

For Immediate Release

February 18, 2014

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Columbia Riverkeeper, Farmer File Lawsuit to Protect Columbia County Farmland, Endangered Salmon from Industrial Expansion

St. Helens, OR – Columbia Riverkeeper and Columbia County business owner and farmer Mike Seely filed appeals today challenging Columbia County’s decision to open 837 acres of high quality farmland along the Columbia River for industrial development. The Port of St. Helens seeks to double the amount of land available for large-scale industrial development near the existing Port Westward site, located 4.5 miles from Clatskanie, Oregon.

Columbia County Commissioners approved the Port’s rezone request for industrial land despite a 5-to-1 Planning Commission vote recommending denial.

“We’re a successful rural farm and manufacturing business adjacent to Port Westward. The existing oil trains delay our workers enough,” says Seely Mints owner Mike Seely. “A coal terminal or an increase in oil unit trains will force us to relocate.”

“The same stretch of Columbia River the Port is eyeing for fossil fuel development is home to some of the Northwest’s highest quality salmon habitat,” stated Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director for Columbia Riverkeeper. “An oil spill here could devastate the Columbia River’s sportfishing and commercial salmon fishery,” stated VandenHeuvel.

The oil boom in North Dakota is spurring an influx of projects that transport crude oil in unit trains to storage terminals along the Columbia River. These projects are being met with skepticism after four recent oil train explosions, including a Quebec explosion that killed 47 people and incinerated a large portion of the town of Lac Megantic. A [new report](#) by the U.S. government found that trains carrying Bakken crude - the same crude shipped to Port Westward - are more explosive and dangerous than other types of oil.

“Citizens of Rainier expressed concerns at our community meeting about the safety of DOT-111s oil rail cars passing through town carrying highly volatile Bakken crude oil,” stated City of Rainier Councilman Steve Massey, who is concerned that expanded industrial development at Port Westward would lead to increased rail traffic.

Seely and Riverkeeper’s appeal challenges the removal of zoning restrictions that protect Oregon’s productive agricultural land and riverfront habitat. The acreage approved for industrial use is adjacent to the Seely Mint Farm where high value mint is grown, manufactured and sold nationally in chocolates and teas and natural oil products.

Columbia Riverkeeper is represented in the appeal to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals by the non-profit law firm the Crag Law Center.

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