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Attached, find my comments on the Tongue River Railroad DEIS. Please ensure that they get entered into the record. -
Carolyn Walker

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COMMENTS ON THE TONGUE RIVER RAILROAD, DOCKET #30186

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My name is Carolyn Walker, and I am a member of Northern Plains Resource Council. For twenty years, I lived and raised (not single handedly obviously) my three daughters on a ranch near the little town of Birney, MT. Birney is directly adjacent to the Tongue River. This river in the midst of semi-arid land is the life blood for many hundreds of square miles around and along it and its tributaries. This river serves the area's long-time ranching communities (my grandchildren are the 5th generation to live on their ranch near the Tongue). The river not only serves to irrigate adjacent crop lands but it has also provided life-giving drinking water to grass and other plants as well as wildlife, livestock and families from both the ranching communities all along it and the Northern Cheyenne tribe indigenous to the area for many hundreds of years.

The subject of this railroad came to the top of our awareness in the late 1970's and early 1980's. It was so improbable at that time that we could not imagine how a few private entities could conceive of building a railroad just to haul coal from mines that some neighbors were determined would come from their land along the river. We were concerned then, as residents are now, by the impacts coal development would have on our community, and worked hard on those impacts to some significant successes. I was invite to Washington, D.C. in 1978 to a White House reception when the federal Strip Mine Reclamation Act (SMCRA) was passed and signed into law by President Carter.

People in this area have always understood the value of river and stream valleys. As a result, we worked successfully to get a provision written into SMCRA which prohibits mining coal in or near "Alluvial Valley Floors". I think many of us though that there would be no mines along the Tongue with this provision in place. That thinking was augmented by the improbable audacity of allowing condemnation of private farm and ranch lands by a private for-profit entity for the purpose of hauling one commodity only. It was an outrageous justification for eminent domain then, and it remains one now.

Then along came the concept of the OTTER CREEK mine (Excuse me I meant hoped-for-plans for that mine, given its speculative nature). Now Otter creek is a tributary of the Tongue, but the proposed mine is quite a long distance from it. It is also an alluvial valley floor- most of the area's water is underground. To get from the river to Otter Creek would demand another railroad spur.

What must be understood about this area is that it is really sparsely populated. In order to have both the railroad and the mine (keep in mind you can't have one without the other) entire new communities must be developed. People, and perhaps families, to build and operate the railroad and another community to develop and operate the mine. Good communities don't spring up out of the head of Zeus! Neither the community of Birney or Otter Creek or Ashland or Forsyth or is large enough to build enough houses schools or shops in a short time. There would likely be "man camps" and other social ills such as are found in the Bakken fields in North Dakota.

In addition to impacts to the human community of southeastern Montana, the Tongue River Railroad and Otter Creek mine would impact wildlife communities as well. Wildlife (elk, bears, etc.) have been appearing in that region in recent years that had not been seen there previously, likely because of increasing development along the foothills and in the Big Horns. Industrializing the Otter Creek and Tongue River Valleys will have a negative impact on these wildlife populations.

Aside from the environmental destruction of river water and land, ground water, grass, livestock, wildlife and human life, there is no need for the coal or the railroad. If the coal is destined go to China and other far eastern places then, though we don't see the energy, surely of course it will come back to us in carbon dioxide and other poisons. There is NO SUCH THING AS CLEAN COAL!! IT IS FILTHY ONCE IT IS MINED.

The impacts of the Tongue River Railroad (and connected Otter Creek coal mine) extend beyond southeastern Montana. If in the most extreme case that both are developed, there will be a dramatic increase in coal trains through towns like Livingston, Great Falls, and Missoula, MT, as well as towns in Washington state and/or Oregon. Then when all that coal is loaded on ships and taken the thousands of miles across the Pacific ocean and is unloaded in China, it will have air quality impacts when it is burned there as well.

I cannot imagine the perceived rationale for this railroad – the human and environmental impacts; the impacts to ranching communities and ranch land, sacred Native sites and dwellings- all because the Federal government thinks it is economical and productive to disregard the cultures and environments along the entire route the coal would follow. I shudder to think of the power of Eminent Domain being given to private entities to condemn land, water and communities across all of the northwestern part of the nation.

If it were even partially environmentally or economically sound to develop these projects it would be somewhat understandable to run many trains through little communities for the benefits, right? That is not the case here, and it is wrong, WRONG! WRONG! to cause that much destruction for that little return. This is especially true given the shenanigans the government is pulling in terms of giving special pricing breaks to coal companies for the Federal coal.

In sum, because of the impacts to the Tongue River ranching community where I used to live, the downrail community where I now live, and the rest of the country and world, I request that the Surface Transportation Board select the 'no action' alternative and deny the permit application for the Tongue River Railroad.