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**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD COMPLETES ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, WITH
ISSUANCE OF FINAL SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT, FOR
TONGUE RIVER RAILROAD'S PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION & OPERATION OF THE
WESTERN ALIGNMENT IN ROSEBUD & BIG HORN COUNTIES, MONTANA**

The Surface Transportation Board (Board) announced today that its Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) has issued the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Final SEIS) for the proposed construction and operation, by the Tongue River Railroad, Inc. (TRRC), of approximately 17.3 miles of new railroad line in Montana, known as *Tongue River III* or the "Western Alignment."

TRRC previously submitted two related applications that were considered and approved by the Board and by its predecessor agency, the Interstate Commerce Commission, in 1986 and 1996, respectively (*Tongue River I* and *Tongue River II*). The proposed Western Alignment is an alternative routing for the southernmost portion of the 41-mile, Ashland-to-Decker alignment approved in *Tongue River II*, known as the "Four Mile Creek Alternative."

The primary purpose of *Tongue River I, II, and III* is to transport coal from existing and future mines to markets in the midwestern and northeastern states. In proposing *Tongue River III*, TRRC seeks to reduce the environmental impacts, reduce higher operating and maintenance costs, and address safety concerns resulting from the steep grades associated with the previously approved Four Mile Creek Alternative.

Working with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation acting as lead agency for other Montana state agencies, SEA issued the Final SEIS as part of the environmental review process required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The Final SEIS reflects SEA's independent analysis of the potential environmental impacts that could result from the construction and operation of the proposed Western Alignment, after consideration of the views of the public, as well as Federal, state, and local agencies. The Final SEIS responds to the comments received on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Draft SEIS), which was made available for comment on October 15, 2004, and presents SEA's final conclusions and recommendations for mitigating possible environmental effects. In making its final decision in this case, the Board will consider the entire environmental record, including all public comments, the Draft SEIS, the Final SEIS, and SEA's final environmental recommendations.

The Final SEIS was issued today in the case entitled [Tongue River Railroad Company, Inc. - Construction and Operation--Western Alignment, STB Finance Docket No. 30186 \(Sub-No. 3\)](#). SEA has distributed the Final SEIS to all parties of record (official participants), including key governmental agencies and other appropriate entities. SEA has made the Final SEIS available for review in the Miles City Public Library (1 South 10th Street) in Miles City, MT and the St. Labre Indian School (1000 Tongue River Road) in Ashland, MT. A printed copy of the Final SEIS is available for a fee by contacting **ASAP Document Solutions, 9332 Annapolis Rd., Suite 103, Lanham, MD 20706**, telephone **(202) 306-4004**, or via asapdc@verizon.net. The entire Final SEIS is also available for viewing and downloading on the Board's website at <http://www.stb.dot.gov>. For further information about the proposed Western Alignment, contact SEA's Project Manager for this project, **Kenneth Blodgett, at (202) 565-1554**.

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