



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex
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NEC FUTURE

February 27, 2017

Attn: Ms. Rebecca Reyes-Alicea
U.S. DOT Federal Railroad Administration
One Bowling Green, Suite 429
New York, NY 10004
(Submitted via email to info@necfuture.com)

Dear Ms. Rebecca Reyes-Alicea:

The Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex would like to advise you that the proposed “conceptual” alignment of the NEC future project, specifically the “*Old Saybrook to Kenyon Bypass*” portion of the proposal lies within or runs immediately adjacent to the focus area for the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge, where land acquisition authority has been granted to conserve important fish and wildlife resources.

While the Tier 1 FEIS does address other National Wildlife Refuges and recognizes the sensitivity of these areas, we feel it is important to address this national wildlife refuge as well and the purposes for which it has been established.

This National Wildlife Refuge was established to protect wildlife resources and their habitats including migratory songbird, shrub dependent species including the New England cottontail, and Endangered, Threatened, and rare species.

Importantly, the conservation design for this refuge assumed that existing conservation lands would provide much needed habitat and dispersal areas for these species in question. However, the proposed location of the new rail lines bisect and fragment multiple conservation lands including the Grills Preserve in Westerly, RI and the Francis Carter Preserve in Charlestown, RI.

These two preserves and others figured highly in providing a landscape where long term conservation of these species could be reasonably obtained. In combination with retention of current rail lines in the area, the proposal could have substantial effects on managing these species over time, including impacts to habitat connectivity, direct habitat loss, reduction in habitat quality adjacent to the rail lines, and the direct reduction in available habitat. This can in turn reduce the effectiveness of lands incorporated into the National Wildlife Refuge System in this area. It is unknown as to whether mitigation applied during a Tier 2 assessment could ameliorate these impacts.

Ms. Rebecca Reyes-Alicea

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We recommend that the Federal Railroad Administration consider and evaluate these comments not only in the Final Tier 1 EIS but also when drafting the Record of Decision for this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. E. Vandemoer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

CHARLES E. VANDEMOER
Project Leader
Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex