

ET-20301

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
355 East Hancock Avenue  
Athens, GA 30601

November 18, 2012

Marcellus C. Kirchner  
Norfolk Southern Corporation  
3 Commercial Place  
Norfolk, VA 23510-9207

**Re: Early Coordination Request for Docket No AB-290 (Sub-No. 343X), Central of Georgia Railroad Company – Abandonment – in Newton County, Georgia**

Dear Mr. Kirchner:

This letter is in reference to your request for information on the possible impacts the proposed railroad abandonment project may have on land use, conservation, water quality and other general environmental concerns that may be of interest to our agency. The following outlines our concerns with the proposed project with regards to farmland protection, and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) watershed dams and project easements.

Farmland Protection

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) is intended to minimize the impact federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. Projects are subject to FPPA requirements if they may irreversibly convert farmland (directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use and are completed by a federal agency or with assistance from a federal agency. For the purpose of FPPA, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance. Farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for cropland. It can be forest land, pastureland, cropland, or other land uses, but not water or urban built-up land. It should be noted that the FPPA does not authorize the Federal Government to regulate the use of private or nonfederal land or, in any way, affect the property rights of owners.

NRCS uses a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system to establish a farmland conversion impact rating score on proposed sites of federally funded and assisted projects. This score is used as an indicator for the project sponsor to consider alternative sites. It is our understanding that the proposed project involves federal funds or assistance, and thus could be subject to this assessment. Your letter requests a consultation on "the effect of the proposed action on any prime agricultural land". Based on a 60' right of way for the proposed abandonment, there are 114 total acres involved. Of those, 60% are soils classified as prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance. That is a total of 67.9 acres in both categories with 39.7 being prime farmland and 28.2 statewide importance. For the purposes of FPPA, this action would be exempt as it does not convert farmland. You need take no further actions for FPPA purposes.

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NRCS Watershed Dams

More than 50 years ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture was authorized by Congress to help local communities with flood control and watershed protection through the Watershed Program (PL-534 Flood Control Act of 1944 and PL-566 Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act). As a result, local communities, with NRCS assistance, have constructed over 11,000 dams in 47 states since 1948. These dams were originally constructed for protection of farmlands from flooding impacts. In 2000, PL-566 was amended to provide NRCS authorization to assist communities with rehabilitation of their aging dams. The legislation authorizes NRCS to work with local communities and watershed project sponsors to address public health and safety concerns and potential environmental impacts of aging dams.

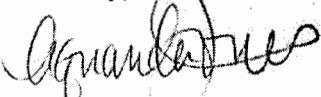
We have reviewed our records and have determined that there are no PL566 structures downstream or in the vicinity of the proposed abandonment.

NRCS Easements

NRCS easements relate to our Wetland Reserve Program and the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program. We have reviewed our records and have determined that there are no such easements within the vicinity of the proposed project that would be impacted.

NRCS appreciates this opportunity to comment. If you have questions or need any additional information, please contact Dan Wallace of my staff at (706) 546-2272 or [dan.wallace@ga.usda.gov](mailto:dan.wallace@ga.usda.gov).

