



A Printer Friendly  
Page From

**OregonLive**

[www.oregonlive.com](http://www.oregonlive.com)

## Residents protest plan to deepen Columbia

*Upper ports want a deeper channel in the river, but some people fear environmental harm*

Sunday, July 30, 2000

*By Erin Middlewood, Correspondent, The Oregonian*

ILWACO, Wash. -- Most of the residents testifying at public hearings last week urged the state of Washington to do whatever it could to block a proposed \$196 million project to deepen the Columbia River channel.

The project would deepen the existing 40-foot channel between Astoria and Portland by three feet. Upriver ports sponsoring the project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers say a deeper channel will keep them competitive with other West Coast ports by allowing larger ships to move more cargo.

Residents told the state Department of Ecology, however, that they feared the project might hurt the environment and coastal communities.

"If Portland and the upriver ports want this, let them be prepared to pay for the damages," said Dick Sheldon. The oyster farmer from Ocean Park, Wash., was one of about 26 people who spoke against the deepening at Department of Ecology hearings in Longview, Wash., on Wednesday and in Ilwaco on Thursday. Only one, a former director of the Port of Kalama, spoke for the project.

The Department of Ecology gathered public comment until Friday to help determine whether the project complies with state laws protecting shorelines and water quality.

"The corps is comfortable with their decision. We're not to that point yet," said Joe Witczak of the Department of Ecology. "If we can make a difference with our regulations, we will."

Whether the state Department of Ecology has any say over one of the most sharply criticized aspects of the project -- a new deep-ocean dumpsite for dredge spoils -- is unclear, Witczak said. Washington crab fishermen say the site will bury and kill crabs. The 14-square-mile site would be located about five miles off the mouth of the Columbia River on the Oregon side. The corps proposes to pile dredge spoils as high as 40 feet over a 6.7-square-mile dumping area, surrounded by a buffer.

"It's a well-documented fact that crabs avoid current disposal areas," said Dale Beasley, head of the Columbia River Crab Fisherman's Association.

Jon Kaino, Pacific County commissioner, and Mack Funk, manager of the Port of Ilwaco, also said they feared that channel deepening would hurt the crab industry and the economy.

"The scientific studies used to justify dumping are inadequate," Funk said. He and Beasley said the Corps of Engineers should do more baseline testing.

The Department of Ecology will decide by Aug. 30 whether the deepening project complies with Washington state environmental regulations.

[Back](#)

Copyright 2000 Oregon Live. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.