

LNG Terminal Clears hurdle in Clatsop

Controversy - A panel moves closer to land-use changes for the liquefied natural gas operation

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Clatsop County commissioners Thursday tentatively approved land-use changes that would allow a massive liquefied natural gas terminal at the mouth of the Columbia River outside Astoria.

The Bradwood Landing facility, proposed by Houston-based NorthernStar Natural Gas Inc., is one of three natural gas terminals proposed in Oregon. Two are near the mouth of the Columbia; another is in Coos Bay.

To meet the Clatsop County code, commissioners Thursday listed the project as a small- to medium-size facility, prompting disbelief among opponents.

Frankly, they've reached a conclusion that appears to defy the law of physics," said Brent Foster, executive director of Columbia Riverkeepers. "This is one of the largest industrial projects in Oregon in three decades. This decision doesn't even really pass the laugh test."

The high-capacity pipelines linked to any of the proposed terminals in Oregon would run through hundreds of miles of farmland, timber land and wilderness.

Financial backers of the terminals and associated pipelines are racing to see which will gain regulatory approval first.

This fall, the Clatsop County Planning Commission approved the land-use changes that the facility needs to meet local zoning rules, ignoring the advice of county staff and an outside consultant.

The decision then passed to the Board of County Commissioners, who took Thursday's first step toward approval.

County commissioners could not be reached for comment late Thursday.

Project backers say the increased gas supply would diversify Oregon's energy portfolio and could lower prices as competition increases for domestic and Canadian supplies.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission continues to take public comments on a draft environmental review of the Bradwood Landing facility that it issued in August. The federal commission has ultimate siting authority for liquefied natural gas terminals, though Oregon regulators have permitting authority under the clean air and water acts and coastal zone management rules.

Opponents hope the state will block the terminals. They contend Oregon doesn't need the gas and is being used as a backdoor conduit to ship gas to California, which has already blocked several liquefied natural gas projects.

Foster said county commissioners have time to change their minds, though he doubts they will.

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