Sincerely,

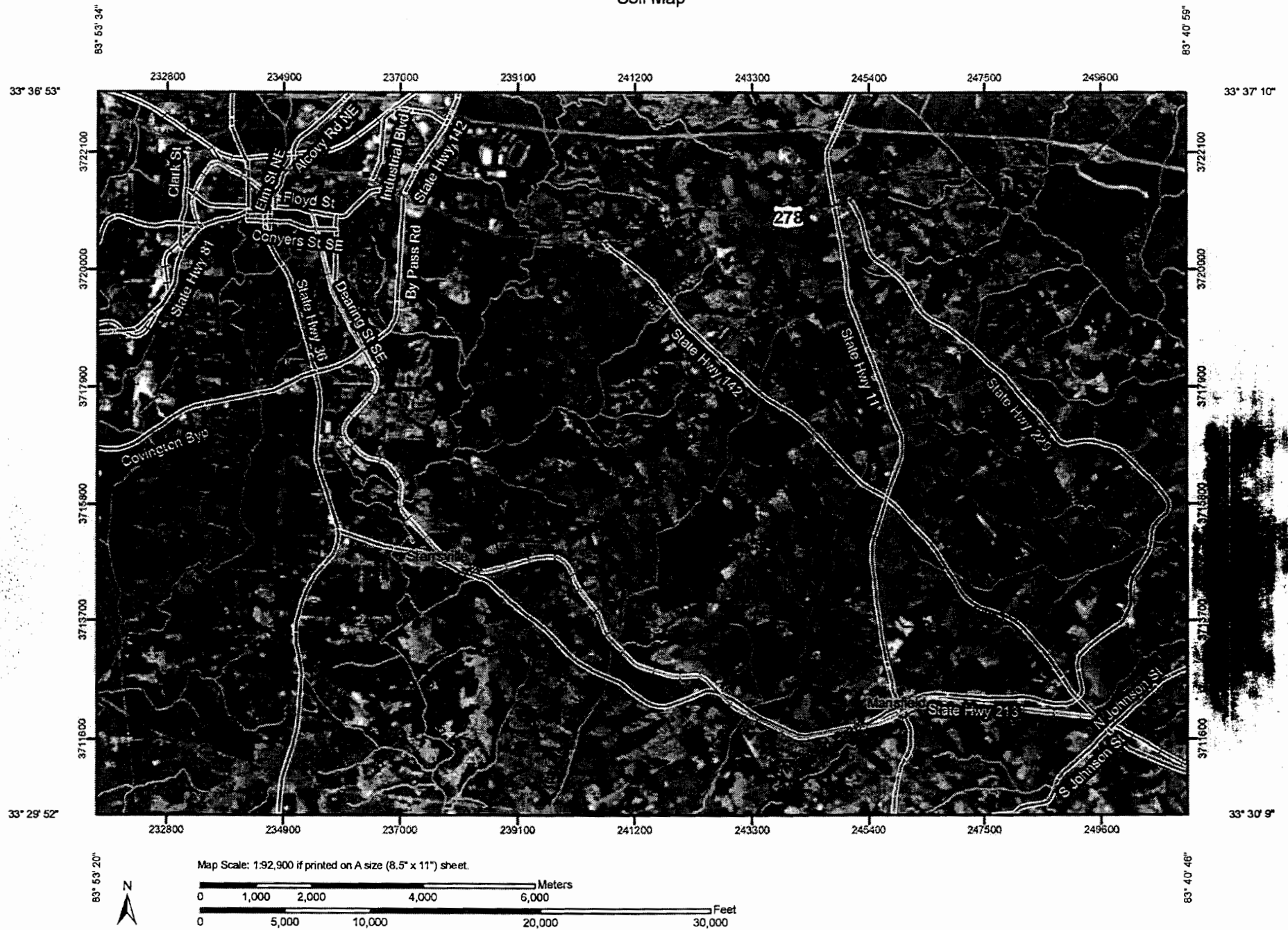


**Acting for**

JAMES E. TILLMAN, SR.  
State Conservationist

cc: Michael Watson, Assistant State Conservationist (FO), NRCS, Griffin, GA  
Dennis Brooks, District Conservationist, NRCS, Madison, GA  
Jim Lathem, Resource Soil Scientist, NRCS, Athens, GA  
Dan Wallace, State Resource Inventory Coordinator, NRCS, Athens, GA

Custom Soil Resource Report  
Soil Map



## Map Unit Legend

| Newton and Rockdale Counties, Georgia (GA649) |                                                                   |              |                |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Map Unit Symbol                               | Map Unit Name                                                     | Acres in AOI | Percent of AOI |
| AkA                                           | Altavista sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes, occasionally flooded | 0.5          | 0.4%           |
| AmB                                           | Appling sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                         | 8.0          | 7.0%           |
| AmC                                           | Appling sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes                        | 7.2          | 6.3%           |
| AnC                                           | Appling-Urban land complex, 2 to 10 percent slopes                | 0.1          | 0.1%           |
| AwC                                           | Ashlar-Pacolet-Wedowee complex, 4 to 15 percent slopes            | 0.6          | 0.5%           |
| AwE                                           | Ashlar-Pacolet-Wedowee complex, 15 to 25 percent slopes           | 0.2          | 0.2%           |
| CCA                                           | Cartecay and Chewacla soils, frequently flooded                   | 1.7          | 1.5%           |
| CeB                                           | Cecil sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                           | 24.9         | 21.9%          |
| CeC                                           | Cecil sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes                          | 2.2          | 2.0%           |
| CfB2                                          | Cecil sandy clay loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes, eroded              | 1.8          | 1.6%           |
| CfC2                                          | Cecil sandy clay loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes, eroded             | 5.8          | 5.1%           |
| CuC                                           | Cecil-Urban land complex, 2 to 10 percent slopes                  | 18.1         | 15.9%          |
| GeB                                           | Gwinnett sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                        | 1.0          | 0.9%           |
| GwB2                                          | Gwinnett sandy clay loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes, eroded           | 2.5          | 2.2%           |
| GwC2                                          | Gwinnett sandy clay loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes, eroded          | 1.1          | 1.0%           |
| MdC2                                          | Madison sandy clay loam, 2 to 10 percent slopes, eroded           | 2.2          | 1.9%           |
| MoC                                           | Molena loamy sand, 2 to 10 percent slopes                         | 1.0          | 0.8%           |
| PaB                                           | Pacolet sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                         | 1.3          | 1.2%           |
| PaC                                           | Pacolet sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes                        | 6.0          | 5.3%           |
| PaD                                           | Pacolet sandy loam, 10 to 15 percent slopes                       | 0.0          | 0.0%           |
| PaE                                           | Pacolet sandy loam, 15 to 25 percent slopes                       | 2.7          | 2.4%           |
| PfC2                                          | Pacolet sandy clay loam, 2 to 10 percent slopes, eroded           | 3.4          | 3.0%           |
| PfE2                                          | Pacolet sandy clay loam, 15 to 25 percent slopes, eroded          | 1.3          | 1.2%           |
| PgD                                           | Pacolet-Urban land complex, 10 to 25 percent slopes               | 0.9          | 0.8%           |
| Ta                                            | Toccoa fine sandy loam, rarely flooded                            | 1.3          | 1.2%           |
| TCA                                           | Toccoa and Congaree soils, frequently flooded                     | 1.3          | 1.1%           |
| Ur                                            | Urban land                                                        | 9.0          | 8.0%           |
| W                                             | Water                                                             | 0.1          | 0.1%           |
| WeC                                           | Wedowee sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes                        | 3.2          | 2.8%           |

