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State says 'insufficient' information on proposed Plaquemines coal terminal

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Following a **state judge's ruling**, the state Department of Natural Resources' Office of Coastal Management is requesting more information from RAM Terminals LLC before deciding on whether to re-approve the coastal-use permit for a controversial proposed coal export facility in **Plaquemines Parish**.

Office of Coastal Management permit analyst Nicole Dandurand on Friday (March 13) requested more information from RAM on alternative site assessments as well as "methods and procedures used to limit coal spillage into the Mississippi River and surrounding coastal areas."

A state judge in Plaquemines **ruled in December** that the coastal-use permit for the proposed facility was invalid and that the state must "investigate alternative sites."

On Feb. 2, the state Office of Coastal Management requested details of "site alternatives and products to be transported," according to Dandurand. The state Office of Coastal Management received that information from RAM on March 4 but, open review, it "has determined that this submittal is insufficient."

The Sierra Club, the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, the Gulf Restoration Network, and several residents **had challenged** that permit, in part arguing that the proposed facility posed a health threat to nearby residents. The groups also said the facility would threaten the construction of a federal-state freshwater diversion project that had been planned to run through the site.

Judge Kevin Connor, in a Dec. 23 ruling, said "the Department of Natural Resources failed to fully investigate alternative sites for the RAM Terminals project and the specific commodities that RAM Terminals intends to transport by rail in connection with the project."

Connor also wrote that "it is unclear whether rail is even necessary" to the

Grace Morris of the Gulf Restoration Network

Grace Morris of the Gulf Restoration Network speaks of how an environmental impact study fits into broader plans to restore the parish coastline.

project.

In her letter Friday to engineer Price Lanier, Dandurand asked for "specifications for all related equipment used in loading and unloading vessels with an explanation of how it will be designed and/or operated to minimize spillage."

"Also, please provide the contingency plan for securing coal piles, barges and equipment during storm and/or other weather events," the letter continued. "Include a timeline for when response activities are expected to occur and the conditions under which the contingency plan will be employed."

Dandurand said RAM must provide that additional information within 30 days.

It is yet another roadblock in the proposed facility's path. The Plaquemines Parish Council **in January denied** the controversial RAM Terminals LLC coal export facility's building permit following Connor's unfavorable ruling.

And last month, the **Jefferson Parish Council** and the **Gretna City Council** implored state officials to conduct an environmental impact study of the proposed facility.

RAM has proposed processing 6 million tons of coal annually at a plant on 600 acres near Myrtle Grove, north of Ironton. Its officials have stated that the facility would load, unload, mix and store coal on site. Also, it would increase rail traffic, with coal being brought to the facility.

RAM Terminal officials have said the plant is needed as the demand for coal increases. The coal would come from producers in the Illinois Basin and western and central Appalachia, and be shipped out to Asia and Europe. The project was expected to employ 150 people upon completion, 300 during construction.

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