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RR Seeks To Close Line

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PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Maine Central Railroad says flood damage and an increasing deficit were factors in its bid to abandon a 58-mile freight spur in northern New Hampshire and Vermont.

The Portland-based freight carrier confirmed Thursday it will petition the Interstate Commerce Commission for authorization to abandon service between Quebec Junction at Carroll, N.H., and Beecher Falls, Vt.

An MEC spokesman said recent floods washed out three bridges along the road's Mountain Division spur, and work crews were still attempting to repair the damage.

The final 23-mile stretch of track running into Beecher Falls has been out of service since the flooding several weeks ago.

The railroad said the spur had been operating at a deficit,

which was sharply increased last month when the St. Regis Paper Co. elected to ship from a Canadian National railroad at Norton, Vt., rather than along the spur.

That decision left the Beecher Falls Furniture Co., a division of the Baumritter Corp., as the only Vermont shipper on the line.

All but a mile and a half of the spur is located in New Hampshire.

Initial reports that curtailment of rail service could force the closing of the furniture plant were denied by its general manager, Marshall Ames, who said the firm will ship its future cargoes by truck.

Ames said a rail shutdown would have no adverse effects on the company or its 600 employees.

Earlier, the plant's controller, Charles Carchide, warned of possible job layoffs. He said

shipments have been temporarily diverted by truck to Stratford, N.H., but the plan has been costly and "the company could go broke if we have to truck for long."

In New Hampshire, Resources Commissioner George Gilman said the company has a \$4 million payroll in his state alone, and also buys wood products from the Granite State.

Gilman said several grain supply firms in New Hampshire's North Country are dependent upon the MEC spur.

"We're in touch with Maine Central," said Gilman. He said Gov. Thomson has "given us permission to see if we can help maintain and retain the line."

Gilman said his state could petition the ICC to reject the railroad's petition, or try to

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have interconnecting lines take over the freight spur.

These lines include the Canadian Pacific, Canadian National and the Grand Trunk.

If the spur is abandoned, Gilman said the state would acquire the rights of way, as it has tried to do with lines being abandoned in southern New Hampshire by the Boston & Maine Railroad.

The MEC said the Mountain Division spur is made up of four segments, including:

—A 13-mile stretch extending north from Quebec Jct. to Coos Jct. in Lancaster, N.H., owned by the MEC.

—Nine miles from Coos Jct. north to Groveton, N.H., owned by the Boston & Maine.

—About 13 miles between Groveton and North Stratford, N.H., owned by the Canadian National's Grand Trunk.

—A 23-mile stretch from North Stratford to Beecher Falls, owned by the MEC.

President E. Spencer Miller said the MEC has no plans to abandon its Mountain Division main line, which runs from the Rigby Yards in South Portland, Maine, to St. Johnsbury, Vt., where it links up with the financially troubled St. Johnsbury & Lamoille County Railroad.