

Quinault and Earthjustice Hope to Shine Light on Crude by Rail

Local News

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HOQUIAM, Wash. - Tens of millions of barrels a year: that's how much crude oil is projected to be rolling by rail to Washington State under a proposal that's being challenged by local tribes and community groups.

According to Tyson Johnston, First Councilman with the Quinault Indian Nation, his tribe wants to see the same kind of environmental review for oil transported to the new proposed crude oil terminal as currently takes place when oil is pumped via a pipeline.

"I feel that if the watershed is damaged due to an oil spill, it's going to become a people problem versus a tribal problem," he declared. "And so we also feel that this is also in the best interest of our neighbors, for their benefit and their children."

Facility proponents say there will be little or no environmental impact from the oil terminal or the rail shipments into it. However, EarthJustice sued last week seeking environmental review on any proposed terminal.

Kristen Boyles, staff attorney with Earthjustice, said state law normally requires a full environmental review, but that is being circumvented because companies are transporting the oil by rail.

"Shipping oil by rail to a barge, then to take it to a refinery: the number of breakpoints in that system, as you can imagine, are large, and the risk of an oil spill increases as we do this kind of thing," she stated .

Tribal councilman Johnston said that Earth Day, observed this week, is a good time to note that these concerns go beyond just his tribe and the state.

"You see the increase on crude oil being shipped on train lines throughout the United States, and everyone is aware of what happened in the Gulf Coast and what the indigenous people in that area have gone through trying to clean their environment," he said.

Johnston said two more crude-oil terminals are also proposed for the Washington Pacific Coast port of Grays Harbor.