Summary of Major Conclusions

The Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has conducted an extensive review of the potential beneficial and adverse environmental impacts that could result from the proposed project, a new rail line in Juab, Sanpete, and Sevier Counties, Utah. The Six County Association of Governments (SCAOG or the Applicant) is proposing to construct a new 43-mile rail line between Juab and Salina in central Utah. The purpose of this project is to provide rail access to local industries; primarily the Southern Utah Fuel Company (SUFCO) coal mine owned by Bowie Resources and located about 30 miles northeast of Salina, Utah.

The SUFCO mine produces 6 million to 7 million tons of low-sulfur coal annually. About 4 million tons are shipped to power plants in Carbon and Emery Counties east of the mine, about 1 million tons are shipped to the Salt Lake City area, and 1 million to 2 million tons are shipped to the Sharp loading facility near Levan, Utah.

Other than Juab's access to the nearby Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) line, there is no freight rail service in this part of Utah, and, therefore, local industries in Sanpete and Sevier Counties rely exclusively on trucking for freight transportation, including the transportation of coal from the SUFCO mine.

OEA issued the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project in June 2007. During the public review and comment period, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) submitted informal comments suggesting that OEA conduct a more detailed analysis of the potential impacts of each alternative route on wetlands and consider an alternative that would either avoid or have fewer impacts on wetlands at the north end of the project.

Following receipt of EPA's letter, OEA worked closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to determine the extent of water resources that would be impacted by each alternative and to identify new alternatives that could avoid or minimize these impacts. OEA released its analysis on May 2, 2014, in a Supplemental Draft EIS. Comments were due on June 23, 2014.

This Final EIS responds to the comments received on both the Draft and Supplemental Draft EISs. In addition, it sets forth the mitigation measures recommended by OEA to minimize environmental impacts associated with this project. Finally, it contains OEA's major conclusions based on the information available to date; consultation with Federal, state, and local agencies; input from a wide variety of organizations and citizens of Utah; and its own independent environmental analysis.

OEA has identified Alternative B3/B2 as its Environmentally Preferable Alternative for the proposed new rail line because it would have the least impacts to water resources (including wetlands) and associated biological resources, as well as fewer impacts to cultural and historic resources.

The major conclusions are set forth below.

1. The proposed rail line would remove up to 750 truck trips per day (one way) from local roads. These trucks currently haul coal produced by the SUFCO mine out of the area. The trucks pass through the cities of Salina, Centerfield, Gunnison, and Levan on their way to a loading facility near Salina, where the coal is removed from the trucks and loaded onto trains. As an example, trucks travel through downtown Salina at a frequency of about one truck every minute. The trucks use local and state highways as well as city streets that are not designed for heavy truck loads. Each truck carries about 43 tons of coal.

2. OEA originally considered 15 build alternatives in the Draft EIS. Thirteen of the alternatives were dismissed from further consideration for a variety of reasons. In addition to the No-Action Alternative (Alternative A), two build alternatives were carried forward for detailed analysis: (1) the Applicant's Proposed Action as of the Draft EIS (Alternative B) and (2) a second alternative (Alternative C).

   The Supplemental Draft EIS examined five build alternatives in addition to the No-Action Alternative (Alternative A). The build alternatives consist of Alternative B (the Proposed Action in the Draft EIS), three modified alternative routes (Alternatives B1, B2, and B3) developed by the Applicant after issuance of the Draft EIS, and Alternative N1 near Mills, Utah, which had been dismissed in the Draft EIS but was re-evaluated in the Supplemental Draft.

   Each of the build alternatives considered in both the Draft, Supplemental Draft, and Final EISs would result in adverse impacts, primarily to wetlands, farmlands, and cultural resources. To minimize and, in some cases, avoid potential environmental impacts to these resources, OEA recommended that the Board impose environmental mitigation measures. These measures include requiring the Applicant to use construction practices that would maintain natural water flow and drainage and use best management practices.

