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Comments of the BWRR SCMaglev Project's Water Quality Certification Application

1 message

Mo ODo <[REDACTED]>

Wed, Nov 15, 2023 at 11:53 PM

To: danielle.spendiff1@maryland.gov

Dear Ms.Spendiff:

Many years ago, I worked at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and came to appreciate this and the other large tracts of federal land just outside the Nation's Capital. This land serves not only as host to important research facilities, but also provides enormous benefits to the natural environment and local residents. The immense green space serves to mitigate effects of climate change while also providing a respite to local residents. This is a special area given its uniqueness so close to a major urban center.

For many years, the Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) has been in my awareness but was only recently visited. Last Friday (November 10, 2023), a friend and I explored for the first time the PRR. I was stunned by its beauty, the diversity of trees, and the bird population. How fortunate, I thought, to have a largely untouched natural resource so close to two major urban centers, Baltimore and Washington. Such a lovely find that I was sure to revisit.

On returning home, I was alerted coincidentally to the plans for potentially disturbing this land and other federal lands for the purpose of installing a magnetic levitation train (BWRR-SCMagLev). After reading about the project, it occurred to me that as a former federal employee, a resident of the greater Washington area, and a citizen who is concerned about the continuing threats to our fragile ecosystem, I needed to register my comment to request a halt to this project. There are many, many reasons to do so, one of which is the impact on water quality.

Please deny the requested water quality certification. Reasons for not approving this project:

Federal land needs to remain federal

Making federally-owned land available to private companies sets a dangerous precedent. Other private corporations could build landfills. Mining companies could claim "public good" and destroy land owned by the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Patuxent Research Refuge, or National Aeronautics and Space Administration. They could create an unnecessary and inconveniently located industrial zone, as well as impact federally-owned land in other parts of the United States.

Water quality impact

The damage inflicted on the environment will not be able to be mitigated. Water quality in Tier II catchment areas will be lower. The area will not be able to recover environmentally.

Invasive Species Proliferation

Invasive species are advantaged by the disturbance of soil as will be necessary to build train maintenance facilities, access roads, guides, laydown areas, etc. This will mean a less healthy ecosystem and loss of biodiversity through loss of habitat.

Retention of Original Biodiversity

The region has retained much of its original biodiversity. For example, the Patuxent Research Refuge has retained all its breeding bird species except for two (i.e., Broad-winged Hawk and Bachman's Sparrow). Similar results likely exist for all the other groups of plants, fungi, insects, and vertebrates. The combined protected landscapes of several government agencies have created an integrated refuge for the region's plant, animal, fungi, and micro-organisms. The extensive and interconnected nature of these landscapes allows for these species to ebb and flow in space and time without becoming locally extinct due to small parcel sizes. Mitigation efforts will be inadequate. Losses of unique and globally rare forests will be destroyed. It will be inadequate to simply plant trees somewhere else, buy other land, pay into a land bank, and other non-mitigation mitigations. This area cannot be replaced or recreated elsewhere because of unique characteristics (DEIS Chapter 4.3, Page 17)

Documentation of Plant and Animal Species

The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) has 901 plant species documented, while the Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) has 282 species of birds, 217 species of bees, and 72 species of butterflies. Thousands of insect specimens have been collected from the combined properties of the BARC and PRR. The biodiversity of these combined research centers is more studied, more completely known, and of greater taxonomic importance than any national park or wildlife refuge in the nation. Reductions in their living space will equate to reductions in their numbers. Many of the species using the PRR are migratory. Disruption of the resting areas are destructive to their migratory patterns and ability to reproduce and thrive.

Loss of Green Space, especially contiguous green space!

If built, the last and largest green space between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., will be weakened and partially disassembled. Green Corridor, the area that covers Greenbelt Park, the Greenbelt Forest Preserve, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, and Patuxent Research Refuge is the largest span of contiguous forest land on the East Coast between Richmond, Virginia, and Boston, Massachusetts. Former senator Paul Sarbanes called this area the "lungs of Maryland."

Climate Change Impacts, Pollution

If built, residents will lose the cooling, carbon storage, air pollution capture, calming, and spiritual aspects of this green area space. The impact area will be far beyond what the applicant claims. "Temporary" areas and access points will never be returned to their former capacities.

Cumulative Impacts to the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center

Cumulative impacts of the proposed Superconducting Magnetic Levitation train project and the Department of the Treasury's Bureau of Engraving and Printing's final plan for a Currency Production Facility on the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center will impact the same Tier II waters the Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail application addresses. The combination of these two projects' impacts on Tier II waters needs to be assessed and publicized, allowing the public sufficient time to comment.

There are already so many threats to our water quality, climate stability, and biodiversity. All of these are reasons to deny this certification. An added reason to deny is that the diminishment of this land will be a diminishment to the quality of life for citizens of the greater Washington area. The impact on the green space of our area renders this a 'dirty' project. Please deny the water quality certification and preserve this land for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Best regards,

Maureen O'Donnell

