



**Coal and Caring for Creation
A Catholic Perspective
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“Caring for creation... means nurturing the world with responsibility and transforming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone.”

- Pope Francis, 2013

Call for Comprehensive Review

The Catholic Bishops of Washington State urge civic leaders to give a thorough review of the proposal for the construction and operation of a coal terminal in Cowlitz County and its impact on the environment, fishing interests, transportation, jobs and the economy. We consider the protection of our environment a moral obligation and, therefore, we support a comprehensive analysis of all the potential risks and benefits of the Millennium Bulk Terminals - Longview proposal.

Two Proposals for the Transport and Export of Coal

Proposals are pending to transport coal mined primarily from public lands in the Powder River Basin region of Montana and Wyoming to ports at Cherry Point in Whatcom County and Longview in Cowlitz County for shipment to Asia. The coal would be transported in uncovered cars passing through rural and urban communities, along riverbanks and through watersheds, as well as agricultural areas and ranches in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. At full capacity, the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal at Cherry Point could export up to 48 million metric tons of coal per year and generate 18 train trips per day in addition to more than 18 vessel trips per week. The Millennium Bulk Terminals - Longview proposal would bring up to 44 million metric tons of coal annually by rail for storage and export on ships. The so-called “scoping” process for the proposed Cherry Point terminal was completed last fall and winter, and calls for evaluation of a broad range of indirect and cumulative impacts likely to occur within and beyond Washington. A similar process to receive public comment to determine the scope of study for the proposed Longview project ends November 18, 2013.

Moral, economic and social considerations

We recognize that this proposal for the transport and shipment of coal raises a complex of important issues, all of which require exhaustive and independent review, including: the environmental consequences of transporting coal in our region; the impact on jobs and the economy; the effect that burning coal has on climate change; the impact on regional transportation; and the effect on regional fishing, including Native American treaty rights.

The coal shipments being proposed would pass by rail through Spokane, the Tri-cities, the Columbia Gorge, Vancouver and the Puget Sound Basin, thus impacting the lives of those we jointly serve in the three Catholic dioceses in Washington State. It also would increase the number of transport vessels on our rivers and coastal waters. Moreover, Native tribes including the Yakima and Lummi are understandably concerned about possible violations of their fishing treaty rights and destruction of ancestral burial grounds.

Proponents of the coal terminals contend that construction of the terminals will create thousands of direct and indirect jobs and that operation of the terminals will result in permanent employment for hundreds of workers.

Thus, the proposals in question involve an interrelated set of moral, environmental, social and economic issues: from climate change to the need for jobs and the human right to participate in work; from transportation congestion created by increased coal train traffic to the possible destruction of state fisheries and threats to Native American treaty rights. These are not easy issues to balance, and therefore much study and broad consultation are required to reach prudent and just decisions.

We Are Ready Partners

We, the Catholic Bishops of Washington State, stand ready to be of assistance by partnering with civic leaders and others in a comprehensive review. Care for creation and the damage caused by humans to the environment have been major concerns of popes, Vatican scientists, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Bishops of Washington State for more than three decades. The Catholic Bishops of the United States declared in 1991 that “the fundamental relation between humanity and nature is one of caring for creation.” In the pastoral letter, *The Columbia River Watershed, Caring for Creation and the Common Good*, the Catholic Bishops of our region said: “We can live in greater harmony with our surroundings if we strive to become more aware of our connection to, and responsibility for, the creation that surrounds us.”

In a special way we want to bring to the table of discussion our tradition that has carefully thought through the connections between human and environmental ecology. Catholic social teaching, which affirms a special concern for the poor, has long held that people living in poverty are most at risk if we fail in our responsibility to care for creation. “As a result of where they live and their limited access to resources, the poor will experience most directly the harmful effects of climate change and the burdens of any measures to address it, including potential escalating energy costs, worker displacement and health problems.” (Letter on the occasion of the G-8 Summit by seven presidents of the Catholic bishops’ conferences, 2007.)

We All Are Responsible

It is a tribute to our democratic system and a testament to a widespread sense of responsibility for the environment that more than 200,000 comments have been received during the two public scoping processes. This fact alone is a compelling reason for conducting the comprehensive review we are advocating here. We urge Catholics, people of every faith and all people of goodwill to join us in calling for a full review of the Millennium Bulk Terminals - Longview coal export project similar to the study already underway for the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal at Cherry Point. Such a review would include environmental effects on water and air quality, cultural and archeological resources, fish and wildlife and other possible adverse environmental effects.

As Pope Benedict XVI fittingly observed in his 2010 World Day of Peace Message: “*We are all responsible for the protection and care of the environment. This responsibility knows no boundaries.*”

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