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RE: Conservation Northwest Scoping Comments for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Pacific International Terminals Inc.'s proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal project at Cherry Point, Washington and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway's (BNSF's) Custer Spur Rail Expansion project ("GPT").

Dear Representatives Kelly (DOE), Perry (USACE), and Schroeder (Whatcom County):

Thank you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments for the preparation of this EIS. It is clear that this project could lead to irrevocable environmental, economic, and quality of life changes for our communities, state and region.

Conservation Northwest has 5,000 members and supporters in Washington State and throughout the Pacific Northwest. We have offices in Bellingham, Seattle, and Spokane. Conservation Northwest protects and connects old-growth forests and other wild areas from the Washington Coast to the British Columbia Rockies, vital to a healthy future for us, our children, and wildlife. Since 1989, Conservation Northwest has worked to find solutions that are grounded in science while maintaining a common interest with rural communities. Supported by 5,000 members our staff combines science, policy, communications, and organizing skills with passion and innovation to achieve success for conservation. www.conservationnw.org

Conservation Northwest is deeply concerned about the local impacts associated with the GPT project especially those affecting our marine waters and terrestrial environments and fish and wildlife habitats. And as global citizens, we are also concerned about regional, national, and international impacts to air, land, and water as fundamentally we all depend on a clean and healthy environment for our health and our economies.

The Pacific Northwest has one of the most distinctive identities in the United States and the world. Our rich and diverse cultures, cuisine, music, and, most of all, our natural and recreational amenities draw visitors and residents from all over the world to climb, fish, hunt, sail, hike, ski, watch a sporting event, or simply sit on a beach and read a book. Our region is first and foremost known for its dramatic mountain, coastal and marine landscapes; for its clean air, water, fish, and wildlife.

Our rich natural environment is the engine that drives our diverse and vibrant economy. It encourages a creative and entrepreneurial class that is second to none. It is home to cutting edge high tech, biotech, aircraft, engineering, and biomedical industries that exist alongside aboriginal subsistence and commercial fisheries and some of the richest agricultural lands in the nation. Our research and higher educational institutions are among the best in the world.

Web and email

conservationnw.org
info@conservationnw.org

Main office

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Spokane

35 West Main, #220
Spokane, WA 99201
509.747.1663
509.747.1267 (fax)

In short, the PNW is one of the best places on earth to live, work and raise a family. Our own families kayak, fish, crab, sail, bird watch, and swim in Puget Sound and the Salish Sea. We live here because we love it and professional and personal opportunities are extensive. Our sons and daughters stay or return for the same reasons.

Anything that has the potential to impact the fragile balance of our regional environment and economies must be analyzed and understood to the fullest extent. Maintaining the health, integrity, function, and natural beauty of the marine and terrestrial environments of this region is critical to preserving our local and regional economies and quality of life.

The proposed GPT project if realized would be transformational to our region and the millions who live, work, and visit here. What's more, the changes and impacts, like our marine environment, would be bi-national and respect no national borders.

What we care about

Of primary concern to Conservation Northwest are the:

- cumulative impacts to an already ecologically compromised Puget Sound, the greater Salish Sea ecosystem and its water quality and food web and;
- Impacts to the atmosphere and the global climate that will result from the mining, transport, and export of an additional 48 million metric tons of coal from Cherry Point alone and the additional millions metric tons from other proposed ports in the PNW.

Puget Sound is only a part of a globally unique greater trans-boundary marine and near shore ecosystem, the Salish Sea which also includes the Georgia Basin. The Salish Sea includes world famous, biodiversity rich San Juan, Canadian Gulf, and Discovery Islands, and Georgia Straits. The Salish Sea systems contain more than 400 islands and more than 7400 km of coastline nurturing communities numbering more than 8 million people (Friends of San Juan Islands).

The Salish Sea and its marine, estuarine, and near shore habitats are home to an estimated 37 species of mammals, 172 species of birds, 247 species of fish, and over 3,000 species of invertebrates (Gaydos & Pearson, 2011, and Brown and Gaydos, 2011).

Of these there are 113 species of concern in this vast marine ecosystem, up from 64 in 2008¹. Listed species include 37 fish species, including 2 ecologically significant units of Chinook, 2 of Chum, 2 of Coho and 3 of Sockeye Salmon, for a total of 32 distinct species of fish. Thirteen percent (32/247) of the fish species in the ecosystem are listed as species of concern. Listed species include 33% of all birds that use the Salish Sea at some time in the year and 32% or 15 mammals including 4 distinct population segments of orcas².

