

Remarks of Elin D. Miller before the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission
Oregon Convention Center
October 18, 2007

* Thank you for modifying your crowded agenda to make this time available. Because I know our time is short, my remarks are not, and many of the issues we will discuss today are important and complex, I'm going to dive right in.

Region 10 Strategy for 2007-2011

* I'd like to start my giving you a brief background on Region 10's new strategy for 2007 – 2011

Issues and Challenges in Oregon

There are a few items within our endeavors that I want to cover.

- Columbia River
- Portland Harbor
- Fish Consumption and Water Quality Standards
- NPDES permits
- Forestry, and
- Air standards and toxics emissions

COLUMBIA RIVER - TOXICS & TEMP TMDL

* We appreciate OR's leadership and support reduce toxics in the Columbia River Basin. As you know, EPA with support of OR, ID, WA, Columbia Basin Tribes and others, designated the Columbia River Basin as one of our Priority Large Aquatic Ecosystems, joining the likes of the Chesapeake Bay and Great Lakes Program.

* We have set some challenging but achievable goals for our work in the Columbia River Basin. One of our key numeric goals is to demonstrate a 10% reduction in contaminants found in water and fish tissue. We greatly appreciate Oregon's many contributions to this effort.

* For example, Oregon's Pesticide Stewardship Partnerships are achieving positive results on the ground. This year in the Walla Walla watershed, median concentrations of Chlorpyrifos were 67% lower than in 2006, and maximum concentrations were 94% lower.

* Another example is Oregon's Legacy Agriculture Pesticide Collection Events, supported, I might add, with EPA funding, The Milton-Freewater July 2007 event, for example, collected more than 7600 lbs. of pesticide wastes, including 1000 lbs. of organochlorines (such as DDT) and ~3000 lbs. of pesticide containers.

* We would like to see these toxics reduction efforts continued and expanded. We are working with OR DEQ and others on the Columbia River State of the River report focusing on toxics which we expect to complete by late 2008. We hope to use this report to help garner public support and resources for toxics reductions efforts throughout the Basin.

PORTLAND HARBOR

* In Portland Harbor, EPA and DEQ are overseeing the multi-year Superfund Site investigation that is being conducted by the Lower Willamette Group or LWG, a group of potentially responsible parties. The current study area is approximately 9 river miles of the lower Willamette River.

* EPA and DEQ are working closely to focus this challenging work by identifying, prioritizing and controlling significant sources to coincide with meeting the overall schedule to have Record of Decision for the Site by the end of 2010. We appreciate the collaboration.

FISH CONSUMPTION AND WATER QUALITY STANDARDS

* With regard to Water Quality Standards, we greatly appreciate the leadership of DEQ in the major collaborative work effort with EPA and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to engage the public in a process to develop a fish consumption rate that fully protects human health.

* I know you had a long conversation yesterday about this important work effort and Mike Gearheard was a key part of that conversation. Let me simply emphasize that EPA is committed to working collaboratively with DEQ and the Umatilla Tribe on this challenging issue.

NPDES PROGRAM

* Staying with water issues: we appreciate how hard DEQ has worked to reduce the permit backlog. It is paying off as we expect Oregon will soon be meeting our national targets.

* Perhaps even more important is the work of implementing TMDLs through these permits. Oregon is a national leader in developing water quality trading through your TMDLs. In fact, I highlighted our shared success working with Clean Water Services in the Tualatin in a recent speech I made to western ag sector representatives in Tucson, Arizona.

* We know there are still areas that need attention and improvement. We are committed to work with you as we seek to resolve challenging issues such as: Mixing Zones, Compliance Schedules, CSOs and Sanitary Sewer Overflows, Permit Information Management, and the state program environmental review process – with its potential to affect future SRF funding.

FORESTRY ISSUES

* When discussing water issues, one sector stands out for us: forestry. Over half of the PNW is forested land. These forests include most of the nation's remaining old growth and high quality salmon habitat. And many of the Oregon's impaired waters are in these forested lands. As my staff has explained both to the Forestry Board and you, EPA is not confident that forest practices on state and private land in Oregon is adequate to attain

AIR PROGRAM

Finally and briefly, let me turn to the Air program. I appreciate the hard work that's been done to bring all of Oregon in attainment with the national standards and the important work being done to reduce air toxics emissions in Oregon, especially diesel particulates. We are not done though. New challenges will arise as ambient air quality standards are revised and important new work to address the challenge of climate change is just beginning.