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To <David.Navecky@stb.dot.gov>

cc "'Alaska Outdoor Council'" <aoc@alaska.net>, "Wayne
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bcc

Subject Northern Rail Extension environmental review process

Dear Mr. Navecky:

I am providing comments on the review process on behalf of the Alaska Outdoor Council (AOC). The AOC is a statewide umbrella organization comprised of about 45 outdoors clubs and over a thousand individual members, with a total membership of about 10,000. The AOC's main purposes are to advocate scientific State management of fish, wildlife and their habitats, and the opportunities for the public to access and use those resources consistent with Alaska's constitutional protection of common use and equal access in the use of Alaska's renewable resources on a sustained yield.

First, I wish to note that the timing and duration of the comment period was too short at 45 days, and ill-timed, considering its overlap with traditional holidays compounded by the diversion of the inauguration of a new president.

Having inquired with the Citizens Advisory Commission on Federal Areas about the state of the review process, Mr. Leaphart forwarded your email to me in which you responded to his request for extended opportunities for public input.

I was surprised to learn that your Board apparently feels comfortable with the information you've received, since from what I've gleaned since returning to the State a week ago, many local people are not at all comfortable with what they learned about physical characteristics of the proposal and particularly regarding the paucity of firm proposals for year around outdoor access across the proposed railroad right of way.

Your email recommends contacting the Alaska Department of Natural Resources about public access on state lands. That is good but incomplete advice, since traditional outdoor access by various means involves substantial areas of federal lands on the Tanana Flats. Based on local feed-back about the consideration given to providing for public access to vast areas of both state and federal public lands, I am concerned that the importance of public access across the proposed railroad route and the potential effects on local resources and resource uses may be underestimated.

I recommend that your Board check their assumptions about the adequacy of public input, and reconsider extending those opportunities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Richard H. Bishop, President

Alaska Outdoor Council

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