According to Bierregard et al., 2001, "In our opinion, the high proportion of species of concern is suggestive of ecosystem decay and we suggest that at some point we need to consider the entire Salish Sea as an ecosystem of concern. In light of projected increased population growth, on-going

¹ Listing jurisdictions include WA State, US Federal governments, BC Provincial and Canadian federal governments. According to jurisdictions listing classifications include Endangered, Threatened, Candidate, Red, Blue and Yellow listed, Special Concern and Sensitive

² Gaydos and Brown, Salish Sea Species of Concern, Proceedings of the 2011 Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference, October 25-27, 2011

Web and email

conservationnw.org
info@conservationnw.org

Main office

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Spokane

35 West Main, #220
Spokane, WA 99201
509.747.1663
509.747.1267 (fax)

habitat modifications and expected climate change, the number of species of concern for this ecosystem is likely to increase ...”³

At ground zero for the GPT, Cherry Point herring are symbolic of the cumulative impacts of human impacts and their contributions to the precarious health of Puget Sound. Cherry Point herring have declined by 95% since the 1970s. Yet their place and that of other herring populations as a keystone species and a critical link of the Puget Sound food chain is well documented (Brown and Gaydos); and by force of logic the impacts of the continued and potentially worsening health of marine and near-shore environments and habitats in the Sound on all of us who depend on this unique system.

Our environment, fish and wildlife abundance, our health and our economy are inextricably linked. The projected impacts of this and similar proposed projects in the region must be scoped for their collective cumulative impacts on these linked values.

Request that scoping cover area-wide direct and indirect cumulative impacts

The proposed GPT alone will add 18 new trains per day along a rail corridor that extends from mines in Montana and Wyoming through Sandpoint, Idaho, to Spokane, down through the Columbia River Gorge, up along the Puget Sound coast, passing through Longview, Tacoma, Seattle, Edmonds, Everett, Mt. Vernon, Bellingham, Ferndale, and dozens of communities in between.

Cherry Point’s eight mile shoreline already receives 850 annual transits from its three existing marine piers. The proposed terminal would add approximately 221 to 487 (by 2026) vessels for a total of 442 to 947 transits per year of either Capesize or Panamax vessels (GPT Project Information Document).

The Strait of Georgia is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world and is getting busier with recent increases in the region’s marine exports. In addition, the number of oil tankers traveling from Canada through the Strait of Georgia has increased dramatically due to an increased volume of oil exports. Moreover, the number of oil tankers and the volume of oil exports in the Strait are expected to grow unprecedentedly high with North America’s Kinder Morgan plans to proceed with a major oil pipeline expansion linking Alberta tar sands oil to Vancouver’s Westridge terminal (Kinder Morgan).

In the big picture, two coal-export terminal projects currently have permits pending before the Corps in addition to the Gateway Pacific Terminal site at Cherry Point: the Oregon Gateway Terminal at the Port of Coos Bay, Oregon; and the Coyote Island Terminal site at the Port of Morrow, Oregon. We understand that additional permit applications are anticipated in the weeks ahead at the Millennium Bulk Logistics site in Longview, Washington, and two separate facilities at the Port of St. Helens, Oregon (Ambre Energy and Kinder Morgan). It is likely that additional proposals will be forthcoming.

The sheer scale and magnitude of the mining, shipping, and export operation will affect millions of people in hundreds of communities through impacts to traffic and emergency services, air quality, water quality, noise, local economies, and property values, fisheries and marine ecosystems, global warming, quality of life and regional identity, existing and future passenger rail service, and aboriginal treaty rights.

³ Ibid

Web and email

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info@conservationnw.org

Main office

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Spokane

35 West Main, #220
Spokane, WA 99201
509.747.1663
509.747.1267 (fax)

The health of the Sound and the Salish Sea – What’s at stake?

The federal and state governments and the Puget Sound Partnership have invested millions of dollars to restore Puget Sound to a healthy, thriving ecosystem by 2020. There are 21 threatened and endangered species in Puget Sound (Puget Sound Partnership Action Plan, 2009). The proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal activities and operations and associated shipping and rail traffic will directly, indirectly, and irreversibly impact listed and non-listed species and their habitats.

Additionally, there are human societies even more deeply rooted than the generations of fishing families who depend on healthy local marine environments for their livelihood. The Lummi Nation and other First Nations communities who have depended on, and whose generations have witnessed the inexorable diminishment of their subsistence livelihoods, must be considered in the scoping exercise. It is important to scope the direct and indirect effects of the project on the sovereign treaty rights and non-treaty aboriginal rights and title.

An accident involving a coal spill or a coal ship/oil tanker collision involving a spill of one or both cargoes could have long ranging and far reaching implications for such a vast and complex system and must be fully explored.

Daily persistent pollution, at an increased rate and including new elements precipitated by a new coal port, might be just as devastating, but will take longer to show. These too must be fully considered.

It is imperative that this project scoping carefully scrutinize the myriad ways that the proposed GPT and its associated activities will further impact the current health of the Sound and the Salish Sea, the possible jeopardy to threatened and endangered species, and our ability to restore degraded areas to a reasonably healthy state.

Direct Impacts

Scoping must consider the costs and impacts to local economies, [local jobs and businesses](#) and public health, property values, and quality of life from a nearly 20-fold increase in train traffic. Such traffic includes snarling road traffic at rail crossings, risks to public health by traffic, increased diesel emissions and resulting decrease of air quality, potential interruption of emergency services and passenger rail service, and impaired water quality.

The specter of train derailments is not just speculative. There were nearly 40 coal train derailments in the US and Canada in the past 3 years (coaltrainfacts.org). It seems reasonable to assume that with such an increase in rail traffic that derailments will continue at least at their current average.

Increased marine traffic (GPT Project Information Document) and the coal terminal would affect fisheries (Cherry Point Work Group), marine ecosystems, and air quality and add to the cumulative impacts of Puget Sound, Georgia Basin, and near shore habitats including critical wetlands.

Indirect Impacts

Further, substantial taxpayer investment may be required to support infrastructure for the project and to mitigate some of the potential negative effects. There are questions as to whether damages to local businesses, [regional identity](#), communities and fisheries could ever be adequately mitigated. The current and future [global impacts](#) of coal export and coal combustion are significant.

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conservationnw.org
info@conservationnw.org

Main office

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Spokane

35 West Main, #220
Spokane, WA 99201
509.747.1663
509.747.1267 (fax)

Finally how much of the costs of the impacts and infrastructure required to accommodate such an operation will be absorbed by the taxpayers?

Impacts and Effects to Consider

“...there is considerable agreement among regional scientists and community leaders that the alteration and loss of habitat and the ongoing input of pollutants are the top two immediate and pervasive threats facing Puget Sound.” Puget Sound Partnership Action Plan

1. **Environmental & Habitat Impacts including marine, wetlands and near shore environments, wildlife habitat and at-risk species (e.g., orcas, salmon, various bird species).** The EIS must consider the impacts of increased ballast water discharge, marine vessel traffic, storm water runoff, wetland degradation and removal, and marine accidents or spills. These include
 1. Invasive species in ballast water
 2. Physical changes and impacts to species and habitats by ships and construction, storm water runoff, coal dust emissions, ship noise on marine mammals, and the threat of accidents and spills
 3. Further habitat degradation of the Cherry Point herring population, a keystone species

Significance

- Integrity of marine ecosystems and provision of ecosystem services including water quality and conservation of at-risk species.
- Economic benefits from salmon, crab, shellfish and other fisheries, tourism and wildlife viewing, regional identity and quality of life.
- A healthy Puget Sound accounts for 80% of the state’s tourism industry and supports \$20 billion in economic activity (Puget Sound Partnership).

Rationale

- Panamax and Capesize coal ships and will be navigating the difficult waterways of the San Juan Islands and Puget Sound. This terminal alone will add up to 487 such making 970 transits through the waterways each year. (GPT Project application)
- 12 local processors handle hundreds of millions of dollars of salmon each year; 9 of those 12 processors alone employ 676 people (WSU).
- The county’s fishery employs 2,450 people; nearly 10 times what the terminal would employ (Commercial Fisherman’s Association of Whatcom County, GPT application & information). In 2006, the value of commercial fisheries in Whatcom County alone was \$13.5 million. (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife)
- Social justice: Threats to fisheries disproportionately affect communities of color: commercial processing employees in Whatcom County are predominately Hispanic; the majority of fishing vessels in Whatcom are tribal.

2. **Climate Change Impacts.** Climate change is the most serious issue that mankind has ever faced. It is likely that increasing exports of coal to Asia will encourage more use of the biggest single input to global warming and climate change (Power, 2012). The EIS must consider the impacts of the GBT and other proposed coal export projects on global carbon emissions, climate change, ocean acidification, sea-level rise, low summer stream flows due to glacier retreat, and reduced snowpack and prolonged droughts.

Web and email

conservationnw.org
info@conservationnw.org

Main office

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Spokane

35 West Main, #220
Spokane, WA 99201
509.747.1663
509.747.1267 (fax)

As well, Washington State has been a leader in policies designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Scoping must review the impacts of increased coal exports from the West Coast on the price of coal and the resulting increased demand of coal in Asia and how it will impact Washington's emissions.