In some areas, land that does not meet the criteria for prime or unique farmland is considered to be *farmland of statewide importance* for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. The criteria for defining and delineating farmland of statewide importance are determined by the appropriate State agencies.

Generally, this land includes areas of soils that nearly meet the requirements for prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some areas may produce as high a yield as prime farmland if conditions are favorable. Farmland of statewide importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by State law.

In some areas that are not identified as having national or statewide importance, land is considered to be *farmland of local importance* for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. This farmland is identified by the appropriate local agencies. Farmland of local importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by local ordinance.

## Report—Prime and other Important Farmlands

| Prime and other Important Farmlands— Newton and Rockdale Counties, Georgia |                                                                   |                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Map Symbol                                                                 | Map Unit Name                                                     | Farmland Classification          |
| AkA                                                                        | Altavista sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes, occasionally flooded | All areas are prime farmland     |
| AmB                                                                        | Appling sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                         | All areas are prime farmland     |
| AmC                                                                        | Appling sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes                        | Farmland of statewide importance |
| AnC                                                                        | Appling-Urban land complex, 2 to 10 percent slopes                | Not prime farmland               |
| AwC                                                                        | Ashlar-Pacoleet-Wedowee complex, 4 to 15 percent slopes           | Not prime farmland               |
| AwE                                                                        | Ashlar-Pacoleet-Wedowee complex, 15 to 25 percent slopes          | Not prime farmland               |
| CCA                                                                        | Cartecay and Chewacla soils, frequently flooded                   | Farmland of statewide importance |
| CeB                                                                        | Cecil sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                           | All areas are prime farmland     |
| CeC                                                                        | Cecil sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes                          | Farmland of statewide importance |
| CfB2                                                                       | Cecil sandy clay loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes, eroded              | Farmland of statewide importance |
| CfC2                                                                       | Cecil sandy clay loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes, eroded             | Not prime farmland               |
| CuC                                                                        | Cecil-Urban land complex, 2 to 10 percent slopes                  | Not prime farmland               |
| GeB                                                                        | Gwinnett sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                        | All areas are prime farmland     |
| GwB2                                                                       | Gwinnett sandy clay loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes, eroded           | Farmland of statewide importance |
| GwC2                                                                       | Gwinnett sandy clay loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes, eroded          | Not prime farmland               |
| MdC2                                                                       | Madison sandy clay loam, 2 to 10 percent slopes, eroded           | Not prime farmland               |
| MoC                                                                        | Molena loamy sand, 2 to 10 percent slopes                         | Farmland of statewide importance |
| PaB                                                                        | Pacoleet sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes                        | All areas are prime farmland     |
| PaC                                                                        | Pacoleet sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes                       | Farmland of statewide importance |
| PaD                                                                        | Pacoleet sandy loam, 10 to 15 percent slopes                      | Not prime farmland               |
| PaE                                                                        | Pacoleet sandy loam, 15 to 25 percent slopes                      | Not prime farmland               |
| PfC2                                                                       | Pacoleet sandy clay loam, 2 to 10 percent slopes, eroded          | Not prime farmland               |
| PIE2                                                                       | Pacoleet sandy clay loam, 15 to 25 percent slopes, eroded         | Not prime farmland               |

| Prime and other Important Farmlands-- Newton and Rockdale Counties, Georgia |                                                     |                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Map Symbol                                                                  | Map Unit Name                                       | Farmland Classification          |
| PgD                                                                         | Pacolet-Urban land complex, 10 to 25 percent slopes | Not prime farmland               |
| Ta                                                                          | Toccoa fine sandy loam, rarely flooded              | Farmland of statewide importance |
| TCA                                                                         | Toccoa and Congaree soils, frequently flooded       | Farmland of statewide importance |
| Ur                                                                          | Urban land                                          | Not prime farmland               |
| W                                                                           | Water                                               | Not prime farmland               |
| WeC                                                                         | Wedowee sandy loam, 6 to 10 percent slopes          | Farmland of statewide importance |
| WwB                                                                         | Wickham sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes           | All areas are prime farmland     |

### Data Source Information

Soil Survey Area: Newton and Rockdale Counties, Georgia  
 Survey Area Data: Version 6, Jul 17, 2009