



Oregon

Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor



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May 28, 2008

Mr. Joe Franco,
Assistant Director for the River Corridor
U.S. Department of Energy
P.O. Box 550 MS A3-04
Richland, WA 99352

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Dear Mr. Franco:

I want to express concern about an evolving problem being encountered by my staff in participating in workshops, briefings and similar technical discussions at Hanford. During the past few months, they have encountered several scheduling snafus in which two or more meetings dealing with a similar topic have been scheduled at the same time by DOE and its contractors.

The most notable example was on April 17, when the DQO workshop for the Columbia River Component (CRC) was scheduled at the same time as the public presentation session for the groundwater/river interaction expert panel that met with DOE from April 16-18. One of the critical needs for the CRC project will be to identify and characterize groundwater upwellings into the Columbia River (and to assess the risks associated with those upwellings). This is precisely the topic that was being considered by the expert panel, and it would have been beneficial to have CRC workshop participants (stakeholders, as well as DOE and its contractors) be able to attend the expert panel discussion. As soon as we learned of the schedule conflict, our staff contacted Washington Closure and DOE to ask about the possibility of delaying the CRC workshop so we could attend both, but were told it was not possible to change the schedule. As it turns out, my staff had the worst possible outcome. DOE and WCH did adjust the CRC workshop schedule so WCH subcontractor staff could leave to make a presentation to the expert panel and so stakeholders who chose to attend the expert panel meeting in the morning wouldn't miss presentation and discussion of the proposed sampling design at the CRC workshop. Because we were not informed of this change, however, we sent backup staff (less familiar with the issues) to the expert panel meeting, while staff who attended the CRC workshop were stuck with a very long (more than 2 hour) lunch break.

I could point to several other instances of substantive conflicts with meeting schedules already in 2008, but don't think anything is gained by focusing on past events. Staffing for Oregon (and other stakeholders) is limited and not deep in every area of expertise. When meetings are scheduled on top of one another, we must often decide whether to skip one of the meetings or send someone with perhaps less familiarity and expertise. The end result is undesirable for stakeholders and for DOE, as it diminishes communication and the opportunity for substantive discussion. With improved scheduling, we wouldn't have to make these kinds of no-win decisions.

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We recognize that there are many meetings for many groups at Hanford, and that some scheduling conflicts are inevitable. We do ask, however, that you and your staff revisit your process for internal and external scheduling and publicizing meetings, so the number of conflicts can be minimized. Moreover, when conflicts arise, we urge flexibility by the organizers so stakeholders can participate to the maximum possible extent in the Hanford decision process. If there is any way we can contribute to this effort, or if you want to discuss our concerns, please call me or Paul Shaffer at 503-378-4456. Thank you very much for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Niles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ken" and last name "Niles" clearly distinguishable.

Ken Niles
Assistant Director

Cc: Hanford Natural Resource Trustee Council
Larry Gadbois, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
John Price, Washington Department of Ecology