

## Coal Exports Seek Footing in the Pacific Northwest

By Merissa Moeller and Laura Kerr

As a result of growing Asian demand for coal and the existing significant reserves of coal in the Powder River Basin, five coal export terminals have been proposed for Washington and Oregon. With these terminals comes the potential for major impacts to the environment. This year NEDC students became deeply involved with understanding the scope of the proposed export terminal projects and questioned the potential impacts to the natural resources of the Pacific Northwest.



In December, student volunteers for NEDC's Air Quality project group teamed up with Legal Fellow Marla Nelson on a "super comment" regarding the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal ("GPT") proposed for Cherry Point, Washington. The GPT project is one of at least four separate regional proposals to facilitate exports of Powder River Basin coal from Montana and Wyoming to Pacific Rim countries via seaports in the Pacific Northwest.

NEDC argued that the EIS should evaluate the GPT project in a larger context and account for the cumulative impacts of similar pending proposals. In addition, NEDC commented that the EIS should address impacts not necessarily immediately linked to the project by geography and time, including permanent loss of wetlands, coal dust emissions, degradation to air and water quality as a result of construction and transportation emissions, threats to marine ecosystems, and the climate change effects of burning coal.

In April, NEDC partnered with Student Advocates for Business and Environmental Responsibility ("SABER") and Students for International Environmental Law ("SIEL") to hold "*Northwest Coal Exports: Making Cents of the Environmental Costs*," a panel for students and attorneys. The panelists included Liz Fuller (Director of Client Services for Portland's Gard Communications, representing Ambre Energy), Bob Jenks (Executive Director of the Citizens Utility Board), and Brett VandenHeuvel (executive director of Columbia River Keeper). The panel was moderated by Rob Smith of the Portland Business Journal.

The goal of the panel was to give the public an opportunity to hear a variety of viewpoints on the issue and gain a better understanding of the decision that Oregon faces regarding proposed coal export terminals in the region. The event was a success, drawing over 100 participants. At the end of the evening, Richard Whitman, John Kitzhaber's Natural Resources Advisor, made a statement on behalf of the governor explaining that Oregon was moving slowly and deliberately in making its decision about coal exports.