COAL EXPORTS in the Pacific Northwest
Last year saw a groundswell of public opposition to proposals to export millions of tons of coal from the Powder River Basin through Oregon and Washington ports. A series of public hearings in both states drew opposition to the projects from around the region. Every setting echoed the same message: the mining, transport, and burning of coal anywhere is harmful to communities everywhere. The cumulative impacts of coal exports on our health, safety, natural resources, local economies, and more, must be considered by decision-makers at every level.

**cherry point public hearings**

Tuesday, January 22, 2013, marked the closing of a whirlwind 121-day public comment period that generated 124,000 public comments around the controversial project and overwhelmingly opposed coal export proposal in Cherry Point, Washington. Week after week, thousands of Pacific Northwest residents poured into public hearings all over Washington to speak out against the coal industry, whose plans would imperil public health—especially in children and the elderly—and pollute the beautiful communities Washingtonians call home.

Seattle hosted the last of seven public comment hearings, drawing over 3,000 people and prompting local, state, and federal officials to move the hearing from a community college to the much more expansive Downtown Convention Center.

The Washington hearings were hosted by the Whatcom County Council, the Washington Department of Ecology, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of a process to allow the public to formally weigh in on the “scope” of the many threats posed by the coal export process, which will be studied in the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement. This is the first stage in a long decision-making process that could determine the future of the hotly-contested plan to ship 50 million tons of coal annually through the Cherry Point facility to markets in Asia.

**BUILDING A MOVEMENT AGAINST EXPORTING COAL**

**Reuters:** Analysis: Coal fight looms, Keystone-like, over U.S. Northwest

**Bloomberg Business Week:** Big Coal’s Hard Road to China

**Salon:** Worse than Keystone

**Think Progress:** Coal Exports Emerging as Major Climate Fight in the Pacific Northwest

**Huffington Post:** Green Stories Of 2012: Environmental News In Review

Nearly 10,000 people participated in the public hearings throughout Washington, turning out masses in Bellingham, Mount Vernon, Spokane, Ferndale, the San Juan Islands, Vancouver, and Seattle. At each and every hearing, an overwhelming majority of people who attended and spoke opposed coal exports. Even in places where only 400 were expected to participate, 1,000 or more showed up, blowing predictions out of the water.

The opposition in Mount Vernon, a town that is infamous for giving the key to the city to Glenn Beck, proved that this is not a partisan issue: coal exports are not good for our communities, no matter which way those communities lean politically. In Spokane, a mid-sized, conservative-leaning city that is the choke-point for all rail traffic in the Inland Northwest, more than 800 people turned out, with over 700 demonstrating opposition to the project—among them Eastern Montanans who drove hundreds of miles to make sure their concerns were heard. The groundswell of opposition to the coal export scheme was initially inspired by the kickoff hearing in Bellingham, where 2,000 people flooded a local high school for their chance to officially voice concerns about the proposal, and noteworthy voices such as the Lummi Nation Tribal Chair publicly spoke out about the threats to his tribe’s way of life and ancestry if exporting coal is permitted.

The outpouring of opposition at the Seattle hearing embodied what a “grand finale” should look like. Early on, this gathering was predicted to draw massive crowds, and Seattle residents did not disappoint. A staffer at the Washington State Convention Center reported that they “hadn’t hosted a crowd so large since President Bill Clinton spoke there in September.”

The hearing, and the rally preceding it, was crawling with reporters from small and major outlets alike, including a full production crew from James Cameron’s new climate change focused docu-series, *Years of Living Dangerously.* The production team spent three days on the ground in Seattle, interviewing opponents of the proposed coal export terminal, and reported having at least “150 great stories” to choose from for the series.

**the anti-coal exports movement is massive, and it’s growing**

The public hearings elevated the anti-coal export movement to a level not seen since the start of the Keystone XL Pipeline fight. The droves of people speaking out against coal exports, coupled with the climate-devastating threat of dumping 200 million tons of CO2 pollution into the air annually (compared to Keystone’s annual 140 million tons of CO2), have prompted respected national journalists early on to draw comparisons between the two movements.

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But the most amazing and moving aspect of all the hearings was the testimony of ordinary citizens speaking out about the dangers exporting coal posed to their families, communities, and businesses, and the obligation to protect our children for generations to come.

The Seattle rally boasted an impressive lineup of speakers, including ranchers and Northern Cheyenne tribal members from Eastern Montana whose livelihoods and families are threatened by coal mining in the Powder River Basin. Joining them in speaking out against coal exports were doctors, business leaders from the renewable energy sector, and elected officials. Even Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn and King County Executive Dow Constantine gave testimony calling into question the wisdom of coal exports.

