Frequently Asked Questions About NEXT Energy

This FAQ addresses basic questions about Houston-based NEXT Renewable Fuels LLC which proposes to build a renewable diesel refinery at Port Westward, a critical bend in the Columbia River estuary near Clatskanie. Columbia Riverkeeper does not support siting of NEXT Energy at Port Westward based on the proposed development’s significant impacts to local residents, water resources, air quality, and the troubling track record of the company. In recent months, NEXT has disclosed a plan to add a 400-car railyard and up to 4 loaded trains per week to feed the proposed refinery, a major red flag for community members and Oregon’s lead land use agency, the Department of Land Conservation and Development.

Note: Scroll to the end of this FAQ for updates on how to engage and provide input to key decision-makers (that section will be updated as new comment periods open up).

What is proposed?

The proposed refinery at Port Westward would be one of the largest producers of renewable diesel on the West Coast. Renewable diesel is a form of biofuel that is more easily used to replace diesel than conventional biodiesel. The process of converting feedstocks into a diesel fuel will demand power, fracked gas, and water.

- The Port Westward project would rely on transportation by water, railroad, and road to receive materials used in production (feedstock oils, tallows, bleaching earth) and to ship renewable diesel produced from the facility. Through an energy-intensive process—using a significant amount of fracked gas—the project would produce up to 50,000 barrels per day of renewable diesel and other fuels.

- NEXT’s proposed railyard presents a major recent shift in the project. When first proposing its refinery, NEXT’s spokespeople committed to supplying the facility with marine shipments and only receiving a small amount of material by rail. Now, community members are sounding the alarm about NEXT’s bait-and-switch, which could add a significant number of long trains to the Highway 30 corridor. This winter, the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Oregon’s lead land use agency, rebuked NEXT’s approach to building the railyard.

- The impacts of the refinery and railyard would be enormous. NEXT would impact over 140 acres of wetlands during construction and operation. The local drainage district and many neighboring farmers have rejected NEXT’s proposed mitigation plan as unworkable.

- The process of constructing the NEXT facility and its pipelines for liquid fuel and gas, as well as other supporting infrastructure, will involve grading, filling, and altering wetlands and sensitive drainages at Port Westward. Construction and operation of the NEXT project would impact neighbors, as well. Throughout NEXT’s permitting process, local
residents have demanded a thorough analysis. Soon, Oregon DEQ and the Army Corps of Engineers will begin air permitting and an environmental impact statement process for the proposed refinery and railyard.

- The risks of a diesel spill (renewable diesel is a very pure form of diesel) came into clearer focus in 2022. In February, a long train carrying renewable diesel spilled one gallon per minute on its path to Port Westward’s Global Partners facility, prompting a hazmat response and a lane closure on Highway 30 near Scappoose. More trains of this kind, or carrying feedstocks and other supplies, present safety and spill risks throughout Columbia County. (Photo from Scappoose Fire District Facebook Page).

**What does the area look like where NEXT proposes its refinery?**

The area known as Port Westward, Oregon, is located closest to the town of Clatskanie at a deep bend in the Columbia River.

The area is diked, and large areas of agricultural land are maintained through a system of sensitive drainage infrastructure managed by the Beaver Drainage Improvement District. Local farmers in the diking district, including the drainage district’s directors, do not support NEXT or its mitigation proposal because of concerns about impacts to the drainage infrastructure, their water supplies, and other natural resource impacts. Nearby wetlands, including forested wetlands near the Columbia River shoreline, provide important fish and wildlife habitat in an important stretch of the Columbia River Estuary.
Who lives at or near Port Westward, and who depends on it?

To get an up-close view and account of how the proposed refinery would impact nearby residents at Port Westward, check out this video made by local residents: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jguuAar5ToM

Port Westward is located in the midst of abundant berry fields, world-class mint production, forestry, salmon habitat, sensitive drainages, dikes, liquefiable soils, and current and historic fishing grounds. NEXT’s proposed developments are close to people’s homes, businesses, and rural, natural public gathering places.

Here are some additional notes about the area:

- Port Westward is a critical bend in the Columbia River for Tribes, salmon, farmers, and the entire Columbia River system. The area is home to local farmers, residents, a monastery, and visited frequently by agricultural and other workers.

