

# Bucking the establishment anti-LNG crowd

The more I engage in community rights work the more sense the right of local self-government makes to me. Whether it is banking regulators, energy regulators or environmental regulators the working class communities are getting the short end of the stick because the industry writes the rules. One of the main rules is that communities don't get to decide whether they want fracking waste injected into their ground water, or sewage sludge spread across their fields, or toxic emissions in the very air they breathe. In short, the rules say communities aren't even allowed to protect their children from chemical assault. The very concept of sustainability, of developing a sustainable economy is illegal because of these rules, because we cannot say NO to non-sustainable practices. Shucks, we must live with the consequences of fracking waste injection wells, or coal and gas emissions, or aerial pesticide and herbicide spraying so we ought to have some say. That is what democracy is all about.

Presently, my efforts are focused upon the environment and sustainability but I see the potential for using the rule of law to the benefit of social and economic justice as well. Centralized decision making, a sort of one size fits all approach to everything from fossil-fuel regulation to banking regulations and environmental regulations just allow bureaucrats appointed by the oligarchy to control the masses. So begging FERC or the governor or LUBA or DOE or DEQ or fill-in-the-blank has never set well with me. Perhaps this is why it was so easy for me to embrace the concept of affirming that communities are self determining, I don't like groveling.

So a group of us formed the [Coos Commons Protection Council](#) and began circulating a citizen initiative to establish a local bill of rights that expands upon the existing Bill of

Rights and will elevate community rights over corporate rights. When it passes, Coos County will make history as the first US county to ban a LNG terminal on the grounds that it violates our right to a sustainable energy future. Naturally, we expected push back from the pro-LNG booster crowd but we were more than a little dismayed when local anti-LNG activists turned out to be the biggest obstructionists.

For the most part Coos Commons has tried to stay out of the weeds and ignore these people although we spend an enormous amount of valuable time correcting the misinformation they put out. After attending the [PIELC](#) (Public Interest Environmental Law Conference) in Eugene we got another taste of how far and wide their efforts to thwart us have gone. Throughout the conference we were approached by fellow activists, most expressed similar dismay and sympathy for our plight and offered to help us. One woman from Portland, however, told us that “we need to get along” as if Coos Commons has any control over the “rift.” The only way to get along, as far as we can tell, is to stop using direct democracy and stop our initiative, something we are unwilling to do.

To provide an example of the kinds of bad information we are regularly having to correct I am including my response to an email thread from a few weeks back. The thread is quite long and I was only brought in on it towards the tail end.

*Thank you [redacted] for including me on this thread. Unfortunately, the Denton, TX example [redacted] is providing below is not a rights based ordinance and has nothing in common with community rights work. The same is true with some of the ordinances in Colorado but unfortunately people not involved in community rights are often confused and mix these ordinances up. Your statement below that these ordinances are always overturned in court is incorrect. Out of the 200 rights based ordinances passed just five are being challenged*

*in court and those cases are yet to be decided. You are correct the ordinance allows for renewable energy used sustainably. The ordinance title is the Coos County Right to a Sustainable Energy Future after all so of course renewable energy is allowed. (it is possible to use renewable energy in a [non-sustainable way](#)).*

*You are also right that we need to decentralize power production. We should have a conversation about that sometime.*

*No one working on community rights expects a miracle fix, we are in it for the long haul and working at the state level not just the local level. Changing decades of bad policy will not happen overnight, think abolition or suffrage. Change will not happen, however, unless and until we actively start defying the rules just like they did in order to free the slaves and give women the right to vote. See my [op-ed](#)*

*As for comments about the fracking fight in Colorado I refer you to an [op-ed penned](#) by Cliff Willmeng from Lafayette, Colorado. Cliff would be happy to correct any misconceptions you may have about the effort there.*

*Not to diminish the efforts of those filing comments but regarding Principal Power, I contacted Kevin Banister a few months ago and the decision to separate from Jordan Cove had nothing to do with public comment but was a business decision influenced by their acquisition by another company.*

*Mary*

One of the [points of contention](#) is that the ordinance will prohibit the non-sustainable use of renewable energy. From the ordinance: "Non-sustainable energy systems means those systems that are controlled by state and federal energy policies,

rather than community controlled energy policies; hydroelectric power and industrial scale wind power when it is not locally or municipally owned and operated...” Flopping a floating wind farm smack dab in the middle of a prime hake fishery and using Coos County as a highway to allow a corporation to sell power to California is not sustainable for Coos County. Without even getting into the enormous footprint these farms require and the toll on the ocean bed beneath them there is really nothing in it for the county to participate in this very costly scheme. In fact the State of Oregon agrees and Principle Power is, pardon the pun, pretty much [dead in the water](#).

It may come as a surprise to many but large scale hydroelectric power is not a clean source of energy. Consider this piece from EcoWatch: [The Hydropower Methane Bomb No One Wants To Talk About](#)

*A few months before visiting Costa Rica I had written a post for [EcoWatch](#), “[Dams Cause Climate Change: They Are Not Clean Energy](#).” Based on research I’d done in fighting dam proposals on my own river, the Cache le Poudre, as well as my work advocating for the already-dammed Colorado River, I’ve come to believe that [hydropower](#) is one of the biggest environmental problems our planet faces. Construction of hydroelectric dams around the world is surging dramatically, guided by the false premise that they produce clean energy, even as study after study refutes this claim.*

Make no mistake, Coos Commons doesn’t claim to have all the answers but we do know that many communities are learning how to become sustainable. Some communities have developed [creative ways to finance](#) their own wind farms, for example, providing local power and keeping energy dollars local. Solar is becoming more and more affordable and the less money we

spend importing power from companies like Pacific Power the more money we have to reinvest right here.

Coos Commons Protection Council along with Coos Community Radio in conjunction with area students will be holding a sustainability fair April 21. More details will come as we get closer to the event.