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Contact: Bob Shavelson, [907.299.3277](tel:907.299.3277)

Emily Fehrenbacher, [907.276.4060](tel:907.276.4060)

Alaskans Challenge Boondoggle Rail Project *Big Coal's Rail Project Threatens Wild Alaska Salmon, Private Property Rights*

ANCHORAGE, AK –Today concerned Alaskans submitted legal papers to protect wild salmon and Alaskan taxpayers from the impacts of the proposed railroad spur and access road to Port MacKenzie, which is located across from Anchorage. The groups filing the challenge are Cook Inletkeeper, Alaska Survival, and the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club.

"As a local landowner, I know the issues and the history of this project. The rail extension has been pushed through without proper planning, just like the ferry and the prison," said Grace Whedbee of Big Lake. "The railroad extension would go through the heart of future growth and will destroy our primary recreational areas."

The Port Mackenzie railway would cost hundreds of millions of dollars to construct, yet the project's viability hinges on speculation that new mines and other industry will somehow materialize. Additionally, the Mat Su Borough and the Alaska Railroad have failed to define how ongoing operations and maintenance costs will be covered. Furthermore, southcentral Alaska boasts 3 ports – in Anchorage, Seward and Whittier – that are already connected to the railroad, so there's no need for an expensive new facility.

"From the Bill Sheffield Railroad terminal and the Port of Anchorage expansion, to the Mat Su Ferry and the Knik Arm Bridge, Upper Cook Inlet has become a magnet for wild-eyed government spending," said Bob Shavelson, Advocacy Director for Cook Inletkeeper. "And like all these boondoggle projects, there's no serious business plan for the railroad to Port MacKenzie. Instead, it's more 'build it and they will come' and the taxpayers will be left holding the bag once the dust settles."

The proposed rail line would also bisect important wild salmon habitat that feeds the Mat Su Valley at a time when salmon runs in the Valley have been decreasing. Although no firm commitments are in place, one potential customer for the new rail line and port is the Usibelli Coal Company.

“Destroying wild Alaska salmon habitat so we can ship coal overseas makes no sense,” said Emily Fehrenbacher, with the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club. “The Port Mackenzie railway will put fisheries, public health and property values at risk for the benefit of coal company profits.”

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