Oregon's Morrow-Pacific Hearings
The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) held informational hearings this Fall to take public input on Ambre Energy’s proposed Morrow Pacific project. This plan would ship coal by barge from the Port of Morrow, down the Columbia River to two potential sites to be reloaded onto ocean-going vessels bound for Asia. DEQ staff said the public hearing in Portland boasted the largest attendance they’ve seen in the history of the agency. Three hearings were held in the cities along the transport route: Boardman, Clatskanie, and Portland. In Boardman, the rural town near the proposed Morrow export site drew a crowd of 30 in opposition. Clatskanie, located near the site where traveling coal would be offloaded onto ocean-going vessels, attracted another rural crowd of 200, and only five testified in support of the project. Portland hosted its hearing the following day, the final of the three bringing in 850 opponents donning red “Beyond Coal Exports” t-shirts, many traveling on a rented bus from Salem or the Columbia Gorge to demonstrate a united statewide voice to Oregon agencies. With only three weeks’ notice from the agency, community members came out in droves to tell Oregon decision makers to protect them from the harmful impacts coal trains and barges would have on their existing businesses and industry along the Columbia River including outdoor recreation, wineries, orchards, and more.

Great Stories from the Cherry Point Hearings

Seattle King 5 (Bellingham Hearing):
Community speaks out about controversial coal terminal near Cherry Point*

Spokane KHQ 6 (Spokane Hearing):
Hundreds Attend Coal Train Hearing In Spokane*

Seattle Times (Seattle Hearing):
Coal Export Opponents Dominate Seattle Hearing*

Oregon Public Broadcasting (Vancouver Hearing):
Coal Export Opponents Dominate Vancouver Hearing*

Seattle PI (Pre-Seattle Hearing):
Beyond Coal Exports - The coal port TV wars*

* Other highlights & anecdotes:

- In Mount Vernon, the “sea of red” clearly defined our presence. A handful of coal-export supporters, clad in green, led one media outlet to report, “If red means stop and green means go, the sentiment at Monday’s public comment meeting on the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal was in big, bold, capital letters: ‘STOP.’”
- Some of those recruited by the pro-coal campaign to testify in support of the terminal were “converted” during the hearing, taking off their Gateway Pacific Terminal stickers and putting on a red t-shirt and “No Coal Exports” stickers. An 84-year-old woman tearfully apologized during her testimony, saying she had originally shown up to testify in support of the terminal, but after hearing other community members testify, decided she was adamantly opposed. Coverage of her story made it into the Daily Kos.
- After forbidding our groups from using any amplification at the Bellingham event, a Washington Department of Ecology staff member used our bullhorn to help get the crowd to file in and receive their numbers to testify.
- A local organic farmer spoke at the morning press conference in Bellingham and she brought a large basket of fruits and vegetables to visually demonstrate the bounty of Whatcom County’s local food production which is threatened by coal exports.
- A sea of red “Beyond Coal Exports” t-shirts dominated the Spokane hearing. Approximately 35 of the 100 speaking spots used by pro-terminal speakers, which were reserved by paid line-sitters. Even they could not beat out a small handful of Sierra Club volunteers who arrived by 7:30 AM in cold weather to earn the first speaking numbers handed out at 3:45 PM.
- After being told by the agencies making the first round of decisions that hearings would not be held east of Spokane, Washington, communities in Montana that would be harmed the most by coal mining in the Powder River Basin decided to hold their own “People’s Hearings.” Hundreds of citizens came to submit comments and voice their concerns about the impact that mining and transporting coal will have on their communities.

This is what democracy looks like
Because the agencies were limiting spoken testimony to only 150 spots, hundreds of people waited in line for hours undeterred by cold and rain to secure just one of the 150 “golden testimony tickets.” Moms and dads attended hearings after having worked a full day, just for the opportunity to put their comment in a box and to throw on a red “Power Past Coal” t-shirt to stand in solidarity with their friends and neighbors to protect the future for their children, their community, and the planet. The resolve of these everyday people across Washington has been nothing short of inspiring.
The message has been loud and clear. From mine to rail, Tharinger Thurston County Councilors Romero, Wolfe, of Commissioners difficult battle before them.

coal export terminal proposals on the table in the Clark County Commissioners Skagit County Board County Executive Dow Constantine Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber WA State Representatives: Carlyle, Dunshee, WA Dept. of Ecology Director Ted Sturdevant King are refusing to let Big Coal railroad its dirty coal from port to plant, people from diverse backgrounds Northwest, parents, fishermen, business leaders, local elected officials, tribal leaders, recreationists, health professionals, and many others have demonstrated in no uncertain terms that no matter where companies want to build a coal export terminal, they will have a long and difficult battle before them.

statements of concerns & opposition to coal export

Public Officials and Agencies

U.S. Senators Patty Murray & Maria Cantwell (WA) U.S. Senators Ron Wyden & Jeff Merkley (OR) U. S. Representative Adam Smith (WA) U.S. Representative Jim McDermott (WA) U.S. Representative Earl Blumenauer (OR) EPA Region 10

