Please check the appropriate response(s) from the list below and use the back of this form or additional sheets if you wish to make comments:

_____ There are no known historic properties present or within the vicinity of the proposed project and further consultation is not requested.

_____ There are or may be historic properties present or within the vicinity of the proposed project, further consultation is requested, and we would like to be considered a Consulting Party.

_____ We have no interest associated with this proposed project and further consultation is not required.

Contact Information

If you have chosen to participate in further consultation with SEA, please indicate the manner in which you wish to continue consultation by providing the relevant contact information below:

Mail Address:

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Other (please describe):

Printed Name of Designated Contact for this Project

Phone: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

[Name and Title of Organization Representative]

Please mail to: Dave Navecky, SEA Project Manager, Surface Transportation Board, 395 E Street, SW Washington, DC 20423. Or, fax to: Dave Navecky at 202-245-0454

 Alaska Railroad Track

Map Sheet

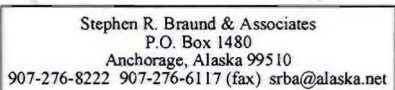


Figure 2
Proposed Project, Tyonek D1

Proposed Alternative

 Willow

 Alaska Railroad Track

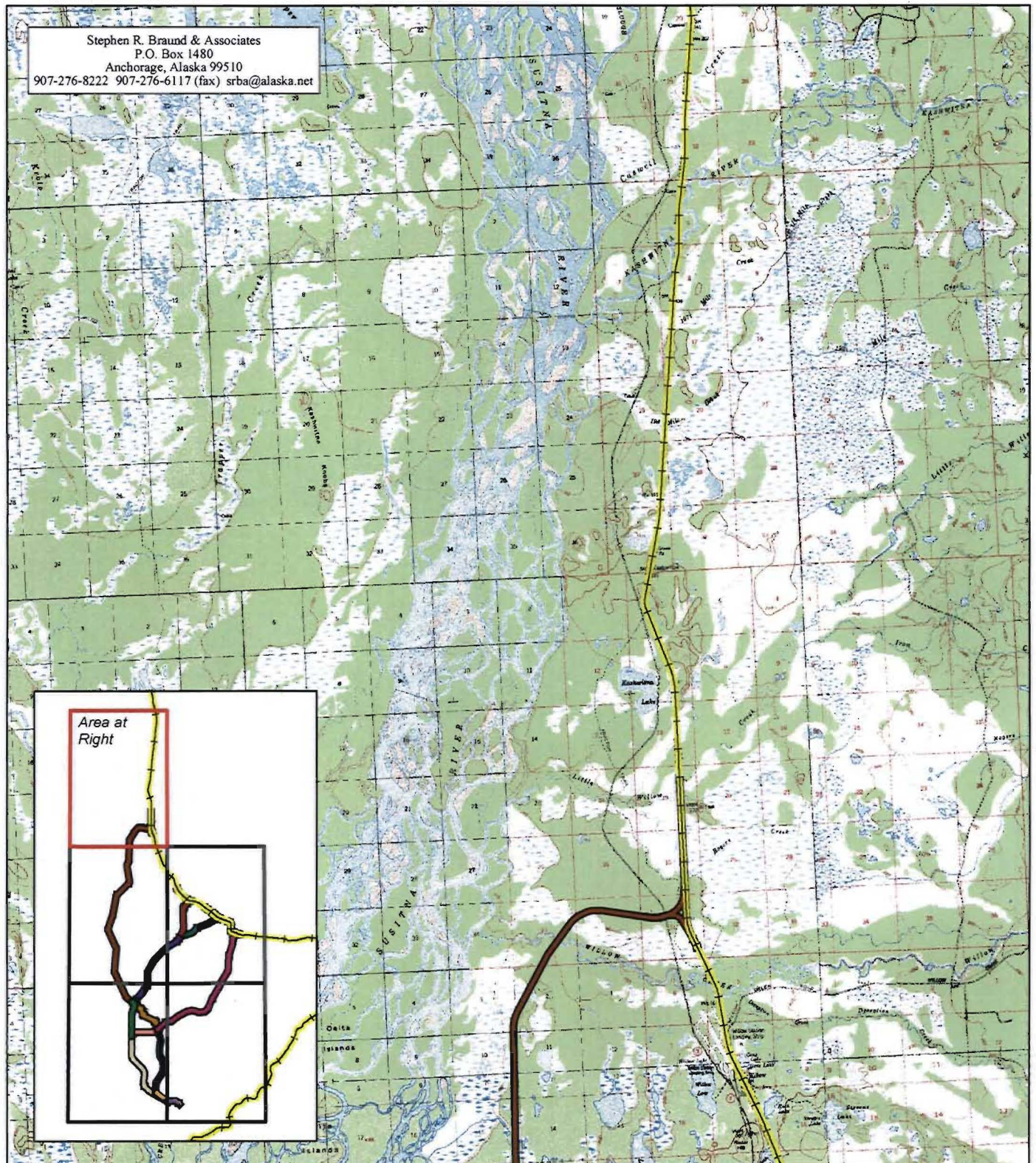
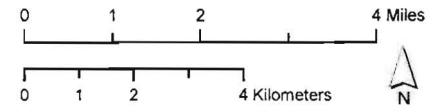


