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EDITORIALS

The newspaper's view

NO TO MINING SKAGIT RIVER HEADWATERS

For the good of our shared region, the government of British Columbia must listen to the chorus rising against the mining of the Skagit River headwaters and stop it.

Too much is at stake to risk contaminating the Skagit's waters if Imperial Metals is allowed to drill mile-deep mines. The development company's proposal to exploit Canadian mining claims carved out of vast parklands and staked decades ago threatens Washington resources and the health of Puget Sound. The river, which provides 30 percent of freshwater flow into Puget Sound, is a uniquely powerful resource for our region.

All five species of salmon native to the Pacific Northwest, including the majority of Puget Sound's chinook, grow in the Skagit, according to fisheries experts. The 11-square-mile tract at the river's headwaters where Imperial Metals wishes to drill is believed rich in gold and copper. This juxtaposition carries the potential for ecological catastrophe.

Copper and other heavy-metal pollution in water can eviscerate salmon populations, even at low concentrations. The possible disastrous consequences of allowing Imperial Metals to proceed are not just theoretical. The company is just five years removed from a spill of billions of gallons of mining waste and process water into lakes and rivers elsewhere in British Columbia.

The Seattle Times' Evan Bush reported that a host of leaders, from Seattle and Washington

government and members of Congress to tribes, have voiced immediate opposition to the mining plan, and for good reason. After so much effort to restore salmon populations to feed humans and endangered orcas alike, renewed mining operations in the "donut hole" surrounded by E.C. Manning Provincial Park and Skagit Valley Provincial Park would create costly, perhaps irreparable damage.

Several government agencies must cooperate to end this threat and protect against future ones. Whether more members of Congress and Trump administration officials sign on or not, British Columbia Premier John Horgan and the province's Ministry of Energy, Mines & Petroleum Resources must deny the request to drill. By doing so, Horgan will demonstrate that he learned from the debacle of temporarily allowing the Skagit watershed to be logged last year, which created the inroads for this mining request.

As a permanent solution, the internationally appointed Skagit Environment Commission must be empowered to purchase the mineral rights to the donut hole so this threat won't emerge again. The tract should be absorbed into its surrounding parklands, ending an absurd geographical situation that poses a grave risk.

OPINION

The lessons of Bellingham's Olympic Pipeline explosion

By DEREK MOSCATO
Special to The Times

Recent developments in Canada's Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion saga remind us yet again of the inevitability of energy infrastructure debates in the West. By ruling that British Columbia's government does not have the authority to restrict shipments of oil sands crude from neighboring Alberta, B.C.'s top appeals court has further advanced the petroleum pipeline ambitions of politicians in Alberta and Ottawa, including Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. And just last Thursday, Alberta's government launched a \$1 million advertising campaign in downtown Vancouver to sway public opinion and pressure B.C.'s government to get on board with the pipeline program.

Just a short drive from the pipeline's terminus in Burnaby, B.C., some residents of Whatcom County are keeping a close eye on the proposal's momentum north of the border. That's not only because of where the project fits into larger narratives about global climate change and the ecological feasibility of oil-sands extraction, but also growing concerns about increased oil-tanker traffic — and associated environmental risks — in the Salish Sea that such a pipeline would bring. Petroleum spills represent a worst-case scenario in this fragile cross-border ecosystem. Further inland, pipeline leaks large and small represent a significant threat to land, wildlife, and watersheds if and when they are not caught on time.

Such lessons have been well documented in Bellingham, where 20 years ago the Olympic Pipeline explosion wounded a community's faith in energy infrastructure. On June 10, 1999, the 16-inch gasoline pipeline owned by Olympic Pipeline Company — spanning about 275 miles between Ferndale and Portland, and part of a larger regional pipeline network — was seriously ruptured. The accident released more than 230,000 gallons of fuel into Whatcom Creek, a key urban waterway that connects Lake Whatcom to Bellingham Bay and provides urban green space, wildlife habitat and salmon spawning grounds.

