



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200
Austin, Texas 78758
512 490-0057
FAX 490-0974

MAY 19 2005

#E1-1479
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Victoria Rutson
Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
Washington, DC 20423

Consultation # 2-15-03-I-0276

Dear Ms. Rutson:

This responds to your May 12, 2005, concurrence request for the construction of Southwest Gulf Railroad Company's (SGR) proposed rail line (Surface Transportation Board (STB) Finance Docket No. 34284) near the town of Quihi, Medina County, Texas. We understand STB has determined that the proposed construction is not likely to adversely affect the endangered golden-cheeked warbler (*Dendroica chrysoparia*), pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

Effects to the environment from the construction of the 7-mile (11-kilometer) proposed rail line were analyzed in STB's November 5, 2004, draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS summarizes field surveys initiated by STB that indicate that no habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler or the endangered black-capped vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*) exist along the rail line route. However, a proposed loading track that connects with the rail line on the adjacent proposed Vulcan quarry property may contain habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler. Vulcan performed three years of presence/absence surveys for the warbler in this area, and found no individuals of this species. Therefore, we agree the project as proposed is not likely to adversely affect the golden-cheeked warbler.

Projects in Medina County also have the potential to affect species associated with the Edwards Aquifer, particularly in the recharge zone. It appears that most of the rail line occurs downgradient of the recharge zone. The loading track is within, or in close proximity to, the aquifer recharge zone, but all fueling of rail cars and other activities that can result in release of hazardous materials will occur outside of the recharge zone.

No karst invertebrate species are listed in Medina County. However, they do occur in adjacent Bexar County. We appreciate the willingness of STB to use caution during work around karst features, as they may contain connections to karst features in Bexar County that can support the endangered species.

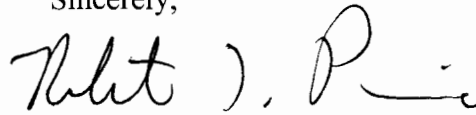


Ms. Rutson

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We thank you for your concern for endangered and threatened species and other natural resources, and we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed project. If we can be of further assistance or if you have any questions about these comments, please contact Jana Milliken at 512-490-0057, extension 243.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert T. Pine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert T. Pine
Supervisor