

Calumet
Astronomical
Society, Inc.

E1-22558

Lowell Scoping Mtg
April 12, 2016

P.O. Box 851 • Griffith, Indiana 46319-0851
Web www.casonline.org • Email

Dear GLBT Board,

We are writing this letter to object in the strongest terms possible to the proposed railroad right of way south of the Historic Buckley Homestead County Park in Lowell, Indiana. The Calumet Astronomical Society (CAS), a 501c3 organization, is working with Purdue University, the Lake County Park Department and the Lake Heritage Parks Foundation to develop the Calumet Astronomy Center, located at 191st Avenue and Chase Street in Lowell, Indiana. Presently at this site, CAS operates the Thomas Conway Observatory and the Mildred Hunter Astrophotography Laboratory and is in developmental stages of adding another observatory that will be used for solar observing. The proposed railroad line would come through the land designated for the Calumet Astronomical Center.

Astronomical telescopes are extremely sensitive instruments and they not only magnify the night sky, but any vibration they are subjected to is also magnified. Astronomical telescopes have piers set deep in the ground and are not attached in any way to the building since footsteps alone would cause the image to vibrate. We can only imagine that a freight train passing within 200 feet of the observatory would render our telescopes unusable.

The Thomas Conway Observatory alone represents 20 years of work by numerous volunteer organizations. The observatory building was built by the United Steelworkers at Burns Harbor and donated to the Calumet Astronomical Society at an estimated cost of \$60,000. The telescope and pier were donated by the Friends of the Dunes at a cost of \$17,000. The foundation of the building, sidewalks, observing patio, gravel roads and parking lot were finished with work donated from several local contractors, along with members of the CAS at an estimated cost in the tens of thousands of dollars.

The Calumet Astronomical Society has 80 members that can use this facility at all hours of the day or night, whenever skies are conducive to observing or astrophotography. In return for this access to the facility, CAS has entered into a contract with the Lake County Parks to host public observing sessions at the Calumet Astronomy Center every month. Hundreds of visitors regularly attend these free, family-friendly events. The Calumet Astronomical Society also provides educational programs to schools, local scouting groups and other organizations that wish to take advantage of this extraordinary educational facility.

In order for the Calumet Astronomical Center to continue providing these excellent programs to the citizens of Northwest Indiana (and the Greater Chicagoland region) and educational programs for area school children, it is critical that the Great Lakes Basin Transportation Board reconsider their intention to have these train tracks in such close proximity to the Calumet Astronomy Center.

Sincerely Submitted,

Calumet Astronomical Society Board of Directors