

30. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

This chapter addresses irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources. This category of loss typically applies to natural resources, but can also be a consideration for human cultural resources (cemeteries and historic features) and socioeconomic conditions. Irreversible means that the loss is permanent. For example, cutting down an old growth forest or demolishing a commercial downtown to construct a highway represents natural and socioeconomic losses, respectively, that are irreversible. Irretrievable refers to loss of productivity and applies to resources that can be restored but take a long time to reach pre-disturbance conditions. Filling a wetland constitutes an irretrievable commitment of resources, as the wetland can be reconstructed, but the re-establishment of the functional ecological community can take many years.

The SDEIS Preferred Alternative required a number of natural and man-made resources be expended in the construction and operation of this project, including the funding, building materials, energy, and human effort that would be required to develop, construct, and operate the passenger rail system. Few of these resources qualify as irreversible or irretrievable losses. These impacts are confined to property acquisition and loss of wetlands.

A total of 20 private properties and 9 public properties would be acquired either in whole or part to construct the passenger rail system. Although the Uniform Relocation Assistance Act provides assistance for uses displaced by public projects, meaning that it is likely that many of the displaced commercial enterprises would be re-established elsewhere, their loss in the study area represents an irreversible change. Parkland acreage would also be permanently incorporated into the Northern Branch to accommodate station parking areas and infrastructure. The NJDEP Green Acres Program requires that diverted parkland be compensated by the provision of new land for parkland development and/or funds for the development of parks and recreational amenities. Green Acres would therefore require that new parkland be developed or existing parks improved, although the parkland acquired would be permanently lost.

The Preferred Alternative is expected to require the acquisition of 3.92 acres of wetlands (Refer to Chapter 15: Wetlands for additional details). These wetland areas would be built upon to improve the right-of-way for rail passenger service, and as such represent an irretrievable commitment of resources to the project.

There is no mitigation for irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Although the Northern Branch Corridor wetland acreage acquired would be redeveloped in a wetlands mitigation bank which serves the same watershed as the affected wetlands do, such as the Kane tract or the MRI-3 Wetland Mitigation Bank, the creation of new wetland acreage to maintain watershed water quality does not physically replace the wetlands in the same location as where they were taken. Consequently, although the function of the affected wetland areas can be mitigated, the loss of the discreet wetlands areas within the Northern Branch Corridor cannot be mitigated and therefore constitute an irretrievable commitment of resources within the project study area.

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