- Nearby, Crims Island is a jewel of the Columbia River estuary restoration efforts. Homes are perched on the hillside on the bluff on the Washington side of the river. Nearby residences at Port Westward include a close-by Buddhist monastery.

- Air and water pollution from the area has the potential to impact a large and sensitive area of the Columbia River estuary. The Columbia River estuary is a critical area for salmon survival and recovery, and Port Westward continues to be used for fishing, boating and other uses. The area is very important for wildlife.

- Port Westward faces significant flooding and earthquake risks, and the area’s peat soils are prone to liquefaction.

- Local farmers have opposed the NEXT facility and its mitigation site outright: you can find more about their concerns at protectoregonfarms.com.
How does renewable diesel compare to diesel or biodiesel?

The lifecycle carbon content of biodiesel and renewable diesel are similar to one another. Renewable diesel is more carbon-intensive to produce than biodiesel, but it offers a much purer and cleaner-burning form of diesel.

- The lifecycle carbon content of renewable diesel is much lower than conventional diesel. If made from true waste, the lifecycle content of renewable diesel can be lower than all other forms of biodiesel.
- Burning renewable diesel produces less forms of certain pollution, such as particulate emissions, than other forms of diesel.
- Vehicle electrification is an agreed-upon critical path to limiting global warming and avoiding the worst impacts of climate change. For hard-to-electrify purposes, biodiesel and renewable diesel show potential as a step forward.
- Unfortunately, the NEXT project is poorly conceived, poorly planned, and proposed by a company with a poor track record: wrong place, wrong plan, wrong company.

Is the NEXT project the only industrial project at Port Westward?

No. Industrial developments at Port Westward include PGE’s gas-fired power plants and Global Partners, which receives ethanol and renewable diesel trains. The Port of Columbia County wants to rezone 837 acres of high-value farmland adjacent to Port Westward to heavy industrial zoning. Global Partners would work with the proposed NEXT project to load and unload marine shipments of NEXT’s feedstocks and refined diesel. However, the area retains a highly agricultural character, nearby homes, sensitive drainage infrastructure and wetlands, and a Buddhist monastery. The local community has voiced sharp opposition to further industrialization of Port Westward.

Would local residents’ health and safety be impacted by NEXT?

Yes, the NEXT project would impose significant construction and operation-related impacts on people in the area and downstream or downwind from the Port Westward site.

- Rail traffic is a serious concern. NEXT has altered its plans to include more rail traffic than originally proposed, admitting to at least four loaded and four unloaded trains each week, up to 100 cars in length, carrying feedstock and supplies through the length of Columbia County and portions of Multnomah County. This will divide communities and block at-grade crossings throughout Columbia County.
• Although NEXT prefers to receive its feedstock (seed oil or tallow/waste products) and export its product (renewable diesel) via marine vessel, the company acknowledges that long trains will be used for feedstock receipts and product shipments. NEXT also plans to truck renewable diesel away from the site. NEXT has indicated that they could use rail exclusively for feedstock shipments when marine shipments cannot meet the refinery’s needs.

• NEXT's proposal opens the door to more long train traffic and other transportation impacts for Port Westward and Columbia County. The troubling history of Global Partners’ terminal, once an ethanol refinery, offers a compelling example for why the public should ask for more details about the NEXT project. Global Partners, once a biofuels refinery and currently NEXT’s potential neighbor, became a significant oil train terminal almost overnight in 2013-2014.

• There are already significant risks for people living in the area due to unstable soils, a high water table, and sensitive drainage systems. The Port Westward area is prone to soil liquefaction, landslides, flooding, and other hazards that could exacerbate any public health or safety issues that arise with NEXT. The area relies on dikes to protect low-lying areas from flooding, prompting major concerns about NEXT’s proposed alterations to the area’s drainage. The Beaver Drainage District opposes the project.

• Although NEXT touts environmental values, key players in NEXT Energy were involved in a failed biodiesel facility in Odessa, WA, leaving behind a toxic cleanup site. This has prompted many local neighbors to question their claims and the potential long-term consequences for the area if NEXT’s plan fails and results in a Superfund cleanup.

