

SERVICE DATE – DECEMBER 8, 2025

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Docket No. AB 312 (Sub-No. 6X)
South Carolina Central Railroad Company, LLC – Abandonment Exemption –
In Muscogee County, Ga.**

And

**Docket No. AB 1000 (Sub-No. 5X)
Georgia Southwestern Railroad, Inc. – Discontinuance Exemption –
In Muscogee County, Ga.**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, South Carolina Central Railroad Company, LLC (SCRF) and Georgia Southwestern Railroad, Inc. (GSWR) (jointly, the Applicants) filed a notice of exemption under 49 C.F.R. § 1152.50 seeking exemption from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10903 for SCRF to abandon a freight rail easement and GSWR to discontinue service in connection with a line of railroad in Muscogee County, Georgia. The rail line proposed for abandonment extends approximately 2.17 miles and consists of two connected rail segments. The first segment, known as the Dummy Line, extends from MP 0.60/Value Station 91+21 northeast of the 6th Street and 6th Avenue intersection to Value Station 41+60 southwest of the West 8th Street and Front Street intersection; the second segment, known as the Georgia Power Lead Track, extends from Value Station 0+00/59+79 northwest of the 6th Street and Front Street intersection to Value Station 41+61 south of the Columbus Civic Center in Columbus, GA (the Line). A map depicting the Line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA).

According to SCRF, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) owns the underlying right-of-way and physical assets of the Line. Because GDOT has no residual common carrier obligation to provide freight rail service over the Line, the entire common carrier obligation of any rail carrier to provide freight rail service over the Line would be extinguished with abandonment of the freight operating easement. If the notice becomes effective, SCRF states it would salvage the Line on behalf of GDOT to facilitate a City of Columbus repaving project on 6th Street should the Board grant abandonment authority.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

The Line is located in Columbus, Georgia, in an urban setting. According to SCRF the right-of-way is generally 20 feet wide. SCRF and GSWR states SCRF acquired the freight

operating easement from GSWR in 2002, and GSWR acquired the right to operate the Line by lease in the same transaction. At the same time, the GDOT acquired the underlying assets of the Line, but not the common carrier obligation. SCRF states no stations exist on the Line and that the last date of local service on the Line was in 2016. Based on a desktop review of the Line, OEA has determined that there are no structures (bridges, embankments, etc.) on the Line.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

SCRF submitted a combined environmental and historic report (E&H Report) that concludes the quality of the human environment would not be affected significantly as a result of the proposed abandonment of the Line, including salvage. SCRF served the E&H Report on a number of appropriate federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) environmental rules [49 C.F.R. § 1105.7(b)]¹ implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. The Board's Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

Diversion of Traffic

According to SCRF, no local traffic has moved over the Line over the last nine years, and there is no overhead traffic on the Line that would have to be rerouted. Therefore, the proposed abandonment would not result in the diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could result in significant impacts to air quality or the local transportation network. Nor would the proposed abandonment adversely impact the development, use and transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities or the transportation of ozone-depleting materials.

Salvage Activities

Impacts from salvage and disposal of a rail line typically include removal of tracks and ties, removal of ballast, dismantling of any bridges or other structures that may be present on the rail right-of-way, and regrading of the right-of-way. Salvage may be performed within the right-of-way, or, if necessary, via the construction of new access points to the right-of-way. If abandonment authority is granted, SCRF states it would salvage the Line on behalf of GDOT to facilitate a City of Columbus repaving project on 6th Street. No tree removal or new access points to the right-of-way are proposed. Based on a desktop review, OEA has concluded that there are no bridges, trestles, culverts, or tunnels located on the Line.

Land Use

SCRF considers the proposed abandonment to be consistent with existing land use plans. SCRF requested comments on the proposed abandonment from the Columbus Consolidated

¹ The E&H Report is available for viewing on the Board's website at www.stb.gov by clicking "Search STB Records;" selecting "Filings" in the "Search for" dropdown menu; entering ("AB" "312" "6" "X") or ("AB" "1000" "5" "X") sequentially in the four boxes for "Docket Number," then selecting "Search." The E&H Report was filed on September 16, 2025.

Government (CCG). By email, dated June 26, 2025, SCRF received a response from CCG stating that it had no environmental concerns with the track removal.

SCRF notified the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the proposed abandonment by letters dated June 15 and August 11, 2025. SCRF received responses from NRCS, on June 11 and August 12, 2025, stating that the proposed abandonment is completely contained within a U.S. Census Bureau designated urban area (Columbus, GA 19099) and is thus exempt from the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment. Therefore, no further action is needed for Farmland Protection Policy Act purposes. Accordingly, OEA concludes that the proposed abandonment would have no effect on prime agricultural land.

The Georgia Coastal Resources Division confirmed that the Line is not located within a Coastal Zone. Therefore, no further consultation under the Coastal Zone Management Act is required.

Hazardous Materials/Spills and Safety

SCRF states that the proposed abandonment would have no detrimental effects on public health and safety. There are no known hazardous waste sites or sites where there have been known hazardous material spills on the Line. Therefore, OEA concludes that the proposed abandonment is unlikely to affect the transportation of hazardous materials.

Biological Resources

SCRF requested comments from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regarding the potential impact of the proposed abandonment to protected wildlife, including federally listed threatened and endangered species. To date, USFWS has not provided comments. To identify protected species in the project area, OEA conducted a search of the USFWS’ Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system.² The following nine species may be present in the project area:

Protected Species That May Occur in the Project Area or be Affected by the Project	
Mammals	Status
Tricolored bat (<i>Perimyotis sublavus</i>)	Proposed Endangered
Birds	
Whooping crane (<i>Grus americana</i>)	Experimental Population, NE*
Reptiles	
Alligator snapping turtle (<i>Macrochelys temminckii</i>)	Proposed Threatened
Southern hognose snake (<i>Heterodon simus</i>)	Proposed Threatened
Insects	
Monarch butterfly (<i>Danaus plexippus</i>)	Candidate
Flowering Plants	

² U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Information for Planning and Consultation Tool (IPaC), <https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov> (OEA accessed on December 3, 2025, Project Code: 2026-0022054.)

Protected Species That May Occur in the Project Area or be Affected by the Project	
Fringed campion (<i>Silene polypetala</i>)	Endangered
Georgia rockcress (<i>Arabis georgiana</i>)	Threatened
Michaux's sumac (<i>Rhus michauxii</i>)	Endangered
Relict trillium (<i>Trillium reliquum</i>)	Endangered

*NE=Non-essential.

No critical habitat was identified within the proposed area of abandonment. OEA's search of the IPaC system also confirmed that there were no wildlife refuges within the area of the proposed abandonment.

Because the Line is in an urban landscape; salvage activities are not proposed in any grasslands, shrublands, or forested habitat; no bridges or culvert are located on the Line; and no critical habitat is present, OEA concludes that the proposed abandonment would have no effect on listed species. OEA is providing a copy of this Draft EA to the USFWS, Georgia Ecological Services Field Office and Georgia Wildlife Resources Division, for its review.

SCRf notified the National Park Service (NPS) of the proposed abandonment and requested assistance in identifying any potential effects on wildlife sanctuaries or refuges, National or State parks or forests. To date, NPS has not provided comments. Because the Line does not cross any wildlife sanctuaries or refuges, National or State parks or forests, OEA believes that no such area would be affected by the proposed abandonment.

Water Resources

SCRf requested assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Savannah District in identifying whether permits under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) would be required for the proposed abandonment. By email dated, August 13, 2025, SCRf received a response from USACE stating that the proposed abandonment crosses one of the Mobile District's federal projects (the Chattahoochee River), and it forwarded the information to the Mobile District Office. To date, USACE, Mobile District Office, has not replied. Because there are no stream crossings, no bridges on the Line, and the scope of salvage is limited, OEA believes that abandonment-related salvage activities would not require a permit under section 404 of the CWA, and that no waterways or wetlands would be affected. However, the Line passes through 100-year floodplains. Accordingly, OEA is providing USACE, Savannah and Mobile Districts, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) a copy of this Draft EA for its review.

SCRf requested assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Region 4 in identifying whether permits under Section 402 of the CWA are required for the proposed abandonment. To date, USEPA has not provided any comments. Accordingly, OEA is providing USEPA a copy of this Draft EA for review.

SCRf requested assistance from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) in identifying any potential effects on water quality standards. GA EPD provided a response by email dated, June 26, 2025, stating that if the proposed abandonment disturbs one acre or more, it will require coverage under the National Pollution Discharges Elimination

Discharge (NPDES) Permit for Storm Water Discharges Associated with Construction Activity. Accordingly, OEA is recommending that any decision granting abandonment authority include a condition requiring SCRF to consult with GA EPD prior to the commencement of any abandonment-related salvage to ensure appropriate consideration of NPDES requirements. OEA is providing GA EPD a copy of this Draft EA for review.

Air Quality and Noise

OEA believes air emissions associated with abandonment-related salvage activities would be temporary and would not have a significant impact on air quality. Similarly, any noise related to abandonment-related salvage activities would also be temporary and should not have a significant impact on the area surrounding the proposed abandonment.

Summary

Based on all information available to date, OEA does not believe that the proposed abandonment would cause significant environmental impacts. In addition to the parties on the Board's service list for this proceeding, OEA is providing a copy of this Draft EA to the following agencies for review and comment: USFWS, Georgia Ecological Services Field Office; Georgia Wildlife Resources Division; USACE, Savannah and Mobile Districts; FEMA; USEPA, Region 4; and GA EPD.

HISTORIC REVIEW

SCRF served the E&H Report on the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO), pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 1105.8(c).³ Based on available information, the SHPO submitted comments stating that the Line is part of the Georgia & Alabama (GAAL) Railroad and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The Line also contributes to the NRHP-listed Columbus Historic District. Accordingly, OEA is recommending a condition requiring the railroad to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all historic properties including sites, building, structures and objects within the project right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect, or APE) eligible for listing or listed in the NRHP until completion of the Section 106 process. Guidance regarding the Board's historic preservation review process is available at <https://www.stb.gov/resources/environmental/historic-preservation-overview>.

