

NW Groups say 'No' to Tropical Trash

Local News

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Portland, OR - It's not exactly the "aloha" you'd expect from Hawaii. Conservation groups and the Yakama Nation have filed a lawsuit to stop barges loaded with Hawaiian garbage from making their way to a landfill in the Northwest. The trash would be unloaded at Longview, Wash., and sent by rail to southeastern Washington.

The lawsuit charges that the U.S. Agriculture Department hasn't done enough to ensure the trash won't carry invasive, non-native pests and plants into the orchards, vineyards and water of the Columbia Gorge. Robert Harris, director of the Sierra Club of Hawaii, agrees.

"The fruit fly, for example, which is quite prevalent in Hawaii and has been eliminated in the United States. And the concern is, what if it gets established in either Oregon or Washington? These are the types of things that really should be looked at through an environmental review, which hasn't happened yet."

Harris says the tons of trash have been wrapped in plastic bales for transport, but they've sitting for more than a year, and many are torn and leaking. The shipments were set to start this week, but the lawsuit will delay them.

"The City of Honolulu has threatened, if the shipping doesn't start soon, that they may rescind the contract, so this may be the death blow to it, but only time will tell. There's obviously incredible pressure here to do something about the trash, and I'm sure there will be pressure to continue looking at this idea."

The lawsuit asks that a full environmental impact statement be prepared before shipping Hawaii's trash is allowed into the Gorge. Harris says waste disposal has reached a crisis point in Hawaii, and the barging was meant to be temporary until an incinerator can be expanded. But he says Hawaiians generate about twice the amount of trash per day as folks on the mainland, and recycling has not been a priority there until recently.

The complaint is online at www.gorgefriends.org.