

Pipeline Safety a Concern at Oregon LNG Meeting *continued from front page*

ment since 2004, would include an LNG export terminal in Warrenton. The project proposes taking natural gas obtained from Canada through the controversial method of hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” and transporting it across Washington through an expanded Williams Northwest Pipeline. The pipeline would cross the Columbia River near Columbia City, OR and Woodland, WA and then traverse Columbia County in a thirty-six inch pipeline. At the Warrenton plant the natural gas would be converted to liquefied natural gas in order to be shipped to potential Asian markets.

The pipeline crosses Rock Creek, the water source for the City of Vernonia, about four miles above the city intake. It also crosses numerous other rivers and streams including the Nehalem River twice. It mostly travels across sparsely populated areas owned by timber companies and only directly affects five landowners in Columbia County.

Opponents to the project have previously raised concerns that include: destruction of salmon habitat in the Columbia River and the loss of commercial fishing areas due to exclusion zones around the terminal; harm to the water quality of regional rivers and streams that the pipeline would cross; and threats to public safety.

During the January 29 meeting in Vernonia twenty-two citizens signed up to ask formal questions, which were followed by a more informal discussion period.

Members of the audience asked numerous questions concerning the safety of the pipeline and were repeatedly told that pipeline safety does not fall under the purview of any of the agencies on the panel, but is instead the responsibility of the US Department of Transportation. Several citizens mentioned recent documented pipeline accidents and concerns about how a potential explosion could impact local timberland by causing forest fires and affect local emergency response agencies.

In addition to safety issues, citizens raised concerns about the “public interest” of the project and noted that since the project takes natural gas from Canada and exports it to Asia, there is little or no benefit to local economies and communities who take all the risk of being im-

pacted by a potential disaster. According to the Oregon LNG website, during construction the project would employ an average of 3,000 workers for more than five years and directly employ 150 people once the terminal becomes operational.

Citizens also raised concerns about the impact the project would



have on global climate change.

They also questioned the cost of filing permits and pointed out that Oregon LNG only pays \$100 to file a permit with the Army Corps, indicating American taxpayers pay for the expense of the Army Corps to evaluate the permit application, accept public comment and hold public meetings. The DEQ representatives noted that the cost of the DEQ permits are commensurate with the work needed to process them and usually run in the tens of thousands of dollars.

In addition to needing to secure permits from the above mentioned regulatory agencies, Oregon LNG currently faces several hurdles that could kill the project.

On December 17, 2014, the Oregon Court of Appeals upheld the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners decision to deny the pipeline due to land use rules.

Oregon LNG is also facing current litigation which indicates they don't have access to the land where they intend to construct the export terminal. Oregon LNG subleased the land from the Port of Astoria, but a pre-existing ease-

ment from 1957 given to the Army Corps of Engineers to dump dredge spoils on the site may supersede the land lease. Oregon LNG has filed suit against the US government to gain access to the land.

Members of the panel representing the Army Corps declined to comment on the current litigation during the meeting in Vernonia.

Despite those potential roadblocks, Oregon LNG has continued to pursue the permit process.

DEQ is responsible for reviewing a proposed project permit to ensure that the Oregon LNG project meets state water quality standards, does not degrade water quality, and maintains waterways for recreational use and as aquatic habitat. DEQ has the ability to grant or deny 401 water quality certification.

DEQ is currently accepting public comments on the project until February 16, 2015. If DEQ proposes to grant the permit it will be placed on public notice and public hearings will be held to accept formal comments. When asked, Christensen and Purcell said a public hearing on the pipeline portion of the project would be held in Vernonia.

The Army Corps of Engineers is also responsible for the review of the Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit and can deny the permit if they determine that the project is not in the public interest.

The project is also subject to review by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which will issue a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the project. Federal agencies cooperating in the preparation of the EIS include the US Department of Energy, US Department of Transportation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Coast Guard, US Army Corps of Engineers, and US Environmental Protection Agency.

Once the draft EIS has been issued there will be a forty-five day comment period as well as public comment meetings before a final EIS is issued.

Are Pipelines Safe?

One of the major concerns raised by local residents is the safety of the proposed Oregon Pipeline project, which would transport natural gas through a 36 inch high pressure pipeline across Columbia County on mostly private timberlands to an export facility, Oregon LNG, in Warrenton, OR. The pipeline would cross Rock Creek about four miles above the intake for Vernonia's Water plant. Local residents have raised concerns about the impact a pipeline accident could have locally, including the potential for a forest fire in the event of an explosion and water quality degradation if there was a leak.

Local residents' fears have only increased. In January 2015 alone there have been four pipeline accidents in the United States:

- On January 26 a natural gas pipeline in Brooke County, West Virginia exploded in a ball of flames. No one was injured but flames melted the siding off one home and damaged a power line.
- On January 22 three million gallons of saltwater drilling waste spilled from a North Dakota pipeline.
- On January 17 a pipeline dumped up to 50,000 gallons of crude oil into the Yellowstone River, leaving thousands of Montanans without drinking water.
- On January 14 a gas pipeline in Mississippi exploded, rattling residents' windows and causing a massive smoke plume.

A wikipedia search for “List of pipeline accidents in the United States since the year 2000” produces fifteen pages of results.

According to FracDallas.org, a website devoted to exploring the facts, truths and myths about natural gas exploration and production, since 2001 gas pipeline explosions and other accidents have resulted in the loss of at least forty-five lives and many more serious injuries.

Pipeline safety is regulated by the Federal Pipeline Hazardous Materials and Pipeline Safety Administration (PHMSA), a division of the US Department of Transportation. According to FracDallas.org PHMSA only has funding for 137 safety inspectors and often employs less.

A recent report by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) found that gas companies failed to conduct inspections or tests that could have found weaknesses that caused several major accidents and that improvements are needed. According to the report the US is crisscrossed by nearly 300,000 miles of gas transmission pipelines, more than half of which were installed before 1970. FracDallas.org reports the nations total energy pipeline network exceeds 2.5 million miles, operated by 3,000 separate companies. The NTSB report does say the pre-1970 pipelines have a significantly higher failure rate because they have been exposed to environmental forces longer and newer pipelines have been made with improved safety technology.

The list of pipeline accidents is immense. But one recent accident stands out.

On March 31, 2014 a twelve inch pipeline at the Williams Northwest LNG facility in Plymouth, WA exploded, injuring five employees, one seriously, and forcing the evacuation of 1,000 residents. Williams Northwest will own the proposed pipeline expansion that will connect to the Oregon Pipeline in Woodland, WA. The LNG plant where the explosion occurred is a smaller version of the LNG storage terminal that the Oregon Pipeline will connect to in Warrenton.

Send written comments to DEQ:

401 Public Comments
DEQ Northwest Region Office
2020 SW 4th Ave.
Portland, OR 970201
or Email:
401publiccomments@deq.state.or.us
Comments due by 5:00 PM Monday,
February 16, 2015
503-229-5379
Fax: 503-229-6957

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VHS

SAVE THE DATE

SUNDAY
AUGUST 16TH, 2015

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2ND BIGGEST REUNION

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