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VOICES FROM ACROSS STATE, COUNTRY WEIGH IN ON “CRADLE TO GRAVE” IMPACTS OF COAL EXPORT

Approaching 100,000, Unprecedented Number Submit Comments Calling for Broad Look at Peabody Energy and SSA Marine’s Proposed Coal Export Terminal

Whatcom County, WA -- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Washington Department of Ecology, and Whatcom County PDS received comments approaching 100,000 detailing the broad “cradle to grave” scope they should take when looking at the proposed coal export terminal at Cherry Point, WA. Residents, businesses, organizations and elected officials called on the agencies to look at impacts from the mines, along the rail and tanker routes, and from coal burning once exported.

Today is the last day to submit public comment for the proposed Cherry Point terminal and the three agencies will next determine what they will study in the Environmental Impact Statement. If built, the terminal at Cherry Point would be the largest coal export terminal in North America, with Peabody Energy exporting its coal from the Powder River Basin. This is one of five terminals proposed for WA and OR. [The Cherry Point terminal would result in up to 18 coal trains per day traveling through WA, MT and ID.](#) The proponents of the terminal include Peabody Energy, SSA Marine, and Goldman Sachs.

The comments mirrored the depth and breadth of the movement against coal export across the region. From the state agencies like the Washington Departments of Health and Fish and Wildlife to towns all along the rail line. From health professionals, sheriffs, tribal leaders, and biologists, to faith leaders, community leaders and children. The written comments complement last falls’ historic hearings where public opposition dominated the participation.

Comments submitted [to the public record](#) conveyed the diversity of concern about coal export and the “whole truth” of possible impacts, starting at the Powder River Basin (PRB):

“Because the primary (or sole) reason for the GPT as well as the other proposed West Coast coal export terminals is to ship PRB coal to Asian markets, these terminal projects will lead to a significant increase in coal mining in the PRB. Thus, increased coal mining is a connected and cumulative impact of the GPT and the other proposed West Coast coal export terminals, and these impacts should be included and analyzed in the EIS. The proposed Otter Creek coal mine in southeastern Montana is just one example of this issue,” wrote Walter Archer, Chair of Northern Plains Resource Council in Montana.

Smaller rail-line communities and businesses would be greatly impacted with multiple at-grade crossings. Rail-line communities' impacts and business corridors are concerned with traffic congestion, pollution and economic loss including [possible decreased real estate values](#):

“. . . we request that the Gateway Pacific Terminal/Custer Spur EIS include within its scope a systemic analysis of potential impacts to Skagit County, including but not limited to regional transportation and economic impacts,” said the Skagit County Board of Commissioners in their public comment.

The Seattle Art Museum and other economic entities including stadium stakeholders in Seattle's SODO neighborhood also submitted comments. This fall the City of Seattle released a study on the impacts to [rail congestion in the city](#) which noted areas including SODO with the sports stadiums but excluded the Chinatown-International District. In their scoping letter the Chinatown-International District stated: “[the] District is already disproportionately impacted by a variety of environmental justice issues. [The] District strongly encourages the NEPA/SEPA Review to include a health and environmental justice impact assessment for the Chinatown-International District. . . a traffic study that takes into consideration the affects the 18 coal trains will have on the . . . District. . . a thorough assessment. . . the 18 coal trains will have on each of the historic buildings.”

Several school districts expressed concern for its student body – both the [Mt. Vernon, WA](#) and also notably [Ferndale, WA](#) submitted comments, noting the need to look at impacts to their student bodies including transportation and local health impacts from increased coal dust and diesel emissions.

Many tribal governments and leaders have also weighed in, raising impacts to health and their livelihoods, desecration of sacred ground at Cherry Point, as well as violations of treaty rites: “My treaty rights were fought hard for by our people which ended in the Judge Boldt decision in 1974. I believe in my treaty rights to hunt, fish, shell fish and gather medicinal plants that are a custom to my people. I specifically request that you consider my treaty rites as well as my families, as we are all fisherman, in the issues, that you study in the Environmental Impact Statement,” said Grace Byrd, Nisqually Tribal Member, in her public comment.

