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Experts: Shut Down Oil Flow Now in Mackinac Straits

Magnitude of Harm to Great Lakes Is Too Large to Risk Oil Spill While State Considers Alternatives

TRAVERSE CITY – On the cusp of the annual Labor Day Mackinac Bridge Walk, a team of scientists and engineers is calling for the immediate shutdown of oil flowing through the Mackinac Straits, where twin oil pipelines cross about two miles west of the Mackinac Bridge.

Because of the imminent, high-level harm to the Great Lakes, the oil flowing through the 62-year-old Enbridge pipelines should be halted while the state of Michigan assesses the risk and studies alternatives that would not threaten freshwater resources or the Great Lakes-based regional economy, as recommended in a state task force report released July 14.

The team of experts also called for additional and more frequent monitoring of the condition of the aging Straits pipelines and establishing stronger emergency response plans and capabilities, including personnel, at or near the Mackinac Straits.

"A permanent solution – eliminating the Line 5 Straits Crossing – will take time," **said Rick Kane, a hazardous materials risk-management specialist and member of the expert team.** "But in the short-term, the Line 5 crossing is a high risk due to the severe consequences of a leak and probability that a leak could occur from a number of causes, including a large failure or a smaller failure that would leak over a number of days or weeks below the system detection threshold, potentially releasing thousands of gallons per day, unknown to operators."

The expert team – two accomplished engineers and a hazardous materials risk-management specialist – were convened by FLOW, a Traverse City-based Great Lakes law and policy center to consider risks to the Enbridge oil pipelines. Enbridge, which is infamous for its Line 6B that corroded and spilled 1 million gallons of heavy oil in 2010 into the Kalamazoo River watershed near Marshall, Michigan, has withheld key data and reports from public scrutiny, the state task force and the experts found.

Line 5 appears to have many safety issues comparable to those resulting in the disastrous ruptures of Enbridge Line 6B in Kalamazoo, Plains All American Line 901, and the Exxon-Mobil Pegasus pipeline. Similar issues include: (1) pipeline wall thinning and cracking caused by natural corrosion and erosion over 62 years on Line 5; (2) addition of multiple pumping stations that increased the capacity from Line 5's original design of 300,000 barrels per day (bbl/d) to the current 540,000 bbl/d without appropriate engineering analysis; (3) mussel encrustation on Line 5's underwater pipelines adding stress and a corrosive environment; (4) inadequate in line inspection data and information coupled with unrealistic repair/replace criteria used by pipeline operators; (5) addition of drag reducing agent injection stations without state documentation confirming these changes on Line 5; and (6) loss of mandated abrasion protection with current pipeline external protective coating system on the Straits sections of Line 5.

The aging Enbridge pipelines push nearly 23 million gallons of oil and natural gas liquids a day through the Straits of Mackinac, which the company uses as a shortcut for its Line 5 route from Superior, Wis., to Sarnia, Ontario. A July 2014 study by the University of Michigan called the Straits "the worst possible place for an oil spill in the Great Lakes" and depicted the prospect of a plume from a million-gallon oil spill in the Straits stretching for 85 miles – from Lake Michigan's Beaver Island to Mackinac Island to Rogers City down the Lake Huron shore.

"The shutdown of oil and these interim actions are even more critical because the Governor's executive order forming a pipeline safety advisory board looks only to long term pipeline safety in Michigan, but does not address the necessary actions needed to address the high risks and unacceptable harm presented by the transport of oil in the Straits," **said Jim Olson, FLOW's president and an environmental attorney.** "As noted by various experts, Line 5 demands urgent attention. The Executive Order makes it clear that Attorney General Schuette and the DEQ and DNR are free to take whatever enforcement actions necessary to address the risk of unacceptable harms to Straits area communities and businesses."

Stopping the oil flow pending a full public review of risks and alternatives is critical because of structural concerns, including the worry that waste excreted by zebra mussels may have corroded and dangerously weakened the steel pipes, according to the team of scientists and engineers.

Built in 1953, the twin oil pipelines also have an outdated protective coating and welds connecting the 40-foot segments that make up the pipelines, and lack the required number of supports to secure the pipes in the powerful currents of the Straits, just west of the Mackinac Bridge, the experts found.

"Analysis of these issues, as documented by several reports, now leads me to the conclusion that Line 5 is far more likely to present an imminent threat to health and property than not," **said Ed Timm, PhD., PE, a former senior scientist and consultant to Dow Chemical's Environmental Operations Business and member of the FLOW expert team.** "This forces me to the ethical conclusion that immediate action should be taken to assure the safety of Line 5 while the legal deliberations go on."

FLOW and its expert team plan later in September to issue a formal legal and scientific analysis to Gov. Rick Snyder and his pipeline task force co-chairs – Attorney General Bill Schuette and DEQ Director Dan Wyant – calling for the state to halt Line 5's oil flow and to:

- Implement the Task Force's specific recommendations for Line 5, including the independent and comprehensive alternatives assessment, as well as independent, credible release and worst-case scenarios, and financial assurances.
- Require immediate submission of additional information, from Enbridge and other qualified and independent sources, to assure that the information is sufficient to conduct evaluations and render final decisions and actions regarding transport of oil in Line 5.
- Take immediate enforcement actions against Enbridge to address potential violations of the 1953 Easement and imminent unacceptable risk of Line 5 under the Straits;
- Exercise the full authority under the Michigan constitution and laws to eliminate the present and imminent risk of harm from a rupture, leak, or other failure of Line 5.

For more information, visit the FLOW website:

- www.FlowforWater.org
- www.FlowforWater.org/programs/enbridge-line-5-pipelines-in-the-straits-of-mackinac

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