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The blog of Executive Director Michael Brune

Time to Stop a Bad Idea

It began with prayer. A small group of Native Americans established a prayer camp last spring near the confluence of the Missouri and Cannonball rivers. Their goal was to stop construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, which would pass just north of the reservation of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota. They prayed that their community -- and the water source it depends on -- would not be sacrificed for the sake of another dirty fossil fuel pipeline. They prayed because, like all of us, they know that it has never been a question of *whether* a pipeline will spill but only of *when* the next disaster will happen.

Sadly, you don't need to look far to see where such disasters have already occurred. Hundreds of communities, from the Great Lakes region to the Midwest to the California coast to the Gulf of Mexico, have experienced pipeline disasters firsthand. Yet new oil and gas pipelines continue to be proposed, permitted, and constructed -- including the Dakota Access, which would transport crude oil from North Dakota's Bakken fields to Illinois.

Oil and drinking water are a catastrophic combination, and no company should know that better than Enbridge, the oil and gas transportation giant that is a majority shareholder in the Dakota Access pipeline. Enbridge also happens to be responsible for the largest inland tar sands oil spill in U.S. history. A spill from the Dakota Access could contaminate the Missouri River and Lake Oahe, which are the water sources for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

How did such a bad idea get this far? In 2014, Energy Transfer Partners and Dakota Access proposed a 1,168-mile pipeline -- just seven miles shorter than the now-rejected Keystone XL pipeline. Then just last month, the Army Corps of Engineers granted the general permit that allowed construction to begin (using a little-known loophole called Nationwide Permit 12 that allows the process to be fast-tracked without adequate environmental review, tribal consultation, or public input).

By then, though, last spring's small protest had grown into something much bigger -- something impossible to ignore. Native Americans from reservations across the United States are joining the Standing Rock Sioux's protest. Celebrities are [tweeting their support](#). And last Thursday, almost three dozen environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, [wrote to President Obama](#) asking that his administration "deny the remaining Section 408 permits for Dakota Access, revoke the pipeline's authorizations under Nationwide Permit 12, and initiate a transparent CWA Section 404 permitting process that includes public notice and participation, formal tribal consultation, and adequate environmental review of the pipeline."

Although this protest is being led by the Standing Rock Sioux, who have now been joined by more than 90 other tribes, all of us who care about stopping the spread of dirty fuels have a stake in its outcome. For its part, the Sierra Club is proud to support our Native American allies in this struggle, whether by spreading the word through social media, reaching out to media, or even helping out with transportation to North Dakota for tribes from other states. This isn't the first time Sierra Club has stood in solidarity with tribal allies [see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), for example] nor will it be the last; I believe these alliances are fundamental to our goals and aspirations as an organization.

What's more, the outcry against the Dakota Access pipeline demonstrates that the grassroots success in rejecting the Keystone XL pipeline was only the beginning. People will continue to mobilize until Big Oil and other corporate polluters recognize that communities will not stand by while their health and welfare are sacrificed for the sake of profits.

We do not want, nor do we need, an expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure. We have the technology and ability to continue and complete our transition to 100 percent clean renewable energy and leave dirty fuels like Bakken crude oil where they belong -- in the ground.

Take action: Join us in asking President Obama to direct the Corps to [repeal the permits for the Dakota Access pipeline](#) until formal tribal consultation and environmental reviews are properly and adequately conducted.