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CHRISTOPHER AND RUTH A. FAYE
241 W. SKYLINE COURT
MANKATO, MN 56001-1924

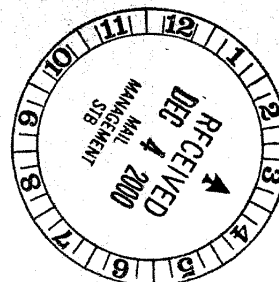
PHONE (507) 345-3309

FAX (507) 388-2257

November 25, 2000

Office of the Secretary
Case Control Unit
STB Finance Docket No. 33407
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20423-0001
Attn: Victoria Rutson

001609



Re: DM&E Powder River Basin Expansion Project Draft EIS

Dear Ms Rutson:

Background

Despite what our above stated address seems to indicate, we are residents of the City of Skyline—not Mankato. Skyline is contiguous to Mankato; it is an incorporated city. It contains 123 homes and a municipal building. It is 100% residential. It does not have its own post office, but is served by the Mankato post office. I regard this information as relevant as the focus of this letter is upon what we perceive as the impact upon our home and the City of Skyline if the above captioned request is granted.

The above captioned request, if granted, will have a devastating impact upon Skyline, and for reasons that this letter will make clear we are joining an ever increasing group of individuals who are in opposition both to Alternative M-2 and M-3, and favor Alternative M-1—M-1 being the no build alternative.

The railroad trackage contemplated by this request will be built along one of Skyline's borders. We are told that it will result in the condemnation of about 15% of our tax base.

Comments Concerning Certain Aspects of the DM&E Request

ENVIRONMENTAL
DOCUMENT

As you know, the above captioned request asks approval to discharge dredged and fill material into waters and wetlands within the State of Minnesota. Of the 240 acres of wetlands involved, 24 acres could be impacted by the southern by-pass route (M2) in the Mankato area.

Since the M2 route would have a cumulative effect not only on wetlands, but also on fish and wildlife, aesthetics, and cultural values, we are emphatically opposed to this project. Please look at the reverse side of this sheet for an article taken from the November 22, 2000 issue of *The Free Press* for further information on this subject.

We are told that this request contemplates 37 trains a day. Each of these trains would be approximately one mile in length and will have to be powered by a large engine. The length of these trains is such that it will take each train a significant length of time just to go by our city.

DM&E threatens biological diversity

I have been spending a considerable amount of time reading the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed DM&E rail expansion project. Here are thoughts concerning the biological assessment portion.

Minnesota is blessed with an amazingly rich diversity of living organisms that consists of more than 1,800 vascular plants, 600 vertebrates and literally thousands of invertebrate animals and nonvascular plants. Despite this rich diversity, this study chose to discuss the possible impact of this project on just 20 species that have federal status as endangered, threatened or are potential candidates for federal status. Does this mean that the other Minnesota species are irrelevant? I think not. Minnesota biologist Harrison Tordoff has reminded us "that extinction of species, the silent crisis of our time, diminishes our world."

Minnesota has a painful history of losing species by exploitation of the environment, and it is imperative we not repeat the mistakes of the past.



Don
Gordon

Columnist

In retrospect, who would have thought at the time of Minnesota statehood, that the Carolina parakeet, leath hen and passenger pigeon would be annihilated in less than a half century? Who among the early naturalists would have thought that the whooping crane, long-billed curlew, McCown's longspur and several other species would be gone from Minnesota by 1900? Who could have guessed that ginseng, *Panax quinquefolia*, a plant that inhabited Minnesota woods by the millions would become commercially extinct and survive only in limited numbers in isolated pockets in southern Minnesota? Who could have imagined that 99 percent of the tall grass prairie that covered a good portion of western Minnesota would be eliminated?

In 1981, the Minnesota Legislature mandated the Department of Natural Resources to prepare a list of Minnesota plants and animals that had populations in jeopardy. An expert advisory committee selected more than 300 species for this list and each species was placed in a defined category of endangered, threatened or special concern.

