



Protecting the Common Waters of the Great Lakes Basin  
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**State of Michigan Takes a “Holiday” from Preventing Line 5 Oil Spill Disaster in Great Lakes**

*Snyder Administration Watches and Waits as the 64-year-old Dual Pipelines Missing Their Anti-Rust Coating and Structural Supports Continue to Use Mackinac Straits as a High-Risk Shortcut to Private Profits*

**TRAVERSE CITY, MI** – The Snyder administration, in two letters ([here](#) and [here](#)) released Wednesday, indicated it will seek more information, but take no enforcement action, while continuing to accept Enbridge’s assurances that all is well with dual oil pipelines in the Mackinac Straits that the Canadian company itself has indicated are missing portions of an external, anti-rust coating and lacking 18 anchor supports to prevent the pipes from grinding and bending along the bottom and bursting.

The letters – signed by Attorney General Bill Schuette, Michigan Department of Natural Resources Director Keith Creagh, and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Director Heidi Grether – describe “inviting” Enbridge to explain the company’s September 2016 [report](#) that identifies 19 areas along the submerged steel pipes where the anti-corrosion coating is missing. Enbridge’s report euphemistically calls the missing portions “holidays,” industry jargon for areas where the coating has worn or fallen off. The report outlines a plan for assessing Line 5’s integrity where the coating is gone and acidic waste excreted by invasive mussels that blanket the pipes could be causing corrosion.

Enbridge claims that the report is merely “hypothetical,” even though the report flatly states that the external coating is missing and the words “hypothetical” and “theoretical” are not found in the document.

“The State of Michigan is moving in slow motion to question Enbridge’s claims that its own report doesn’t mean what is plainly says,” **said Liz Kirkwood, an environmental attorney and executive director of FLOW**, a Traverse City-based water law and policy center dedicated to upholding the public’s rights to use and benefit from the Great Lakes. “When the pipelines finally fail, will the state invite Enbridge to explain what the thick, black substance is pouring out of the 64-year-old pipes and into the drinking water source for nearby Mackinac Island, St. Ignace, and roughly 5 million Michiganders?”

The state issued its March 8 letter in response to February 17 correspondence from the [Oil & Water Don’t Mix](#) campaign, which FLOW co-leads with several other leading organizations, that raised grave and detailed concerns about the condition of Line 5 and called for its immediate shutdown.

An Enbridge representative is expected to explain its report at the March 13 quarterly meeting in Lansing of the governor-appointed [Michigan Pipeline Safety Advisory Board](#), whose members include Attorney General Schuette. The advisory board is overseeing the completion of two nominally independent studies funded by Enbridge: one on the financial risk to communities and the Pure Michigan economy of a Line 5 oil spill in the

Mackinac Straits and the other on alternatives to the aging pipeline that could avoid such a disaster. These two studies are expected by June 2017.

Enbridge is infamous for leaking more than one million gallons of heavy tar sands oil into the Kalamazoo River watershed near Marshall, Michigan, in 2010, fouling nearly 40 miles of the river and shore, sickening numerous people, harming wildlife, and forcing more than 100 families to permanently abandon their homes and property.

The failure to adequately maintain the Line 5 pipelines, including a [lack of supports](#) to prevent bending of the pipeline – is a breach of Enbridge’s 1953 legal [easement](#) agreement with the State of Michigan that allows the company to occupy public waters and state bottomlands. The failures documented in the Enbridge report add to the mounting evidence of the unacceptable risk that this infrastructure poses to the Great Lakes.

A 3-minute [video](#) of Line 5 pipelines in the Straits, researched and edited by FLOW’s engineering expert Dr. Ed Timm, reveals the physical deterioration of Line 5, with missing and dislodged coating, broken bands, detached wooden structural slats, unsupported segments, and possible rust and pitting.

In addition, a just-released [technical note](#) prepared by Dr. Timm regarding Line 5 reinforces the urgent need for the state to immediately shut down Line 5 while it evaluates the integrity of the aging infrastructure that pumps nearly 23 million gallons of oil a day through the Mackinac Straits before eventually reaching refineries in Sarnia, Ontario. Specifically, this technical note concludes the following:

- Line 5 is not immune to corrosion and stress cracking despite its thick walls, contrary to Enbridge’s claims;
- The asphalt enamel based coating system is compromised or missing on many areas of the pipe;
- The extent of the coverage by invasive mussels on the pipelines makes it “impossible” to evaluate how much of the coating system is compromised;
- The easement-required wooden slats that were designed to protect from point loads and abrasion are missing entirely on portions of the pipelines; and
- The peak currents in the Mackinac Straits are nearly twice the maximum velocity considered when the pipeline was designed, adding significant stress;
- A full study of the integrity of the coating system that includes a careful examination of the impact of the biofouling on the pipelines is critical to making a proper fitness-for-service evaluation.

“The evidence demands that the State of Michigan respond and fulfill its affirmative fiduciary duty,” wrote Jim Olson, an environmental attorney and FLOW’s president, in a March 9 [follow-up letter](#) to the State of Michigan. “It is not enough to stand by the sidelines and merely request additional information from Enbridge given the high risk of a catastrophic oil spill in the Great Lakes that would devastate our public drinking waters and our water-dependent economy. ‘Pure Michigan’ should not just be an advertising slogan.”

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