

The proposed Coos Bay terminal pipeline would cross 379 bodies of water, many of which are critical habitats for threatened Coho salmon.



# IN THE SHADOW OF THE **SALMON**

{ Rogue Riverkeeper battles LNG project  
in one of America's last wild places. }

By Lesley Adams, Rogue Riverkeeper

**S**ince the 1970s, plans to construct liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in California have been defeated one after another. As a result, multi-national energy interests have turned their sights south to Mexico and north to Oregon. In 2008, the Costa Azul LNG terminal in Baja, Mexico became the first LNG facility to be completed on the West Coast of North America, and three massive LNG terminals have been proposed for Oregon. One of these, the Bradwood LNG project on the Columbia River in the northern part of the state, was defeated in May when, after a six-year fight led by Columbia Riverkeeper, NorthernStar Natural Gas announced that they were pulling the plug. But two are still alive, and, if completed, they would be the first such ports constructed on the West Coast of the continental United States.

One of the proposed LNG terminal sites in Oregon is on the Columbia River near the Washington border, and a second is planned for Coos Bay in the southwest corner of the state. Both would include over 220 miles of high-pressure gas pipelines that would rip across sensitive wildlife habitats in Coos Bay and the Columbia Estuary, across thousands of Oregonians' family farms and forestlands, and through important forest habitats, including Mt. Hood National Forest. These destructive and ill-conceived projects are being challenged by a number of parties, including Columbia Riverkeeper in the north and Rogue Riverkeeper in the south.

One of the principal threats presented by these proposed facilities is to wild salmon, an integral part of the Pacific Northwest's cultural, ecological and economic fabric, and a regional icon. "Think of the Northwest," Carl Safina wrote in his essay *The Soul Who Swims*, "and salmon soon come to mind."

Wild salmon populations in the Pacific Northwest are already at historically low, even crisis, levels, largely because of dam construction, habitat loss due to development, poor water quality and habitat degradation resulting from logging operations that



cut down 90 percent of Oregon's and Washington's original old-growth forests. As Richard Manning has written, "The forest raises the salmon, but the salmon also raise the forest."

Developments that harm salmon are often justified by their economic returns. In rural southern Oregon, an LNG proposal is being touted by energy prospectors as sound economic development. But the value of salmon is habitually underappreciated. As Jean-Michel Cousteau has observed, "We are experiencing the consequences of not placing priority on the protection of this valuable ocean resource. It takes great courage to act in the interest of the environment over commerce, but the protection of our wild salmon is now an economic issue."

LNG technology greatly reduces the volume of natural gas, making it possible to ship it long distances. Natural gas is drilled in far-off gas fields in places such as Russia and the Middle East. Then it is super-cooled until it reaches liquid form, loaded onto huge, specially designed tankers, and shipped thousands of miles to coastal terminals. Upon reaching its destination, the liquefied gas is reprocessed to its original gaseous form. The leading LNG exporters include the three countries with the world's biggest natural gas reserves—Russia, Iran and Qatar—as well as Indonesia, Malaysia and Algeria.

These old-growth trees are in the way of a 95-foot-wide clearcut that would run 235 miles.



The LNG project would impact 29 species listed as endangered or threatened, including six species of whales.

In December 2009, in what might be called a rubber-stamp decision, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the Jordan Cove/Pacific Connector LNG import facility in Coos Bay and the associated 235-mile pipeline. This decision flies in the face of opposition from state agencies, rural landowners, ranchers, anglers, energy activists and conservationists who expressed a multitude of concerns about this project—including insufficient analysis, threats to the environment, public safety and private-property rights, as well as increased U.S. reliance on imported fossil fuels.

Perhaps most troubling is that FERC based their determination on an inadequate body of

information, failed to demonstrate an adequate purpose or need for the project, and did not weigh reasonable alternatives. For example, tapping domestic natural-gas sources could be cheaper and less environmentally destructive, and investing in clean-energy development would reduce reliance on fossil fuels and nuclear power. Moreover, in FERC's rush to approve, their analysis virtually ignored the potential impacts on water quality and supply, wetlands, salmon, wildlife habitats, old-growth forests and public safety.

