

Chapter 3

Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

This chapter describes the affected environment and environmental consequences for each resource of concern for the proposed rail line and the contribution of the proposed rail line to cumulative impacts on each resource. OEA determined the resources of concern through scoping and agency and tribal consultation.

OEA took the following steps to analyze each resource.¹

1. Defined a study area or study areas to be analyzed.
2. Developed analysis methods.
3. Reviewed the current conditions of the resource in the relevant study area(s).
4. Determined the level of potential impact that the construction and operation of the proposed rail line would or could have on the resource.
5. Identified mitigation that would minimize or compensate for impacts, if required.²
6. Reviewed regulations and guidance relevant to each resource, which are summarized in Appendix B, *Applicable Regulations*.
7. For cumulative impacts, analyzed the effects of the proposed rail line when combined with impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects and actions.

OEA compared all potential impacts of the proposed rail line Action Alternatives and the No-Action Alternative. Under the No-Action Alternative, the proposed rail line would not be constructed or operated.

¹ OEA used the best available data to inform its analysis. These data may not reflect recent changes in conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In its petition, the Coalition has stated that projections of future rail traffic are based on conditions existing before the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and anticipates these conditions caused by the pandemic will be temporary in nature.

² The Coalition has proposed voluntary mitigation and OEA has made preliminary recommendations for mitigation. OEA will finalize recommended mitigation measures after comments are received on the Draft EIS and will present the final recommended mitigation measures in the Final EIS. The Board has the authority to impose mitigation measures as conditions to mitigate environmental impacts. Chapter 4, *Mitigation* contains the complete list of mitigation measures. Each mitigation measure has a unique identifier that consists of a prefix and a number. The Coalition's voluntary mitigation measures follow the format VM-1, VM-2, etc. OEA's recommended mitigation measures include a unique prefix for each resource topic. For example, mitigation measures for biological resources follow the format BIO-MM-1, and mitigation measures for land use and recreation follow the format LUR-MM-1. OEA uses these unique identifiers to refer to specific mitigation measures throughout Chapter 3.