

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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AND URBAN AFFAIRS  
BUDGET

July 18, 2012

The Honorable John McHugh  
Secretary of the Army  
1400 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1400

The Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW, Room 5665  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary McHugh and Secretary Salazar,

I have been talking with Oregonians in town hall meetings across the state, and have heard a great deal of input about the proposed coal export facilities in Oregon and Washington. These comments reflect a broad spectrum of opinions and some deep differences of opinion within and among communities that would be affected. Like many of the Oregonians I have heard from, I am supportive of efforts to increase exports of American products, especially through Oregon's ports. I recognize and appreciate that these projects would create much-needed jobs and economic development for local communities. Yet I also recognize and appreciate that many Oregonians have serious concerns relating to local and global impacts of these projects.

I am, therefore, writing to request that the Army Corps and the Bureau of Land Management conduct a comprehensive, expedited programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed coal export facilities in Oregon and Washington.

The proposed export projects are a major undertaking but there has been significant uncertainty about the proposed facilities and communities are divided about the benefits and consequences of exporting coal. For that reason, I believe it is imperative that we do all we can to ensure there is full public disclosure of information about, and analysis of, the proposed facilities. A programmatic EIS would help put more information before the public and enable more comprehensive and informed public discourse. At the same time, the programmatic EIS should be conducted on the fastest timeline possible, preferably within one year, so as to not unnecessarily delay the decision-making process.

Some local communities see significant economic development opportunities and jobs in the potential coal export facilities. The potential benefits include the construction of coal transport infrastructure, jobs on trains and barges and at ports, and improvements to our region's rail and shipping infrastructure. In addition, it is likely that additional jobs for manufacturing and

operating barges would be created in Oregon. Permanent, family-wage jobs would be created through preliminary labor agreements between unions and the companies proposing the exports. At a time when we need to be doing everything possible to promote economic development and get Oregonians back to work, the proposals could have benefits for our state.

Some local communities have also expressed deep concerns about the impact of the proposed facilities. These include the impact of coal dust on public health or on local businesses, and the effects of increased rail congestion. Some residents have described their worry that small towns could essentially be divided in half by very lengthy coal trains for long periods of time.

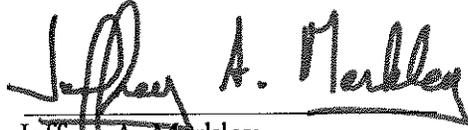
Many people are concerned about larger-scale impacts. Conservation organizations have expressed concern that the proposed projects would offer developing Asian economies a significant new source of coal that they would otherwise not be able to access. They assert that this access, and the resulting effect on coal prices and demand, could change the fundamental economics of coal in Asia, increasing dependence on coal and slowing growth in the use of cleaner energy sources. Some are also concerned that further dependence on coal in Asia will lead the amount exported from the U.S. to increase significantly in the future. These developments could have a significant impact on climate change.

A programmatic EIS, or any type of EIS the Army Corps conducts, must be comprehensive in nature, and consider both local and global issues raised by the public. Relatively localized issues to be studied should include potential impacts on public health from coal dust and diesel pollution; effects on water quality; effects on listed species such as Chinook Salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Willamette rivers; effects on other critical habitat and aquatic resources; effects on cultural resources and historic sites; and the effects of mining activity on public lands. In addition, the EIS should assess the impacts of increased vessel traffic on the Columbia River, including effects on navigational and maritime safety concerns; and the impacts of increased rail traffic, including noise and traffic delays for events such as emergency vehicles at rail crossings.

Global impacts of coal exports to be studied must include effects on climate change (including cumulative additions to global greenhouse gas emissions), global energy markets, energy security, and the clean energy economy. The changing climate is already altering our environment, and will have particularly significant negative impacts on our state, including sea level rise, ocean acidification, and an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events like storms, floods, and summer droughts.

These issues are complex and have major implications. They raise questions about whether global environmental and energy policy should be decided based on project-by-project applications or whether other policy forums should be engaged. A programmatic EIS would be one step toward ensuring more comprehensive analysis and informed decision-making. We should not make public policy decisions that could constitute significant moves toward a more coal-dependent future without gathering and publicly disclosing the best possible information and engaging in the appropriate analysis. I support an expedited programmatic EIS for that reason: it would enable a full and thorough examination of the issues to best inform public policy decisions for Oregon and for the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Cc:

The Honorable Nancy Sutley  
Chair, Council on Environmental Quality  
Executive Office of the President  
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