

GREAT NORTHERN

CORRIDOR COALITION



Environmental Hot Spots

Great Northern Corridor SWOT Analysis

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Prepared by the Olsson Associates Team

Introduction

The Great Northern Corridor (GNC) stretches from Chicago to ports on the Pacific Coast and represents an east-west artery of commerce that supports the economic vitality of more than 27 million Americans across eight North Central and Pacific Northwestern States. Thousands of manufacturers, ranchers, farmers, miners, timber and limber businesses, and energy companies rely upon the multimodal transport options the corridor provides. The GNC consists of railroad and highway surface transportation networks which connect deep water ports, river ports, rail terminals, and a wide array of warehousing and distribution facilities

This Environmental Hot Spots White Paper presents the findings of an initial, high-level review of potential environmental and permitting “hot spots” that exist along the GNC which may result in a more involved permitting and environmental approval process for individual projects along the Corridor. This paper discusses the methodology for the review of the environmental issues as well as an initial analysis of the findings along the GNC as a whole. Please note that for some resources, such as Tribal lands, only large-scale areas are included; more detailed information will be developed in the next phase of the project as specific projects are more closely examined.

Environmental Resources Mapping

The Olsson Associates Team (Team) began by mapping the GNC with a 300 mile buffer in order to assess potential environmental resources along the Corridor that could potentially lead to more involved environmental permitting for individual projects. At this high scale, potential environmental resources with a high probability of affecting project schedule, cost, or benefits were mapped along the Corridor; these resources included:

- Federal and State lands
- Native American Tribal lands
- Military installations
- Coastal Management Zones
- Air Non-attainment areas
- Critical habitat for federally listed species
- Ramsar Wetlands
- Superfund Sites
- Wild and Scenic Rivers

References for the sources of the data used to map these resources is included in the final section of this white paper. Individual maps were prepared for each resource. Once these resources were mapped, the Team reviewed their prevalence along the corridor, and potential for overlap between resources, to determine which resources could potentially create environmental permitting/approval “hot spots.”

Analysis of Environmental “Hot Spots”

After reviewing the previously listed environmental resources along the GNC corridor (within a 300 mile buffer), the Team narrowed down the resources to those that seemed to be most prevalent directly along the Corridor and also those that overlapped one another along the Corridor. Three resources, Federal and State lands, Native American Tribal

Lands, and critical habitat for federally listed species, were selected as the most prevalent and overlapping resources. These resources, as they intersect the GNC and overlap once another, are shown on **Figure 1**.

In particular, the northwestern portion of the GNC, which contains the northwest port connectivity, is overlapped by Federal and State lands, Native American Tribal lands, and critical habitat. The abundance of resources in this area could lead to additional environmental approvals and permitting for particular projects along the GNC. Consultation with various federal and state agencies or Native American tribes would be required for projects that take place within lands owned by them.

Consultation with Agencies for Federal- and State-Owned Lands

Consultation and coordination with the federal agency that owns the land where the proposed project would take place would be required. This consultation could include coordination under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which would include preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), depending on the scope and potential impacts of the proposed project. This would also lead to additional federal permitting requirements such as Section 106 under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for listed species. Consultation and coordination with state agencies would also be required under NEPA, and additionally as required for projects taking place on lands owned by the state. This could also require additional state-level permitting for things like air, water/stormwater, and state-listed species.

Native American Tribal Consultation

Federal consultation with Native American tribes is required when potential projects take place on, or could impact, Tribal lands or interests; this consultation needs to be meaningful, in good faith, and entered into on a government-to-government basis that supports and respects tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Preservation laws that would need to be considered during Tribal consultation could include: the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the Archeological Resources Protection Act (APRA), and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA). These regulations would likely fall under the scope of either a NEPA or NHPA Section 106 process.

