

End the LNG threat that faces Oregon

Commentary Essay

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The Oregonian's unfortunate support for a liquefied natural gas terminal on the Columbia River aligns the editorial board with a small group of Texas energy speculators, Northwest Natural Gas Co. and other LNG boosters who would profit directly from the project ("The overheated LNG debate," July 15).

In contrast, a diverse cross section of interests opposing LNG on the Columbia ranges from the Democratic Party of Oregon to the Cowlitz County Republican Party, the Sierra Club to the Yamhill County Farm Bureau, Columbia Riverkeeper to the National Grange, and from the Northwest Property Rights Coalition to 1000 Friends of Oregon. These groups and many others agree with the Oregon Department of Energy's finding that there is no need for the proposed LNG projects in this state.

At a time when Americans are held captive to Middle East oil producers, why would we intentionally become dependent on these same producers for our natural gas? As the Oregon Department of Energy's recent report made clear, most of the LNG imported into Oregon would come from the Middle East and would be twice as expensive as available gas supplies from the Rockies and Canada.

With global warming already melting Northwest glaciers, increasing storm intensity and threatening our water supplies, approving a project that could double the amount of gas entering Oregon is at odds with our national environmental reputation. The fact that LNG has a 30 percent higher greenhouse gas impact than domestic gas makes it all the less attractive.

The editorial board assumes we need more natural gas, but even the Northwest Gas Association projects only about a 2 percent increase in annual demand over the next five years. By aggressively pursuing renewables, efficiency and conservation, we can meet that demand while providing new family-wage jobs. Even if more natural gas were needed, any of the three massive new gas pipelines already planned into Oregon from the Rockies would double the state's current imports, but with less-expensive domestic gas.

Although NW Natural wants to build a 223-mile pipeline connecting Bradwood Landing, NorthernStar Natural Gas' proposed terminal on the Columbia, to the California-bound pipeline in eastern Oregon, it's telling that the company has

reserved less than 10 percent of the pipeline space for its use in Oregon, with the remainder likely destined for California.

In exchange, Oregon would see one of the most important salmon nurseries in North America seriously degraded by the Bradwood terminal. Similarly, Oregon farmers, foresters and landowners would face eminent domain for a 3-foot-diameter pipeline, which would also slice a 40-mile clear-cut through Mount Hood National Forest and cross more than 300 streams and rivers. Astoria and other Columbia River communities would face safety threats from LNG tankers that led even Tijuana, Mexico, to fight off an LNG port proposed there.

It's unfortunate The Oregonian's editorial board has sided with Texas energy speculators, but Gov. Ted Kulongoski and state agencies should listen to the diverse chorus of interests who agree with Secretary of State Bill Bradbury that "LNG would take us 180 degrees in the wrong direction." The state has the authority to deny water rights and other permits for Columbia River LNG proposals, and it should use that authority to end the LNG threats facing Oregon.

Brent Foster is executive director of Columbia Riverkeeper.