

Washington state deals blow to plan for coal export terminal

September 26 2017, by Rachel La Corte

A company that wants to build and operate a large terminal to export coal from the western U.S. to Asia was denied a key permit by Washington state on Tuesday because of environmental concerns.

The Department of Ecology rejected a water quality permit that Millennium Bulk Terminals sought because the proposed facility near the city of Longview would have caused "significant and unavoidable harm" to the environment. The department cited effects to air quality, noise pollution and tribal resources, among others.

"There are simply too many unavoidable and negative environmental effects for the project to move forward," Ecology Director Maia Bellon said in a statement.

Millennium Bulk Terminals has long hoped to build a facility along the Columbia River to handle up to 44 million tons of coal a year. Trains would carry the coal from Montana, Wyoming and other states, which would be loaded onto ships headed to Asia.

William Chapman, the president and CEO of Millennium, said the company will appeal the decision and expects "a fairer and more consistent interpretation of the law."

"Multiple recent decisions by the agency seem biased against the Longview community, and particularly blind to the need for employment opportunities in Cowlitz County," he said in a written statement.

Environmentalists, tribes and others have fiercely opposed the project—which could increase U.S. exports of coal by 40 percent—because of concerns about global warming, coal dust pollution and potential damage to fisheries on the river. Several of those groups lauded Tuesday's decision.

"The state did the right thing today, standing up for clean water, public health and the Pacific Northwest's iconic endangered salmon runs," Power Past Coal co-director Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky said in a statement.

Businesses, some labor groups and other supporters say the project would create jobs, add tax revenue and boost the local economy. The governor of Wyoming, the nation's leading coal-producing state, previously traveled to the Pacific Northwest to pitch the importance of coal exports to the governors of Washington and Oregon.

Kris Johnson, president of the Association of Washington Business, criticized the process that led to the decision, saying that the project has faced "unprecedented regulatory hurdles."

"We need companies to invest in manufacturing, construction and infrastructure to support trade," he wrote in a prepared statement. "Instead of turning away investment, our leaders should be encouraging responsible growth."

Montana's attorney general said he plans to review the decision to make sure the law has been followed.

Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead said that despite Washington's decision, "Wyoming will continue to work towards a plan that allows for the safe transportation of coal through coastal ports."

An environmental review released in April by Washington's ecology

department and Cowlitz County analyzed potential harm to fish habitat, wetlands, water quality, local communities and more. Of 23 environmental areas, 19 would face harmful effects, and some could not be offset or reduced, officials said at the time.

The review found that coal dust pollution from trains would not be major because emissions levels would be below state and federal standards, but pollution from locomotives would raise the cancer risk for one low-income neighborhood.

Residents also would see more noise and traffic delays at rail crossings without a quiet zone or other measures, the study said. At full capacity, the project would add 16 more trains through the area and increase the number of ships by 1,680 a year.

Gov. Jay Inslee said he was confident that state ecology officials "based their decision on sound science and in accordance with the law."

"It's absolutely critical that all projects—particularly of this scale—undergo an objective and extensive review that ensures they are able to meet the standards necessary for protecting our land, air and water," he said in an emailed statement.

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Washington state deals blow to plan for coal export terminal (2017, September 26) retrieved 5 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2017-09-washington-state-coal-export-terminal.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
