

From: [Mbabaliye, Theogene](#)
To: [Assenza, Adam](#)
Cc: [Martin, Bradley](#)
Subject: Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project - DOCKET NO. FD 34936
Date: Monday, August 12, 2019 7:50:34 PM

Dear Mr. Assenza:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the draft supplemental environmental assessment for the proposed Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project in Grant County, Washington (EPA Region 10 Project Number 19-0042-STB). Our comments are provided pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR §§ 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The DSEA assesses potential environmental impacts associated with construction, operation and maintenance of an 11-mile-long railroad line in Grant County. This route would provide rail service to lands and properties designated for industrial development in the northern area of the City of Moses Lake, as well as to the eastern side of the Grant County International Airport (GCIA), to enhance opportunities for economic development, and to attract new rail-dependent businesses to those areas. After the initial analysis of the project in 2009, new circumstances and information led to the decision to analyze the project further and disclose the most current environmental impacts. We note that the original line segments 1 and 2 would be modified, resulting in a 0.5-mile reduction in the length of the route.

We believe the DSEA includes analysis of specific resources that would be impacted by the proposed action, nature of the potential impacts, and measures that would be followed to minimize impacts. We find that most of the potential impacts from the project appear to be related to construction activities, which would result in long-term noise and land use impacts, but also impacts on other resources including water and biological resources. Although mitigation measures would be applied to keep the impacts from becoming significant, we believe that it would be important to coordinate with other federal and state agencies throughout the implementation of the project to ensure that activities are conducted in a manner protective of human health and the environment. We recommend that the Final EA include additional clarifying information as discussed below:

Potential impacts on contaminated sites

- Because of the existence of contaminated sites in the project area and the possibility that more contaminated sites could be discovered during construction of the project, we recommend that the Surface Transportation Board coordinate with the EPA Superfund Program as the project is implemented so that the STB actions are consistent with agreed upon remedies for the contaminated sites cleanup. The EPA Manger for the Site is: Martin Bradley and he may be reached at 206-553-4029 or at martin.bradley@epa.gov.
- We also recommend the final EA include a monitoring program designed to assess both impacts from the projects and effectiveness of mitigation measures for the impacts. Please indicate how the program would use an effective feedback mechanism, such as through adaptive management, so that any needed adjustments can be made to the projects to meet environmental objectives during this project operations and maintenance. For example,

monitor emerging contaminants and take corrective action if pollutant levels exceed standards or pose risk to human health and the environment.

Potential impacts to water quality

As construction activities may impact water resources, particularly from increased turbidity and sedimentation of downstream waters at crossings of Crab Creek and irrigation canals, we recommend that the Final EA:

- Include information to demonstrate that the proposed action would comply with anti-degradation provisions of the Clean Water Act to prevent deterioration of water quality within waterbodies that currently meet WQSS;
- Discuss the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System or NPDES permit application process and measures to protect water quality. The DSEA indicates that the project construction would disturb a land area of one or more acres, which would subject it to the NPDES permitting requirements for discharges to waters of the United States and related Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, as well as construction best management practices;
- Provide the most current information regarding the status of the State of Washington Clean Water Act Section 401 certification and any conditions of the certification that assure the project would meet the state water quality standards; especially for temperature, dissolved oxygen and turbidity within the affected waters in the project area, e.g., the Crab Creek;
- Including the updated information on the CWA Section 404 application process with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The final EA should include any proposed mitigation measures for impacts to aquatic resources as a result of this project. The draft EA indicates that there wetlands in the project area that could be filled; and
- The STB coordinate with the Washington State Department of Ecology and all affected tribes to assure that state and tribal water resources are protected from impacts associated with the proposed project's construction and operation activities.

Potential impacts to biological resources

Since there are federal- and state-designated protection statuses for several species within the project study area, we recommend that:

- The Final EA include information on work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and as appropriate, with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife including recommended measures to reduce risks and protect biota and habitat. The draft EA indicates there are fish-bearing creeks and other threatened, endangered, candidate, sensitive species occurring within the project area, which could be impacted by the proposed project activities. Thus, the Final EA should include outcomes of consultations and coordination with the services and agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this DSEA and look forward to reviewing the Final EA when it will be available. If you have questions about our comments, please contact us for assistance.

Theo Mbabaliye, Ph.D.
USEPA Region 10
Regional Administrator's Division (RAD)
Policy & Environmental Review Branch (PERB)

1200 6th Ave., Suite 155, 14-D12
Seattle, WA 98101-3140
Phone: (206) 553-6322