The environmental damage was unprecedented. When the hundreds of thousands of gallons of spilled gasoline ultimately ignited, a fireball roared down the creek, utterly devastating most of the wildlife habitat in its path. The explosion also caused millions of dollars of damage to civic and private property.

The saddest legacy was the human toll. Three young people were killed — two 10-year old



ANGELA LEE HOLSTROM / BELLINGHAM HERALD, VIA AP, FILE

Smoke billows from Bellingham's Whatcom Creek after gasoline leaked from a ruptured pipeline and ignited June 10, 1999.

boys, Wade King and Stephen Tsiorvas, and 18-year old Liam Wood. Their passing left the community reeling.

While two decades feels like an eternity in the modern world, it represents a mere blip in the natural order of things. The ecological scars of June 10, 1999, are still evident along the creek's winding path from lake to sea — even as local officials have done commendable work to repair and improve the conditions of the creek system and adjoining restoration lands.

Meanwhile, improved oversight, maintenance and governance of pipeline assets — thanks to public pressure and civic leadership at local, state and national levels — have gone a long way in building trust with community members. But the tragic toll of human life is never forgotten.

The Canadian political economist and geographer Harold Innis, drawing from the lessons of North American frontier economies of the past two centuries and the lumber trade in particular, argued that most societies were an outgrowth of their natural resource industries. His theory holds true across the Pacific Northwest, where mining, lumber, energy and other natural resources play not only substantial economic roles in communities large and small, but also leave political, cultural and environmental impacts.

That's why the public's trust must be paramount in virtually any resources-infrastructure project — pipelines included. One positive legacy of the 1999 tragedy was the establishment of the Pipeline Safety Trust, which came into being thanks to a grassroots watchdog group called SAFE Bellingham and the families of the deceased, who demanded improved oversight and accident prevention planning. Inspired by a similar organization set up in the wake of Alaska's 1989 Exxon

Valdez oil spill, the Bellingham-based organization has a mandate to advocate for safer pipelines not only in the Northwest but, indeed, nationally.

This is emblematic of the corporate social responsibility concept known as social license to operate. Developed by scholars grappling with the oft-volatile relationships between mining companies and the communities in which they operate, such social license emphasizes the role of community members and other local stakeholders in incorporating a company's enterprise into their collective identity, or conversely, refusing to accept it based on a misalignment with local values. Bellingham's community response in the aftermath of this tragedy is but one example, but it highlights the critical role of engaged citizenship and civic governance to the ability of resources companies to operate in democratic jurisdictions. Companies must earn the trust of local constituencies before they turn a profit.

The anniversary of the Olympic Pipeline Explosion not only serves as reminder that our economy continues to be tied to energy infrastructure, especially as oil and gas pipeline debates flare up across the U.S. and Canada. It's a reminder that the movement of petroleum products — whether by pipeline or rail — presents a particular set of complex risk-management issues for communities. In Bellingham, the explosion left a legacy of human tragedy and natural disaster. But it also provides an example of how civic and ecological engagement can provide a sustainable and hopeful path going forward.



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Northwest Voices

Letters and emails

Climate change

Migration

"Climate change is hot; why isn't Inslee's campaign?" [June 2, NWSunday] notes that 70% of registered U.S. voters say global warming is real. And the No. 1 issue for conservatives is border security.

A lot of people are leaving their beautiful countries not just because of the violence there but also because their sunny — and warm — homelands are getting much, much warmer. Slowing global warming could help slow the exodus from Central American countries.

— Pat Irle, Bainbridge Island

Inslee's leadership

Re: "Inslee wrong to pull support for LNG plant" [May 17, Opinion]:

I suggest that good leaders keep current with valid scientific

information that affects life and business.

Good leaders are informed by the National Climate Assessment of 2018 and the United Nations climate report of 2018, which concluded that human activity is causing climate change and that we have 12 years to cut our gas, petroleum and coal emissions to have a livable planet.

