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Oregon Climate Convergence kicks off, promises civil disobedience

Coburg, Oregon – Last summer while Al Gore wondered “why there aren’t rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants,”¹ Oregonians had plans for similar schemes already well underway. This week hundreds are gathering to bring the plans to fruition.

“Climate change is here, and more and more people are refusing to sit by waiting for governments to act and watching them fail. The Climate Convergence is part of a new wave of direct action against the causes of climate change, a global protest movement mobilizing in response to this global threat,” said Alicia Ng of Portland.

The West Coast Convergence for Climate Action is taking place on an organic farm in Coburg, Oregon, between July 28th and August 4th. It’s the third year running for an international movement now spanning the global, with affiliated events in Virginia, New York, Quebec, Russia, England, Germany, New Zealand, Denmark and Australia. Last year’s Convergence took place on the Columbia River in rural Washington, near a proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) importation terminal, and drew nearly 500 participants. The event is a medley of workshops, music, strategy sessions, and sustainability demonstrations, all with the goal of promoting a just, rapid transition away from fossil fuels.

“Last year’s convergence was incredible and I came home with new skills to share with my local community in our fight against LNG,” said Cheryl Johnson, a thirty-year resident of the Columbia River estuary, who lives downstream from a proposed LNG terminal. “My husband and I were amazed to learn how much we have in common with other community struggles. We connected with the folks from Canada who are fighting tar sands projects - which coincidentally need LNG to do their dirty work.”

Unique amongst sustainability oriented conferences, the Convergence for Climate Action ends with a large act of non-violent direct action targeting fossil fuel projects. However, event organizers are quick to point out that camp is not just about protest. The event is completely run on solar power and features dozens of sustainability demonstrations.

“Fighting polluting industries has to be coupled with the search for solutions,” explains Monica Vaughan of Eugene. “The camps will explore and demonstrate examples of truly sustainable, less energy-intensive ways of living that don’t depend on the oppression and destruction that come with fossil fuel extraction.”

This year’s event focuses on a long list of energy issues in the Pacific Northwest– the expansion of Interstate 5 at the Oregon-Washington border, the BLM’s forest plan revisions, the removal of the Klamath dams, sustainable agriculture, and LNG development along Oregon’s waterways.

In addition to daily press tours at 1:30 pm, a press conference is schedule at noon on Thursday, July 31st. Western Environmental Law Center attorney Dan Galpern will announce a new lawsuit targeting the Bush administration's unlawful refusal to regulate certain major sources of global warming pollution. Galpern currently represents 10 national and state-wide environmental organizations in two cases jointly with California, Oregon and other states to challenge the Bush administration's refusal to approve a request by states under the Clean Air Act to enforce laws restricting greenhouse gas emissions from autos and light trucks.

The event is free and open to the public. Food, camping, and childcare are provided. Buses fueled by recycled vegetable oil will be shuttling participants from Portland to Coburg daily throughout the event. Directions to the West Coast Convergence for Climate Action and more information can be found at www.climateconvergence.org.

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¹ <http://gristmill.grist.org/story/2007/8/16/62545/5027>