



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

EI-18038

BUREAU OF FORESTRY

February 4, 2010

PNDI Numbers: 20406, 19648, and 20163

Kevin Starner
Skelly and Loy, Inc.
Fax: 717-232-1799

Re: RJ Corman Railroad Co., Proposed Beech Creek Branch Line Construction and Operation between Wallacetown and Gorton, PA
Various Townships, Clearfield and Centre Counties,

Dear Mr. Starner,

Thank you for submission of the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) Environmental Review Receipt Numbers 20406, 19648, and 20163 for review. PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources screened this project for potential impacts to species and resources of concern under DCNR's responsibility, which includes plants, terrestrial invertebrates, natural communities, and geologic features only.

Our office received the original railroad alternative of this project in April of 2008 and responded in June providing information on species known to be found in the vicinity including *Sparganium angrocladum*, *Prunus alleghaniensis*, *Polygonum careyi*, *Stellaria borealis*, *Gaultheria hispidula* and *Lonicera villosa*. A survey was performed by Skelly & Loy for the species listed above on July 16 and September 24, 2008. The results of this survey were received in our office November 12, 2008. Our response to the survey findings was sent on December 2, 2008.

Our office received the new railroad alternative of this project in May of 2009 and responded in June requesting a survey for *Sparganium angrocladum*, *Prunus alleghaniensis*, *Polygonum careyi*, *Stellaria borealis*, *Gaultheria hispidula* and *Lonicera villosa*. A survey was performed by Skelly & Loy for the species listed above between June and September 2009. The results of the survey were received in our office December 7, 2009. The survey for the railroad alternative did not find any individuals of *Prunus alleghaniensis*, *Polygonum careyi*, *Stellaria borealis*, *Gaultheria hispidula*, or *Lonicera villosa* within the area that will be disturbed. The survey found one location of a *Sparganium* species that could not be identified. Thus another field visit in 2010 is required for species identification.

Our office received the local road upgrade alternative in October of 2009 and responded in October providing information on species known to be found in the vicinity of the project including *Prunus alleghaniensis*, and *Polygonum careyi*. A habitat assessment was performed in September 2009 by Skelly and Loy for the six species originally identified in the vicinity of this project. The habitat assessment found habitat that would likely support populations of *Sparganium angrocladum*, *Polygonum careyi*, *Stellaria borealis*, *Gaultheria hispidula* or *Lonicera villosa*. The assessment also found one area within the road alternative that had a species that could potentially be *Prunus alleghaniensis*.

As per Kevin Starner's request during our phone conversation on 1-26-2010, the following summarizes DCNR's understanding of the outcome of the investigations, as well as our concerns. This information is to be used for the draft EIS. Further surveys will be performed prior to any permit applications to confirm the identity of the *Sparganium* and *Prunus* species found during the field surveys.

- For the local road upgrade alternative - The habitat assessment determined that there was suitable habitat in the vicinity of the project for all six species. Additional surveys are requested if this alternative is pursued. Specifically individuals in the *Prunus* genus will be revisited in 2010 to confirm their identity to species level.
- For the new railroad alternative -- Field surveys performed in 2008 and 2009 helped determine the following:

Sparganium angrocladum (Branching Bur-reed)

Potential habitat was surveyed, including wetlands, swales and streams. *Sparganium* species were found in several of the wetlands. In the survey report, Skelly & Loy recommend that this wetland be revisited next field season to

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confirm the identity of the species. Some disturbance is planned to this species' habitat. Please verify the identity of this *Sparganium* specimen to the species level. Please include botanical field survey forms, maps showing areas surveyed for this species and photos of diagnostic characteristics.

Prunus alleghaniensis (Allegheny Plum)

Potential habitat was identified in the project right of way, however no individuals of *Prunus alleghaniensis* were found in the railroad alternatives. No impact anticipated to *Prunus alleghaniensis*, for the new railroad alternative.

Polygonum careyi (Pinkweed)

A few *Polygonum* species were found associated with wetlands and stream edges, but were not identified as *P. careyi*. In the survey report, Skelly & Loy determined that the *Polygonum* species were not species of special concern. No impact anticipated to *Polygonum careyi*, for the new railroad alternative.

Stellaria borealis (Mountain Starwort)

A few areas of potential habitat were found in project area, however, no Mountain starwort plants were found in any of those areas. No impact anticipated to *Stellaria borealis*, for the new railroad alternative.

Gaultheria hispidula (Creeping Snowberry)

A few areas of potential habitat were found in project area, however, no Creeping Snowberry plants were found in any of those areas. No impact anticipated to *Gaultheria hispidula*, for the new railroad alternative.

Lonicera villosa (Mountain Fly Honeysuckle)

A few areas of marginal habitat were found in project area, however, no Mountain fly honeysuckle plants were found in any of those areas. No impact anticipated to *Lonicera villosa*, for the new railroad alternative.

This response represents the most up-to-date summary of the PNDI data files and is valid for one (1) year from the date of this letter. An absence of recorded information does not necessarily imply actual conditions on-site. Should project plans change or additional information on listed or proposed species become available, this determination may be reconsidered.

Should the proposed work continue beyond the period covered by this letter, please resubmit the project to this agency as an "Update" (including an updated PNDI receipt, project narrative and accurate map). If the proposed work has not changed and no additional information concerning listed species is found, the project will be cleared for PNDI requirements under this agency for an additional year.

This finding applies to impacts to DCNR only. To complete your review of state and federally-listed threatened and endangered species and species of special concern, please be sure the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, PA Game Commission, and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission have been contacted regarding this project as directed by the online PNDI ER Tool found at www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us.

Sincerely,



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