3. OEA assessed noise and vibration impacts that would result from both rail line construction and train operations on the proposed new rail line. Following the Board's regulations for noise analysis, OEA first determined whether the project would result in an increase in noise exposure as measured by a day-night average noise level (L_{dn}) of 3 A-weighted decibels (dBA) or more and an increase to a noise level of 65 dBA L_{dn}.

   OEA's analysis indicated that the width of the 65-dBA L_{dn} wayside train noise contour would be 38 feet, a distance that is within the proposed right-of-way limits for the project—a 100-foot-wide right-of-way would be required for rail operations, and a 200-foot-wide right-of-way would be required for and during construction of the rail line. No sensitive receptors are located within the 65-dBA L_{dn} wayside noise contour for the project. However, because of the relatively low background noise levels in the study area, 16 residences located within 0.25 mile of the crossings would likely hear train warning signals sounded at the public crossings. OEA recommended mitigation to minimize construction-related noise.

4. The Applicant's Proposed Action (Alternative B in the Draft EIS) would fill 12.3 acres of wetlands. Three new alternatives were studied in the Supplemental Draft EIS and Final EIS that would reduce potential project-related wetland impacts. The alternatives studied in detail would fill 3.1 acres if the Applicant's new Proposed Action (Alternative B/B2) were constructed or 2.1 acres if Alternative B3/B2 were constructed. Alternative N1, which would impact 0.5 acre, was studied but dismissed for safety reasons. OEA has recommended 17 mitigation measures to avoid or reduce impacts on water resources and wetlands in this Final EIS.

5. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that the Proposed Action and Alternatives would have no effect on threatened or endangered species. USFWS has designated critical habitat for two federally listed species: one bird species, the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), and one plant species, the heliotrope milkvetch (*Astragalus montii*). Project-related construction and operation would not affect these species because the areas designated as critical habitat for each of these species are outside the project right-of-way (area of disturbance). Also, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has stated that no threatened, endangered, or sensitive species are present on BLM-administered land in the project right-of-way. Other minor impacts to wildlife habitat are addressed with proposed mitigation.

6. Construction of the proposed rail line would result in the loss of 66 acres of irrigated farmland and between 126 acres (Alternative B/B2) and 165 acres (Alternative B3/B2) of non-irrigated and sub-irrigated cropland.

7. The potential overall project benefits from the reduction of truck traffic include reduced congestion and improved safety on affected roads, reduced traffic delay, reduced noise in communities along local roads, reduced local air pollutant emissions, reduced roadway maintenance costs, and longer pavement life.

8. Construction of the proposed rail line would potentially eliminate 108 jobs in the trucking industry. These jobs could be offset by new jobs in the rail industry. OEA's analysis indicates that any socioeconomic impacts that could occur from job loss in the trucking industry would not be disproportionately borne by minority or low-income populations.

9. Construction of the proposed rail line would adversely affect up to 36 properties within the area of potential effects that are eligible or unevaluated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. OEA, in coordination with the Utah State Historic Preservation Officer, BLM, USACE, the State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), the Utah Department of Natural Resources, State Parks and Recreation, 11 federally recognized tribes, and the Applicant, is preparing a Programmatic Agreement to satisfy the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Based on its independent environmental analysis and review of all comments received, OEA recommends that the Board grant the Applicant authority to construct and operate Alternative B3/B2, conditioned on the requirement that the Applicant implement the environmental mitigation measures set forth in Chapter 2, Final Recommended Conditions/Mitigation, of this Final EIS. The environmental mitigation measures include all of the Applicant's voluntary mitigation measures as well as mitigation measures recommended by OEA.

Issuance of this Final EIS completes the Board's environmental review process. The Board will now make a final decision on the project. In making its final decision, the Board will consider the entire record on the transportation merits as well as the entire environmental record, including all public comments; the Draft, Supplemental, and Final EISs; and OEA's final recommended mitigation measures.