

January 25, 2021

**RE: My comments on the Uinta Basin Railway Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)**

Dear Government Officials:

Please accept, review, respond to, and include in the relevant NEPA project file my following comments on the above-referenced DEIS.

At the outset, I am a long-time Utah resident who greatly enjoys hiking and exploring on public lands in Utah. I also have a longstanding interest in the protection of these public lands. I am deeply concerned about climate change and its worsening effects on these public lands and resources. These factors are all connected to the proposed Uinta Basin Railway.

This project would encourage and facilitate the extraction and eventual burning of more fossil fuels. This is exactly the opposite of where our government should be going. The climate crisis demands that we take aggressive steps to immediately phase out the extraction and burning of fossil fuels as we accelerate the development of solar, wind, geothermal, and other clean alternative energy sources. President Biden and other leaders have properly called the climate crisis "an existential threat" to our future health and that of our biosphere.

Despite this reality, most Utah Republican politicians are still beholden to fossil fuel interests. They shamelessly put short-term corporate profits over the long-term health of their own constituents. They likely illegally use funds intended to mitigate for harmful community effects from fossil fuel development to instead push this project to enhance such development and increase the associated adverse effects. They are clearly out of step with the increasingly serious concerns of most Americans, and regressively acting against the public interest.

I believe that the DEIS "No Action Alternative" is the only reasonable choice given the relevant laws and best available scientific information, and consistent with the public interest. I urge all relevant agencies with permit and/or funding authority to support and adopt this "No Action Alternative" and thereby reject this harmful and unnecessary project. Limited government funds should instead be used to advance clean

alternative energy sources and to increase protection for our public lands.

In addition, I share the concerns about the adequacy of this DEIS under NEPA and the CEQ regulations with respect to the following issues:

- **Increase in Uinta Basin Oil Production** - The EIS must consider the increase in production of fossil fuels that will be a direct result of the railway operations. The railway could increase oil production in the Uinta Basin by up to four times the current level. The EIS needs to consider the full impact that the new exploration, drilling, production and eventual combustion of fossil fuels will have on the environment, wildlife, and nearby communities.

- **Climate Change** - The proposed railway is intended to facilitate the vast expansion of oil, gas, and other fossil fuels in the Uinta Basin to distant markets. Without the railway, these fuels have nowhere to be sold, and thus, cannot be developed. This increase in oil production --potentially four times the current amount-- will contribute irreversibly to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Our climate is already at a tipping point, we must not allow an expansion of fossil fuel development on this scale.

- **Air Quality** - Air pollution in the Uinta Basin already exceeds federal standards because of existing oil and gas development in the region -- by increasing oil and gas development, this project would make it worse.

- **Wildlife** - The proposed route of the Uinta Basin Railway traverses roadless areas, steep canyons, and rugged terrain. Over 10,000 acres of big game habitat will be affected by the railroad. Some of this area has been designated as crucial big game habitat by the U.S. Forest Service. The route also impacts the 1600 acres of Greater sage grouse habitat, and areas inhabited by the endangered Barnaby ridge-cross.

- **Water** - The preferred project alignment would run almost the entire length of Indian Canyon Creek, affecting the entire area with 443 stream crossings, impacting over 61 miles of streams and 26 acres of floodplains. All the alternative routes connect to the existing railroad at the same spot: directly adjacent to important wetlands along the Price River. These are unacceptable impacts to the precious perennial waterways in our semi-arid state.

● **Community** - The Uinta Basin Railway would change the way of life for those who live and recreate in the area. Landowners in Argyle Canyon and other off-grid canyon communities along the proposed railway route fear the disruption and disfigurement of the stunning landscapes they love. Each locomotive would disturb beloved wildlife, bringing noise and clouds of diesel smoke. Mile-long trains would create traffic delays and the real potential for accidents, derailments, spills and sparks, which could ignite disastrous wildfires. This is an unacceptable threat to community health, safety and wellbeing.

Please ensure that these issues are all thoroughly and objectively addressed in any Final EIS.

Please keep me on this email list for all future notifications relating to this project.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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