The purpose of this list was not only to help preserve the diversity and abundance of plant and animal species in the state, but also to alert biologists of potential problems here in Minnesota before problems became paramount at the federal level.

What is interesting about the draft environmental impact statement is that there is only a limited discussion concerning possible impact on Minnesota's endangered, threatened and special concern species. Also missing from the draft EIS is any mention of the most important book ever published on Minnesota diversity and biology. Failure to include the 1988 book, "Minnesota's Endangered Flora and Fauna," edited by Barbara Coffin and Lee Pfammutter,

clearly indicates the draft EIS is flawed and incomplete. This book contains county distribution maps for Minnesota species considered to be endangered, threatened or special concern and the reasons why they are listed. Because the rail expansion project proposes to traverse counties where some of these species are located, it is imperative we know if this project may impact their existence.

A few years ago, the former Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Brundtland, suggested we must pursue intergenerational equity solidarity in our management plan for the planet. Resource use should not be avoided, but only on a scale that will leave room for future generations. She employs us to "consider our planet on loan from our children, rather than being a gift from our ancestors." We owe it to our children to make every effort to preserve Minnesota's biological diversity. This proposed rail expansion project is not important enough to totally ignore Minnesota's threatened, endangered and special concern species.

When 32 percent of 20,500 U.S. plant and animal species are vulnerable to premature extinction, it is irresponsible to consider approving a major rail project that traverses hundreds of miles and yet considers only the possible impact on just 20 species with federal status.

The draft EIS is incomplete and does not present sufficient evidence to support either the Mankato route or the southern bypass.

Clearly, the most environmentally preferred alternative would be the no-action alternative. The application presented by DM&E based on information presented in the biological assessment should not be approved.

■ ■ ■

Don Gordon is professor emeritus of botany at Minnesota State University. Send questions concerning horticulture or the environment with a stamped self-addressed envelope to him at Route 2, Box 130A North Mankato, MN 56003 or e-mail to osokato@aol.com

Just in case the noise and vibration isn't enough to force our residents to move, we will also have to contend with the diesel fuel emissions (emissions that are carcinogenic) and the coal dust (which contains a certain degree of radioactivity and is carcinogenic) coming from the trains.

Since this plan contemplates significant "cutting into" the hillside upon which our city is built, the future of the stability of this hill (and thus the homes thereon) from the standpoint of erosion particularly in view of the severe vibrational effect of the passing trains comes into serious question.

It's hard to estimate what the combination of a new dose every 40 minutes of noise coupled with significant vibration, and an atmospheric injection of diesel fuel emissions and coal dust might do to the remaining 85% of our tax base. It is difficult to imagine how our residents could sell their homes; it is equally difficult to imagine how they could remain in their homes.

One way to estimate this impact would be to try to answer the following question:

Who would like to have their home next to railroad tracks with such traffic?

Just last year we installed a new playground in Skyline at an approximate cost of \$35,000—a cost that would have been much greater except for the volunteer workers who installed it. The only reason we mention the playground is to underline the fact that Skyline contains quite a number of children. Our residents are quite concerned about a plan that would result in their children being in close proximity with heavily traveled rail tracks. Potential purchasers (if any could be found) would naturally view this as another significant negative.

The subject of the curious failure of Skyline to get notice

For reasons that are unknown, the City of Skyline to this date has not received any formal notice of this request. We did not learn of the details until November 14th. Please look at the reverse side of this sheet for a photo copy of an article taken from the November 21, 2000 issue of *The Free Press* on the subject of Skyline failing to receive notice. You will observe from this article that not only did we fail to receive notice, but also the maps in the Environmental Impact Statement are wrong. So even if we had received this impact statement, we still wouldn't have realized that the plan called for the condemnation of Skyline property.

The way the matter now stands is that we are supposed to provide our response to over 2,000 pages of highly technical material no later than November 28th. It would seem unlikely that if this entire matter becomes a subject of litigation that we will be bound by a deadline date of November 28, 2000.

