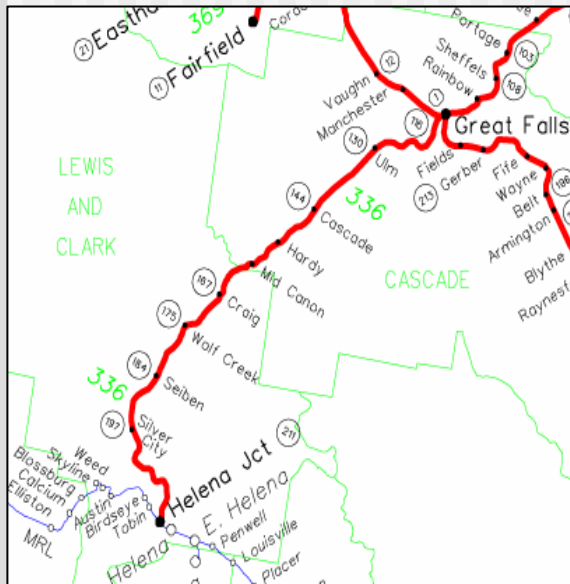


# BNSF Railway

## Great Falls – Helena Branch Line



Montana Department of Transportation



### Rail Service Competition Council Meeting

Great Falls, December 5, 2006

Dick Turner, Chief  
Multimodal Planning Bureau  
Transportation Planning Division  
Montana Department of Transportation

# History

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- James J. Hill responsible for the development and construction of Montana Central Railway.
- The last spike was driven on November 19, 1887.
- Montana Central became an operating subsidiary of Hill's Manitoba Line in 1890.
- Montana Central became part of the Great Northern in 1907.
- Montana Central was "dis-incorporated" in 1939.
- Great Northern merged with Northern Pacific Railway in 1970 in the Northern Lines merger that resulted in the Burlington Northern.

# Statistics

- Length of line is approximately 95 miles.
- 27 at-grade public crossings & 61 at-grade private crossings.
- Maximum track speed is 35 MPH with restrictions at several locations.
- Maximum car weight is 143 tons.
- Rail weight varies from 90 to 132 pounds.
- 59% of line consists of 112# welded rail.
  - Nine miles of 90# bolted
- 58 railroad bridges, four tunnels, & 22 turnouts.
- Right of Way varies between 100 and 200 feet.



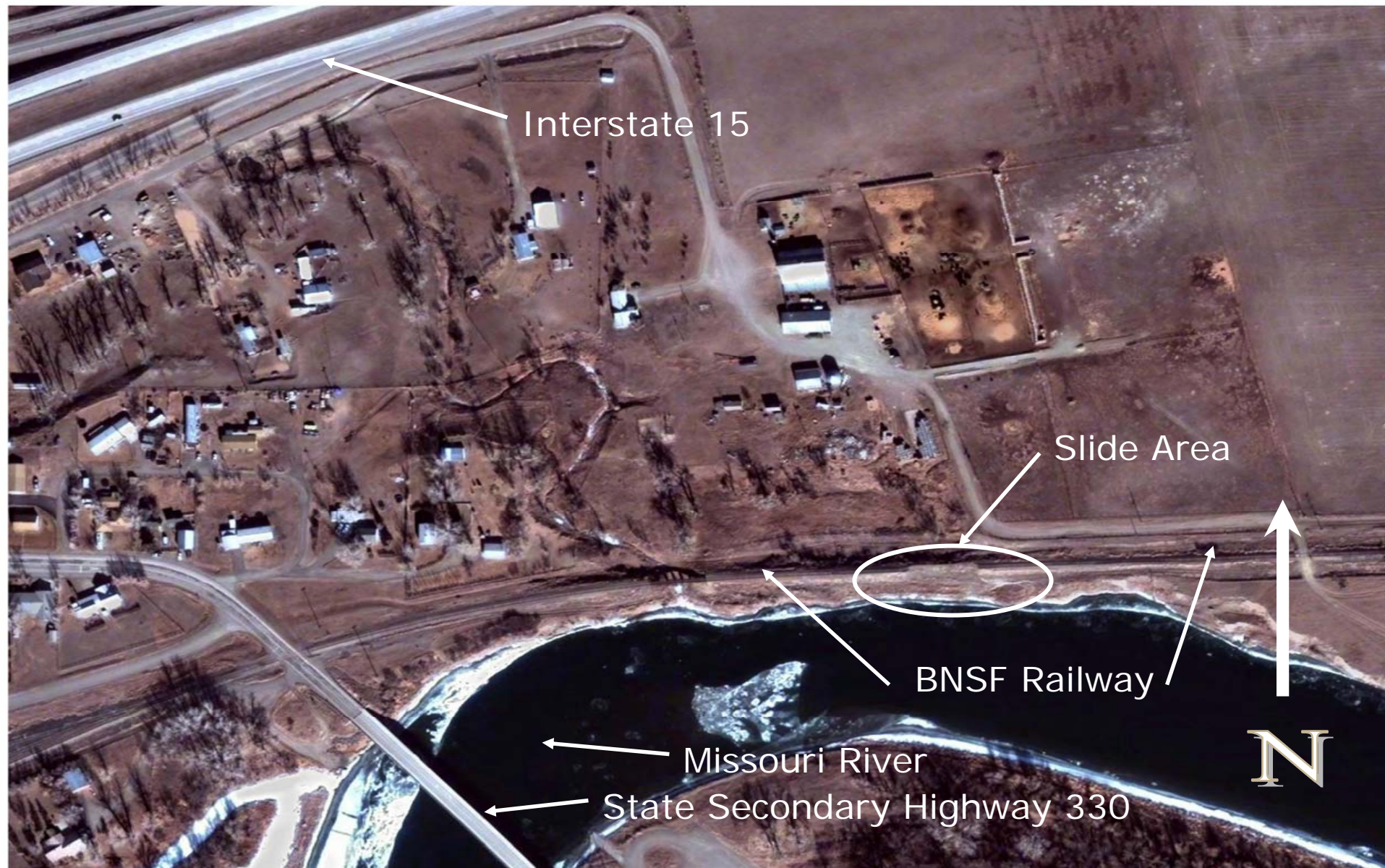
NOTE: Statistics provided by BNSF Railway

