

LUBA again sends Port Westward expansion back to county

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

CLATSKANIE, Ore. — The Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals has for a third time sent back to Columbia County its decision to rezone 837 acres of agricultural land for industrial development at Port Westward.

In its ruling on May 9, LUBA sided with environmental and land use organizations that the county did not adequately demonstrate how proposed industrial uses may be compatible with surrounding property, including farms.

The land was purchased by the Port of Columbia County in 2010, and is adjacent to the Port Westward Industrial Park along the Columbia River near Clatskanie.

Port officials have long sought to rezone the 837 acres to expand Port Westward and attract more industrial tenants. Opponents, however, worry the site will become a hub for fuel development, threatening the area's air and water quality.

County commissioners have approved the port's rezone application three times since 2014. Each time, opponents have appealed the decision to LUBA, which sent it back to the county.

The most recent appeal was filed by Columbia Riverkeeper and 1000 Friends of Oregon. They



Harold Hutchinson/Port of Columbia County

The Port Westward Industrial Park is at the center of a controversy involving farmers and a company that wants to build a biofuel plant.

argued the county and port failed to consider impacts on farms, salmon habitat and other natural resources.

Previously, the port had identified five business types that could locate within the rezoned land, including forestry and wood products, dry bulk commodities, liquid bulk commodities, natural gas and break bulk cargo.

All would be dependent on Port Westward's deepwater dock that provides 4,000 feet of waterfront access for large cargo ships on the Columbia River.

NEXT Energy is proposing a \$2 billion renewable diesel refin-

ery at the industrial park. Opponents have appealed the county's approval of a rail facility that would serve the project. The rail line would cross land zoned for agriculture.

Dan Serres, conservation director for Columbia Riverkeeper, said LUBA's latest ruling is a validation of concerns that have been raised locally. If the rezone were approved, it would nearly double the size of Port Westward, putting it on par with the Port of Vancouver in Washington.

"Again and again, community members have come together to

protect the Lower Columbia River's clean water, salmon and other fish, and sustainable jobs," Serres said.

Farmers in the nearby Beaver Slough Drainage District have raised concerns about how industrial contamination could harm their crops, which rely entirely on surface water for irrigation drawn from the Columbia River via a system of ditches.

Mike Seely, a mint farmer in the district, said the county "erred badly" in rezoning Port Westward. "The land they seek to industrialize has been farmed for genera-

tions, providing unique and deep soils that sustain the production of food and other crops that go far beyond this community, from U-pick blueberries to high-quality mint and cattle," Seely said.

According to LUBA, the county's insufficient analysis of potential impacts under the rezone places a disproportionate burden on other agencies that would issue conditions for specific projects "to ensure, if not establish, compatibility."

In a statement, Sean Clark, the port's executive director, said he was disappointed by LUBA's decision but remains hopeful. He did not specify whether the port will attempt to rezone the property for a fourth time.

"The port believes that we effectively demonstrated that responsible industrial and agricultural uses can coexist together as good neighbors, as they have for decades at Port Westward," Clark said. "The port commission will consider how to best move forward for economic development in Columbia County."

Port Westward is already home to three natural gas power plants operated by Portland General Electric, and a loading facility managed by the Massachusetts-based Global Partners Inc. to ship ethanol and biodiesel across the Pacific Ocean.

Agriculture groups welcome USDA trade nominee

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Agricultural groups are wholeheartedly supporting the nomination of Alexis Taylor as USDA undersecretary of trade and foreign agricultural affairs, a position that has remained vacant for more than a year.

The groups have pushed the administration to fill the position, saying it is vital for U.S. agriculture, and they were quick to weigh in on Taylor's experience in agriculture and trade.

Taylor has been director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture since 2016 and formerly oversaw USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service and worked for several members of Congress.

Dan Halstrom, U.S. Meat Export Federation president and CEO, said Taylor is an outstanding nominee.

"USMEF and our member companies had many opportunities to work with Ms. Taylor in her previous roles at USDA and we are confident she will be a strong and effective advocate for U.S. exporters and all of U.S. agriculture," he said.

The U.S. Dairy Export Council and the National Milk Producers Federation praised Taylor's nomination.

"With her wealth of leadership experience at both USDA and at the state level, Ms. Taylor is perfectly positioned to serve American farmers, the broader agricultural industry and American workers throughout the agricultural supply chain in this indispensable role," said Krysta Harden, USDEC president and CEO.

Jim Mulhern, president and CEO of NMPF, said Taylor is well qualified for the position.

"She has done an excellent job in her prior government service roles and we know (she) will be a strong advocate for U.S. dairy and agriculture ...," he said.

Julie Anna Potts, president and CEO of North American Meat Institute, said Taylor's experience makes her uniquely qualified.