We would like to request that the date of our response be revised to be 6 months from the date of our receipt of accurate data to which we are supposed to respond. We would also request that you give earnest consideration to the *no build alternative*.

Yours truly,



Christopher and Ruth Faye

Rail plan takes chunk out of Skyline

► Eight homes could be affected by latest interpretation of where DM&E route would go

By Dan Nieraber
Free Press Staff Writer

SKYLINE — Eight homeowners in the small hilltop city of Skyline were the latest to learn they are in the path of a proposed railroad bypass to the south of Mankato.

An inconsistency in a draft of an Environmental Impact Statement has caused confusion about what will be the overall impact of a Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad plan to run as many as 37 trains a day through the area. The mile-long trains would carry coal from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming through South Dakota and Minnesota to shipping points on the Mississippi River.

For more than three years, the railroad has been working with cities along the route while developing its \$1.4 billion plan to

upgrade the existing route that runs through Mankato. But, for some reason, officials in the city of Skyline — which could lose 15 percent of its tax base to the railroad — have never been contacted.

That has Skyline Mayor Willard Vetter fuming about what he called "the damnable plan."

"We've had no formal notification of anything from anyone," he said Monday. "As a small-town mayor, it's kind of a nightmare situation to have all of this descend upon us without having any information about it before."

During its regular city council meeting Monday, after finding out the railroad would be passing below the west bluff of Skyline, the council passed two resolutions: one saying the city was against the plan for a southern bypass, and a second saying a 3-foot-thick encased tunnel should be built around the railway below the city.

That was before Vetter learned the following day that the pro-

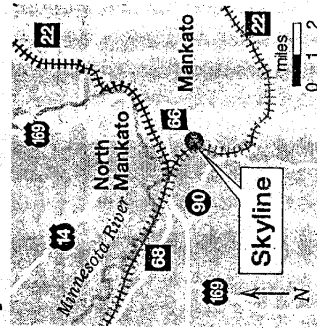
posed plan to divert coal train traffic out of Mankato would also cut 100 feet off the Skyline bluff, meaning eight houses would be lost.

"So on Saturday we had an informational meeting to let residents know our little city was targeted for destruction," Vetter said. "Losing eight homes could have a very strong impact on our little community and, if it were improperly done, it could doom our community."

Al Forsberg, Blue Earth County engineer, said the narrative in the Environmental Impact Statement described the railroad as going west of Blue Earth County Road 33, which is about a quarter mile west of Skyline. But maps showing the southern bypass plan have the railway running to the east of the Blue Earth River, which runs along the base of the city's west bluff.

The county has been told that the route on the maps is the correct route and the description in the Environmental Impact Statement is wrong, Forsberg said. So

Skyline houses threatened by DM & E route



Free Press graphic

the statement doesn't address many environmental, social and safety issues resulting from the actual path of the railway.

Some of those issues include the obvious destruction that will be done to the bluff and river, the damage that will be done to the

See SKYLINE
(Please turn to Page 3B)

SKYLINE: 'This all came as a real shock'

(Continued from Page 1B)

wildlife there — including a herd of deer and nesting eagles — and the pollution the diesel exhaust from the passing trains will bring to the city, said Ann Fischer, Skyline parks and playground director.

"We just find it hard to believe that they've been working on this for three years and never got around to contacting us," she

said. "We're a separate city — totally different — but they never fill us in."

Fischer doesn't want the DM&E to expand at all. But, if it does expand, she wants it to use the existing route through downtown Mankato along the Minnesota River.

"If it has to go, we already have a railroad corridor — use it," she said.

One of the Skyline houses that

would be lost belongs to George Sugden.

He bought the third lot that was sold in the city and has lived in the house for 42 years.

It wasn't until Saturday that he learned it could be lost to the DM&E.

"This all came as a real shock because I don't think anybody had any idea they would be taking part of Skyline," he said. "I know I never had any idea."

The Free Press

Tuesday, November 21, 2000