Have impacted Tribal Nations weighed in on this proposal?

Given the relatively few opportunities to comment directly on NEXT thus far, not many governments or people are on the record supporting or opposing this project directly. There are major questions about the NEXT project, its design, impact, and its mitigation project. We urge key agencies to give adequate information and time for tribes to engage and to seek input from tribal entities before proceeding with decision-making on the NEXT project.

How much pollution will come from the facility?

DEQ is in the process of reviewing this issue, with a formal permitting process and comment period in 2022. DEQ refers to the NEXT project as a “large, complex” source. Until DEQ puts NEXT’s draft proposed permits out for public comment, we won’t know for sure what the expected environmental impacts will be. A lot will depend on the overall fracked gas combustion and use of the facility, which originally planned to use up to 30 million cubic feet of gas per day for the refinery as a whole.¹

¹ NEXT’s application to the Oregon Department of Energy for an exemption from Oregon’s siting rules may only acknowledge a portion of the refinery’s overall fracked gas use.
The project will demand a large quantity of power and fracked gas to upgrade the feedstocks into diesel. DEQ expects that the combustion of fracked gas will be the major driver for pollution from the NEXT site. Burning fracked gas both provides energy for converting the fuel, as well as potential energy for producing hydrogen used in the refining process. Burning and using fracked gas often contributes to smog-forming pollution and other air emissions.

Other facilities of this size are major sources of air pollution. DEQ expects the NEXT facility to emit over 70 tons of VOCs per year, for instance.

The project will also discharge wastewater into the Port’s wastewater system, combining with other area facilities to create more water pollution that would have to be treated on a regular basis.

The pollution will combine with other existing and potential sources of air and water pollution, including PGE’s nearby fracked gas power plants, the Global Partners’ ethanol refinery and train terminal, and a lurking proposal for a new, massive, fracked gas-to-methanol refinery.

What can I do to learn more and to take action?

We have an opportunity to stop this polluting project. The key decision-makers for this project include:

- Oregon natural resource agencies, such as Oregon DEQ and the Oregon Department of State Lands. They must decide how much wetland impact, water pollution, and air pollution are allowable for the proposed refinery, rail yard, and mitigation area.

- At the federal level, the Army Corps of Engineers will decide whether to issue permits relevant to impacts on waterways, wetlands and drainage systems. They are gearing up to develop a full Environmental Impact Statement, a decision made with the support of hundreds of public comments in late 2021.

- The Port of Columbia County Commission also plays a key role in evaluating the project’s compatibility with the Port and the community and making decisions regarding NEXT’s lease at the Port. The Columbia County Board of Commissioners is expected to formally approve NEXT’s local land use permits for the refinery and 400-car rail storage area in March 2022, and the decision may be appealed to the Land Use Board of Appeals. The Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Oregon’s lead land use agency, rejected NEXT’s approach to local land use siting, stating that NEXT’s approach mischaracterized its railyard as a rail branch.
NEXT faces major community opposition and permitting hurdles. As more details about the project emerge, new concerns are arising, including risks to area water resources, neighboring farms, and the increase in long trains and rail traffic for NEXT's project.

Columbia Riverkeeper will urge state and federal government agencies to pay close attention to the detailed issues and problems already identified by comments from a broad array of community members and leaders, many with deep roots in the community.

Here are some of the upcoming processes where you can engage and speak up for farmers, salmon, clean water, and a healthy community at Port Westward.

- The Army Corps will conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and we expect a formal public comment period soon. This is a very good opportunity to identify key issues, potential alternatives to and within the project, and the likely impacts on water resources and other resources in the area.
  - Stay tuned - Columbia Riverkeeper will share more information about how to comment in upcoming fact sheets and webinars.

- Oregon DEQ will review air pollution and water-related permits for the NEXT project. We expect Oregon DEQ to put a draft air pollution permit for NEXT soon. The NEXT project raises major concerns for neighbors to the project due to its potential for noxious odors, particulate emissions, emissions related to converting fracked gas into hydrogen for the renewable diesel, and health impacts on nearby neighbors.
  - Columbia Riverkeeper will post a fact sheet and information about public hearings on this issue as soon as DEQ releases its draft permit for comment.

