<u>Tribe Members to Weigh in at WA Coal Plant Hearing</u> Local News

Posted by:

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SPOKANE, Wash. - A packed house is expected Tuesday at the Spokane County Fairgrounds for a hearing about a coal terminal planned for western Washington, near Bellingham. Some concerned citizens coming to add their comments do not live anywhere near the terminal, or even in Washington, including members of Montana's Northern Cheyenne tribe. But they are concerned that making it easier to ship coal to China means more coal mines in their area, and the resulting negative effects on water, air and land.

Alexis Bonogofsky, manager of tribal partnerships for the National Wildlife Federation, says they believe every facet of coal production must be considered in order to get an accurate environmental assessment.

"What's really important for us is to show them that it's all connected, that these aren't just discrete impacts. The mines are connected to the ports and are connected to the rail lines - and they have to look at the impacts all the way from the mine to the port."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is holding the hearing to help determine what should be included in an environmental impact study of the coal terminal project. The Corps wants to hear about issues from air quality and public safety to the transportation impact of increased rail traffic.

(Photo: The Black Thunder coal mine is located in Wyoming's Powder River Basin. Photo courtesy of Ecoflight.) The Northern Cheyenne land contains coal deposits, and some tribal members say they should be making money from a mining boom. But Bonogofsky points out that the tribe has already enacted some of the nation's strictest air- and water-quality standards, and other members are not willing to compromise them. She says they are just as concerned about other new ports being planned along the West Coast.

"If these ports get built, then southeastern Montana becomes a sacrifice area for an Asian coal export market. They don't want their cultural sites destroyed; they don't want their air quality and their water quality impacted."

She says some tribe members are also protesting a new rail line proposed for coal shipments that borders their reservation and parallels the Tongue River, linking mines in Wyoming and Montana.

The hearing starts at 4 p.m.; a rally and news conference precede it.

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