



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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Granting ExxonMobil's large load permits may violate the law and state-federal agreements

Moving massive loads threatens Clearwater and Lochsa rivers

BOISE — A coalition of conservation groups told the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) today that allowing ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips to transport huge loads of industrial equipment up the Highway 12 corridor to sites in Montana and Canada would violate state law, violate agreements between the state and federal government on management of the scenic corridor and threaten the scenic and recreational character of the Clearwater and Lochsa rivers.

In comments filed jointly by Idaho Rivers United, Friends of the Clearwater and the Boise-based environmental law firm Advocates for the West, the groups also pointed out that state transportation officials have incorrectly represented to Highway 12 corridor residents and business owners that they have no choice but to issue the permits for the oversized loads.

"During recent public meetings in Moscow, Lewiston and Kooskia, ITD officials said their agency is required to issue the permits," said IRU Conservation Director Kevin Lewis. "That is not the case. There is no legal requirement for ITD to permit these loads, and in fact ITD may be violating its own regulations and legal agreements if it issues these permits."

The conservationists submitted joint comments to ITD asking the agency to reject two separate proposals — one from Imperial Oil/ExxonMobil Canada and another from ConocoPhillips — to turn the Clearwater-Lochsa corridor into a "High & Wide" transportation route to move massive loads of machinery from the Port of Lewiston to the Tar Sands oil developments in northern Alberta and to refining facilities in Montana, respectively. The companies want to ship the foreign made equipment up the Columbia and Snake Rivers by barge, then by massive truck caravans up the Clearwater-Lochsa River corridor and over Lolo Pass.

The three groups' letter today is part of a groundswell of developing opposition to the potential for these massive loads. On July 2, the Nez Perce tribe adopted a resolution concluding the giant shipments "would establish a dangerous and unacceptable precedent in one of the most beautiful and pristine federally protected corridors in the U.S."

"Local residents are fairly united in opposition to this project," said Friends of the Clearwater Ecosystem Defense Director Gary Macfarlane. "Over 1,700 people signed a petition opposing this ill-conceived idea and the threat it poses to the Clearwater and Lochsa rivers, the potential harm to local businesses, and the tremendous threats to safety and public welfare from the disruption of use of the Highway 12 corridor. We hope the agency will heed our concerns."

Exxon's proposed large loads will weigh up to 580,000 pounds and be up to 200 feet in length — well in excess of Idaho's definition of oversized loads. Additionally, the proposed loads will cover the entire width of Highway 12 with zero clearance in the narrow sections of the roadway and be up to 30 feet in height. Moving these loads will require closing Highway 12 with a "rolling roadblock" that will greatly inconvenience residents and the many people who recreate in the corridor. Further, traffic delays caused by this project could prove life threatening due to increased response times by emergency responders serving local businesses and residents.

— more —

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“This federally designated Scenic Byway and the Clearwater-Lochsa Wild and Scenic River corridor is not the appropriate route for these mammoth loads,” Lewis said. “There is already an established corridor for this equipment through the Gulf of Mexico and up the center of the U.S. These highly profitable oil companies should use existing routes, rather than mess up this pristine corridor. If Americans and Idahoans can’t protect the Clearwater and Lochsa Rivers – two of America’s first Wild and Scenic Rivers – we probably can’t protect anything.”

Lewis said other oil companies are reported to be watching this effort as they develop plans to move even greater numbers of loads over the next few years, making a high degree of public and state agency scrutiny imperative in the current round of permitting.

“If this camel gets its nose under the tent, we may have to deal with the whole animal,” Lewis said. “This proposal by ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips must be held to the highest levels of legal scrutiny, and it is clear that ITD has not done that.”

“The issuance of these permits would raise a number of legal issues,” said Natalie Havlina, an attorney with Advocates for the West. “By identifying these issues, we hope to empower the people of ITD to do the right thing and deny these permits.”

— End —