Figure 3
Proposed Project, Tyonek C1

Proposed Alternative

 Houston

 Willow

 Alaska Railroad Track

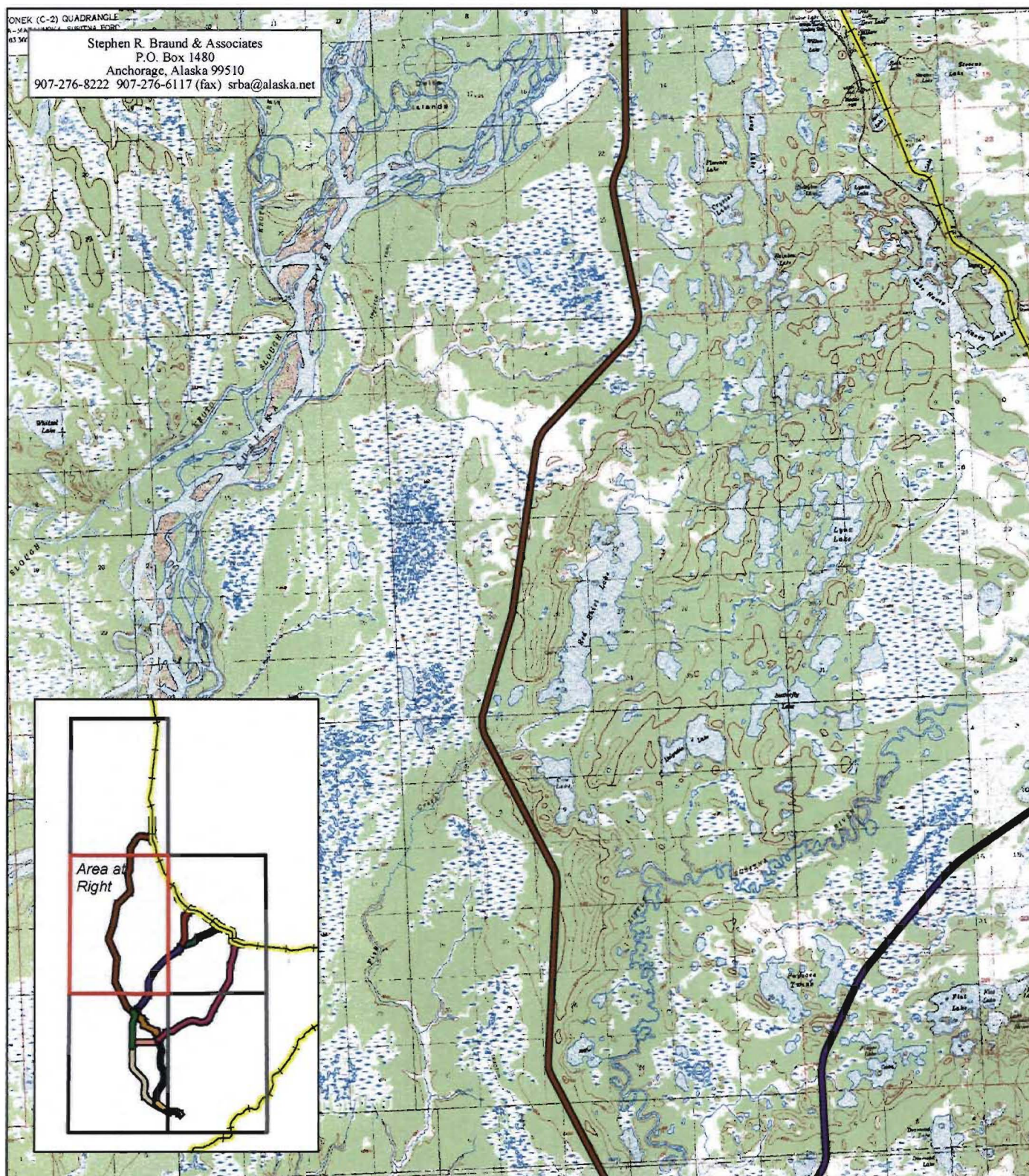
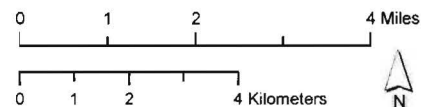


