

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, August 28, 2012

Contact:

Laura Stevens, Sierra Club, 503-740-9078

Samantha Lockhart, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, 201-925-8300

Kimberly Larson, Climate Solutions, 206-388-8674

Krista Collard, Sierra Club, 415-977-5619

Northwest Residents and Leaders Converge on Army Corps' Portland Office
Demands for full evaluation of dangerous coal exports escalate

PORTLAND- Today, in an unprecedented action, hundreds of Northwest residents and local Oregon elected officials came together in front of the Northwest Headquarters of the Army Corps of Engineers in demanding a long overdue evaluation of the five coal export proposals threatening the region. They delivered over 25,000 signatures to the Army Corps.

Out-of-state and foreign coal companies have been moving forward with controversial plans to haul up to 150 million tons of Powder River Basin coal through Washington and Oregon to be burned in unregulated coal fired power plants in Asia. The residents, officials and petition signers are calling on the Army Corps to protect residents by conducting a full evaluation of the five current proposals. If done properly, the review would mandate a structured public testimony period and a thorough analysis of all affected communities from mine to rail and from port to plant.

Moli Thomas, a member of the Stevenson City Council in Oregon has many concerns about the harmful effects coal transport could have on her community, she say that according to estimates, train frequency in the Columbia River Gorge would increase to 1 train every 24 minutes--24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

“The average coal train is expected to be mile and a half in length, meaning our waterfront and commercial business district would essentially be inaccessible for approximately 40 minutes of every hour, every day, says Thomas. “Currently, there are no adequate alternatives to access the river and commercial district, and there are no provisions in place to fund alternative access. To do so, would add insurmountable financial burden to the people of our community.”

Despite calls from elected officials on the local, state, and federal level, the Environmental Protection Agency, and tens of thousands of local residents, the Army Corps of Engineers has continued to shy away from announcing plans to fulfill its duty to conduct an area-wide review of the proposals.

As the coal companies develop their plans to build coal export terminals in the Pacific Northwest evolve, local communities and elected bodies are not the only ones thinking transporting coal would be risky business. To date, there are close to 300 health professionals, 88 faith leaders, and 400 local businesses (mostly from smaller rail line communities) that have either voiced concern or come out against coal export off the West Coast. A [number of elected officials and agencies](#) (now approximately 90 local elected officials) – most recently U.S. Senators Merkley and Murray and Congressmen Smith and McDermott along with Gov. Kitzhaber-- have either come out in opposition or have raised concerns about coal export.

Less than two weeks ago, RailAmerica announced that after two years of careful study, it has scrapped plans to develop the proposed coal export terminal at Grays Harbor.

In May, Portland General Electric (PGE)-owner of the last remaining coal fired power plant in Oregon, turned down a lucrative leasing deal with Kinder Morgan to ship 30 million tons of coal to Port Westward, located adjacent to PGE's natural gas power plant. As reported in the South County Spotlight, PGE was concerned that coal dust and traffic congestion could impair the operation of its natural gas power plant at Port Westward.

Finally, last week marked the eleventh coal train derailment since the end of June, resulting in terrible wreckage and the tragic loss of four lives. Although the exact cause of these derailments have not yet determined, many are questioning if coal dust was contributing factor given the documented damage it can do to the rail lines. Additionally, coal trains are the heaviest and longest type of train to travel the rail-lines.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF), no stranger to the risks of coal dust, states on its website that "...BNSF has determined that coal dust poses a serious threat to the stability of the track structure and thus to the operational integrity of our lines in the Powder River Basin." In 2005, Vice President of Transportation at BNSF testified that coal dust was "absolutely a contributing factor" in back-to-back train derailments in 2005.

Kate McBride, a Hood River City Council member in Oregon, says her concerns are countless; listing coal dust falling off of nearby trains polluting the Columbia River, to the hit her local economy is bound to take when tourism dollars, a key source of revenue for the city, dry up.

"Hood River is known for its water and wind sports like windsurfing, kiteboarding, and more recently, stand-up paddling. This new barge traffic would clog up the river, making all of these sports more dangerous and less attractive," says McBride.

"The Army Corps needs to study all of risks from the mining operations to the toxic pollution that would return to us from Asia. That's why we're calling for a full evaluation and a comprehensive public comment period," McBride added.

The risks associated with each individual proposal stretch far and wide, and are increasingly recognized by elected officials across party lines. Regardless of party majority, several city councils around the region have unanimously passed resolutions, all asking the Army Corps of Engineers to do an area-wide look at the cumulative impacts of the five proposals.

POWER PAST COAL is an alliance of health, environmental, clean-energy, faith and community groups working to stop coal export off the West Coast. www.powerpastcoal.org