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## Coal terminal study requested by Jefferson Parish Council

### Devin Martin, of the Sierra Club, addresses the Jefferson Parish Council

On Sept. 17, Devin Martin spoke to the Jefferson Parish Council in praise of a resolution the council passed unanimously, that asks the Corps of Engineers to conduct an environmental study of the potential effects of a proposed coal terminal. Martin spoke on how the parish can be both environmentally friendly and friendly to businesses.

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Responding to the **cry of environmental advocates** and worried residents over a proposed coal export terminal in **Plaquemines Parish**, the **Jefferson Parish Council** on Wednesday asked the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct an environmental study and host a series of public hearings on the project. The resolution suggests assessing the proposed terminal's effect on coastal restoration efforts, such as the mid-Barataria sediment diversion.

The vote came three weeks after the council endorsed **a separate study on the effect of altering the routes of trains that could carry coal** through West Jefferson to the proposed RAM Terminal at Ironton. The request was sponsored by council members Ricky Templet, Elton Lagasse and Chris Roberts and approved 7-0, prompting applause from the audience.

No one from RAM Terminal addressed the council. But for environmental advocates, the council's request is a show of political weight that they have long sought. The corps has authority over projects that could affect wetlands and has yet to release a decision on the coal terminal project's permit. The agency has not held public hearings on the proposal despite requests from the public, said Grace Morris, senior organizer of the Gulf Restoration Network.

"The Army Corps will respond to political pressure. I think that today sends a clear message that Jefferson Parish is really concerned with this proposed coal export terminal," Morris said.

To Sierra Club organizer Devin Martin, the resolution is a strong signal from Jefferson's political leadership. "They showed some tremendous leadership standing up for coastal restoration and putting up this

resolution," Martin said. "We're really, really happy to see politicians in Louisiana who are not afraid to champion coastal restoration."

A corps study could represent an important legal step toward keeping the terminal from being built, Martin said. If the Corps of Engineers refuses to grant a permit without having gathered evidence from such a study, the terminal owners could accuse the corps of having insufficient grounds to block the project. On the obverse, if the corps grants a permit without such a study, environmental groups could challenge the corps on the grounds that it did not have significant information to make such a decision.

Oscar Pipkins, president of the West Jefferson Civic Coalition, said a corps study and public hearings will help to address the increasing concern of West Jefferson residents. "There's a lot of passion out there for this issue," Pipkins said. "We depend on the coastal marshlands on natural protection from hurricanes. Anything that disrupts that is going to be impacting us, and it's not a question of if a large storm is going to be coming this way; it's a question of when."

Plaquemines resident Linda Ramil said the resolution also addresses concerns outside Jefferson. She said it acknowledges that coal terminals, such as one near her home, might harm the environment.

"I'm not here to discuss the nightmare our lives have been for 15 years living near a coal terminal with no resolution in sight until now," Ramil said. "I'm only here to thank you for your acknowledgment that the RAM Terminal could have a negative effect on the entire West Bank."

Morris counseled that requesting a corps study doesn't portend victory for the terminal's opponents. "This is definitely a huge next step. It doesn't stop the RAM coal export terminal in its tracks. We'll really call victory when that happens," said Grace Morris.

"We cannot let our state become an industrial corridor for coal," West Bank resident Laurie Ledet said. "Louisiana is our home. Let us stand together to protect it."

A representative for RAM Terminals was not immediately available for comment.

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**CORRECTION:** *An earlier version of this article identified Plaquemines Parish as an entity that could grant the terminal a permit.*

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