

Enbridge ignoring calls from public to decommission Line 5

This year, let's save the Great Lakes and decommission Line 5.

Line 5, a pipeline owned and operated by Canadian company Enbridge, carries crude oil across the Midwest and Great Lakes. Despite the journey this oil takes through Midwestern soil and waterways, there is little gain for Wisconsinites as we face an environmental crisis. Yet, Enbridge refuses to decommission the line or cease trespassing on tribal land.

Built in 1953, Line 5 was constructed to operate for only forty-five years. Seventy-one years after construction, it runs twenty-two million gallons of oil daily through Wisconsin, Michigan, and the Great Lakes via the straits of Mackinac, where Lake Michigan and Huron meet. This eroding pipeline has spilled over 30 times since 1968, putting the Great Lakes at risk.

While Line 5 risks everyone relying on the Great Lakes, Wisconsinites must understand how Enbridge disrespects and disregards the tribal lands and waters that the pipeline crosses. With petroleum deposits originating in Alberta, the oil travels from the Alberta Clipper to Line 5 in Superior, Wisconsin. This crosses into the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa's Reservation. However, the easements allowing Enbridge to use tribal land expired over a decade ago. The Band filed a lawsuit in 2019, and Judge William Conley ordered Enbridge to halt the oil passage on the reservation within three years. Enbridge has yet to leave tribal land. Following flooding in May of 2023, the eroding pipeline became an even greater danger to the reservation.

Even after this lawsuit, Enbridge threatens Bad River's waterways. In 2020, Enbridge counter-proposed to reroute next to tribal land. However, this would continue to impact the tribe negatively, as it would operate on rivers flowing into the reservation. When the pipeline breaks, the oil will flow into the reservation, poisoning the water, wild rice beds, and biodiversity.

Yet, the Bad River Band is not the only tribe whose sovereignty is violated by Enbridge. The Bay Mills Indian Community of Michigan holds a spiritual, historical, and cultural connection to the Straits of Mackinac, the birthplace of the Anishinaabe origin story. The inevitable oil spill will be detrimental to the community's cultural, economic, and spiritual survival. Over 60 tribes across the Midwest and Canada have united to protect the Great Lakes. Survival as Tribal people is interwoven with the water and land on which we have lived for thousands of years. Contamination of the Great Lakes will sever present and future tribal people from the water we have thrived on long before European contact.

Tribal Nations, 350 Wisconsin, Oceanographers, environmental scientists, the Native American Rights Fund, and even Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel all agree this will

be the worst inland oil spill North America has ever experienced. It will devastate our drinking water, recreation, commerce, and biodiversity.

When profit is valued above clean water, safe biodiversity, and tribal sovereignty, it is morally reprehensible and an inevitable environmental crisis. Enbridge is already responsible for the worst inland oil spill in US history. One million gallons of oil from the ruptured 6B pipeline polluted Michigan's Kalamazoo River in 2010, leaving residents unhoused, water polluted, and wildlife decimated. Days before, Enbridge assured the public that the pipeline was secure. Enbridge believes we benefit from Line 5, yet it is merely a hazardous shortcut for another nation's profit. Is this worth the risk of another catastrophic spill? Shouldn't water prioritize fossil fuels, a dwindling energy source?

More importantly, do we want to risk this with our Great Lakes- 20% of the world's freshwater source?

I urge all Wisconsinites to stand with the Bad River Band, Bay Mills Indian Community, 350 Wisconsin, and all other individuals, native and non-native, relying on and respecting the Great Lakes in a way Enbridge cannot diminish. Line 5 places every living creature relying on the Great Lakes in danger. So, moving forward into 2024, let's create a New Year's resolution to protect the Great Lakes. If we cannot care for our waterways, we cannot truly care for Netāēnawēmakanak- all of our relations.

Gracie Waukechon, who lives in Bonduel, is a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and a descendant of the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin .
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