

New Fossil Fuel Export Infrastructure— A Call to a Higher Road for the Pacific Northwest

An Open Letter of Pacific Northwest Elected Officials, Cities and Agencies from People of Faith in the Pacific Northwest.

The Pacific Northwest is a special place of beauty and natural abundance. From deserts to shores of the Pacific, from mountains to fertile valleys, we are blessed by the Creator to call this place home. For over two decades, the idea of the Pacific Northwest serving as global model of a green economy that supports both people and nature has been an inspiration to many throughout the world. Among people of faith, a vision for the well-being of humankind together with nature has been expressed as “Shalom,” “eco-justice (ecological and economic justice),” and more recently by Pope Francis in his encyclical as “integral ecology,” which connects care of the natural world with justice for people, especially the most vulnerable. The push by the fossil fuel industry to turn our lands and waters into sacrifice zones for fossil fuel export threatens much that we value.

The Pacific Coast, from British Columbia to California, stands between large deposits of fossil fuel of the North American interior and Asian energy markets. A cultural and moral shift in the way that fossil fuels are viewed and new policies to limit pollution from the burning of fossil fuels domestically has fueled a search for new markets. Pacific Coast ports are the only way to get these fuels to Asian markets. Proposed fossil fuel export projects and transportation threaten sacred sites and treaty fishing areas of Native peoples, put communities in danger of explosive fires and toxic discharges into air, land and water; bring added pollution and noise to low-income communities along train routes, reduce transport capacity for other essential goods such as agricultural products, and foreclose other, more sustainable uses for lands and transportation corridors.

The extraction of these fossil fuels, including Bakken shale, Alberta tar sands and Powder River Basin coal pollute and scar the land. Social disruption and human exploitation increase in extraction areas. The social and environmental costs of extraction for these fossil fuels are not reflected in export market prices.

When burned, these fossil fuels warm the climate and their pollutants, such as mercury, return to the Northwest on trade winds. As people of faith, we believe that climate change is one of the greatest moral and spiritual concerns of our time. We believe that our region must reject new fossil fuel export projects now and move without delay in the direction of renewable energy and a green economy that provides opportunity for all, and supports the health and well-being of human communities and all Creation.

Proposed fossil fuel infrastructure to store and export greatly increased volumes of fossil fuels through the Pacific Northwest is deeply out of alignment with our values as people of faith and as residents of the Pacific Northwest. Proposed fossil fuel infrastructure currently includes 27 projects such as the Bulk Millennium Plant Terminal at Cherry Point (Bellingham, WA); Tesoro Savage: Vancouver Energy Distribution Terminal (Vancouver, WA); NuStar Energy: Vancouver Energy Project (Vancouver, WA); Jordan Cove Liquefied Natural Gas Terminal (Coos Bay, OR).

A Call to Action

We call upon all cities, state governments and port authorities of the region to follow the lead of the Portland City Council in calling for a halt to the building of new fossil fuel export infrastructure. If the entire fossil fuel export infrastructure proposed was to be built, it would be roughly equivalent the fossil fuel burned from five Keystone XL Pipelines. As people of faith, we will stand behind leaders who want to leave behind a legacy of a prosperous, healthy region and world.