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Keystone XL Protests Heat Up as Public Comment Period Winds Down

The opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline remains vigilant as the public comment period for the State Department's latest Environmental Impact Statement closes.



On Friday, the 7th of March, activists from a coalition of environmental organizations gathered outside of the State Department to deliver roughly 2 million public comments opposed to the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, a proposed 1,179-mile crude oil pipeline that would begin in Alberta, Canada extend to Steele City, Nebraska and then move onward to refineries on the Gulf Coast.

Earlier in the week, approximately 1,000 people showed up at the White House, where police arrested dozens of demonstrators as young people, mostly college age, fastened themselves with plastic ties to White House fences and lay down on a black tarp spread across Pennsylvania Avenue meant to symbolize an oil spill.

TransCanada, the company planning to build the pipeline, contends on its website that "Keystone XL Pipeline will be the safest and most advanced pipeline operation in North America. It will not only bring essential infrastructure to North American oil producers, but it will also provide jobs, long-term energy independence and an economic boost to Americans."

Environmental groups point out that the pipeline encourages the use of the "dirtiest" variety of fossil fuels, rather than a move to renewable energies and that any spills from the viscous tar sands oil the pipeline would transport could prove impossible to clean up. They also point out that the Pipeline, once built, would require as little as 35 long-term jobs to maintain, and would transport crude destined for overseas markets.

With successful opposition, the project has moved forward in fits and starts. In January 2012, president Barack Obama rejected TransCanada's application to build the pipeline citing negative environmental impact on Nebraska's Sand Hills region. When the original route of the pipeline was changed, Nebraska governor Dave Heineman approved these changes the following year. However, in late February of this year, a Nebraska Judge ruled that TransCanada may not use eminent domain to take land away from landowners who deny the company access to their property, which was a critical part of Governor Heineman's new plan. Now the decision to make a claim to the land in order to build the proposed pipeline rests with Nebraska's Public Service Commission, unless the decision is overturned in the Nebraska Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, last Friday was the end of a 30-day public comment period following the release of a final addendum to the State Department's controversial Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Now other federal agencies have 60 days left to weigh in.

Once the State Department issues its decision, other agencies have another 15 days to object, and if that happens, President Obama will make the decision whether to issue the permit, which he may choose to delay until a decision is made by the Nebraska Supreme Court.



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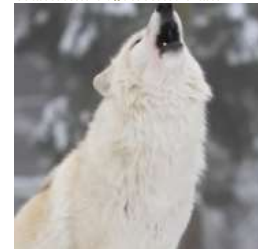
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