

LIQUIFIED NATURAL GAS ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER REIGNITES FOSSIL FUEL BATTLE



This Piece by Dan Serres, Conservation Director for Columbia Riverkeeper, addresses a growing threat to the Pacific Northwest: being used to export fossil fuels. With high-bidding Asian markets willing to pay top dollar for U.S.A. fuels we run the risk of destroying our lands in the process of mining/hydrofracking and exporting fuels to be burnt in Asia. If the Pacific Northwest refuses to export we will discourage mining/hydrofracking on our neighbors' lands, protect our land from pipelines, and help keep our fuel in the ground and out of our air. This piece concerns all 6 Essentials and is placed in our air section for this reason.

In 2005, the *Wall Street Journal* called liquefied natural gas (LNG) “the next fossil fuel.”

In the same year, far from Wall Street, in the Columbia River estuary, energy companies launched plans for terminals to import LNG (super-cooled liquid methane) from Russia and the Middle East. At proposed terminals on the Oregon Coast and the Columbia River, energy speculators sought to re-warm the liquid methane back into gas and ship the gas through hundreds of miles of new pipelines to California. The proposed pipelines would condemn the lands of hundreds of unwilling Oregon farmers and foresters, cut a swath through hundreds of acres of ancient forests, and trench through hundreds of salmon-bearing streams and rivers.

In response to the habitat destruction, greenhouse gas pollution, and private land condemnation that LNG would have brought to the Columbia River and neighboring counties, we formed a broad, brawling coalition to take on the New York-funded, Texas-based Bradwood LNG and its local partner, NW Natural gas. For once, farmers, fishermen, loggers and ‘huggers[i] could agree on something: LNG was wrong for the Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest.

In 2010—following years of lawsuits, meetings, rallies, and hearings—we won. Bradwood LNG declared bankruptcy after spending over \$120 million and failing to turn a single shovel-full of dirt. We anticipated that other proposed LNG projects, like those proposed by Oregon LNG and Jordan Cove LNG, might falter similarly as both were dealt significant setbacks in early 2011.

Signs popped up all over Astoria, Oregon that read, “Oregon LNG: You’re Next!” Indeed, even the *Wall Street Journal* reversed its position, calling its optimism for LNG imports a “bad call.” The Columbia River estuary—the most critical salmon nursery in the Pacific Northwest—would likely be spared the dredging and pipeline damage of Bradwood LNG and its competitor, Oregon LNG. Today, over fifteen months after Bradwood LNG’s bankruptcy, LNG projects have quietly taken a different shape along the Columbia River and further south in Oregon’s Coos Bay estuary. Oregon LNG in Warrenton and Jordan Cove LNG in Coos Bay have not canceled their projects; rather, they now seek to export—not import—LNG. Because of low natural gas prices and increased supplies created by highly polluting hydraulic fracture (“fracking”) gas drilling techniques throughout the United States, the Columbia River and Oregon’s Coast offers a direct route from cheap western U.S. gas fields to high-priced Asian markets. In a recent report on the LNG industry’s reversal, *The Oregonian* reported that the economics of export are a “slam dunk.” Worse yet, access to lucrative overseas markets will encourage expanded fracking and natural gas development, a highly polluting industry.

While the price incentive for sending LNG to Asia may be a “slam dunk”, the proposals to liquefy and ship the gas overseas are not.

Thousands of Oregonians and Washingtonians opposed LNG projects when the industry purported to create jobs and supply “needed energy” to the Pacific Northwest. Now, the same proposals would ship energy overseas using eminent domain—the direct taking of private lands through a government-issued order. The proposals involve the same polluting, salmon-killing swaths of construction for pipelines. In response, in monthly meetings held in granges, churches, and living rooms throughout Oregon and Washington, an unusual coalition comprising farm, forestry, fishing, business, and conservation voices is again gearing up to fight LNG.

Even industrial groups such as the Industrial Energy Consumers of America (IECA) and the American Public Gas Association have entered the fray, making firm public statements in opposition to LNG export because it would “play havoc” with U.S. gas prices. Industrial consumers argue that LNG exports will force U.S. consumers to out-bid high-priced overseas markets while increasing the volatility of our gas prices. According to Paul Cicio, president of the IECA, “In the end, it’s going to be every homeowner, every farmer buying fertilizer, and every manufacturer trying to create jobs who is going to be hurt by this.”^[ii] In rural communities like Forest Grove, Yamhill, and Woodburn, Oregon, farmers know that higher fuel and fertilizer prices would add insult to the injury of having their land condemned.

In the coming weeks and months, the frontline for stopping West Coast LNG exports will be right here in Oregon and Washington. The team that stopped Bradwood LNG still lives here and supports ongoing efforts to halt Jordan Cove LNG and Oregon LNG. Unlike Bradwood LNG executives, we cannot flee to air-conditioned Houston business suites when things go awry. We will need to band together once again to defeat the LNG industry. The decision on LNG exports will fall on the governors of Oregon and Washington, as well as our Congressional delegations. Your voice is critical in ensuring that our Governors do not overlook the LNG industry's big bait-and-switch.

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