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Jefferson Parish Council calls for study of Plaquemines coal terminal

templet.jpg

Jefferson Parish Councilman Ricky Templet, left, introduced legislation calling on the state Department of Natural Resources to study the environmental impact of a proposed coal terminal in Plaquemines Parish. *(Adriane Quinlan, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)*

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on February 11, 2015 at 1:50 PM, updated February 11, 2015 at 1:56 PM

The **Jefferson Parish Council** called Wednesday (Feb. 11) for a state study of how a proposed coal terminal in **Plaquemines Parish** would affect rail traffic in **Jefferson**. The council voted unanimously to request the environmental study by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, and asked that the department hold public hearings for Jefferson residents "to educate the public and elected officials as to the environmental impacts."

"Today is Jefferson Parish making a strong statement that they want the state to take action," said Grace Morris, an organizer for the Gulf Restoration Network. The proposed RAM Terminals development would sit on the West Bank of the Mississippi River at a site north of Ironton, and would process 6 million tons of coal annually.

Environment advocates say it would harm a continuing coastal restoration project, the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion, as well as residents who live near rail lines in West Jefferson. Open rail cars carrying processed coal would serve the terminal.

The Jefferson resolution was introduced from the floor by Councilman Ricky Templet, whose district includes downtown Gretna, an area crossed by a rail line. He did not speak on the resolution after its introduction.

Gretna resident Laurie Ledet applauded the measure. "Citizens ... deserve clean air, safe communities and protection from hurricanes. ... We don't want to breathe RAM Terminals' coal dust. We certainly don't want an out-of-state coal company threatening our Louisiana coastal plans."

If the state conducts the study, it will better define those threats, said Devin Gene Martin, a Sierra Club organizer. "It means we will see all the negative impacts to our coastal restoration program, the negative impacts to people who live on rail lines, and will allow several chance for people to have public input."

The request echoes the Dec. 23 ruling of a Plaquemines judge who found the project's coastal use permit to be

invalid. Judge Kevin Connor **ruled** that the Department of Natural Resources did not have enough information on the project to justify its approval of the permit, and that the state must consider alternate sites.

Now, as the state weighs how to proceed, pressure from local governments could force a more extensive review of the project, organizers said. "This request ensures that the Department of Natural Resources does their due diligence this time, because they certainly did not last time," Martin said.

A similar measure is scheduled to come before the Gretna City Council on Wednesday night, Martin said. Citing Connor's decision, the Plaquemines Parish Council **voted** Jan. 8 to deny Ram Terminals a building permit.

Previously the Jefferson council asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct public hearings on the project before it decided whether to grant a federal permit. The corps denied the request and **granted the permit**.

Organizers think the state will be more responsive. "There's a much closer relationship," Morris said. "The state relies on local government leaders to bring issues to their attention."

"Jefferson Parish is putting hard money into coastal restoration that is based on the positive impact of existing coal restoration projects," Morris said.

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, which includes among its members Jefferson Parish President John Young, issued a memorandum supporting RAM Terminals. It has not withdrawn support, despite Connor's ruling.

"CPRA dropped the ball," Martin said.

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