# Traffic

- Prior to 2000, there were no customers on the line and all traffic was “bridge” traffic.
- Traffic in 1999 (last year of service) totaled one million gross tons or approximately 60 cars per mile.
- Traffic is presently re-routed through Laurel.
- Prior to 2000, primary “bridge” traffic was Canadian potash moving from Saskatchewan to west coast ports.
- This potash now moves via the Canadian rail system to the same destinations.
- BNSF has used ends of the line for storage of rail cars.
- Line is eligible for STB “Class Exemption” abandonment process



# Slide Area - Ulm





# Slide Area - Ulm

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# Slide Area - Cascade





# Slide Area - Cascade

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# Permit Agencies Involvement

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Government Permit Agencies Authority – Permits that could apply to efforts to correct the slide areas:

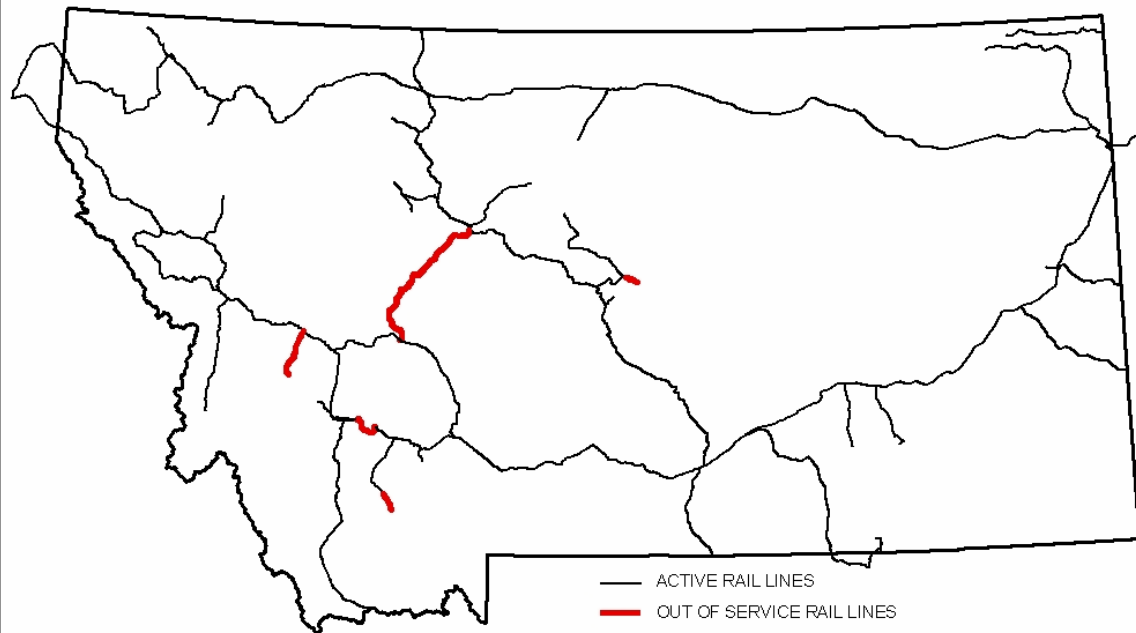
- **Montana Natural Streambed & Land Preservation Act (310 Permit)**
- **Montana Stream Protection Act (SPA 124 Permit)**
- **Montana Floodplain & Floodway Management Act**
- **Federal Clean Water Act (404 Permit)**
- **Federal Rivers & Harbors Act (Section 110 Permit)**
- **Short-term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity (318 Authorization)**
- **Stormwater Discharge General Permits**



*A Guide to Stream Permitting in Montana* is available on the internet at:  
[www.dnrc.mt.gov/permit.html](http://www.dnrc.mt.gov/permit.html)

# Out of service Lines – System Perspective

Montana Out of Service Rail Lines



PREPARED BY THE  
STATE OF MONTANA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
ROAD INVENTORY AND MAINTENANCE SECTION  
Created June 2004 by Dennis R. Smith, AAS, ESRP, Inc.  
MAD 1000 Statewide Montana RPS 2000  
Landscape Customized Color

Printed: Tuesday, December 5, 2006 11:33:40 AM File: D:\m\_functions\CUSTOM\_MAPS\RAILROADS\ACTIVE\_RAILROADS.mxd

- Out of Service lines are not unusual in Montana.

- Four other lines have been out of service longer.

- The Great Falls-Helena line is not identified on the BNSF Railway systems diagram map as Category I – where abandonment is anticipated within 3 years.

# Recent Interest in Line

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- SB 210 in the 2005 Legislative Session would have created a Corridor of Discovery Commission to convert line to trails use if abandoned.
- Legislature rejected SB 210 due to opposition from adjacent landowners and from agricultural producers.
- Passenger rail supporters are also concerned about loss of line.
- Rails-to-trails advocates have continued to conduct an outreach effort to develop support for converting the line to trails use through the Federal rail banking process.
- Process allows removal of track and ties, leaving tunnels and structures intact, and official abandonment & disbursement of property would not occur.
- Request to STB in October, 2006 by Dr. Fiehrer to acquire line. STB rejected the application on November 22.







# Questions?

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