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State Denies Key Water Quality Permit for Longview Coal Project

Largest coal export terminal in North America not moving forward

Longview, Washington - The Washington Department of Ecology denied a necessary water quality permit for the proposed Millennium Bulk Terminals coal export facility in Longview today, citing the project’s negative impacts on climate, clean air and water.  Absent a successful legal challenge to the decision, the denial renders the project formally dead. The decision can be found here: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/fed-permit/pdf/201001225WQC15417.pdf>

If built, Millennium would have been the largest coal export facility in North America, sending up to 44 million tons of Powder River and Uinta Basin coal per year to Asian markets that are quickly turning away from coal-fired power. The state’s own analysis, found that the climate pollution from this project would be [equivalent to adding 8 million cars](https://thinkprogress.org/proposed-coal-terminal-would-be-the-equivalent-of-adding-8-million-cars-to-the-road-dd4b076d9919) to the road at a time when our changing climate is contributing to catastrophic forest fires and stronger hurricanes. Millennium would also add up to sixteen trains a day traveling between the Powder River Basin and Longview, tying up traffic and impacting public safety response times in rail communities across the Pacific Northwest and contributing to [higher rates of cancer](http://kuow.org/post/cancer-congestion-pollution-among-outcomes-longview-coal-export-project-study) in low-income communities, including Longview’s Highlands neighborhood.

Ecology’s environmental review documented significant impacts that the project would have on water quality and habitat in the Columbia River, including:

* Coal dust discharge from 75 acres of uncovered coal piles and mile-and-a-half long coal trains. Significant accumulations of coal dust were found as far as a half-mile away from the Roberts Bank coal export terminal in British Columbia. [A growing body of evidence](http://www.sightline.org/2013/03/20/how-unburnt-coal-affects-water-the-state-of-the-science/) suggests coal dust impacts the ecological function of salmon and other aquatic species.
* 1,680 additional trips per year by large vessels in the environmentally sensitive Columbia River estuary, causing large wakes that disrupt juvenile endangered salmon species. Federal and state governments, as well as Tribes, have invested billions of dollars to restore the Columbia River estuary over the years.
* The removal of more than 24 acres of ecologically vital wetlands, to be permanently filled to construct rail lines.
* The potential of coal train spills near or into the Columbia. [Just last month a coal train derailed](http://missoulian.com/news/local/coal-cleanup-underway-on-clark-fork-weeks-after-train-wreck/article_fda8268d-24ff-5dab-90cd-acca61a36a3b.html) in Noxon, Montana, spilling 30 cars worth of coal near the Clark Fork River, which has overcome decades of mining pollution. To date, none of the responsible parties have fully cleaned up the coal.

[Link to Power Past Coal Coalition comments](http://columbiariverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Power-Past-Coal-Second-401-Comments.pdf)

Earlier this year the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) dealt a major blow to the project when it denied a critical sublease for Millennium to operate on the Columbia River, citing the project’s lack of a viable business plan given Asian countries’ steadily declining demand for coal. Millennium sued DNR; oral arguments in that case are scheduled for Oct. 27 in Cowlitz County Superior Court. Millennium also needs permits from multiple state agencies, the federal government, and Cowlitz County.

Power Past Coal coalition members issued the following statements:

“The state did the right thing today, standing up for clean water, public health, and the Pacific Northwest’s iconic endangered salmon runs,” stated Power Past Coal Co-Director Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky. “Washington State and the city of Longview deserve better than empty promises from the dying coal industry.”

“Today the State of Washington stood up for clean water. The state’s decision to protect the water on the Columbia also helps protect farm and ranch irrigators like me. In southeastern Montana, coal seams are aquifers. Mining more coal for export would further disrupt our watersheds and lead to more salty water discharged into the rivers and streams we rely on in agriculture. If we don’t have water, we don’t have anything,” said Miles City rancher and past Northern Plains Resource Council chair Mark Fix.

“We hope this decision moves our community away from coal and other fossil fuel based polluting industry on the Lower Columbia. It’s time to move on to the future; clean, sustainable family wage jobs that provide our area a reliable future so we can grow and attract more economic diversity and create the quality of life that maintains and enhances our families,” said Gary Wallace, president of Landowners and Citizens for a Safe Community,

“This denial reflects the will of the people. Thank you to Washington’s leaders for moving us away from dirty coal and towards a clean energy future.” said Joan Crooks, CEO of Washington Environmental Council and Washington Conservation Voters.

"We’re so pleased that permits for this dangerous project have been denied. Toxic diesel emissions, coal dust, and delayed emergency response threaten all of us, but especially young children, the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions. Low-income and frontline neighborhoods would be hit hardest. As a cancer doctor, I'm acutely aware that, because of today’s decision, we can all breathe easier, " said Dr. Stephen Chandler of Longview.

*Power Past Coal is an ever-growing alliance of health, environmental, clean-energy, faith and community groups and businesses working to stop coal export off the West Coast.  Powerpastcoal.org @powerpastcoal*