Critical Habitat Consultation with USFWS

The USFWS defines the term “critical habitat” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as “specific geographic area(s) that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species that may require special management and protection.” As a result, federal agencies are required to consult with the USFWS on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize to ensure that their actions will not destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. Designation of a critical habitat does not necessarily restrict development within the boundaries of critical habitat, but rather requires consultation with the USFWS to determine that the habitat, and any potential species occupying it, are not adversely affected. Mitigation may be required or recommended for projects as a result of consultation with the USFWS under the ESA. Consultation with the USFWS would fall under the scope of the previously described NEPA process, and would also be required for any project requiring federal funding or authorization.

State-Specific GIS Information

Additionally, the Team is providing a database of links for state-specific GIS environmental information that can be used for planning purposes. The following links are listed state-by-state and include a brief description of the information included in the link.

Illinois - <https://clearinghouse.isgs.illinois.edu/data>

This site contains data from Illinois about soil climate and weather, elevation, imagery, geology, infrastructure, land covers, hydrology, and cadastral.

Wisconsin - <ftp://dnrftp01.wi.gov/geodata/metadadata/>

This site contains all GIS data from maintained and published by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Minnesota - <https://gisdata.mn.gov/>

This site contains an extensive list of data that includes biota, boundaries, environmental, climatology, meteorology, atmospheric, economy, elevation, geology, farming, health, inland waters, imagery, military, planning, location (geodetic and addresses), demographic, transportation, structure, utilities, and communication.

North Dakota - <https://apps.nd.gov/hubdataportal/srv/en/main.home>

This site contains web based data known as web service layers which are read only in nature. Data from this site includes communication, ecological, elevation, emergency services, map indexes, geology, boundaries, government lands, health, hydrography, imagery, land use, land cover, points of interest, natural resources, soils, and transportation.

Montana - <http://geoinfo.msl.mt.gov/>

This site contains data that includes biota, boundaries, climatology, meteorology, atmospheric, economy, elevation, environmental, farming, health, imagery, inland waters, military, location (geodetic and addresses), planning, demographics, structures, transportation, utilities, and communications.

Idaho - <http://cloud.insideidaho.org/>

This site contains web based data known as web service layers which are read only in nature. Data from this site includes elevation, map indexes, biota, boundaries, imagery, climatology, meteorology, atmospheric, structures, planning, and transportation.

Oregon - <http://spatialdata.oregonexplorer.info/geoportal/catalog/main/home.page#>

This site contains web based data known as web service layers which are read only in nature. Data from this site includes administrative boundaries, bioscience, cadastral, climate, coastal/marine, elevation, geology, hazards, hydrography, imagery, land use, land cover, points of interest, transportation, utilities, and indexes.

Washington - <http://geography.wa.gov/>

This site contains data on biota, boundaries, climate, economic, elevation, environmental, farming, geology, health, inland waters, points of interest, military, oceans, planning, demographics, structures, transportation, and utilities.

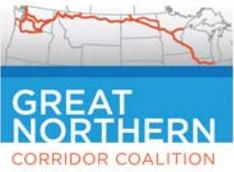
Conclusion

The environmental “hot spots” analyzed for the GNC provide a high-scale understanding of potential environmental authorization and permitting that could be required for projects along and within the GNC. Three environmental resources (Federal and State lands, Native American Tribal lands, and critical habitat) in particular occur most predominantly along the GNC, specifically in the northwest portion of the Corridor. These resources are prevalent and overlap one another within the Corridor which could create additional authorization and permitting requirements for specific projects. These environmental resources would typically trigger requirements for environmental coordination and consultation with various federal and state agencies, and would need to be considered when planning projects. In contrast, some environmental issues such as air quality non-attainment, might be benefitted by projects that reduce congestion or greenhouse gas emissions.

The specifics of adverse or beneficial impacts, the need for authorizations or permits, as well as the level of consultation and coordination with agencies that is required, will depend on the specifics of the project. Once a specific project is identified, the geographic area of potential impacts can be refined and environmental resources that are potentially affected can be fully analyzed at a much smaller scale than this initial review of potential environmental “hot spots.”

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