
June 11th, 2014 WW Editorial Staff | Murmurs

Murmurs: We Hate Coal. We Love Coal. (We Can't Decide.)



IMAGE: Thomas Bresson / CC

- **Gov. John Kitzhaber's** growing opposition to a proposed coal-export terminal in Oregon ("[Coal-line Stand](#)," *WW*, [June 4, 2014](#)) will get a test this week. The Oregon Department of Transportation is meeting in Portland with stakeholders from across the state to divvy up \$42 million from a program called Connect Oregon V. A citizen panel's top-ranked project for Region 1 (the Portland metro area) is the expansion of **a coal-export dock at the Port of St. Helens** in Columbia County that would be used to ship Wyoming coal to Asia. The ODOT committee wants to grant \$2 million of the project's \$5 million cost. Kitzhaber spokeswoman **Rachel Wray** says it's premature to speculate about the outcome of a "long public process."

- The **U.S. Government Accountability Office** published a blistering report June 9 examining the convoluted transactions that sent 30 years' worth of nuclear fuel to the Northwest's only nuclear power plant, Energy Northwest's **Columbia Generating Station** in Southwest Washington ("**Costly to the Core,**" *WW*, Dec. 11, 2013). The GAO found that the transactions "**violated federal fiscal law**" and **cost taxpayers millions of dollars in unnecessary expenses**. The U.S. Department of Energy disagrees, as does the utility. "Energy Northwest reasonably relied on the representations of a federal agency of the United States through its highest official (secretary of energy) that it possessed the required legal authority to enter into this transaction," says Energy Northwest general counsel Bob Dutton. "Any disagreement about legal authority is a matter solely between DOE and GAO, and does not involve Energy Northwest." Portland energy economist **Robert McCullough**, who panned the fuel deal, says the GAO report vindicates his findings. "The takeaway is the GAO says the transactions were illegal and resulted in ratepayers paying far too much for fuel they didn't need," McCullough says.
- The political action committee working to require the labeling of genetically modified foods in Oregon is cranking into high gear. This week, **Oregon GMO Right to Know** disclosed a \$75,000 contribution from Portlander **Karen Swift**, a transplanted California farmer who was active in a campaign there to require GMO labeling in 2012. Based on spending in California in 2012 and in Washington in 2013—labeling failed in both states by 2 percentage points—GMO labeling is likely to be the most expensive measure on Oregon's November ballot. Proponents have so far raised **\$940,000** and this week shifted **\$250,000** to FieldWorks, a signature-gathering company. Labeling opponents, who have been led in other states by chemical companies such as **Monsanto** and **Syngenta**, have not yet begun an Oregon campaign.