

*PRESS RELEASE:* BELLEVUE – The public provided more than 124,000 comments on the scope of an upcoming environmental impact statement (EIS) for a proposed bulk-cargo shipping terminal and rail spur improvements at Cherry Point, according to a preliminary count by the three agencies that conducted a recently-concluded four-month public comment period.

Form-letters or e-mails made up approximately 108,000 of the total, submitted by people who responded to 24 organized comment campaigns identified so far. The agencies received more than 16,000 uniquely worded comments. Work continues on a final comment count and breakdown.

The 121-day comment period ran from Sept. 24, 2012, to Jan. 22, 2013.

The official website, [www.eisgatewaypacificwa.gov](http://www.eisgatewaypacificwa.gov), provides additional details about the scoping process, project proposals, and displays comments received.

Pacific International Terminals, a subsidiary of SSA Marine Inc. (SSA), proposes to build and operate the Gateway Pacific Terminal between Ferndale and Blaine. The terminal would provide storage and handling of exported and imported dry bulk commodities, including coal, grain, iron ore, salts and alumina. BNSF Railway Inc. proposes to add rail facilities and install a second track along the six-mile Custer Spur.

Whatcom County, the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) together are conducting the EIS process for the proposed terminal projects and jointly will produce one EIS. Whatcom County and Ecology must follow the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), and the Corps must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Scoping is a preliminary phase of the EIS process when the agencies identify potential adverse impacts and decide which of these to analyze in the EIS. The three lead agencies gathered input from other agencies, tribes and the public. After considering comments, the lead agencies will decide what should be included in the EIS.

The EIS will evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives, potentially affected resources, significant unavoidable adverse impacts of various alternatives, and explore possible means to avoid, minimize and mitigate effects of the proposals.

The three co-lead agencies hosted seven public meetings during the comment period, which drew total attendance of more than 8,700. People at the meetings submitted 1,419 hand-written comments and 1,207 verbal comments. Of the verbal comments, 865 were given in front of audiences, and 342 were recorded individually.

The agencies consider all comments on an equal basis, regardless of how people submitted them. The joint NEPA/SEPA EIS process enables the co-lead agencies to avoid duplicated efforts where the two laws overlap, while meeting each statute's separate requirements. Parts of the joint EIS process described on the website apply to both statutes and parts apply to one or the other.

The scoping process does not address whether the proposal should receive permits. Scoping only helps define what will be studied in the EIS. Decisions about issuing permits to construct the proposed projects will not be made until after the EIS is complete.

The co-lead lead agencies plan to issue a scoping report in the next few weeks with a thorough assessment of the comments. Then, they will review that input and issue plans later this year for a draft EIS, which may take at least a year to prepare. The lead agencies will seek public comment on the draft EIS, and then produce a final NEPA/SEPA EIS.