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"Sea of Red" Floods Vancouver Opposing Coal Exports

Final week of public hearings draws hundreds

Vancouver, WA- Today marked the sixth of seven Washington public comment hearings on the controversial coal export terminal proposal in Cherry Point, WA. Like the previous five hearings held around the state, Vancouver drew a crowd of several hundred raising serious concerns about the plan. Around 800 people attended the hearing tonight, the vast majority in opposition to the coal export proposal. Of the 150 speakers, 139 spoke against the coal proposal and 11 spoke in favor of it.

Rick Marshall, a real estate developer in Camas and lifelong resident of Columbia County, says the BNSF rail line passes right through his community. He is concerned about the damage 18– 40 more coal trains per day could do to the quality of life in Camas, among other things.

"There's the noise, the dust, the impact on rail crossings, the harm to our downtown, and the almost constant reminder that we'd be shipping millions of tons of pollution overseas that will come back to hurt us," says Marshall. "It is not what our community needs."

Residents from Vancouver and surrounding local communities are outraged about Peabody Coal's plan to ship tens of millions of tons of coal annually through their local communities en route to the Cherry Point terminal in Northern Washington, where it would be off loaded to ships bound for Asia.

"I can't believe we're even having this conversation," said Carol Ross, a retired Portland grandmother and native Appalachian. "We moved to the beautiful Northwest to get away from the devastation the coal industry inflicts on anyone in its path. I would have never dreamed that this would be a place they'd follow us."

Ross says from her experience in West Virginia, there are few things worse than having Big Coal move into your neighborhood. "I was shocked to learn that this plan to use our pristine communities as a conduit to ship this toxic, outdated fossil fuel would be an idea folks would even consider," she said. "Yet here we are, fighting the coal industry as they work extra hard to sell us a deadly bag of goods."

The hundreds in attendance at the Vancouver hearing echoed the choir from communities around the region: whatever Big Coal's selling, the Northwest isn't buying.

Only a hundred slots were allotted for the public to give two minute testimony regarding the concerns they would like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Washington Department of Ecology, and the Whatcom County Council to study in the Environmental Impact Study being jointly conducted by the three agencies.

The Vancouver "scoping" hearing comes on the heels of the three public hearings held in Oregon last week by Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the state agency in charge of determining whether or not to issue an air and water permit for the Morrow Pacific coal export proposal in Boardman, OR.

"What we learned from last week's hearings, is the Department of Environmental Quality's disappointing perspective that their hands are tied when it comes to studying any threats outside of the proposed facility itself," said Bonnie McKinlay of Portland. "If you live on the rail line or if you are concerned about what the potential threats to salmon and other aquatic life in the event of a barge crash or coal spill, those concerns will not be considered."

Oregon's lack of state regulatory structure was repeatedly highlighted last week at the DEQ hearings, leaving most feeling frustrated that their concerns would not be considered.

There's a real fear that the coal export proposals in Oregon may not even be evaluated before being permitted, that's what the coal companies are hoping for."

Dozens of Oregonians crossed the Columbia River to attend the Vancouver hearing and to renew their call for the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full evaluation of all of the dangerous proposals, from mine to rail, and from port to plant. "Please don't discount us just because we're on the other side of the Columbia River, added McKinlay.