



◆ 6 County Shop Rd. ◆ PO Box 200 ◆ Broadus, MT 59317 ◆ (406)436-2405 ◆ JEsp@prco.mt.gov ◆

Surface Transportation Board,

My name is Jennifer Esp and I work for Powder River County, as the Weed Supervisor. I wish to comment on the proposed Tongue River Railroad Project. Railroad rights-of-ways are high risk sites for introduction, establishment and spread of noxious weeds. Weeds can be carried on vehicles, in the loads they carry and on the construction and maintenance equipment. They can be inadvertently introduced into rights-of-ways during restoration projects by use of contaminated mulch, soil or gravel, plants seed and sod. Noxious weeds established on Railroad sides can spread into adjacent non-infested areas and can also be transported to surrounding counties.

As stated in the Montana County Weed Act 7-22-2121, "the board shall provide for the management of noxious weeds on all land of rights of ways owned or controlled by a county or municipality within the district". Powder River County Weed District will manage these lands appropriately on an annual basis. Right of way management objectives include prevention, detection, suppression and eradication. Landowners that object to county ROW weed Control measures may enter into a Landowner Management Agreement pursuant to §7-22-2153, to Montana Code Annotated.

I have personally witnessed the spread of weeds in both the Montana Rail link and the Central Montana Rail Line. Actions need to be taken to prevent weed spread in both the construction and the operation of the proposed Tongue River Railroad.

Thanks,

Jennifer Esp, Powder River County Weed Supervisor

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