We have a choice now to double down with planet-killing "natural gas" or to invest in renewable energy, battery storage and retrofitting buildings. Both will bring jobs.

History is replete with examples of societies that failed due to clinging to outdated practices. Our scientists are telling us that not just our society but human life on our planet cannot exist with ever increasing amounts of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere.

Business as usual will kill the planet.

— Caryl Utigard, Burien

Shannon O'Neil Syndicated columnist

President Donald Trump overruled his advisers last week to announce tariffs on Mexico for not stopping migrants at the border. Facing the continuing fallout from Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation and the prospect of 2020 elections, Trump seems to be betting again that hyping the border and demonizing trade and Mexico will rally his political base.

His latest gambit abuses the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, undermines free trade agreements and taxes American consumers. But that isn't why his threats won't work. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of Mexico can't staunch the flow of people from his neighbors.

Mexico's reaction to Trump's threats so far has been muted. Lopez Obrador sent a conciliatory letter in response. While declaring that he "wasn't a coward," he's been in I'm-a-lover-not-a-fighter mode, couching his criticisms in history lessons. His foreign minister, after hurrying to Washington, D.C., has since been tweeting platitudes about dignity and respect in the lead-up to Wednesday sessions with U.S. officials.

It isn't just Trump who wants Lopez Obrador's government to stop Central Americans. Mexicans are increasingly unnerved and unhappy about the rising number of desperate migrants on their roads and in their communities.

But there is little Lopez Obrador can do. His government has stepped up deportations to more than 50,000 so far this year, sur-

passing the 2018 numbers of his hard-line predecessor.

Mexico's immigration bureaucracies are overwhelmed. The tiny Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance, which handles asylum cases, was unable to process even a quarter of the 30,000 applications it received last year. This year, the number is set to double. Money promised by the United Nations to open up a new office in Tijuana will help only on the margins.

Mexico could and should spend much more to deal with these human flows. But the United States is asking a nation with far fewer resources and much less capacity to shoulder a burden that the U.S. admits it can't handle.

The U.S. government is pushing Mexico to sign onto a safe third-party agreement in exchange for continuing free trade. This would designate Mexico a safe place for migrants, even though it is patently not. It would also free the United States from any Central American asylum claims along its southern border by forcing Mexico to deal on its own with the hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The ensuing humanitarian crisis would likely send Mexico's economy into recession if not a full-blown crisis. More migrants will head to the U.S., as Mexicans join Central America's sojourners.

A saner U.S. government would help rather than punish Mexico. It would double down on aid to process and protect migrants, not force a desperate Mexico to turn to the U.N. for money. And it would offer carrots along with sticks.

A strategic U.S. administration would focus on the reasons Central

Americans leave in the first place. This would mean not backing corrupt politicians such as Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez, who has been investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency for drug trafficking. It would mean not torpedoing a highly effective U.N.-sponsored corruption and crime fighting body in Central America. And it would require expanding Central American aid for programs that take on violence, poverty and the lack of economic opportunity.

Mexico is hoping this will blow over. Lopez Obrador's administration weathered Trump's April threats to close the border through discussions and enforcement promises. If Trump persists, Mexico can respond too, starting with retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods headed south. Mexico has done so before. It could impose nearly \$20 billion in levies from the get-go, raising them each month in tandem with U.S. levels.

This retaliation would highlight the gap between Trump's anti-Mexican rhetoric and the underlying interdependence of the U.S. and Mexico, with stark consequences for 2020. Many of the biggest exporters to Mexico — Arizona, Michigan, Illinois — are already swing states. New tariffs could throw Texas into recession and put its 38 electoral college votes into play. Trade may indeed decide the next election. But if Trump continues down the same path, not in the way he hopes.

Shannon O'Neil is a senior fellow for Latin America Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. She writes for Bloomberg News.