

Joan L. Brownell

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Surface Transportation Board
Case Control Unit
Washington, D. C. 20423

RE: STB Docket No. FD 30186 (Sub-No. 3)
Tongue River Railroad

To whom it may concern:

This letter is written in protest of the proposed Tongue River Railroad now under consideration by the Surface Transportation Board. It is my strong belief that this railroad is not necessary and will disturb one of Montana's pristine cultural landscapes and turn the Tongue River Valley into an industrial zone.

In the past few years, I have had the opportunity to conduct historic research in relation to the Tongue River Valley for both state and federal agencies. My research has involved studying both the ranching history and Northern Cheyenne history in the Tongue River Valley and therefore has allowed me to understand the importance of the valley from two different perspectives.

The Northern Cheyennes traveled, hunted and camped extensively in the Tongue River Country, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century. One of the pivotal battles of the Great Sioux War, the Battle at Belly Butte, occurred along the Tongue River in early 1877. Beginning in 1881 and for almost 20 years, Northern Cheyenne families lived on the east side of the Tongue River and considered the right to homestead these lands a promise to them by the United States government. Although removed from the east side in 1900, many Northern Cheyenne today feel that the land was only leased temporary to the government and should have been returned to the Northern Cheyenne.

The Northern Cheyenne homesteads that existed within the valley bottom along the east side of the Tongue River are important to the Northern Cheyenne people as many think of it as their "homeland." Further investigations should determine the locations of these homesteads along the Tongue River and the sites protected. According to Bill Tallbull, the late tribal historian, the Tongue River served as their last refuge and a "place where they were able to survive and come together as a people." The valley is therefore a significant cultural landscape to the Northern Cheyenne people.

The Tongue River Valley also is a significant cultural landscape to the ranching community who settled along the Tongue River Valley beginning in the early 1880s. It is

this isolated, rough dry terrain where ranching families have struggled to survive for over 100 years. The Bones Brothers Ranch on Hanging Woman Creek, a tributary of Tongue River, recently has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This ranch reflects the evolution of the livestock industry and land settlement of the Tongue River Valley and also operated for many years as a dude ranch. Settled in the late nineteenth century, the Bones Brothers Ranch and others, like the Quarter Circle U Ranch and the Three Circle Ranch, are just a few of the historic ranches still operating within the Tongue River Valley. The significance of these historic ranches along the Tongue River needs to be properly addressed. There are only a few valleys in Montana that have the ability to reflect their historic ranching heritage as strongly as the Tongue River Valley.

The cultural and environmental impacts of this proposed railroad will affect both the historic ranching community and the Northern Cheyenne people. Both peoples hold strong cultural ties to this landscape. The numerous threats that the proposed Tongue River railroad presents to the environment that composes this landscape in terms of air and water quality, wildlife and fisheries need further study. Today, there are few visual intrusions to the landscape of the Tongue River Valley that affect its historic values.

Under the Historic Preservation Act, the historic resources of the Tongue River Valley have not received adequate investigation and evaluation. None of these historic resources have been thoroughly considered relative to the undertaking of the construction of the railroad. The existence of several National Register properties, including the Bones Brothers Ranch and Wolf Mountains Battlefield (Battle at Belly Butte) sets a precedent for recognition of the cultural landscape of the Tongue River. The introduction of the Tongue River railroad will destroy the historic relationships held by both the Northern Cheyenne people and the ranching community within the Tongue River Valley.

I ask you to give due recognition to the cultural landscape of the Tongue River Valley. The numerous irreversible impacts of this proposed railroad to the cultural landscape of the Tongue River Valley are not acceptable. In the climate that our country lives in today, it is important to recognize and protect these places that still reflect our cultural heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Joan L. Brownell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Joan L. Brownell