Significance

- Integrity and ecological function of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and food webs will be seriously affected as climate warms and ocean acidification intensifies.
- Infrastructure improvements to coastal communities particularly First Nations reserves
- Economic impacts of climate change effects on fisheries particularly salmon and shellfish industries
- Impacts to property values in coastal areas and costs to municipalities of sea-level rise
- Impacts to water supplies and aquatic habitats from recession of glaciers

Rationale

- According to Power, increased coal export capacity from the PNW will encourage more coal use in Asia because it will lower the price of low sulphur coal. Building coal export terminals in Washington State and elsewhere on the West Coast will ultimately lower coal prices, increase coal consumption, and over the long term create incentives towards more coal use than would be the case if these terminals are not built.
- Washington already employs some 44,130 in the clean energy sector. Per dollar invested, renewable create significantly more jobs than fossil fuels. (Employment Security Dept, Green Jobs Report, Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory)

3. Traffic Impacts. The EIS must consider impacts and costs of increased coal train and shipping traffic on:

- local economies (businesses and commuters)
- emergency services and public safety
- burden of infrastructure improvements and passenger rail service

Significance

- Coal trains and shipping traffic will slow our economy and add to the costs of doing business in affected communities.
- Required rail infrastructure and safety improvements, such as overpasses and upgrades to at-grade rail crossings, are usually 95% taxpayer expense (BNSF spokesman Terry Finn, Skagit Valley Herald).
- Delays at crossings will increase response times for public safety first responders.

Rationale

- The Cherry Point terminal will add 18 new trains of traffic per day, with 2 to 3 hours of delays for public safety First responders, businesses, and commuters.
- Current infrastructure only supports 14 to 16 trains per day – improvements and siding will be necessary to accommodate increased traffic.
- Extending the South Bellingham siding (WSDOT option) to increase rail capacity and address the Bow to Ferndale bottleneck would decrease access to parks, recreation areas, and businesses along the Bellingham waterfront (Communitywise Bellingham);

Web and email

conservationnw.org
info@conservationnw.org

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1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Spokane

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509.747.1267 (fax)

- The alternative Foothills Route through East Whatcom County would run through Whatcom County's most productive agricultural communities, threatening the health of the industry and its communities.
- Neither SSA nor BNSF have disclosed how the rail bottleneck and need for increased rail capacity will be addressed.

Summary

Puget Sound and the greater Salish Sea are already ecologically compromised with more than 100 at-risk fish, birds, mammals, and reptiles by pollution, development, and habitat degradation. "Dead zones are appearing in our waterways where nothing can live because of lack of oxygen. Populations of salmon and other species that once numbered in the millions have been reduced to the status of endangered species" (Puget Sound Partnership)

These changes have disproportionately affected tribal nations who depend on these resources to sustain their cultures and way of life. Impacts are expected to grow as the regional population increases. Federal and state governments and private entities are spending millions of dollars to clean up the Sound and restore its habitats.

Moreover, profound impacts from the combined effects of climate change, including ocean acidification, are expected to further impact the Sound. Into these troubled waters GPT project proponents are proposing to transport and ship 48 million metric tons of coal from Cherry Point, just one of several proposed new regional coal ports.

Just as the vessels exporting GPT's cargo must not be considered in isolation, so too the impacts on the Salish Sea, shorelines, marine species, bird species, fish and fisheries, tourism, and local economies must not be considered singly.

We request that scoping includes the potential impacts resulting from the build-out of GPT and other facilities when considered synergistically and cumulatively with other existing and ongoing impacts such as mercury and other pollutants. For example, it is critical that we understand the combined effects of local impacts like vessel noise and storm water runoff and broader based impacts of ocean acidification and increased coal dust pollution or a coal or oil spill. How might invasive species become even greater threats through a combination of the impacts expected from this project and background pollution?

Just as your physician must practice care in prescribing combinations of pharmaceuticals because of their possible synergistic effects on our health, we must be cautious about how existing and new environmental impacts interact with each other to amplify our considerable impediments to the health of Puget Sound and the Salish Sea, for this will be our legacy for our children and theirs.

Sincerely,



Joe Scott
Director International Programs

Web and email

conservationnw.org
info@conservationnw.org

Main office

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Spokane

35 West Main, #220
Spokane, WA 99201
509.747.1663
509.747.1267 (fax)

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Web and email

conservationnw.org
info@conservationnw.org

Main office

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
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360.671.8429 (fax)

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206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

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509.747.1267 (fax)