In addition to rail-line impacts, coastal communities expressed grave concern with [increased tanker traffic that would threaten the Puget Sound, Salish Sea and coast](#):

“Just as the vessels exporting GPT's cargo must not be considered in isolation, so too the impacts on the Salish Sea, shorelines, marine species, bird species, fish and fisheries, tourism and local economies must not be considered singly,” wrote the local group Friends of the San Juans in their public comment. “An accident involving a coal spill or a coal ship/oil tanker collision involving a spill of one or both cargoes could have long ranging and far reaching implications for the system that brings us salmon and must be fully discussed. Daily persistent pollution, at an increased rate and including new elements precipitated by a new coal port, might be just as devastating, but will take longer to show. These too must be fully considered. . . Substantive shipping accidents, despite being of a low probability, carry with them the possibility of catastrophic consequences.

Over 600 health professionals have either come out against or raised deep concern and caution over the proposed terminals, calling attention not only to the local health impacts but global ones as well:

Wrote Mary C. Selecky, Secretary for the Dept. of Health: "For each health topic we address in our comments, we request the statement include an analysis of the impacts on the health of the people of Washington . . . our comments focus on public health impacts directly related to our scope of responsibility. We understand there are other concerns associated with the transport and subsequent burning of coal in Asia that may have global health effects including global warming, climate change and greenhouse gas emissions from coal extraction, processing and burning of coal. These impacts may have far-reaching population health implications, including in this state. . . I urge the co-lead agencies to use a Health Impact Assessment for this project." Selecky also cited concerns about coal dust, exhaust, noise, safety, train derailments blocking emergency responder access, impacts to recreation and community well-being.

While a large majority of comments were from Northwest residents, businesses, organizations and elected officials, others from around the country weighed in expressing concern over global warming emissions and toxic pollution, including from all 50 states. Many organizations, including Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, Columbia Riverkeeper, Puget Soundkeeper, North Sound Baykeeper, Greenpeace, Washington Environmental Council, Climate Reality, Friends of the Gorge, 350.org, Rainforest Action Network, National Wildlife Federation, Fuse, Earth Ministry, CREDO and Physicians for Social Responsibility asked residents to submit comments, helping drive the total to approach 100,000 comments by the afternoon of 1/22.

"As climate change continues to wreak havoc across the globe, it would be insane to double down on dirty coal by building the Gateway Pacific Terminal in Washington," said Josh Nelson, Campaign Manager for CREDO explaining why CREDO helped with the effort to generate public comments. CREDO is a progressive activist organization with over 3 million members nationwide.

Many, including groups Climate Solutions and elected officials, also cited the climate impacts from increased carbon emissions. Notably even [Gov. Inslee](#) said last week there were "ramifications ultimately if we burn the enormous amounts of Powder River Basin coal that are exported through our ports... It is an enormous number of tons of carbon dioxide that will be released into the atmosphere, it doesn't matter where it's burned, it ends up in Puget Sound."

SSA Marine has repeatedly emphasized to the public that "China will just get the coal somehow anyway- we might as well get the jobs." As RE Sources for Sustainable Communities pointed out in their scoping comments, this assertion is flatly contradicted by SSA's "Purpose and Need" statement in their application. As RE Sources wrote in their public comment:

"The assumption that Pacific Rim nations "need" this coal effectively answers the question of the Project's contribution to global climate change and other air pollution impacts. Without the Project, Pacific Rim nations would not have the coal that they "need," and therefore the emissions arising from the combustion of coal exported through the Project are directly attributable to the Project. This "need" component forecloses any argument that other sources of coal would be available (and would contribute equivalent greenhouse gas and other air emissions) if the Project were not constructed."

Citizens have also voiced concern about issues like the taking of private land to expand the rail-line in Montana, the impacts [to passenger rail](#) service and grain export cargo with the steep increase in coal train traffic and [who pays for the needed upgrades](#). 9,000 residents turned out for seven hearings in the fall of 2013, with approximately 90% of the attendees being either gravely concerned or outright opposed to the proposed coal terminal

Elected officials from the region weighed in, even those not in Washington but concerned about impacts beyond the state borders:

“The impacts of coal export at Cherry Point extend far beyond the terminal, reaching into every community located along the rail line between the coal mines and the export terminal, and even to communities outside the state that will be affected by the climate impacts of these proposals. I have a responsibility to safeguard my constituents’ economic interests, health, and the natural environment,” wrote Amanda Fritz, City of Portland Commissioner.

While the review for the proposed terminal is still underway at Cherry Point, members of Congress, municipalities and over 14,000 individuals have also called on the Army Corps to do an area-wide review of all five proposed coal export terminals. Most recently, newly elected [U.S. Representative Suzan DelBene](#) (D-WA) wrote a letter to the Army Corps calling for an area-wide analysis; they have yet to reach a decision.

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