

Enbridge Line 5: the Environmental, Ethical, and Economic Effects

For generations, kids have recognized the Great Lakes by the acronym HOMES, standing for Lakes Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. Years later, as adults, over thirty-million of these children will recognize the Great Lakes not only as HOMES, but also as home. Because of this, the discussion of pipelines in the Great Lakes is as much delicate as it is complex. Enbridge Line 5 has recently been the subject of much criticism and equally as much defense; those who have environmental and cultural priorities denounce the pipeline as a potential environmental disaster and havoc on indigenous cultures, while those who take on a more economic stance claim that the pipeline is a major contributor to Michigan's economy. The oil pipeline became a genuine topic of conversation in the early months of 2017, though it was far from overlooked before then, especially by Michigan residents for whom the Line 5 dilemma touches closer to home. The more fiscally-minded have been adamant in their argument that the pipeline is essential to the economy of the mitten state, maintaining that the money Line 5 contributes to Michigan's economy should outweigh the environmental and cultural concerns, or at least stand a legitimate match against the other factors. Conversely, those more in tune with environmental and cultural beliefs assert that conservation of both environment and culture should trump economy.

Without question, Enbridge Line 5 proves disastrous for neighboring Great Lakes tribes, from a potential oil spill to future endeavors. Honor the Earth's National Campaigns Director, Tara Houska puts it simply: "Enbridge's plans will destroy Anishinaabe wild... and wipe out an entire culture" (Targeted News Service). The expansion of an infamously fraudulent and corrupt system as well as the failure to regulate parts already in existence present a number of hits to the

cultures of Anishinaabe, most notably the infection of a natural monument that the Native tribes hold sacred:

“Water is sacred. This is tradition. In contrast to the non-tribal utilitarian view of water, Native Americans revere water and water is life. It is integral to many Native American practices such as purification....blessing rituals...to acknowledge all relations and to establish connection to Mother Earth and Father Sky...As Native Americans, we honor and respect the tradition of water and must protect it always” (Cozzetto et al).

A potential oil leak or spill would mean devastation for a number of tribes who cherish water in the sense of the aforementioned. Further, the development of more pipelines puts native species even more at risk in addition to intruding into their ecosystems; this is ultimately obstructive to relations with indigenous tribes because “...many tribes respect and hold sacred the individual role of species on Mother Earth and thus impacts on these species are of inherent concern to tribes” (Cozzetto et al).

Moreover, an independent risk analysis coordinated by Michigan Tech reported that a potential spill “...could release 32,000 to 58,000 barrels of crude oil into the Great Lakes and impact more than 400 miles of shoreline in Michigan, Wisconsin and Canada...” (“State Agencies”). The report then continues on to list the exact consequences of a hypothetical spill: “Depending on the timing and magnitude of a spill, 47 wildlife species of concern and 60,000 acres of unique habitat could be at risk” (“State Agencies”). Evidently, these risks are ones environmentalists are not willing to take; the environmental platform in the Line 5 dilemma is heavily substantiated, even to those to whom the environment is not a priority: the risk analysis

“calculates clean-up, restoration and liability costs from the defined worst-case scenario at almost \$2 billion” (“State Agencies”). It is undeniable that the potential consequences to the environment would be severe and unforgiving. Because of this, the environmentally-minded seek to take a proactive approach to such ramifications. By decommissioning the pipeline, or at the very least adding protective modifications, their primary goal of conserving the environment will have been set in the right direction. In this case, a victory for the environmentalists means no less than decommissioning the pipeline in favor of an alternative, or adjusting the pipeline so it adequately fits all current standards.

To some minds, though, the risk that accompanies Line 5 is worth it for Michigan’s economy. In a report conducted by London Economics International, it was discovered that trucks or rails from Wisconsin are the cheapest alternative to the pipeline: “The price increase to consumers in the Upper Peninsula would likely be about \$0.05 per gallon” (“New Report”). Though the study continues on to report that “This small price increase would be lost in the noise of typical propane price volatility”, the penny-pinchers of Michigan insist that even as small of an increase as five cents is still an increase in addition to the already fluctuating propane prices (“New Report”). Until an alternative is presented that is deemed suitable by those who are adamant on preserving an arguably struggling Michigan economy, it is not likely that they will allow Line 5 to be decommissioned. This is not to say, however, that those maintaining this perspective do not care about the environment. While their priorities may be different, they typically have more space to compromise than the other two perspectives, especially that which favors the preservation of culture. Alternatives are more likely to target the focus of the fiscal argument, as it is more efficient and possibly easier to sustain the economy or better the

economy through an alternative than it is to create a viable alternative that will in no way impact the environment and/or cultural roots.

In this case, there are very clear and separate stances; two are inherently opposed to Enbridge Line 5 and all its components, while the other is more willing to overlook some environmental and ethnic problems in favor of an economic advantage. Though mirror images of each other in this respect, all three can be distinguished by their priorities. The first major force are the environmental advocates, who fit their character by opposing a pipeline which has and could have detrimental effects on the environment. They call attention to these effects in their fight against Line 5 in hopes of appealing to others who are less involved, less passionate, or on the fence about the issue. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the economically-minded push for Line 5 to remain open, which, under their stance, will ultimately benefit the economy. As a minimum, this group urges for a modification to the pipeline, or a near-identical alternative. Those concerned with culture and ethnicity are more in the middle, and more separate; though no less passionate, a compromise for them is not quite so easy. The environmentally-minded and especially the economically-minded have more room to find the middle ground, or at the very least more options to experiment with. This is not the case for those in defense primarily of preserving cultural backgrounds. For them, a new pipeline or adjustments to the old pipeline will still intervene with ethnic processes and will still be a disruption in their culture. Regardless of these veracities, it is obvious that those with the same end-goal will band together and cite each other's arguments to build a stronger overall cause. Thus, those seeking to protect the environment and those intending to preserve rich culture will band together despite different

priorities, while those hoping to sustain or further the economy will, for the most part, be alone in their fight.

The concerns of all three views are entirely valid. In the end, perspectives all boil down to priorities. What a person cares most about - the environment, the ethics, or the economy - will determine their ultimate stance on the Enbridge Line 5 issue. For some, this might mean opposing the pipeline, and for others it means the opposite. Those concerned with ethics and environment are lucky in that their priorities point to the same end goal; their push to decommission the pipeline is a double-backed force because of this. Those seeking to protect Michigan's economy are less fortunate, and stand alone in their fight; as much as they could agree and acknowledge that there are a plethora of environmental and ethical concerns, their primary concern is the fiscal state of Michigan, and this renders them solo.

Works Cited

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