

Study analyzes impact of Washington state coal-export plan

April 29 2016, by By Phuong Le



In this May 29, 2012, file photo, a train hauling coal to British Columbia heads north out of Seattle between office buildings, condos and the downtown waterfront. On Friday, April 29, 2016, state and local regulators are releasing a

sweeping review of a coal export terminal proposed along the Columbia River in southwest Washington. The analysis is expected to study impacts that extend well beyond the facility site in southwest Washington, from global-warming effects of burning the exported coal in Asia to rail impacts as the coal is from the Rockies throughout the state. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File)

A coal-export terminal proposed along the Columbia River in southwest Washington state could have unavoidable, significant impacts on greenhouse gases emissions, vessel traffic and rail safety, according to an environmental review released Friday.

The analysis by the Washington Department of Ecology and Cowlitz County found that greenhouse gas emissions—from facility operations to when the coal is burned in Asia—would increase by 2.5 million metric tons each year when the project is fully running. While measures can be taken to significantly reduce those emissions, the impact "would still be significant and adverse," the study noted.

Other concerns include increased vessel traffic as 840 ships a year are added, and a potential for train accidents along rail routes in Cowlitz County and other parts of Washington as up to 16 mile-long train trips are added each day.

The study found the project could impact 21 of 23 areas reviewed, and that some of those consequences are significant, Ecology said in a statement. The review looked at fish habitat, water quality, local communities and other issues, and proposed ways for the project developers to reduce those effects.

Millennium Bulk Terminals-Longview is proposing a terminal that would handle up to 44 million metric tons of coal a year. Coal would

arrive by train from the Powder River Basin in Montana and Wyoming and the Uinta Basin in Utah and Colorado to be stored and loaded on ships for export to Asia. Construction could begin in 2018.

Lighthouse Resources Inc., formerly known as Ambre Energy, owns 62 percent of Millennium and Arch Coal Inc. the other 38 percent.

Lighthouse owns the Decker Mine in Montana and the Black Butte Mine in southwestern Wyoming.



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Millennium CEO Bill Chapman said in a statement Friday that the project is a step closer to creating family-wage jobs in Longview while meeting the state's strict environmental standards.

Business and some labor groups also expressed support, saying the project would create jobs, boost the local economy and strengthen the state's trade capacity.

"This is an important project for Washington state, and for the people of Cowlitz County and Southwest Washington searching for good paying jobs," said Kris Johnson, president of the Association of Washington Business.

But environmental, citizens and other groups said Friday that the review confirms their concerns about wide-ranging impacts from moving millions of tons of coal through the Northwest and burning it in Asia. Opponents said the review acknowledges the negative consequences of the project but falls short because it relies on mitigation measures that aren't proven.

The study said air pollution from coal dust at the site and along rail lines would be below federal air quality standards. It also said coal dust would exceed nuisance levels, but it would not be significant impact since state or federal standards do not apply. Regulators recommended coal loaded on trains be sprayed with a substance at the mine site and in Pasco, Washington, to reduce coal dust.

Steve Charter, a Montana rancher, said in a statement that the Washington [coal](#) port is also bad news for his state. He said rail towns would have to deal with traffic delays, diesel exhaust and other consequences.

The study found that without rail and road improvements, the increased

train traffic would create long vehicle delays during rush hour at railroad crossings in Cowlitz County and beyond. It said crossings in Spokane County would have the largest increases in vehicle delays.

The public can comment on the study through June 13, and at three public hearings scheduled in May and June. Regulators plan to incorporate those comments into a final review, a process that could take a year or longer. The state and county got a record number of comments, more than 215,000, earlier in its review.

The Army Corps of Engineers, meanwhile, is doing its own separate environmental review. A spokeswoman said a draft is expected in September.

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