

**DAVID SLAYS GOLIATH, AGAIN:
MEGALoadS BANNED FROM IDAHO'S SCENIC HIGHWAY**

By Nick Gier

Is there not a cause? Let no man's heart fail him

--David facing Goliath (1 Samuel 17)

*Exxon-Mobil expected to have 200 or more of those things in
Canada already. They ain't there. They're still sitting in Korea, mostly.*

~Lucas Laird, Advocates for the West

Right in the midst of their battle against Exxon-Mobil, residents along Idaho's Highway 12 received an e-mail from an unlikely but eminently appropriate source. An Israeli activist fighting gas exploration in the historic Elah Valley found their website FightingGoliath.org and wished them well in their struggle.

The Elah Valley was the site of the famous duel between a young shepherd boy and a giant warrior 3,000 years ago. Visitors can stay walk along the brook where David chose five smooth stones for his trusty sling shot.

On July 19 a Montana judge ruled, primarily for environmental reasons, that Exxon-Mobil cannot move equipment over Lolo Pass into Montana to the Kearl Tar Sands Project in Northern Alberta.

One test load—24 feet wide, 30 feet high, and 208 feet long weighing 250 tons—now sits near the pass after a 24-day, 174-mile trip that Exxon-Mobil promised would take three.

Along the way the load clipped an overhead line and cut off power to 1,300 homes and businesses. It also caused traffic delays of up to 50 minutes. The response from the extremely compliant Department of Transportation was to call the test a "success" and waive (not enforce!) the 10-minute traffic delay rule.

The test load may have to be hauled back to Lewiston where it will be—as Exxon-Mobil has been forced to do with 33 other modules—cut in half so that it can travel on Highway 95 through Moscow and Coeur d'Alene and then to Interstate 90. (The judge's ruling applies only to Highways 12 and 200 in Montana.) Insisting that Highway 12 was the only route from Lewiston, Exxon-Mobil originally claimed that the modules could not be reduced in size.

At \$500,000 per module for the resizing and huge delays in transport, Kearl Project executives are most likely wishing they had taken the higher bid from Alberta's unionized metal workers rather than having the modules made in South Korea for \$1.2 million each.

Originally, Exxon-Mobil wanted to barge 207 loads up to Lewiston, but the remaining 174 modules will now be off-loaded at Vancouver, Washington, cut in half, and trucked up Hiway 395 to Interstate 90.

In announcing the gas exploration in Israel's Elah Valley Fox Business News neglected to mention that its owner Rupert Murdoch has invested money in this venture. Should we be surprised that former Vice-President Dick Cheney is also in on the deal? Goliath brought his shield bearer directly onto the battlefield, but Fox News kept their shady owner way in the rear.

Idaho officials also kept secret their ties with Big Oil. As early as 2008 Gov. Butch Otter assured Exxon-Mobil that it could transport its equipment from the Port of Lewiston up the "wild and scenic" Clearwater and Locsha river valleys. Without consulting their constituents, Idaho's congressional delegation also signed on to the plan.

Lewiston Port officials had started applying for federal funds so they could improve their facilities and receive more oversized loads. This would make Highway 12 a permanent industrial "high and wide" transportation corridor. There are already such routes from ports in Houston and Canada's Hudson Bay and Exxon-Mobil obviously should have used either of these.

Kearl Project administrators were extremely arrogant to think that it could take advantage of a port 440 miles inland and rural highways with few overhead lines, and they were also really naïve to think that people whom they neglected to inform would not object to their obscene plans.

Even if Exxon-Mobil is able to overturn the Montana judge's ruling, it still faces another suit by Idaho Rivers United that demands, for the first time, a clear legal ruling on the full meaning of the wild and scenic river designation. In addition premier trout fishing and white water rafting, Highway 12 also provides access to the largest wilderness areas outside of Alaska.

Using Goliath's own sword, David lopped off his head, which is said to have been pickled and hung in his palace in Jerusalem. The gentle grandparents Linwood Laughy and Borg Hendrikson, the founders of FightingGoliath.org, will certainly not be that brutal. (The grandchildren were sleeping as Linwood corrected a draft of this column.) Although very familiar with wild beasts in the Clearwater National Forest, Laughy and Henrikson have not killed any bears and lions as David said he did defending his flocks.

They have, however, defeated a foe far larger and more powerful than a 9-foot tall warrior carrying 200 pounds of weapons and armor. They now wear the "Breastplate of Righteousness" for the homeowners and businesses along one of America's most scenic highways. Their claims of losses in \$149 million business income and diminished property values fell on deaf ears in Boise.

Lolo Lodge and Hot Springs owners have both lost money this summer because of the presence of the test load in their parking lot. The hot springs manager estimates that he lost \$6,000 in a single day because tourists were put off by the presence of state patrol vehicles guarding the huge metal structure, which travelers call an "ugly eyesore."

At a hearing in Moscow last June I asked one of the Kearl spokesmen if they were prepared to reimburse Highway 12 businesses for their losses, and he answered that they did not expect any claims. If hundreds of modules are allowed to roll—especially during the summer season—I'm sure they will receive plenty.

Just like David, who knew that he might have to face Goliath's four brothers, Laughy and Hendrikson chose five smooth stones from their beloved rivers, because four more companies—Korea National Oil, Shell Oil, Premay Equipment, and Nickel Brothers—have expressed interest in defiling the wilderness.

Responding to his compatriots who refused to fight the Philistines, David said “Is there not a cause? Let no man's heart fail him.” The brave residents along the Clearwater and the Locsha have certainly not lost heart.

Nick Gier taught philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. He has hiked the wilderness trails of the Pacific Northwest and fished the wild rivers of Idaho for 38 years. Read Gier's other two columns on the megaloads at www.NickGier.com/Megaloads.htm. Also check the website at www.fightinggoliath.org.