

Quinault Indian Nation committee adopts anti-coal stance

Local News

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TAHOLAH, Wash. - The Quinault Indian Business Committee has passed a resolution opposing proposals to export coal from the Pacific Northwest. The resolution, passed Monday, specifically addresses a proposal to transport coal by rail from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming through Washington State for export from Cherry Point in Anacortes. There are other locations in Washington and British Columbia under consideration, including Longview, said Fawn Sharp, President of the Quinault Indian Nation. "This resolution is a strong statement by the Quinault Nation and demonstrates its commitment to protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of our people," said Sharp, who is also President of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians. "We have determined that the coal trains are detrimental to the health of our people and to the natural resources of our region, and thus in violation of our treaty-protected rights," she said. "We have serious concerns about the long-term effects of pollution caused by burning coal from Asian countries, many of which lack the pollution standards we are used to within the United States. Emissions from coal-fired plants have the potential to further threaten our oceans and fisheries, already severely impacted by the acidification of the water, added Sharp.

The Quinault Indian Nation is signatory to the Treaty with the Quinault of 1855. It, along with other Northwest treaties, has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the federal government, including the U.S. Supreme Court, and is thus legally classified as the "supreme law of the land" under Article VI of the U.S. Constitution. "Coal dust and diesel particulates will find their way into our air and waterways as these trains pass along and over our rivers, doing damage to natural resources upon which the Nation depends," said Sharp. "The United States Environmental Protection Agency, Tribal governments, and environmental organizations have voiced concerns over the threat to human health these proposals bring because of the adverse health effects of coal dust and diesel pollution, including bronchitis, emphysema, lung damage, asthma, and cancer. Our elders and our children are particularly vulnerable because of sensitivity to the health effects of fine particles," she said. "The Quinault Nation's treaty fishing right includes a right of access to its traditional fishing, hunting, and gathering sites that will be impacted by increased vessel and rail traffic. In the Resolution, the Quinault Business Committee expresses its solidarity and support for the "no" position regarding the Gateway Pacific Terminal proposal adopted by the Lummi Indian Business Council, based on documented disturbance of sacred burial grounds and proposed fill of that area for the purpose of containing over a hundred acres of coal piles. The Resolution also endorses the words of Billy Frank, Jr., Nisqually tribal elder and longtime chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) that, "We are at a legal and biological crossroads in our efforts to recover the salmon and preserve our tribal cultures, subsistence, spirituality, and economies. Not since the darkest days of the fishing rights struggle have we feared so deeply for the future of our treaty rights." Quinault Nation, one of 20 member tribes of NWIFC, is signatory to "Treaty Rights at Risk" submitted to the federal government by that Commission. Among other things, that report states that coal export proposals will, in fact, further endanger Treaty Rights. The Quinault Resolution will be submitted to President Obama, key members of the federal Administration, key members of Congress and to Governor Inslee.