



July 6, 2004

Ms. Rini Ghosh
Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

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received
7/12/04

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ROBERT L. COOK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RE: Notice of availability of Final Scope of Study for the Environmental Impact Statement, Southwest Gulf Railroad Company, Medina County, Texas

Dear Ms. Ghosh:

Thank you for coordinating with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) in the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding a proposed single-track rail line in Medina County, Texas. The information provided by the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) was a notification of the availability of the final scope of study for the Environmental Impact Statement for the project. Preliminary information and recommendations regarding fish and wildlife resources of Texas that should be considered in the preparation of the DEIS are provided.

The proposed project is a single-track rail line in Medina County, Texas to connect a proposed Vulcan Construction Materials, LP (VCM) quarry and the Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) Del Rio Subdivision at milepost 250 near Dunlay, Texas. The proposed line would primarily transport limestone from the proposed VCM quarry, but may provide transport services to other industries in the future.

In general, an inventory of existing natural resources should be made of the project area. Additionally, specific evaluations should be designed to predict project impacts upon these natural resources. Sufficient documentation should be supplied to accurately interpret the value of the natural resources involved and the extent to which the project will impact these resources. This can often be accomplished best with good quality aerial and ground photography, terrain maps, charts and tables, and narrative descriptions of these data. More detailed information outlining requirements and expectations of this Department concerning environmental assessments and impact statements are attached in a document entitled, "Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Suggested Guidelines for Preparation of Environmental Assessment Documents."

The SEA's coordination with the appropriate state and federal regulatory agencies, particularly the US Army Corps of Engineers for wetland issues, the



Take a kid
hunting or fishing

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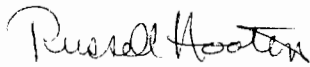
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or historic site

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Edwards Aquifer Authority for groundwater impacts, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for impacts to biological resources, is in accordance with the Departments recommendations.

Your interest in Texas' fish and wildlife resources and this agency's efforts to protect them is appreciated. Please contact me at (361) 825-3240 if we may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Russell Hooten".

Russell Hooten
Wildlife Habitat Assessment Program
Wildlife Division

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Attachment

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Suggested Guidelines for Preparation of Environmental Assessment Documents

Following is an outline of categories of information needed to evaluate a proposed project or action. Every effort should be made to supply quantified data. If subjective data is all that can be supplied, documentation verifying the credentials of the data collector should be provided.

Categories considered essential for adequate biological review by this agency are noted by an asterisk (*). Depending on the complexity and scope of the proposed project or action, or requirements by other agencies, all the items listed below may be required.

Whenever practical, environmental documents should be supported by aerial photography, topographic maps, schematics, charts, tables, etc. with minimum narrative sufficient to describe, quantify, and qualify the data.

A. Project Description

- * • Identify who is proposing the project.
- * • Identify who is conducting the assessments and provide credentials of this person(s).
- * • Describe the purpose of the project.
- * • Define the scope of work.
- * • Identify the project area and study area (total acres, miles of r-o-w, etc.)
- * • Identify the time table projected for the entire project.
- * • Describe any required coordination and review for the project.
- * • List or describe any required public input.
- Provide historical information significant to the project.

B. Description of the Affected Environment

1. Natural Resources

- Describe the geology within the study area.
- * • Describe the soils present and their characteristics.
- * • Describe the landform (topography) and the natural processes impacting the present landform.
- Describe the climatic factors affecting the study area.
- * • Describe the supply and quality of surface water resources in the study area.
- * • Describe the supply and quality of groundwater resources including aquifer recharge zones occurring within the study area.
- * • Describe natural hazards affecting the study area, i.e. tidal influences, flood activity, etc.).
- Describe the quality of the air in the study area.
- * • Describe the vegetation communities (cover type) specifically impacted by the project to include: dominant plant species, estimated height of trees, woody

shrubs or brush; and estimated canopy coverage of woody vegetation. Total acreage of each cover type disturbed by the project should also be listed.

- * • Describe the fauna that would be associated with the dominant vegetation cover types identified above.
- * • Identify "sensitive" ecosystems which occur in the study area such as: springs, streams, rivers, floodplains, vegetation corridors, bottomland hardwoods, wetlands, bays, estuaries, native grasslands, etc.
- * • Describe the occurrence of threatened/endangered species (or their habitats) and unique or rare natural communities which occur in the study area.
 - a. On site inspection of the study area for permanent or seasonal occurrence.
 - b. On site inspection of the study area for occurrence of habitat.
 - c. Interviews with recognized experts on all species with a potential of occurrence.
 - d. Literature review of data applicable to a potential occurring species concerning species distribution, habitat needs, and biological requirements.

2. Cultural Resources

- * • Identify public use and open space areas in the vicinity of the proposed project such as parks, natural areas, wildlife preserves and management areas.
- Identify previous, present, and proposed land uses within the study area.
- Identify significant archeological features within the study area.
- Identify significant historical features in the study area with special consideration of "National Register of Historic Places" properties.
- Identify rights-of-ways, easements, public utilities, and transportation features within the study area.
- Identify noise pollution sources and current noise levels within the study area.
- Identify existing and proposed public health and hazardous waste facilities which exist in the study area such as land fills, hazardous waste sites, wastewater treatment facilities, septic tanks, etc.
- Identify socioeconomic factors, if applicable.

***C. Project Alternatives**

List and describe project alternatives (including "no action") and associated impacts (direct and indirect) to described resources. If the project is potentially large in scope, cumulative effects with other similar projects may be required.

***D. Mitigation**

A major responsibility of TPWD is to conserve and protect the state's fish, wildlife, and plant resources. Certain categories of these biotic resources warrant special consideration. These include habitats that are locally and regionally scarce, habitats supporting unique species or communities, stream and river ecosystems, bays, estuaries, wetlands, bottomland hardwoods, and native grasslands. All projects which could adversely affect these resources should be fully evaluated, and where possible, implementation of less damaging alternatives undertaken. If it is determined that a project or action will potentially affect fish, wildlife or plant resources, a process for adverse impact reduction should be initiated. Mitigation measures should be developed and implemented sequentially as follows:

1. **AVOIDANCE:** Avoiding adverse impacts through changes in project location, design, operation, or maintenance procedures, or through selection of other less damaging alternatives to the project or action.
2. **MINIMIZATION:** Minimizing impacts and by project modification or rectification to restore or improve impacted habitat to pre-project condition; or through reducing the impacts over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the project or action.
3. **COMPENSATION:** Compensating for unavoidable impacts by providing replacement or substitute resources (including appropriate management) for losses caused by project construction, operation, or maintenance.

Mitigation should be an integral part of any action or project which adversely affects fish, wildlife, and habitats upon which they depend. Failure to adequately avoid or minimize adverse impacts or to adequately compensate for unavoidable losses of natural resources is a serious deficiency in any project plan and may cause delays in this Department's review and assessment of the adverse impacts upon fish & wildlife resources. In assessing project impacts, reasonable foreseeable secondary and cumulative impacts should be included.

***E. Coordination**

Provide copies of pertinent coordination correspondence.

***F. Document Preparers and Their Qualifications**

***G. Bibliography**

(references: 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508 and various EPA handouts concerning Environmental Assessment documentation.)