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Dear Adam Assenza,

I am writing to formally express my opposition to the proposed Texas Materials rail project in Burnet County, Texas. This project poses significant environmental risks that will have a lasting negative impact on the region's natural resources, specifically the headwaters of the Russell Fork of the South San Gabriel River.

Impact on the Russell Fork and Water Resources

Both proposed Burnet County rail paths would cross directly over the headwaters of the Russell Fork, which is a vital tributary of the South San Gabriel River. This area contains numerous small springs that feed into the river during non-drought periods. These springs are essential for:

- Maintaining the river's flow and health during dry seasons.
- Supporting aquatic ecosystems and riparian habitats.
- Recharging local groundwater supplies, which many landowners rely on for wells and livestock.

The construction and operation of a rail line in this delicate area would significantly disrupt this natural hydrology. Potential impacts include:

- Soil compaction and erosion caused by heavy machinery, which could divert or block springs, altering the flow of water into the river.

- Runoff contamination from rail operations (fuels, lubricants, and other pollutants), which could infiltrate the springs and degrade water quality.
- Flooding and sedimentation risks, as altered drainage patterns could overwhelm the headwaters during rain events, impacting properties downstream.

Environmental Consequences and Ecosystem Disruption

The Russell Fork and South San Gabriel River are part of a fragile Hill Country watershed that supports diverse wildlife. The region is home to native fish, amphibians, and bird species, some of which are already threatened by habitat loss. Additionally, the waterway plays a key role in supporting agricultural and recreational activities in the region.

- Construction could fragment or destroy riparian habitats, harming local wildlife populations.
- The disruption of springs could permanently alter the river's flow, negatively affecting downstream ecosystems.

Potential Legal and Regulatory Concerns

This project may also violate federal and state water protection laws, including:

- The Clean Water Act (CWA): If rail construction results in the discharge of pollutants into the Russell Fork or South San Gabriel River without proper permitting, it could lead to regulatory violations.
- Endangered Species Act (ESA): The Golden-cheeked Warbler and other protected species may be affected by the destruction of riparian and woodland habitats.

Request for Denial or Reevaluation

Given the critical importance of the Russell Fork headwaters to the South San Gabriel River and the broader Hill Country watershed, I urge you to:

1. Deny the current rail proposal due to its unavoidable environmental consequences.
2. Require a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that evaluates the effects on the river, springs, and surrounding habitats.
3. Ensure public transparency and involvement throughout the review process, allowing affected landowners to voice their concerns.

The Russell Fork and its springs are an irreplaceable natural resource that must be protected from the destructive impacts of this rail project. I respectfully request that all relevant agencies reject or thoroughly reevaluate the project to prevent the irreversible damage it would cause to our local water systems and environment.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ahr

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