

February 8, 2024

Oregon State Legislature, 2024 Regular Session  
House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans  
Public Hearing, HB4083

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the committee. My name is Norm Cimon and I live in La Grande, Oregon. I'm testifying as a private citizen, but I'm also a member of the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition. EOC3 as it's called has a mission to inform and to prepare local communities to adapt to a changing climate.

The Columbia River Basin is surrounded by mountains in every direction. It is subject to regular air inversions that cap the entire area for weeks at a time. Air quality specialist Bob Bachman of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area stated that:

*...these inversions often settle below the surrounding rim providing an effective lid...*

Traveling west from La Grande, before dropping into Pendleton, we often look down from 3500' onto a cloud bank that stretches all the way to the Columbia River Gorge. Nothing escapes from under that during the winter inversions including air pollution. That's the key to understanding the serious air quality problem from power plant and industrial emissions injected into that cloud. When that happens, all of the cities, towns, rural communities, tribal lands, farmlands, all the commercial and industrial operations, and the health of all the residents is affected by bad air.

At the center of those emissions are Boardman and Hermiston in Morrow County. Four of the top five carbon emitters in the State are clustered around those towns, each spewing over a million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> every year. The area is home to a diverse population including the 40% who are Hispanic. Many are long time home owners and proud citizens. These are the farmhands; factory workers; shop keepers; truck drivers; small business owners; school teachers; and professionals who keep the place running. Anyone with a well is at risk from thirty years of nitrates polluting the aquifer. Burdened with bad water, they are also subjected to bad air quality for days on end. Economic justice is lacking in that environment: property values have dropped; peoples health has deteriorated; the water and the air are getting worse not better.

Before it shut down, the Boardman coal fired plant was unregulated. On clear days, the Blue Mountains to the east – and Hells Canyon which cuts through that part of Oregon – is where the pollution would often be driven, sucked into the canyon's depths after carpeting the mountains in smoke. Called to account for that pollution, the plant's owner had little desire to add scrubbers, no interest in keeping the plant running, and not enough money to capture emissions. Carbon capture remains very expensive to this day.

The [collapse of coal in the U.S.](#) means that the owners of the Boardman plant were done a big favor when they were asked to follow the rules. Closing the plant was the most cost-efficient thing that could have happened. It's my hope that Oregon will follow suit and do its residents a big favor by reducing and eventually eliminating its stake in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Thank you for your time.

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