

Activists: 'What we learned is there is no silver bullet, there is no one thing'

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but also their distinct culture. "It is also important to note the Cherry Point area is known to the Lummi as Xwe'chi'eXen, which is part of a larger traditional cultural property," she wrote. Fishing was not just a source of sustenance and wealth, wrote Walker, but also "important to the Lummi Schelangen (Way of Life)."

'I am not an acceptable risk'

When government officials took seats behind long tables at one end of an Oregon high school gymnasium one rainy night, they faced about 100 locals sitting in folding chairs. Most wore red T-shirts that read:

"I am not an LNG 'acceptable risk.'"

The locals' show of force at Knappa High School in 2005 was the first major public protest against the first of four terminals to import liquefied natural gas, proposed for sites along the Columbia River near the Pacific Ocean. Emotions ran high, elevated by the risk of catastrophic explosions associated with LNG tankers.

That 2005 hearing in Knappa launched what became a decade-plus anti-LNG campaign by citizen activists.

It was love of the Columbia River that brought school librarian Cheryl Johnson into the fight. Johnson, who lives near the river in Brownsmead, spearheaded a key opposition group calling itself Columbia Pacific Common Sense.

Johnson's organization came to coordinate myriad citizen opposition groups that popped up spontaneously along the river where the explosive fuel was to be transported, as well as across interior counties where a pipeline would plow through orchards, vineyards and pasture and leave behind the possibility of catastrophic explosions.

Like Johnson, most citizen



Alex Milan Tracy

Cascadian activists have in some cases employed civil disobedience tactics in their fight to keep the region from becoming a major export center for planet-warming fossil fuels. Here, protesters block the main BNSF rail line in Vancouver, Washington, in 2016 as police begin to move in.

activists had day jobs. They soon realized that they were girding for a fight over highly technical matters of science and law. They realized, she said, that they needed an environmental group with professional staff. With expertise.

Johnson and her collaborators found it in the Columbia Riverkeeper, a Pacific Northwest affiliate of the Waterkeeper Alliance founded by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

"They said from the beginning: We have your back. We will help you," Johnson said. "They were pivotal."

The formula, according to Johnson: "We brought the local voice, and they brought the lawyers." Scientists, too.

The citizens' tactics: Workshops. Rallies. Handing out one-pagers at their monthly meetings and public hearings. Lots of time. Lots of preparation. Lots of nights reading and learning.

They used the internet extensively, along with events. A notice for a 2005 event offered: "Artist & activist Janet Essley will join us for a 'Stencil Party.' BYOT (Bring your own T-shirt, hat, posterboard etc.) and Essley will walk you through stenciling 'No LNG' artwork on items of your choice."

They targeted the county commission, the city commission, the U.S. Coast Guard, the state Department of Environmental Quality, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission — any agency that had decision-making authority over numerous government permits. Every month the far-flung local groups sent representatives on the two-hour drive to meet with Riverkeeper in Portland and plan strategy.

And when another show of force was required at a public meeting or event, word went out: This is a red-shirt meeting.

Crucially, when citizen activists failed to gain support from established green groups, they reached out beyond that movement. They involved fishermen who feared the damage to salmon habitat where the LNG plants would be built. They brought in tribes who depend on and venerate salmon. And they linked up with owners of vineyards and orchards whose long-nurtured lands would be riven by proposed pipelines.

Two of the proposals for LNG terminals quickly fell away. But two persisted for years as fracking projects con-

ceived to import LNG were reborn as terminals to liquify cheap, abundant domestic gas for export to Asia.

The first was the Bradwood Landing project upstream from Astoria, proposed by NorthernStar Natural Gas. The Houston-based company that originally sought permits to import LNG, promising jobs and energy, converted it to export after fracking took off.

A key factor in defeating the proposal was a citizen referendum, crafted by the professionals at Columbia Riverkeeper and pushed heavily by local groups, that outlawed the company's plan to build pipelines through publicly owned parks as project proponents planned. More than two-thirds of votes went for the opponents in a special election that spurred more than half of Clatsop County's registered voters to weigh in.