The proposed pipeline would cross 379 bodies of water, many of which serve as critical habitats for threatened Coho salmon. These crossings would require extensive riparian cutting that would increase water temperatures in streams that already violate temperature standards for these and other cold-water fish. Yet FERC's evaluation did not include site-specific impact analysis or crossing plans for any of the sub-watersheds that will be affected. The inadequacy of the energy company's crossing plans for the Rogue River was recognized by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, but the company ignored them, and FERC approved their plans without requiring additional analyses. Further, the project would

FERC Chairman Jon Wellinghoff stated in his dissenting opinion that there are environmentally preferable ways to meet projected energy needs.

impact twenty-nine species listed as endangered or threatened, including six species of whales and four species of sea turtles. Coho salmon, another species on the endangered list, would also “likely be adversely affected” by the project, according to FERC’s own analysis.

Some of the harm would be caused by extensive dredging for terminal construction in the Coos Bay estuary—the amount of material that would be dredged out of the estuary would fill the Rose Bowl stadium in Pasadena nearly 14 times. In light of this enormous impact, the analysis of effects from dredging on sensitive estuarine habitats and marine species was grossly deficient.

FERC’s vote to approve was three-to-one. The lone dissenter was Chairman Jon Wellinghoff. His opinion succinctly explained why it is so important to stop the project. “Based on my review of the evidence,” he stated, “I believe that there are reasonable alternatives that would more efficiently, more reliably, and in an environmentally preferable manner meet the projected energy needs of the markets that the Jordan Cove Project is intended to serve. I am also concerned about specific characteristics of the Jordan Cove Project. Therefore, I conclude that the Jordan Cove Project is not in the public interest, and I respectfully dissent from today’s order.”

The 2005 Energy Act took siting authority away from states and gave the federal government the power to seize private property for the economic benefit of energy companies, but the State of Oregon retains some political and legal options. Since the state is charged with implementing the provisions of the Clean Water and Clean Air acts, it can deny permit applications under these cornerstone environmental laws. Regarding FERC’s approval of the Jordan Cove LNG project, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski stated in January 2010 that “FERC continues to ignore Oregon’s very real concerns about the unknown environmental impact of the pipeline associated with the proposed LNG facility. FERC’s decision to issue a conditional license for a project with such profound



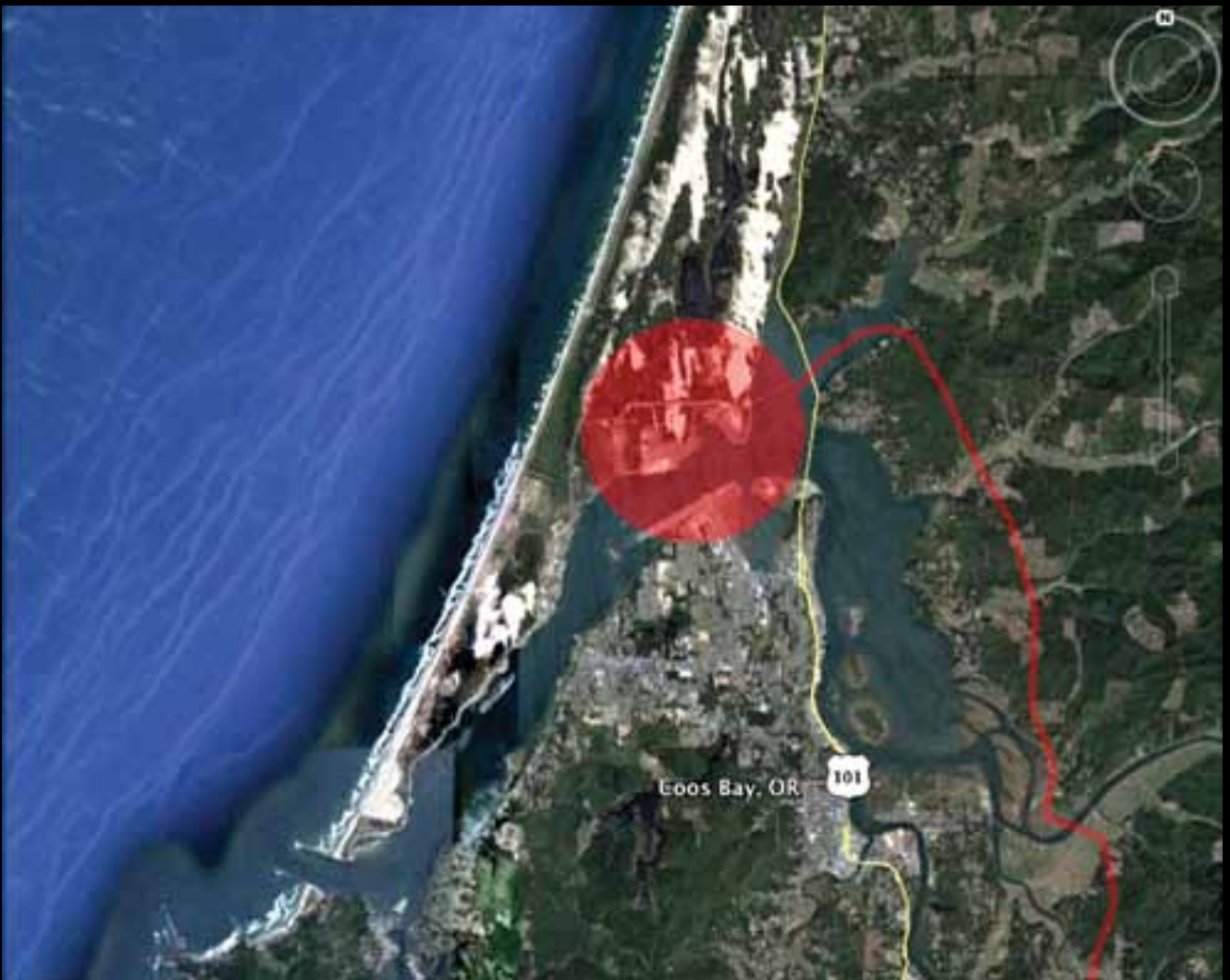
potential impacts on the lives of Oregonians was based on woefully inadequate information that demands reconsideration.”

