

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS IN DOCKET NO. AB 6 (Sub-No. 491X)

October 23, 2015

ABANDONMENT TYPE

The time for comments on the Environmental Assessment (EA) has expired in this:

(X) Notice of Exemption () Petition for Exemption () Regulated Abandonment

() **NO NEW COMMENTS WERE RECEIVED**

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The Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) served an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this proceeding on October 5, 2015 for public review and comment. In the EA, OEA recommended three environmental conditions and concluded that the proposed action would not significantly impact the quality of the human environment.

Background

As noted in the EA for this proceeding, BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) proposes to abandon an approximately 0.45 mile line of railroad in St. Joseph, Stearns County, Minnesota (the Line). Should abandonment authority be granted, BNSF states that the Line would be incorporated into the Lake Wobegon Trail, a 62 mile long pedestrian and biking trail system that extends from St. Joseph to Osakis, Minnesota. BNSF intends to salvage track and ties, but would not remove ballast or alter the underlying right-of-way.

In consultation with the Minnesota Historical Society (the State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO), OEA determined that the rail line proposed for abandonment is part of the Collegeville Segment of the Great Northern Railroad and is a historic property eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (the National Register). Pursuant to Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act, OEA concluded that the proposed abandonment would not adversely affect the College Segment of the Great Northern Railroad because the right-of-way would be preserved as part of the Lake Wobegon Trail. Because there are no other historic sites or structures located with the rail right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect or APE), OEA determined that the proposed abandonment would have no adverse effect on historic properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register.

OEA informed the SHPO of its finding on October 5, 2015. In order to allow adequate time for the SHPO to concur with or object to OEA's finding of no adverse effect, OEA recommended a condition in the EA that would require BNSF to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic properties within the project APE until completion of the Section 106 process.

Comments on the EA

During the EA comment period, OEA received comments from the SHPO, in which the SHPO concurs with OEA's finding of no adverse effect on historic properties within the APE for the proposed abandonment. The Section 106 process for this proceeding is therefore concluded. Accordingly, OEA recommends that the condition requiring BNSF to retain its interest in and to take no steps to alter historic properties located within the APE should not be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority in this proceeding.

Conclusions

The EA comment period has ended. OEA recommends that the condition requiring BNSF to retain its interest in and to take no steps to alter historic properties located within the APE should not be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority in this proceeding. OEA recommends that the other two conditions previously recommended in the EA should remain unchanged. The remaining conditions are:

- 1. Prior to the commencement of any salvage activities, BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) shall consult with the National Geodetic Survey (NGS). If NGS identifies geodetic station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment, BNSF shall notify NGS at least 90 days prior to beginning salvage activities that will disturb or destroy any geodetic station markers in order to plan for the possible relocation of the geodetic station markers by NGS.**
- 2. Prior to commencement of any salvage activities, BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) shall consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to assess potential impacts to the northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), or other federally listed threatened or endangered species and identify any appropriate mitigation measures that may be warranted.**

If the above conditions are imposed, OEA believes that the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

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