Figure 4: Proposed Project, Tyonek B1

Proposed Alternative

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

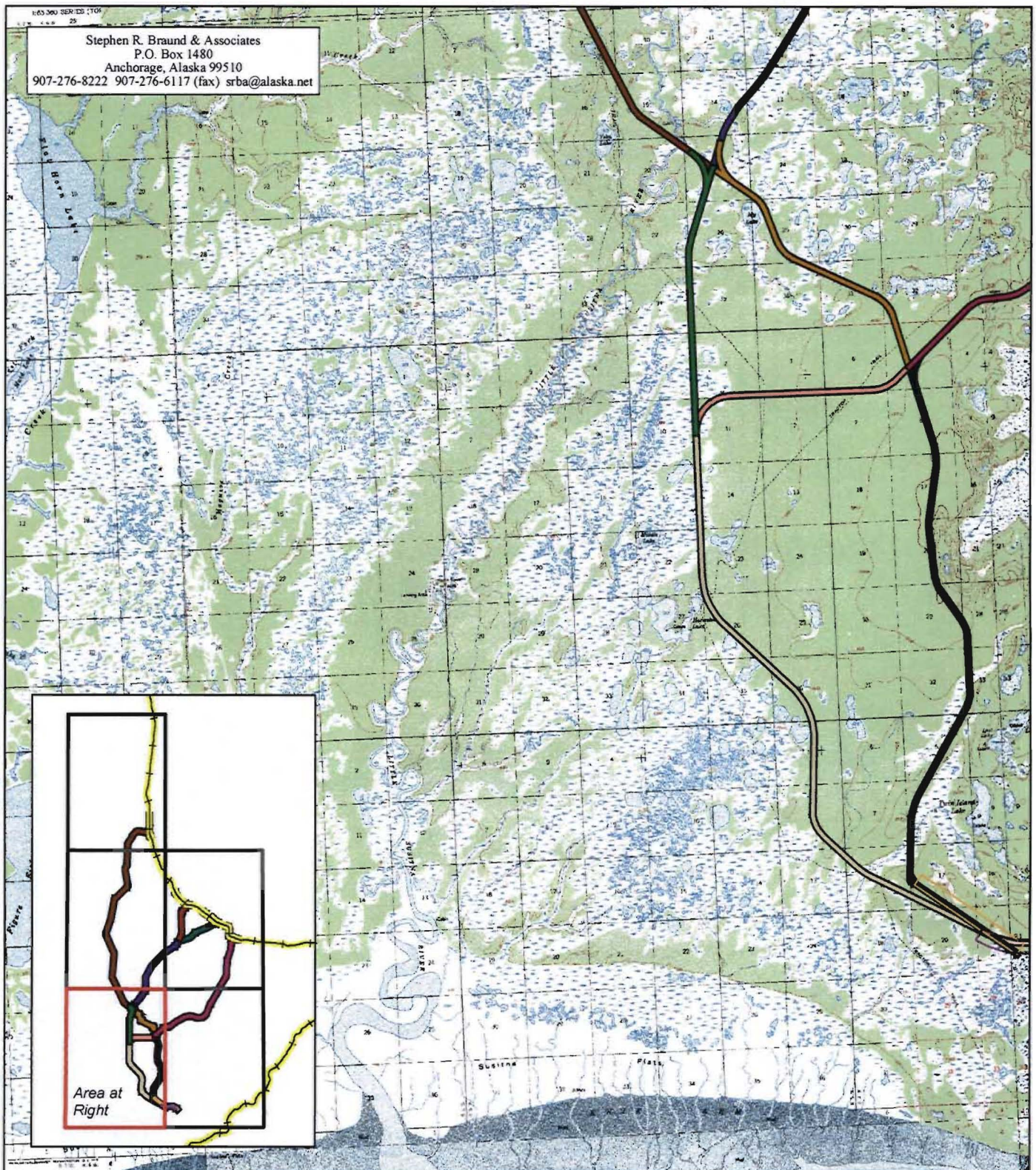
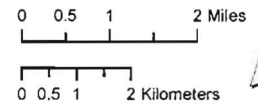


