



Great Redwood Trail Agency

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Today the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA) took the next step in building out the world class Great Redwood Trail in an application filed with the federal Surface Transportation Board.

“The State of California was very clear in its mandate that we are to build the trail from Cloverdale to Humboldt Bay, and this is the next step in that process,” said GRTA Interim Executive Director Karyn Gear.

In order to convert the broken-down railway to a trail, the GRTA is working through the process to railbank the line with the federal government. This officially preserves the corridor for all time and allows for the public trail to be built along the right of way. Due to a multitude of serious safety concerns, GRTA’s dilapidated rail line was closed by the federal government 25 years ago and has not seen a freight train since.

Last year the GRTA filed to railbank 176 miles of the rail line from Willits to Humboldt Bay, and the Surface Transportation Board (STB) approved the application after soundly rejecting attempts by the Skunk tourist train and others to take over critical portions of the public right-of-way.

Today, the GRTA began the process of railbanking the second segment of its line from Willits to Cloverdale, so it can begin trail planning for that 50-mile portion which will run adjacent to scenic vineyard lands, through local communities and along portions of the Russian River.

These filings will allow the STB to make a determination on the status of the Skunk train, which has operated exclusively as a tourist excursion operation and not a freight line. Without ongoing freight operations, STB jurisdiction should terminate, along with the connection to the interstate rail system. This is a process that must be completed before the GRTA railbanking process can move forward. This “adverse abandonment” application seeks a finding that because the Skunk line does not conduct freight operations, and has been unable to run trains from Ft Bragg to Willits at all due to tunnel collapses on the line, their connection to the long embargoed and shuttered GRTA line is not required, paving the way for the full repurposing of the line to complete the Great Redwood Trail all the way from Humboldt Bay to Sonoma County.

“The Skunk does a great job on their tourist train rides and rail-biking operation, and neither this filing nor railbanking the entire GRTA corridor will in any way prevent those activities from continuing. We hope that they will concur that railbanking is in the best interest of their company and the North Coast,” said GRTA Chair Caryl Hart. “The STB’s rulings to date have paved the way for the establishment of the Great Redwood Trail, and we are asking for its approval now so we can continue to plan and build out this incredible trail system.”

The GRTA has already begun their master planning process for the trail and is holding public forums this spring to discuss all aspects of the trail. Information and meeting schedules can be viewed here: <https://greatredwoodtrailplan.org/>

Several segments of the Great Redwood Trail are already built and open to the public in cities like Eureka, Arcata, and Ukiah and are underway in Willits, along Humboldt Bay, and more. Outdoor recreation is booming in California and trails create broad economic opportunities and environmental benefits for their surrounding communities.

The Great Redwood Trail was created by the state of California, through the efforts of Senate Majority Leader Mike McGuire, who represents the North Coast.

A copy of the STB application is attached.