

To:

Dave Navecky

Surface Transportation Board

Docket N. FD 35952

395 E. Street SW

Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

This letter opposes the Great Lakes Basin Rail Line for the following important reasons.

1—Food security.

Wisconsin lost more than 620,000 acres of farmland to development from 2007 to 2012, according to the Census of Agriculture. Wisconsin has the dubious distinction of being among the top states in rapid loss of farmland.

What is particularly disturbing about the Great Lakes Basin Rail Line plan is that it would slice through and take out of production hundreds of acres of the best farmland in the world on the Rock Prairie, east of Janesville, WI.

The Rock Prairie is home to plano silt loam, found only in a few other places in the world and perfect for crop production. The rich prairie soil is a national treasure, which needs to be protected, much like other rare natural resources. Once a railroad is built, there is no reclaiming this unique and valuable soil, which is so vital to food production.

What are the prairie's virtues?

The soil is young in a geological sense and full of fresh minerals and nutrients needed for crop growth. By contrast, Africa has old land surfaces and worn-out soil. The prairie also gets enough rain to replenish groundwater and to feed thirsty crops. This is no small matter.

The far West, including California, is suffering from a historic drought and lacks the ability to maintain its historic food production. The future of these drought-stricken areas is highly questionable.

If the perfect soil on the Rock Prairie is lost, it is irreplaceable. Even the experts in soil science cannot re-create the beautiful plano silt loam. It is critical that agricultural lands with such high quality are preserved.

When fertile farmland is lost, farming is pushed onto marginal lands, which increases cost of production and environmental impact. Farming marginal lands increases potential for soil erosion and increases the need for more fertilizers and pesticides. In the Western United States, farmers tap water from aquifers that are not being replenished or from rivers that are running dry from development upstream.

If we continue to lose farmland at a rapid rate, we face a future where our ability to feed ourselves is seriously compromised. The most important environmental advance of this decade should be the protection of Wisconsin farmland. We need to assign high priority to our most productive food-producing land, including the Rock Prairie in Rock County, WI, which produces the most corn and soybeans per acre in the state.

Treating farmland as limitless and without priority is short sighted.

The world's population continues to explode. Between 1982 and 2010, the United States developed more than 24 million acres of farmland—an area the size of Indiana and Rhode Island combined. This is a dangerous direction. More than 6 billion people rely on food grown on just 11 percent of the global land surface.

We have a shrinking land base for food. But, every year, the world has more people to feed. If we don't stop taking good farmland out of production, we will reach a crisis point when people cannot put food on the table.

2—Lack of need.

The proposed railroad is not needed.

The proposed railroad would begin east of Milton, WI, where a railroad already is located. No rail line official has presented a study about why another railroad is necessary.

In fact, at least two large railroads have told federal officials they are not interested in the 279-mile rail line from Wisconsin to Indiana aimed at relieving Chicago-area freight congestion.

The Norfolk Southern and the Union Pacific railroads both have told the U.S. Surface Transportation Board that they have multiple routes into the Chicago area.

The organizers of this proposal have not said what their trains will carry. Rural families along the route worry about toxic spills and the impact on groundwater. They also are concerned about the high noise level and how it will impact people and livestock. Vibration from trains likely will cause the limestone foundations of homes along the route to crack.

Thank you for considering my comments.

A. Lux

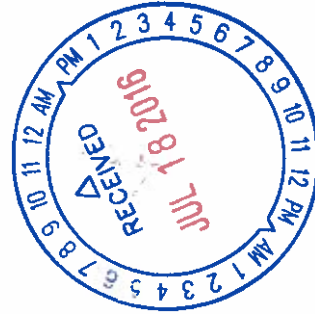
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