

Statement of Councilman Bryan MacDonald

City of Oxnard, California

Before the

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Hearing on

“Public and Outside Witness Hearing”

*Wednesday, March 18, 2015*

Good afternoon, Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am Bryan MacDonald, Councilman from the City of Oxnard, CA. It is an honor to appear before you today on behalf of Mayor Tim Flynn, Mayor Pro Tem Carmen Ramirez and the City of Oxnard to discuss the economic, environmental and, in Oxnard’s case, national security benefits of continued federal participation in the remediation of federally designated Superfund sites and to respectfully request that the Committee support full funding for EPA’s Superfund program.

Oxnard was incorporated in 1903 by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors, who officially named the city after the Oxnard brothers who established the American Sugar Beet Company between 1887 and 1889. The city grew steadily into what is the largest city in Ventura County, with a population of just over 200,000 residents.

Located on California’s beautiful central coast, the City of Oxnard is home to the California Strawberry Festival, and neighbor to the breathtaking Channel Islands National Park and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, Naval Base Ventura County, the Port of Hueneme, miles of beautiful beaches and the Halaco Superfund site. As the City of Oxnard grew in the early 1900’s, the beach areas were considered too remote and undesirable for residential uses. In more recent times, we have come to understand the significant functions played by coastal areas and wetlands and the importance of restoring and preserving them.

The Halaco Engineering Company operated a secondary metal smelter at the site from 1965 to 2004, recovering aluminum, magnesium, and zinc from dross, castings, cans, car parts, and other scrap metal. The Site includes an 11-acre area containing the former smelter, and an adjacent 26 acre waste management area. Immediately adjacent to the Halaco site is a portion of the Ormond Beach wetlands, which are one of the few remaining wetlands in the area and home to endangered or threatened species.

During its 40 years of operation, Halaco produced a large quantity of waste containing residual metals from the smelting process (i.e., slag). From about 1965 to 1970, Halaco discharged waste into

unlined settling ponds in or adjacent to the Oxnard Industrial Drain. From about 1970 to 2002, Halaco deposited wastes into unlined earthen settling ponds east of the smelter. By way of visual demonstration, imagine looking at the original White House, which stands approximately 70' tall and has general dimensions of 85' wide by 168' in length. This amounts to approximately .33 acres of land. By comparison, the Halaco site is 375' long wide to the North side, 600' long to the East side, 500' wide to the South side and 300' long to the west side, and is generally 40' in height. This amounts to approximately 4.39 acres in coverage. We are describing a waste pile that has a footprint 13 times bigger than that of the original White House and a little over 60% of the height of the White House.

Ultimately Halaco abandoned the site and filed for bankruptcy, leaving more than 700,000 cubic yards of waste in the waste management area and 50,000 cubic yards buried in the 11-acre area where the smelter operated. Elevated levels of aluminum, barium, beryllium, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, magnesium, manganese, nickel, and zinc are present in the wastes and in affected soils and sediments. Some areas also contain elevated levels of thorium and radium. Waste material has moved into the underlying groundwater and sediments in the Oxnard Industrial Drain and into the Ormond Beach wetlands.

Unlike other coastal cities, Oxnard's coast has been an industrial dumping ground for polluting industries and actual dumping of toxic waste. This includes two power plants, with towering smoke stacks, bookends marking the boundaries of Oxnard's coast and a third, newer generation, peaker plant. South Oxnard is generally a poorer community. Approximately 17% of the city's people live below the poverty line, it is almost 75% Latino, 37% foreign-born, which includes much of the farmworker population who pick the area's agricultural crops. Less than 15% of the population has a bachelor's degree. In our region of Southern California, it is estimated that one in four children live in poverty. Many of these families live in close proximity to the Halaco Superfund site and Ormond Beach.

Ormond Beach is a 1,500-acre area in the City of Oxnard and County of Ventura, currently comprised of degraded wetlands, active farmland and industrial operations. A two-mile-long beach extends from Port Hueneme to the northwestern boundary of Pt. Mugu Naval Air Station. Over the past century, the wetlands have been drained, damaged and degraded by agriculture and industrial uses, including the Ormond Beach power plant and the now defunct Halaco facility. Despite this, Ormond Beach still provides vital sanctuary for wildlife, hosting over 200 bird species migrating through the Pacific flyway from the Arctic to the Antarctic. It is also home to numerous California native plants.

Experts consider the restoration of 1000 acres of wetland in the Ormond Beach area to be the most important coastal wetland project in southern California. Over 500 acres have already been acquired as part of the restoration program. A committed, group of stakeholders – including property owners, regulatory agencies, community members, advocacy groups, educators, and technical experts – is actively participating in the future of Ormond Beach. Once complete, the Ormond Beach wetlands preserve will be an educational, cultural and recreational asset for local and State

residents, and a world-class destination for wildlife enthusiasts from across the country and around the world. The preserve and remediation of the Halaco Superfund site will protect nearby Naval Base Ventura County-Point Mugu Naval station, which is vital to our national defense as it is one of the few places where pilots are trained to fly our nation's military aircraft, from encroachment that could interfere with military operations.

The City is working with the State Coastal Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Naval Base Ventura County and other partners to restore the wetlands. The full remediation of the Halaco Superfund site and improvement of the Ormond Beach Wetlands will provide critical economic, recreational, scientific and educational benefits for Oxnard, the region and country.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak before you today and I would like to acknowledge the City's appreciation for the support of Congresswoman Julia Brownley and Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer towards full remediation of the Halaco Superfund site.