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 800.2, OEA conducted a search of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Tribal Directory Assessment Tool (TDAT) to identify

³ Applicants seeking authority from the Board to abandon railroad lines may act on behalf of the Board when complying with the Section 106 regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act. Applicants are authorized to initiate the Section 106 review process and carry out some of its steps, but the Board retains overall responsibility for the Section 106 review. See 36 C.F.R. § 800.2(c)(4); 49 C.F.R. part 1105; Delegation Letter (Dec. 9, 2009). The Delegation Letter can be found at a link on the bottom of the Board's website overlooking historic preservation at <https://www.stb.gov/resources/environmental/historic-preservation-overview>.

federally recognized Tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area.⁴ The database indicated that the following federally-recognized Tribes may have knowledge regarding properties of traditional religious and cultural significance within the right-of-way (the APE) of the proposed abandonment: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and Seminole Tribe of Florida. Accordingly, OEA is sending a copy of this Draft EA to these Tribes for review and comment.

CONDITIONS

OEA recommends that the following conditions be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority:⁵

1. Prior to commencement of any abandonment-related salvage activities, South Carolina Central Railroad Company, LLC shall consult with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) to ensure appropriate consideration of National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits and comply with any reasonable requirements.
2. South Carolina Central Railroad Company, LLC (SCRF) shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all historic properties including sites, buildings, structures, and objects within the project right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect, or APE) that are eligible for listing or listed in the National Register of Historic Places until the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 54 U.S.C. § 306108 has been completed. SCRF shall report back to the Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) regarding any consultation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office and any other Section 106 consulting parties that have been identified and the public. SCRF may not file its consummation notice or initiate any salvage activities related to abandonment (including removal of tracks and ties) until the Section 106 process has been completed and the Board has removed the condition.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, OEA concludes that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended conditions are imposed, abandonment of the Line would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Tribal Directory Assessment Tool, <https://egis.hud.gov/tdat> (last accessed December 2, 2025).

⁵ If an interim trail use agreement under 16 U.S.C. § 1247(d) and 49 C.F.R. § 1152.29 is reached for the Line (or a portion thereof), compliance with these conditions is not required with respect to any portion of the Line covered by the interim trail use agreement for the duration of the agreement.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 C.F.R. § 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Board's Federal Register notice of the proposed abandonment. The Federal Register notice is also issued as a Board decision and is available on the Board's website.⁶

TRAIL USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 C.F.R. § 1152.29). The Federal Register notice is also issued as a Board decision and is available on the Board's website.⁷

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact this office directly at (202) 245-0238, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Assistance, Government Affairs, and Compliance, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

OEA encourages interested parties to submit their comments on the Draft EA electronically through the Board's website at <https://www.stb.gov/>. From the Board's home page, scroll down to the blue "How to File" box. Select the "E-Filing (recommended)" button. From the E-Filing page, select "Environmental Comments" under "Select your E-Filing Type." Log-in accounts are not needed to file environmental comments electronically. Brief comments

⁶ Board decisions are available for viewing on the Board's website at <https://www.stb.gov/> by clicking "Search STB Records;" selecting "Decisions" in the "Search for" dropdown menu; entering ("AB" "312" "6" "X") or ("AB" "1000" "5" "X") sequentially in the four boxes for "Docket Number," then selecting "Search."

⁷ Id.

can be typed in the comment field, and lengthier comments can be attached as Word, Adobe Acrobat, or other file formats.

Alternatively, comments submitted by mail should be addressed to: Karen Stevens, Surface Transportation Board, 395 E Street SW, Washington, DC 20423-0001, Attention: Environment Filing, Docket Nos. AB-312 (Sub-No. 6X) and AB-1000 (Sub-No. 5X). If you have any questions, please contact Karen Stevens by email at Karen.Stevens@stb.gov or by phone at 202-245-0304.

Date made available to the public: December 8, 2025.

Comment due date: December 23, 2025.

By the Board, Danielle Gosselin, Director, Office of Environmental Analysis.

Attachment



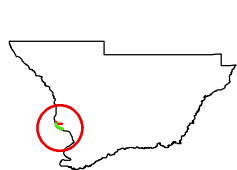
STB Docket No. AB 312 (Sub-No. 6X)
South Carolina Central Railroad Company, LLC
Abandonment Exemption
In Muscogee County, Ga.

STB Docket No. AB 1000 (Sub-No. 5X)
Georgia Southwestern Railroad, Inc.
Discontinuance Exemption
In Muscogee County, Ga.

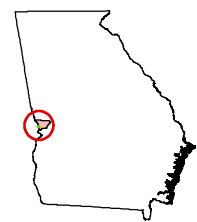
Legend

- Dummy Line
- GPA Lead Track

Note: Maps produced by the STB's Office of Environmental Analysis are based on information provided by the applicant and are for reference purposes only.



Muscogee County



Georgia