

# Something's Fishy with

Nic Callero



*The author holding a reason why coal terminals should be thoroughly studied before allowing the Pacific Northwest to be conduit for coal from the Midwest to China.*



Paul K. Anderson

*Coal trains like this one could become the norm in the Columbia River Gorge. BNSF estimates that each uncovered car loses between 500 pounds and a ton of coal dust en route.*

# COAL EXPORTS

I remember hearing the splash of the jar of salmon eggs hitting the water as my clumsy 6-year-old hands fumbled the bait over the edge of the dock. Staring into the water for what seemed like an eternity I could see the bright red jar slowly fade to black as it sank to the bottom of Puget Sound. My first thought was, “oh no, no more fishing!” This was quickly overtaken by a second more piercing reality, “My Dad is going to be pissed!”

Sure enough, after realizing the giant splash surprisingly was not me falling into the Sound, he grumbled, “May as well pack up the rods, fish have an entire buffet to eat down there now.”

In the 25 years since, I have been able to compile a list of less clumsy fishing moments that, when pieced together, form the raging fishing addict that I have become today. Be it catching my first winter steelhead on the swing on the North Umpqua River, watching the chrome monster summersault out of the water with a Green Butt Skunk pierced through its lip all the while my reel screaming for mercy. Or, living on the Deschutes River in the summer months targeting what I have proudly coined the “Deschutes Trifecta”—upper-river monster browns that find shelter in the grassy cut banks, mid-river redsides when the stonefly and salmonfly hatches are peaking, and lower-river summer steelies that shoot up Colorado and Boxcar rapids en route to spawning grounds.

Topping my list however has to be my time spent on the Oregon Coast alone hiking what remains of the uninhabited

backcountry logging roads, some of which still parallel those small coastal creeks that stubbornly defy the odds and continually support healthy runs of wild chinook, coho, steelhead and sea-run cutties. It is the time spent alone there that I have grown to love not only catching fish but the river itself and the entirety of the system. This passion and respect eventually led me to the work that I do with the National Wildlife Federation.

As a national organization our mission is to inspire Americans to protect fish and wildlife for our children’s future. There are many issues that we are currently working on relevant to the Pacific Northwest—from trying to stop the Pebble Mine in Alaska to passing renewable-energy legislation that dedicates millions of dollars locally to conservation funding. A more recent issue that NWF, as well as our partner the Northwest Steelheaders, have highlighted as a threat to fish and wildlife are the pending coal export terminal proposals in Coos Bay, Boardman, Longview, St. Helens, Grays Harbor and Cherry Point.

It had become quite clear over the past decade that the era of Big Coal in the United States is on the ropes. These past couple years we have steadily reduced our reliance on this dirty fuel, because of its impacts on public health and our global climate, and because coal has been eclipsed by cheaper, cleaner energy options. Despite the gains we have made, the coal industry remains a political powerhouse that isn’t going down without a fight: Peabody Energy, Arch Coal, and the other mega-

producers have now set their sights on the Asian market, where pollution and climate concerns have taken a backseat to a rabid demand for cheap energy.

In an irony lost on no one, the cheapest and fastest route from the western coal fields of the Powder River Basin in Montana and Wyoming goes straight through the Pacific Northwest, mainlined through the mighty Columbia River bisecting Oregon and Washington—a region that is probably the most environmentally conscious in the country. Suddenly, in almost a blink of an eye, Big Coal has proposed at least six export terminals in Washington and Oregon. If all of them are built, we could see 150 million tons or more of coal moved by rail, barge, and tanker every year through these ports.

We know how important a clean environment is to our economy and quality of life, whether that means healthy salmon runs, clean delicious water or haze-free views of Mt. Hood, Adams and St. Helens. Sportsmen, Tribes, and citizens in Oregon and Washington now face a choice between these values that define our region juxtaposed against what I would call a nightmare scenario: becoming a strategic hub for one of the world’s dirtiest industries. This is not the Pacific Northwest that I know and love.

Until recently, coal exports weren’t even on the list of sportsmen’s concerns for the Columbia River, Puget Sound, and the other rich but fragile fisheries in Washington and Oregon. We are more used to battles using sexy buzz words like gillnets,



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dams, habitat, dioxin, and spill. You have likely heard the term used to describe the obstacles our ESA-listed fish face “death by 1,000 cuts”—if these coal terminals indeed come to fruition, they will join the long list of barriers our fish face.

Currently the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is deciding if they will conduct a full Environmental Impact Study linking every proposed terminal on the Columbia River. Residents of the Pacific Northwest, especially sportsmen, deserve this full comprehensive EIS. What we know so far is troubling. Each coal car can lose hundreds of pounds of toxic coal dust en route from the Powder River Basin to the Pacific Northwest. Studies from watersheds in BC indicate that coal dust can have negative impacts on fish. A study of juvenile chinook found that exposure to the hydrocarbons found in coal dust increased the expression of certain genes that play “crucial roles in cellular metabolism,” one of which can convert cancer-causing substances found in coal dust hydrocarbons into active carcinogens. To add to this alarming list, once this coal is burned overseas mercury is especially likely to travel across the Pacific Ocean. Research estimates that as much as 18 percent of the mercury in Oregon's Willamette River comes from sources overseas, primarily China.

Sportfishing supports nearly 31,000 jobs in the Pacific Northwest. Many are directly tied to the Columbia River. Recreational fishing accounts for 2.7 billion dollars a year to the economies of Oregon and Washington. Approving these coal terminals without fully analyzing potential impacts to fish and wildlife is at the very least irresponsible. Transforming the Mighty Columbia, known for its fishing and delicious salmon, into a landscape dominated by mile-long coal trains and acres of coal piles awaiting export is frightening.

These projects threaten our Northwest heritage, and, if approved, may limit the early fishing memories of my children and my children's children—however clumsy those memories turn out to be.

To read the full report, please visit [http://www.nwsteelheaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/NWF\\_PacificCoal\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.nwsteelheaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/NWF_PacificCoal_FINAL.pdf).

Your voice counts! Please send a note to the Army Corps of Engineers, urging them to thoroughly review the risks from proposed coal export terminals in the Northwest. To take action, please visit <http://www.nwsteelheaders.org/take-action-coal/>.

