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November 6, 2000

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

As a landowner on property which has been in my family since 1928 along the Cheyenne River, this letter comes to register my adamant opposition to anything but Alternative A-No-Build on the proposed expansion by the D.M. & E. Railroad.

As for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement recently sent to me by the Surface Transportation Board, busy ranchers don't have time to wade through that kind of bureaucratic garbage. It is poorly organized, doesn't have an index, the graphs are illegible, the maps are wrong and hard to read. I cannot even tell whether or not the proposed route crosses my property.

Most likely it doesn't but I am on the very edge of it, thus will suffer all the bad affects without any compensation. These bad effects will include noise pollution of our presently quiet environment; pollution of the air and water by coal dust, diesel smoke, possible spilled contaminants such as diesel fuel with accidental derailments; prairie fires caused by trains, weed contamination from construction materials as well as trains carrying in seed from who knows where.

All of these matters won't even begin to compare with the devastation to my ranching operation from such an invasive corridor which will split my properties and a route over which I've trailed my cattle spring and fall since 1957. This is a full day's trail but is a matter of little consequence at present, because my cattle know the route and I've even moved them with one man a horse and a dog.

If a railroad came into the picture, who knows how many people and how much time it might take. There would definitely have to be a large underpass built, and I haven't even been contacted by any representatives of this proposed activity to see what my needs or concerns are. There has not even been an archaeological survey done, and I know of no on-site air or water quality testing which has been done.

The wildlife populations of this area will definitely be adversely impacted with any railroad. I have seen no statements on this damage.

One of the major concerns along this Cheyenne River drainage is the weed issue. The problem with leafy spurge and other noxious weeds has already been so bad we've had to form a Niobrara Resource Association in 1994 to try to deal with it. This problem is rampant on private lands as well as National Grasslands. There's no way any kind of construction won't make it worse. Any time the ground is broken and stirred up old weed seed which may have lain dormant for years will come up.

My wife supplements our income with a bed and breakfast tepee village, which is based on the natural environment, wildlife, peace and quiet we feel is our right to enjoy as property owners. Any rail development would effectively destroy all the hard work of five years planning and preparation as well as seven years developing the business into a very going concern. The changes any rail construction would make in this operation would raise issues which cannot be effectively mitigated.

The right to own property, and gain pleasure and profit from it, is among our earliest and most inalienable rights, which the government and its employees are supposed to be dedicated to preserving. There are papers out of our nation's capital stating that if trains can reach their destination on existing corridors no new railways should be built. Why aren't we following those directives?

No railroad, no way - that's my stand,

Du Wayne McGee
Du Wayne McGee

POST SCRIPT:

I've just heard, from a family member, of coal mines in the Thunder Basin closing down and terminating workers. Both Coal Creek and Bell Aire have shut down and people are being laid off from Cypress Amax mine.

With all this happening, why do you want to put more trains out there? There probably won't be enough coal production to keep the trains they already have busy. It's a pretty stupid idea, and the Surface Transportation Board should know about this already if they'd done their homework.