About five years after that first public meeting at Knappa High, Johnson left her seat in a restaurant overlooking the Columbia one night to rescue a forgotten mobile phone from her car. Standing there in the parking lot, she saw 15 messages. Something was up. As she listened, she realized her side had prevailed.

Minutes later she was on the phone with a reporter asking for comment. Johnson was so choked up she couldn't talk through her sobs of joy.

Six years later the other LNG proposal, slated for Warrenton, finally died, too.

"What we learned is there is no silver bullet, there is no one thing," Johnson said. "Big picture, it's just throwing so many obstacles in their way that they finally decide it's not worth it, and they pull out."

Global impact

Cascadia's activism has had global impact, contributing to a downgrading of fossil fuel industries' moral standing and access to capital worldwide. But for all of the activists' victories, it might be a stretch to say they have the fossil-fuel industry on the run. In fact, the industry continues to hold sway in important ways throughout Cascadia.

Trains regularly carry highly flammable Bakken crude oil through the Columbia River Gorge at the Washington-Oregon border. One derailed in June 2016 at a small Oregon town, sending up a fireball, closing a 23-mile stretch of Interstate 84 for half a day and evacuating a school and neighborhood. Another oil-bearing train derailed last month north of Bellingham, Washington.

Oil-bearing trains bisect towns from Oregon to near the Canadian border. Many move through a century-old tunnel that runs beneath downtown Seattle. There, an explosion could easily result in massive evacuations and quite possibly more serious harm.

Washington's refineries may get access to even more oil because of the expansion of the TransMountain pipeline — one of three large fossil fuel export projects underway today in British Columbia.

Activists scared TransMountain's longtime owner,

Kinder Morgan, off its expansion project only to see it purchased by Canada's federal government in 2018. It would nearly triple the capacity of a pipeline that delivers diluted bitumen, the heaviest form of crude oil, from Canada's tar sands in Alberta to just outside Vancouver, British Columbia. It was justified to ship petroleum to China and other Asian countries by tanker, but also sends diluted bitumen to Washington refineries via barge and pipeline.

While the TransMountain pipeline moved forward against objections from British Columbia, the federal government actively courted another megaproject under construction: the LNG Canada gas export terminal in Kitimat and the associated Coastal GasLink gas pipeline bringing fracked gas to Kitimat from Northeast British Columbia.

The Sightline Institute's Eric de Place said that environmentalists trying to maintain the activists' "thin green line" against fossil fuel exports from the West Coast continue to monitor fossil-fuel export proposals north and south of the border, including the Jordan Cove LNG terminal and pipeline proposed for Coos Bay.

Last week, The Oregonian reported that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission upheld Oregon's decision to deny a water quality certification for the project, a potentially fatal blow.

Still, he said the activists' efforts have been a "smash hit," putting fuel-export proponents back on their heels. "I thought when we started out ... that we would not win any of the fights, and as it turned out we came close to running the tables," de Place said. "We established that fossil fuels do not have a safe harbor in the Northwest."

Peter Fairley contributed to this report. This story was funded in part through a grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

SKANSKA

SUB-BIDS REQUESTED

Warrenton School District Improvements

Skanska is requesting Subcontractor bids for the Warrenton Grade School Siding, Flashing and Weather Barrier replacement located at:

Warrenton Grade School
820 SW Cedar Ave.
Warrenton, OR 97146

Scopes of Work currently bidding include:
Work Category #01 Siding, Weather Barrier, Sheet Metal Flashing and Trim Replacement
Work Category #02 Painting

All bids are due no later than
January 29th at 2PM

There will be a non-mandatory pre-bid meeting held at the Warrenton Grade School on Monday January 18th at 10am. Contact Derek Bourque for additional details.

All bids are to be submitted to Skanska via Building Connected.
For bid documents and details contact Derek Bourque, derek.bourque@skanska.com
Oregon CCB: 153980

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