



Alaska Railroad Corporation *News Release*

DATE: July 16, 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Federal Regulatory Warning Spurs Alaska Railroad Weed Control Permit Application

ANCHORAGE, Alaska-The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) has applied for an Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) permit to use chemical weed control along the railroad right-of-way (ROW) from Seward to Indian, as part of an annual integrated vegetation management (IVM) program. This 90-mile stretch is the worst area in terms of out of control track vegetation.

The application was spurred by an April 2009 letter from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), which warns of increased fines, train speed restrictions and possible track closure during the busy summer season. Constant vegetation growth and resulting sub-standard track conditions have drawn increased scrutiny from the FRA, the regulatory body governing safety for the rail industry. Since 1997, the FRA has written 947 defects and 74 violations directed at ARRC due to uncontrolled vegetation. In June 2009, the FRA issued an additional 171 defects and 47 violations. The most recent letter from the FRA, dated April 9, may signal an end to just getting by using previous unsuccessful methods of vegetation control.

ARRC had planned to re-submit a permit application in 2010, once a two-year herbicide research study is complete. However, the FRA warning and impending economic impact have compelled the ARRC to move forward immediately.

The ARRC had applied for an ADEC permit in 2006. ADEC denied the permit based on concerns with the selected herbicides in relation to use near water. The 2009 permit application addresses these concerns by:

- Increasing the set back from water to 100 feet.
- Limiting herbicide selection to AquaMaster, which is approved for use in and around water bodies.
- Limiting the permit area to the worst weed-laden section on the track, as opposed to the entire railroad.

Since 1983, the Alaska Railroad has repeatedly tried to control vegetation along its 600-miles of track with non-chemical methods including mechanical brush-cutting, manual labor, steam, and burning. These alternative methods have proven inadequate. In addition, mechanical cutting cannot address vegetation between the rails and ties, and especially root growth down within the track bed.

With safety as the driving factor, a chemical weed control permit will allow the ARRC to:

- Enable adequate track inspections to visually identify rail defects and other track problems much more clearly
- Help employees to avoid slip, trip and fall injuries
- Reduce the risk of derailment
- Eliminate plants and roots that de-stabilize the track sub surface
- Comply with federal regulatory requirements to control vegetation on and within the rail bed
- Remove brush that has fueled wild fires in the past

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In addition to safety, a permit will also assist State and Federal efforts to control the interior spread of noxious and invasive weeds. Due to train activity and rail passenger origins, weeds that can harm and overtake the natural Alaska ecosystem proliferate and propagate along the rail corridor.

More information on the ARRC's vegetation management program is available at www.alaskarailroad.com (click on "Community" and then "Vegetation Management.")

ARRC is a self-sustaining, state-owned Corporation that operates without state subsidy, serving a number of rail belt communities from Seward to Fairbanks.

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MEDIA ADVISORY:

ADEC permitting includes a 60-day public process, beginning July 16. Three public hearings will be held 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. and will be preceded by a question-and-answer session from 4:00 to 4:30 p.m.

ADEC Public Hearing Schedule

- Whittier: Monday, August 10. City Council Chambers, P-12 Bldg at the intersection of Whittier Street and Glacier Avenue
- Seward: Tuesday, August 11. Seward Marine Center / RM Rae Education Bldg at 125 3rd Avenue
- Anchorage: Wednesday, August 12. Marriott Downtown Hotel, intersection of 7th Avenue and "I" Street

Public comment may be given verbally at the hearings or written comments may be submitted no later than September 15, 2009 via mail to:

Stephanie Stewart, ADEC Pesticide Program
555 Cordova Street
Anchorage, AK 99501

Or by email to: Stephanie.Stewart@alaska.gov