- Oregon DEQ, Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) and the Army Corps of Engineers will review impacts to wetlands, drainage issues, and the cumulative and connected impacts of projects in the area. The agencies will conduct Clean Water Act and removal-fill permit reviews and for the over 100 acres that NEXT will impact. As currently proposed, the project would have significant, unavoidable impacts that conflict with Oregon’s laws for protecting clean water and other resources. The agencies will also consider impacts related to the controversial mitigation scheme that has drawn sharp opposition from the local Beaver Drainage District.
  - Comments closed again on these permits on February 23, 2022, but may reopen again in the future.

Your Voice Makes a Big Difference

Community voices have already made a real difference by supporting the Corps in conducting an EIS, a process that should allow decision-makers to acknowledge and address more fully the potential harms of the project. And local community members spoke 2:1 in opposition to the
project during a long public hearing in front of the Columbia County Board of Commissioners this winter.

Renewable diesel has strong potential to reduce impacts from vehicles and equipment that are hard to electrify and that burn diesel. Unfortunately, the NEXT project at Port Westward represents a stark case of poor site selection, worse planning, and untrustworthy project backers: wrong place, wrong plan, wrong company.

Let's keep up the pressure to protect Port Westward, a critical bend in the Columbia River Estuary that supports world-class mint, blueberries, salmon habitat, amid a small but vibrant community that includes homes, farms, and a Buddhist monastery.

**More Information:**
Contact Dan Serres, dan@columbiariverkeeper.org

**Resources**


2. State of Oregon’s pages here:
   - DEQ Web Page - https://www.oregon.gov/deq/Programs/Pages/NEXT-Renewable-Fuels.aspx
   - DEQ overview presentation - https://www.oregon.gov/deq/Programs/Documents/NEXTPublicInfoMpres.pdf
   - DEQ denial of NEXT’s 401 certification (without prejudice)

3. CRK comments to DSL on NEXT’s dredge/fill permit application.

4. Contact dan@columbiariverkeeper.org for more information on past comments to the Port and County regarding land use or Port decision-making.

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<tr>
<th>COMING UP</th>
<th>How to Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March-April 2022</td>
<td>Comment to Oregon DEQ regarding NEXT air permit, timing TBD.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March-April 2022</td>
<td>Potential comment on scoping of issues, beginning of Army Corps EIS process.</td>
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<td>2022 outlook</td>
<td>Key state and federal permitting processes will continue through 2022.</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/30/2021</td>
<td>EFSC provided an initial evaluation of NEXT’s exemption request and deemed the application incomplete until NEXT submits the necessary land use approvals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/12/2021</td>
<td>NEXT submitted revised / additional information to Columbia County in relation to its land use approval applications</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/28/2021</td>
<td>NEXT applied to the Army Corps &amp; DSL for an individual dredge / fill permit</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/30/2021</td>
<td>NEXT submitted a revised 401 cert. application to DEQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/1/2021</td>
<td>DEQ denied NEXT’s 401 certification (without prejudice)</td>
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<td>9/7/2021</td>
<td>DEQ held a public information session on NEXT’s permit requests</td>
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<td>9/30/2021</td>
<td>CRK submitted comments to DSL on NEXT’s dredge/fill permit application</td>
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<td>9/2021</td>
<td>Mike Seely and a coalition of farmers, residents, and other opponents of NEXT start protectoregonfarms.org. Soon after, local farmers join in by building the SavePortWestward facebook page, a great resource to learn about opposition to NEXT and an inspiring, proactive effort to increase the area’s food security by establishing a new food hub in Clatskanie.</td>
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<td>December 2021</td>
<td>Oregon DEQ and the Army Corps of Engineers concluded public comment on Clean Water Act applications from NEXT. The Army Corps concluded that an EIS is necessary.</td>
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<td>February 2022</td>
<td>Columbia County Board of Commissioners signaled their intention to approve land use permits for NEXT, over objections raised by Oregon DLCD related to NEXT’s use of long trains and rail storage. The final written decision is expected on March 23, 2022.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2022</td>
<td>Army Corps of Engineers began to develop an EIS for the proposal.</td>
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