From:
Tanja Wilcox
2216 Ellis St
Bellingham, WA 98225

January 21, 2013

To:
GPT/Custer Spur EIS
c/o CH2M Hill
1100 112th Ave. NE, Suite 400
Bellevue, WA 98004

RE: **Proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal/Custer Spur EIS Scoping**

To Whom It May Concern,

To begin my comments on the scoping for the Gateway Pacific Terminal EIS, I would like to express my deep concerns about this project. As a resident of Bellingham and of the Puget Sound I can say that the reason that I live in this area, like so many other people, is that I value immensely the quality of life here. In Bellingham, I can breathe fresh air coming off of Bellingham Bay; I can relish eating shellfish from Taylor Fish farm, just down the road, without worrying that it may be contaminated; I can paddle my kayak across the Bay to the San Juan Islands and possibly see an eagle snatch a salmon from the water, watch a wide variety of seabirds find refuge in winter, and hope to see an orca with a newborn calf. In addition to all of this, I can ride the Amtrak train between Bellingham and Seattle to escape the traffic, reduce my carbon footprint, and still split my workweek between the two cities. All of these things that I value so highly are jeopardized by the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal (GPT) construction and operation as a coal port. Therefore, I would like to see the following items studied as a part of the EIS:

Marine Impacts
Consider the impact of ballast water discharge, marine vessel traffic, stormwater runoff, wetland degradation and removal, and marine accidents or spills on local marine ecosystems and water quality. Cherry Point is home to one of the most productive Pacific herring spawning beds in Puget Sound, although it has already declined by over 94% since the Roberts Bank coal terminal began operation. How would the GPT impact the health of the local herring population? The herring are a critical part of the salmon food chain, and salmon are critical to our orca population as well. In particular, how would GPT impacts to the herring population effect endangered Chinook salmon and endangered Southern Resident Orcas?

Marine and Employment Impacts

The transport of coal through Haro and Rosario straits and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, with their narrow channels and rapid currents, particularly during periods of fog and during storms, would increase the risk of an oil and/or coal spill. What is the increased risk of an oil and/or coal spill as a result of the increased vessel traffic associated with the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal project according to the George Washington University's updated Vessel Traffic Risk Assessment? What is the risk of an oil and/or coal spill from a collision or grounding involving single-hull cargo ships? How wide-spread would the damage be? How many species and commercial and recreational fisheries would be impacted and how would it affect the sustainability of those species? How many local (San Juan County, Whatcom County, Skagit County, King County, and Pierce County) jobs and businesses would be adversely impacted or lost, in contrast to the number of temporary and permanent jobs that the GPT may create? What would be the impacts to property values? What would be the impacts to Washington State Ferries in the event of an oil spill? What would be the costs associated with a spill of a bulk carrier's propulsion fuel? What would be the costs associated with a coal spill? What would be the costs associated with a grounding or collision involving a bulk carrier that leads to an oil spill from another spill, including an oil tanker or ship carrying diluted bitumen?

Traffic Impacts

Coal trains would slow down train traffic on the Burlington Northern Train Tracks and would also slow down auto traffic, hurting the economy and making the use of Amtrak passenger rail inefficient to the point of being useless as a reasonable form of transportation for commuters and tourists alike. The Gateway Pacific terminal would add 18 new trains per day, delaying current freight trains and passenger rail. Already, Amtrak is frequently delayed between Seattle and Bellingham as there is only a single track for extensive portions of the trip. How would the additional train traffic caused by the GPT effect Amtrak service? What would the impacts from train diesel emissions and coal dust be on the agricultural lands of the Skagit Valley? If alternative rail routes are developed, what would the impacts be to the agriculture, livestock and health of the communities that are affected? Who would pay for new rail infrastructure and safety improvements, such as overpasses and upgrades to at-grade rail crossings? Often, these costs fall on taxpayers, which seems to me to be unjust, as the profits from the new terminal would go to only a few that reside somewhere far from our region. What would be the cost of new rail infrastructure which would be required to prevent disruption and delay of the existing freight traffic and Amtrak Cascades rail service?

Public Health Impacts

What would the potential public health impacts be from increased coal dust pollution which contains heavy metals, including mercury, arsenic, lead and uranium? What would the health impacts be from coal dust and diesel pollution under a variety of exposures in the communities

along the rail line, based on different operational lifetime projections for the Gateway Pacific Terminal? What would the combined public health impacts be from coal dust, diesel pollution from rail and ships, and also increased car emissions caused by traffic delays from coal trains? What would the health impacts be on local tribes, who consume more fish than the average citizen, and whose fish would be contaminated with coal dust, diesel and contaminated stormwater runoff?

Cumulative Impacts / Climate Impacts

In addition to the GPT project there are four other ports considering coal export proposals, which together, could transport more than 140 million tons of coal through the Puget Sound region. (City of Olympia Scoping Comments – Jan 15, 2013) What would the cumulative impacts be from the emissions of greenhouse gases resulting from the proposed burning, mining and transport of coal at Cherry Point and all the other coal export facilities currently proposed for the West Coast? What would the impact be on our climate from these greenhouse gas emissions? How would the resulting acceleration of climate change impact human health, agriculture, freshwater availability, sea level rise, ocean acidification and frequency of large storms? What would be the costs associated with sea level rise? If all of this coal is burned, how much mercury would be released and how much of that mercury would end up in the Puget Sound? How would this amount of mercury impact seafood in Puget Sound and the people and wildlife that feed upon it? What would be the costs associated with increased mercury pollution?

Alternatives Analysis

I would like the EIS to explore what type of green industry could be developed at the Cherry Point site which would create a number of high paying jobs without filling much of the wetlands at the site. Please also include a no-action alternative.

I would like the EIS to provide an in-depth analysis of all of my comments and questions.

I am putting my trust in CH2M Hill, the US Army Corps of Engineers, Washington Department of Ecology and Whatcom County, that you will do a thorough job of research, documentation and assessment of the potential impacts of the Gateway Pacific Terminal on our environment and our communities. Thank you for reviewing my comments.

Sincerely,

Tanja Wilcox