



SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration

April 13, 2009

Ms. Judith Bittner
State Historic Preservation Officer
Alaska 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, The Alaska Railroad Corporation – Petition for
Exemption to Construct and Operate a Rail Line to Port MacKenzie, Alaska

Dear Ms. Bittner:

In a letter dated June 19, 2008, the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) 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 (1) provide you with a summary and notes (see Attachment 1) of a Section 106 consultation meeting held February 27, 2009 with the Knik Tribal Council, Dena'ina Cultural Historian from the Alaska Native Heritage Center, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough Historical Commission representatives, and (2) request concurrence with SEA's proposed approach to the Dena'ina landscape.

Steve Braund of Stephen R. Braund and Associates (SRB&A) represented SEA at the February 27 meeting. SRB&A is a member of the third-party contracting team that is assisting SEA in its environmental review and 106 consultations for the proposed project. During the meeting, the Knik Tribal Council indicated its desire to have the discussion of Dena'ina be broadened to a cultural landscape level in addition to prehistoric and ethnographic resources. The Knik Tribal Council also suggested that the Dena'ina discussion address the contemporary cultural practices of the Dena'ina and how these practices reflect their past, as well as to show the Dena'ina as a living component of today's landscape. SEA agrees with the Knik Tribal Council's recommendation to evaluate certain aspects of the Dena'ina landscape within the Area of Potential Effects for the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension. SEA requests concurrence from the SHPO on this approach, and would like to consult further with you on the scope of this identification effort. We will contact you in the near future to discuss this identification effort.

If you have any questions, please contact Dave Navecky, SEA's Project Manager, at 202-245-0294, or Alan Summerville of ICF International, Project Manager for SEA's third-party contracting team, at 703-934-3616.

Sincerely,



Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

Attachment

cc: Doug Gasek
State Historic Preservation Officer
Alaska Department of Natural Resources
550 W. 7th Ave., Suite 1310
Anchorage, AK 99501-3565
doug.gasek@alaska.gov

Stephanie Ludwig
State Historic Preservation Officer
Alaska Department of Natural Resources
550 W. 7th Ave., Suite 1310
Anchorage, AK 99501-3565
stephanie.ludwig@alaska.gov

Debra Call
Knik Tribal Council President
PO Box 871565
Wasilla, Alaska 99687-1565
Phone: 907-373-7991
dcall@kniktribe.org
dcall@alaskanative.net

Delia Call
Knik Tribal Council Secretary Treasurer
PO Box 871565
Wasilla, Alaska 99687-1565
Phone: 907-373-7991

Aaron Leggett
Dena'ina Cultural Historian
Alaska Native Heritage Center
8800 Heritage Center Drive
Anchorage, Alaska 99504
Phone: 907-330-8000
Fax: 907-330-8030
info@alaskanative.net

Fran Seager-Boss
Matanuska Susitna Borough Historic Commission
Matanuska Susitna Borough
350 East Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, Alaska 99645
fseagerboss@matsugov.us

Dan Stone
Matanuska Susitna Borough Historic Commission
Matanuska Susitna Borough
350 East Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, Alaska 99645

ATTACHMENT 1

Meeting Notes February 27, 2009

Meeting Attendees:

Name	Organization
Stephen R. Braund	Stephen R. Braund and Associates
Paul Lawrence	Stephen R. Braund and Associates
Debra Call	Knik Tribal Council, President
Delia Call	Knik Tribal Council, Secretary Treasurer
Aaron Leggett	Dena'ina Cultural Historian, Alaska Native Heritage Center
Fran Seager-Boss	Matanuska Susitna Borough Historic Commission
Dan Stone	Matanuska Susitna Borough Historic Commission

Meeting Summary:

The majority of the meeting focused on Knik Tribal Council's desire to have the discussion of Dena'ina be broadened to a cultural landscape level and focus on not only prehistoric and ethnographic resources, but also the contemporary cultural practices of the Dena'ina and how these practices reflect their past as well as show the Dena'ina as a living part of the landscape today.

The meeting began with overview of the project, discussion of project areas of potential effect (APE) and description of 2008 fieldwork survey efforts and results. Both the Knik Tribe and the MSB representatives had not read the consultation letters sent by the Surface Transportation Board (STB) and were unaware if their organizations had received the letters. During this portion of the meeting both entities made very few comments regarding SRB&A's methodology toward defining the project APEs and summary of 2008 fieldwork survey efforts and generally seemed to agree with SRB&A's approach.

SRB&A then proceeded to discuss the results of the dog sledding, recreation, homesteading, and agricultural cultural landscape research that was recommended by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) during a March 5, 2008 meeting. The Knik Tribal Council representatives strongly asserted that this approach was slanted toward a discussion of post-contact Euroamerican landscapes, and lacked any analysis or recognition of a Dena'ina cultural landscape in the study area. The Knik Tribal Council indicated that this approach relegated the discussion of Dena'ina to a simple documentation of individual cultural resource sites with no recognition of the broader cultural landscape of the Dena'ina in the study area as well as the ongoing cultural practices of Dena'ina descendants in the study area. They contended that the typical literature review and site documentation of Dena'ina in the study area was not adequate and that their culture was as deserving of a cultural landscape discussion as the other potential

landscapes of dog sledding, recreation, homesteading, and agriculture. Several related themes that the Knik Tribe reiterated several times during this discussion included:

- Previous documentation of the Dena'ina culture has not captured the contemporary cultural ties to the study area, and a discussion of a Dena'ina cultural landscape would demonstrate such a connection. The theme of Dena'ina trails was brought up several times as an important component of the Dena'ina landscape within the study area.
- Cultural resource work should attempt to move beyond cultural preservation to cultural revitalization.
- There is a need for cultural resource analyses to bridge the prehistoric with contemporary cultural practices.
- The Tribe is tired of being characterized as "prehistoric." They want acknowledgement of contemporary Dena'ina culture and how it ties to the past.
- Impact from rail extension was a barrier that the rail would create to access to cultural sites, trails, and areas

The MSB Historical Commission representatives agreed with the Knik Tribal Council's concerns regarding documentation of Dena'ina cultural resources and concurred that this documentation needed to expand to a broader cultural landscape discussion.

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of the potential impacts to the Dena'ina cultural landscape created by the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension. The Knik Tribal Council discussed that besides the destruction of cultural resources within the rail line right-of-way, the main impact to their culture would be the restrictions in access to cultural sites, trails, and areas created by the rail extension. They claimed that the rail would create a legal barrier that would restrict access to culturally important areas, as well as prevent culturally important activities such as hunting, due to railroad regulations that limit such activities within certain distances of the rail line.