"She is the right person at the right time to lead the nation's focus on strengthening exports, expanding access to new markets and navigating an increasingly unpredictable global economy," she said.

Ted McKinney, CEO of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, said Taylor has a passion for seeking market opportunity for U.S. food producers.



Alexis Taylor

how regulations across the globe matter for individuals in our communities will benefit all Americans," he said.

Chandler Goule, CEO of the National Association of Wheat Growers, said the industry appreciates Taylor's experience and understanding of the agriculture community and trade issues.

"We are eager to see this key leadership role be filled quickly ... so she may begin important work at the USDA to advocate for U.S. wheat farmers and be an advocate for American agriculture around the world," he said.

Stephen Censky, CEO of the American Soybean Association, said, "Alexis has a depth of knowledge about agricultural trade and public policy, and her background, experience and network will serve her well in this post."

Brooke S. Appleton, vice president of public policy for the National Corn Growers Association, said she can't think of a better person for the job.

"She is someone with a deep understanding of agriculture, particularly as it relates to foreign markets, and she is widely respected by policymakers on both sides of the aisle," she said.

Constance Cullman, American Feed Industry Association president and CEO, said Taylor's extensive experience makes her an ideal candidate.

High inflation expected to continue

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Consumer prices in April were 8.3% higher than a year ago, a dramatic increase that was sparked during the COVID pandemic as Congress and the Federal Reserve Bank injected trillions of dollars into a battered economy.

The March inflation rate, 8.5%, was the highest since 1981-82.

There's no quick fix to high prices, and inflation is almost certain to stay above 5% or 6% for the next couple of years, economists with the American Farm Bureau Federation said in a new "Market Intel" report.

International turmoil has driven up the price of certain items, including fertilizer and fuel, which is having a large impact on farmers in particular.

However, that isn't driv-



ing overall price inflation in the U.S., the economists said.

"Quite simply, too much money was created by the Federal Reserve Bank, mostly in 2020, and it is turning, inevitably, into inflation. Thankfully, the Fed has begun taking steps to address this ... but it will likely take a few years to approach their long-term target of 2% per year," the economists said.

Market disruptions in fuel and food have spurred

inflation in recent months, but the much larger reasons for current inflation are the unprecedented actions of the Fed since March 2020 and the resulting growth in the money supply.

In March 2020, the Fed lowered interest rates to just above 0%, which spurred borrowing, and it bought nearly \$6 trillion in assets with money it created. Those actions injected \$6.4 trillion into the economy between March 2020 and the end of 2021, they said.

"This was a massive and unprecedented 42% increase in only 22 months, far more than could be absorbed by economic growth, even with the strong recovery we have had," they said.

The Fed's monetary stimulus was done on top of enormous new federal spending commitments for pandemic relief and infrastructure, as well as pure stimulus spending, and there was a lot of disposable income, they said.

"This ensured that personal incomes and overall demand didn't flag; so there was little reason for the Fed to pursue demand stimulus through such a loose money policy," they said.

Another indication of overstimulation of the economy is the record number of job openings, a rough indication of excess demand that can't be met by the available workforce, they said.

La Nina looks like best bet for next winter

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Odds increasingly favor La Nina prevailing for a third straight winter, the National Weather Service says.

The weather service's Climate Prediction Center pegged the chances for another La Nina winter at 61%, up from 54% last month.

La Nina winters in the northern tier of the U.S. are generally cooler and wetter than normal. Three La Nina winters in a row have occurred only twice since 1950.

Although ample summer water supplies usually follow a La Nina, it's not a sure bet, Washington State Climatologist Nick Bond said Friday.

The last third-straight La Nina winter, 2000-2001, yielded a poor water supply for summer irrigation and led to a drought.

"There's no guarantee there's going to be a huge snowpack," Bond said.

Below-normal sea-surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean trigger a La Nina. While the northern U.S. tends to be cold and wet, the southern tier leans toward being hot and dry. Another La

Nina winter could worsen the drought in the Southwest.

Normally, La Nina has its most influence on Northwest weather in the late winter. This year, it's effects may be lasting into the spring. "I'm prepared to believe that," Bond said.

Washington just had its third coldest April in 128 years of record-keeping. The snowpack rallied during the month from below average to finish above average.

Natural Resources Con-

servation Service water supply specialist Scott Pattee said May 13 the snowpack has peaked, but is melting slowly because of low temperatures.

La Nina likely will stay through the summer, according to the climate center. Bond said he then expects its influence to wane and that the state will follow a trend toward warmer and drier summers.

A La Nina prevailed for 38 months from April 1973 to May 1976, and for 34 months from June 1998 to March 2001.

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