Rogue Riverkeeper got involved in fighting the Coos Bay LNG proposal because of the project’s potential impacts on water quality, salmon and public forests in the Rogue Basin. Home to old-growth cathedral forests, rushing whitewater rivers and those iconic salmon, southwest Oregon is one of the last truly wild places left on the West Coast. The Rogue Basin has the second-largest wild salmon run in Oregon, after the Columbia River, and its temperate forests are among the most biologically diverse in the world. This is hardly an appropriate place to build a 225-mile-long gas pipeline.

“Big Madrone” is a tree that would be cut for the pipeline route.



The site where the proposed pipeline would cross the Rogue River.



The red circle indicates the projected thermal blast zone around the proposed Coos Bay terminal, in the event of an accident. The red line charts the path of the proposed pipeline.



Statewide activists rally on the steps of the state capitol in Salem to protest all three LNG proposals for Oregon.

We quickly have come to understand, however, that this issue has much larger, even national, implications in regard to environmental and energy policy. Not only the Rogue Basin would be impacted, but also the Coos Bay estuary and the Coquille, Umpqua and Klamath watersheds, all of which are part of the Pacific Northwest's "salmon nation." This proposal threatens five watersheds that are already in need of restoration. Rogue Riverkeeper is now working with individuals and organizations in all four counties and all five major watersheds (Coos, Coquille, Umpqua, Rogue and Klamath basins) that would be affected by this potentially disastrous project, which exemplifies the lack of a responsible, comprehensive national energy policy. We hope that we can help rectify that.

The threats posed by the LNG project have led to the creation of several unusual and effective alliances. For example, conservationists concerned about impacts to public lands and waters have aligned with ranchers and private-property rights advocates, as well as many of those living near the proposed regasification

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terminal and high-pressure pipeline, who are concerned about the potential for a catastrophic accident. The diversity of those opposed to the project has strengthened our collective voice, which is now being heard in Oregon's state capital, in Washington D.C., and in the corporate offices of energy companies.

As the devastating effects of the recent offshore oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico continue to reverberate throughout the Gulf Coast and across the globe, it is increasingly apparent that our nation's reliance on a rapidly dwindling supply of fossil fuels leads to a dead end. Energy development in southern Oregon should focus on increased efficiency and renewable sources, not petroleum imports.

In January 2010, Rogue Riverkeeper and allies, represented by the Western Environmental Law Center, filed a petition against FERC's decision, as did the state of Oregon and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Rogue Riverkeeper is prepared to file litigation if our request is rejected. Meanwhile, the voracious energy companies, empowered by FERC's rubber-stamp approval, continue to pursue this project, ignoring and masking its serious impacts. Rogue Riverkeeper is determined to take that rubber stamp out of the federal regulators' hands, to continue the fight to safeguard our rivers and our salmon, and to realize a more rational and secure energy future for our nation.

Lesley Adams founded the Rogue Riverkeeper program in January 2009. She previously served as outreach director for Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, Rogue Riverkeeper's parent organization. She received a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Southern Oregon University, where she also served as co-director of the Ecology Center of the Siskiyou.