San Juan Island National Historical Park (NPS) Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber WA Dept. of Ecology Director Ted Sturdevant King County Executive Dow Constantine Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen Pierce

City Resolutions Passed

Barnbridge Island, WA Bellingham, WA Camas, WA Edmonds, WA Longview, WA Marysville, WA Puyallup, WA Seattle, WA Spokane, WA Stevenson, WA Thurston County, WA Vancouver, WA Washougal, WA Eugene, OR Hood River, OR Milwaukie, OR OR Metro Regional Council Portland, OR The Dalles, OR Mossula, MT Sandpoint, ID

City Statements, additional letters

Bellingham, WA – Mayor Liville, Council members Burlington, WA – Mayor Bruce Cherry, WA – Mayor Tom Tuohy Dalesport, WA – Community Council Elms, WA – Mayor David Osgood Lacey, WA – Mayor Clarkson, CH Pratt, Lawson Marysville – Mayor Jon Nehring Mount Vernon, WA – City Council Members Mukilteo, WA – Mayor Marina, CC President Olympia, WA – Mayor Busbee, CH Hawkins Seattle – Mayor McGinn and City Council members Sedor-Woolley – City Attorney Eron Berg Snohomish, WA – City Manager Tumwater, WA – Councilor Joan Cothey La Connor – WA – Mayor Ramon Hayes Washougal, WA – Mayor Guard Eugene, OR – Mayor Piercy, Councilor Alan Zelenka Metro Councilor Rex Burhwyder (OR) Milwaukie, OR – Mayor Jeffrey Ferguson Mossat OR – Mayor Rogers and City Council Roseburg, OR – Councilmember Tutchesser Helena, MT – City Council Vancouver, BC – Councilor Geoff Meggs

Economic Entities

Port of Edmonds Port of Skagit Port of Skamania County Vancouver Downtown Association (Vancouver, WA) Burlington Chamber of Commerce Edmonds Chamber of Commerce Snohomish County Tomorrow Washington Transportation Commission Leslie Smith, Executive Director for The Alliance for Pioneer Square Kyle Griffith, owner and operator, Seattle Great Wheel Gibson Traffic Consultants have analyzed traffic impacts in the cities of Burlington, Marysville, Mt. Vernon, Seattle and Edmonds

Portland General Electric, opposed coal lease over concerns of coal dust on their operations in St. Helens, OR Columbia Gorge Windsurfing Association

Health Entities

Skagit Regional Health, Skagit Valley Hospital Spokane Regional Health District Board of Health Bozeman City-County Health Board Gallatin City-County Board of Health (MT) Washington Academy of Family Physicians, King County Academy of Family Physicians Washington Association of Naturopathic Physicians

Bob Elliott, Executive Director of the Southwest Clean Air Agency Whatcom Docs – 180 physicians in Whatcom County x more than 400 health care professionals in Oregon

Community Leaders Statements

Robert F. Kennedy Jr Bellingham, WA – former Mayor Pike (2011) San Juan Marine Resources Committee Northwest Straits Commission Washington State Democrats Columbia County Democratic Central Committee (OR) Will Reichardt, Skagit County Sheriff Cherry

Religious Leaders

Bishop Greg Richards, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia (Western Washington) Bishop Jim Waggner, Episcopal Diocese of Spokane (Eastern Washington)

Bishop Chris Boeger, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Northwest Washington Synod Rev. Mike Denton, Conference Minister, United Church of Christ Pacific Northwest Conference Rev. Dr. Marita Patton, Executive Minister, Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches Bishop Martin D. Wells, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (E. WA/Idaho Synod)

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EPA Region 10 Tribal Operations Committee

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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. For more information on the impacts of coal exports, visit www.powerpastcoal.org.

Endnotes

2 http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-07-05/big-coals-hard-road-to-china
3 http://www.salon.com/2012/05/18/worse_than_keystone/
6 http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2012/12/03/cameron-schwarzenegger-damon-baldwin-showtime/1743283/
7 http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/10/28/1151475/-She-said-she-was-sorry-about-coming-to-comment
8 http://media.bellinghamherald.com/smedia/2012/10/27/21/01/170Ice.AuSt.39.jpeg
12 http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2019899522_coalhearing14m.html
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15 http://www.coalguru.com/north_america/governor_kitzhaber_raises_concerns_about_coal_exports/5857
19 http://action.sierraclub.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=2704470&dlv_id=0
20 http://action.sierraclub.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=2704460&dlv_id=0
21 http://action.sierraclub.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=2673860&dlv_id=0
22 http://action.sierraclub.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=2672870&dlv_id=0

Sierra Club is a primary partner group in the Power Past Coal coalition along with RE-Sources for Sustainable Communities, Columbia Riverkeeper, Climate Solutions, Greenpeace, Washington Environmental Council and Western Organization of Resource Councils.