Figure 5
Proposed Project, Anchorage B8

Proposed Alternative

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

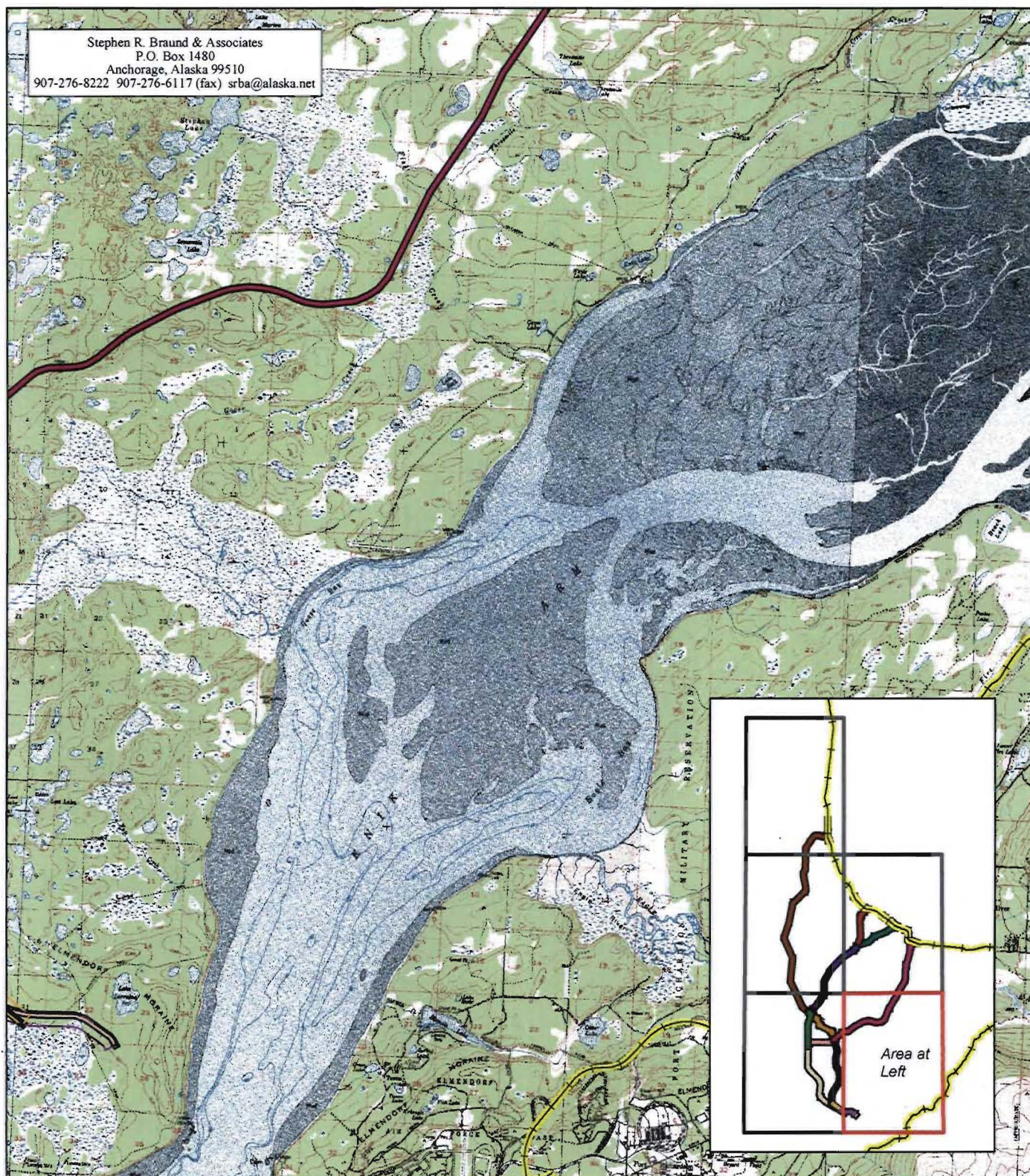
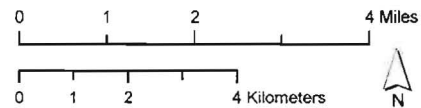


Figure 6
Proposed Project, Anchorage C8

Proposed Alternative

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

