



# LAKE PEND OREILLE WATERKEEPER®

*Our Lake for Life*

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018

Shannon Williamson, Ph.D.  
Lake Pend Oreille Waterkeeper  
Executive Director  
P.O. Box 732, Sandpoint, ID 83864  
208-597-7188

TO: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
CC: U.S. Coast Guard  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Idaho Department of Lands  
Idaho Department of Environmental Quality  
Kalispel Tribe of Indians  
Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Coeur d'Alene Tribe  
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
Spokane Tribe of Indians

RE: Application NO. NWW-2007-01303; Proposed rail bridge over Lake Pend Oreille

Dear Mr. Slate,

On behalf of Lake Pend Oreille Waterkeeper, our members and constituents, I am writing to request an extension to the public comment period for the proposed second rail bridge over Lake Pend Oreille. A 30 day comment period is not long enough to solicit meaningful public comment for a project of this magnitude.

I respectfully request that the public comment period last a total of 120 days, with the public comment period ending on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018. This extended period of time will allow both year-round and seasonal residents of the Lake Pend Oreille region enough opportunity to thoroughly review the 250+ page permit application, formulate meaningful comments and share them with permitting agencies.

In addition, I respectfully request that at least 3 public hearings are held in Sandpoint to consider the proposed project. Ideally, two public hearings would be held prior to the development of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and one public hearing held after the release of the draft EA. These opportunities would allow the public to thoroughly vet the proposal, share their concerns and suggest alternatives.

The proposed project has the potential to significantly impact the people and environment of North Idaho and deserves a public hearing(s).

**Environmental concerns:**

Hazardous materials are transported along the shores and over Lake Pend Oreille every day via the existing rail bridge in Sandpoint. With respect to transport of volatile crude oil and coal, transport of these commodities could increase if export terminals, refineries and other related infrastructure are built along the west coast.

Transport of coal and crude oil threatens the water quality of Lake Pend Oreille and the downstream Pend Oreille River. Coal and coal dust released from open rail cars introduces heavy metals such as mercury, lead and arsenic into our waterways. Oil spills are notoriously difficult to contain. Our communities are not prepared to address the environmental fall out from a coal or oil train derailment into Lake Pend Oreille.

Lake Pend Oreille and the Pend Oreille River provide potable drinking water to thousands of residents and visitors. A public water treatment facility on Lake Pend Oreille serves residents of Kootenai, Ponderay, Sandpoint and parts of unincorporated Bonner County. An additional 3 public water systems on the Pend Oreille River serve residents of Dover, Laclede and Priest River. There are at least 88 additional water lines that draw directly from the Pend Oreille River that serve individual properties for domestic water use and irrigation.

A derailment of a train carrying hazardous materials adjacent to or over Lake Pend Oreille would pose a significant risk to those that depend on these waterbodies for a source of clean water. Derailments of crude oil trains have impaired waterbodies across the country, including rivers and wetlands, and pose a serious threat to public safety.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Transportation has predicted that trains carrying crude oil or ethanol will derail an average of 10 times per year over the next two decades, causing up to \$4.5 billion in damages and killing hundreds of people if the derailment were to occur in a populated area.<sup>1</sup> While the City of Sandpoint, the largest of the lake-side communities (population approximately 8,000), may not be considered a densely populated area, the potential damages to the environment and public safety will be realized just the same.

Lake Pend Oreille and the Pend Oreille River are also extremely popular with all types of recreationalists, including anglers and hunters, and the waterways serve as important habitat for a diverse array of wildlife. The increase in capacity of trains carrying hazardous material that a second rail bridge will enable will directly threaten recreational activities and sensitive wildlife habitat. Furthermore, if the project is approved, the driving of piles would create disturbances that could damage or kill bull trout, which are listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.<sup>2</sup>

**Public Interest:**

Health and Safety –

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<sup>1</sup> <http://beniciaindependent.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PHMSA-Draft-Regulatory-Impact-Analysis-opt.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/bulltrout/>

A second rail bridge over Lake Pend Oreille could result in a doubling of current rail traffic. Rail traffic in the region expected to almost double by 2035<sup>3</sup>, resulting in 114 trains crossing over Lake Pend Oreille every day. Increased rail traffic has been demonstrated to cause an increase in accidents at crossings. According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the number of accidents significantly increases when the number of trains exceeds 30.<sup>4</sup> Increased traffic will also result in significant delays at crossings. The City of Sandpoint has estimated that an approximate doubling of rail traffic would result in traffic delays of up to 6 hours per day, causing economic losses of \$575,000, which is an increase of \$300,000 attributed to current traffic delays.

Increased rail traffic will also delay emergency response. Emergency responders and residents currently experience extended delays at crossings, which puts the person requiring medical attention in a potential life-threatening situation. Monitoring devices that alert emergency responders to a blocked crossing can cost up to a million dollars for a comprehensive system, a cost that the City of Sandpoint and smaller communities cannot afford. Adding new emergency response infrastructure, like a satellite fire station on the north side of Sandpoint, could cost up to \$1.5 million. Similarly, the cost of other rail infrastructure improvements, such as overpasses or underpasses, are not the responsibility of the railroad (outside of 5% - 10%) with the burden falling on taxpayers.

The risk of derailment and subsequent spills of toxic materials, such as Bakken crude oil, also increases with additional rail traffic. As previously mentioned, oil train derailments continue to occur across the United States with disastrous consequences for the affected communities. Emergency responders within the Lake Pend Oreille region admittedly do not have the resources or the “man power” needed to adequately address an oil train disaster. With the cost of an oil train derailment disaster estimated in the billions of dollars<sup>5</sup>, communities like Sandpoint would face the possibility of financial ruin.

Noise and air pollution are also of concern. According to the EPA, problems related to noise include stress related illnesses, high blood pressure, speech interference, hearing loss, sleep disruption, and lost productivity.<sup>6,7</sup> A doubling of rail traffic will undoubtedly exacerbate problems and citizen complaints that are the result of increased rail traffic.

Air pollution can stem from multiple sources. For example, health dangers associated with inhalation of coal dust include exposure to toxic heavy metals and increased asthma, wheezing and coughing in children.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, toxic pollution from diesel exhaust is linked to stunted lung development, increased probability of heart attacks, lung cancer, worsening asthma and infant mortality.<sup>9</sup> Inhalation of particulate matter such as coal dust and diesel exhaust can also increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and events including heart attacks, heart failure, arrhythmias and strokes.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, for the reasons stated above, I respectfully request the following:

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2018/feb/26/bnsf-to-double-track-on-line-linking-spokane-valle/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/xings/com\\_roaduser/07010/sec02.cfm#fig2](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/xings/com_roaduser/07010/sec02.cfm#fig2)

<sup>5</sup> <http://daily.sightline.org/2014/12/18/what-do-oil-train-explosions-cost/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/air/noise.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.coaltrainfacts.org/docs/appendix-D.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.coaltrainfacts.org/docs/appendix-A.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.coaltrainfacts.org/docs/appendix-A.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.coaltrainfacts.org/docs/appendix-C.pdf>

1. The public comment period last a total of 120 days, ending on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018.
2. At least 3 public hearings are held in Sandpoint to consider the proposed project. Ideally, two public hearings would be held prior to the development of the EA and one public hearing held after the release of the draft EA.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon J. Williamson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Shannon Williamson, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Lake Pend Oreille Waterkeeper