

# Rail yard's expansion halted after site visit

Additional permits, site map required before continuing



SHARI PHIEL/The Columbian Portland Vancouver Junction Railroad is building a road as part of its efforts to expand the Chelatchie Rail Yard. Residents in the area say the road is blocking a fish bearing stream that flows into Chelatchie Creek.



BY SHARI PHIEL THE COLUMBIAN

Work to expand Portland Vancouver Junction Railroad's Chelatchie rail yard has come to a halt, at least for now.

Following a site visit by the state Department of Ecology, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Clark County, the railroad company was told to cease operation and apply for needed permits.

In an Oct. 23 letter to Eric Temple, president of the railroad, the Corps of Engineers said based on a preliminary investigation, "discharge of dredged and/ or fill material may have occurred in wetlands and/or waters of the United States without Department of the Army authorization."

Portland Vancouver Junction Railroad leases the 33-mile-long railroad owned by Clark County. It is not affiliated with the Chelatchie Prairie Railroad in Yacolt.

The letter said a Department of Army permit is normally required to discharge dredged or fill material, such as occurs during excavation or mechanized land clearing work.

The Corps of Engineers requested a sketch of the work and details about the project within 30 days.

Another letter sent to Temple by Meghan Tait, wetland and shoreline specialist for Ecology, also sent on Oct. 23, said additional state permits would be required before the work could resume.

"Our site investigation confirmed that wetlands and streams had been

impacted by unauthorized activities,” Tait said in the letter.

Ecology said the railroad company would need to hire a qualified wetlands specialist to “evaluate the area and prepare a wetland delineation and stream assessment report to describe and quantify those impacts.”

Ecology also requested a site map showing the boundaries of wetlands, streams and vegetation on the site. The agency said the rail-road should be prepared to rectify any impacts from this work. The railroad was given 30 days to provide the requested information and documents.

Residents living in the area also brought their concerns to the Clark County Council. During the council’s Oct. 17 meeting, residents spoke about the impacts of work done before the shutdown to nearby streams and wetlands. Several urged the council to cancel its contract with the railroad company entirely.

Temple has refuted claims that the road work has damaged Chelatchie Creek or any nearby streams or wetlands. He has also said the county and state do not have authority over its work.

“Federal statutes establish the regulatory framework that governs railroad construction projects, and they grant us the authority to proceed with this project,” Temple said in an Oct. 6 email to the county council, County Manager Kathleen Otto and others.

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