

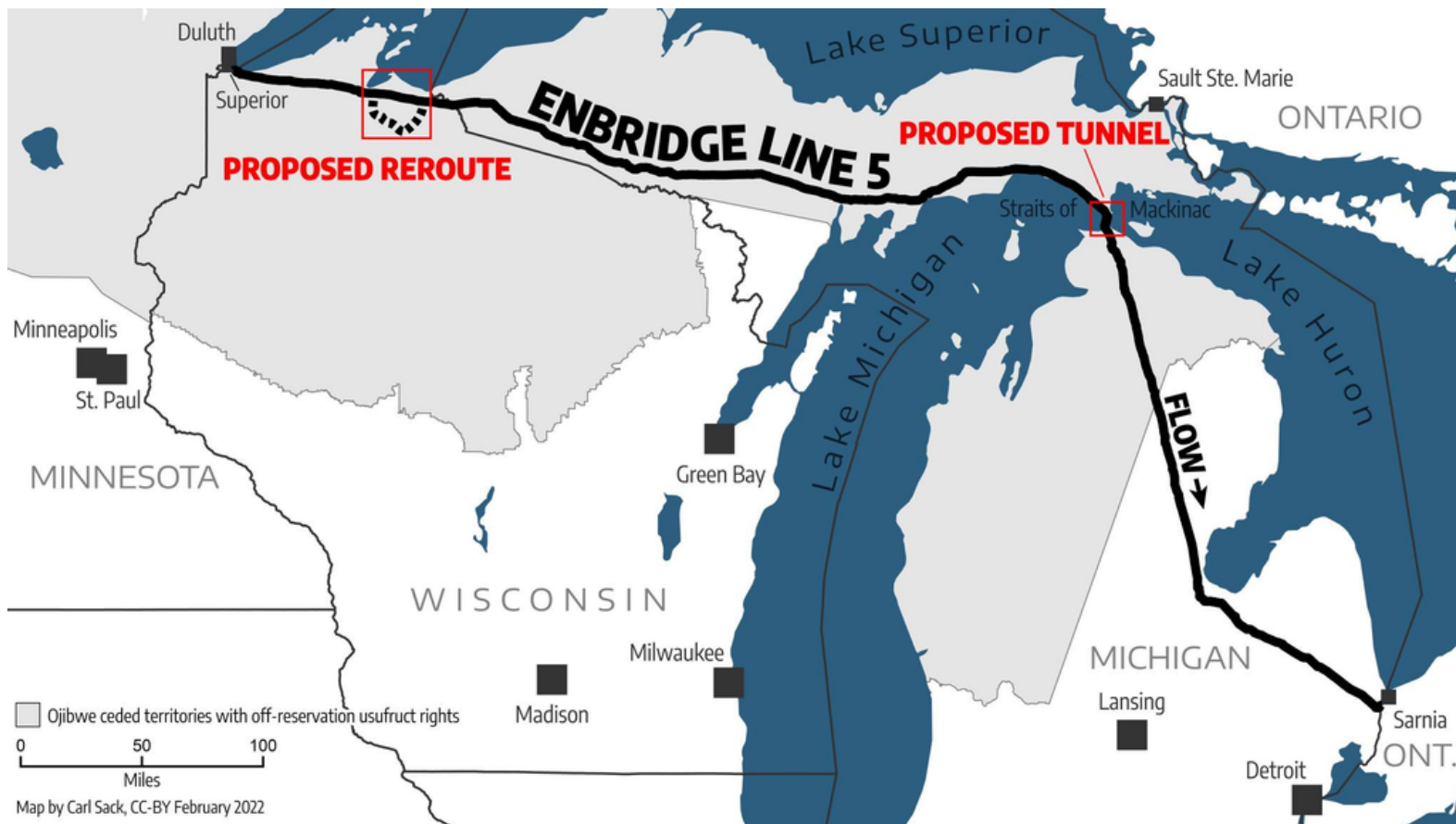
DESTRUCTION AND INTIMIDATION:

Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far



Over the last few months, Enbridge's behavior has raised concerns about the threats Line 5 opponents have warned of for years. Community members are documenting what's going on locally. While construction continues, this document represents a compilation of the impacts of thus far.

August 17, 2026



Background

Enbridge's Line 5 pipeline is a dangerous, aging oil pipeline that runs through the heart of the Great Lakes and threatens countless waters, lands, communities and our climate. Line 5 transports 22 million gallons of crude oil and natural gas liquids across 645 miles of countryside every day – from Superior, Wisconsin through Michigan's Upper Peninsula, under the Straits of Mackinac, and down to refineries in Sarnia, Ontario. Originally built in 1953, this aging line – which has long outlived its anticipated lifespan – has significantly deteriorated over the course of the last several decades and poses catastrophic risks to the neighboring farmland, pristine natural areas, valuable freshwater sources (including 400 rivers, streams, and wetlands), and tribal lands that it cuts through.

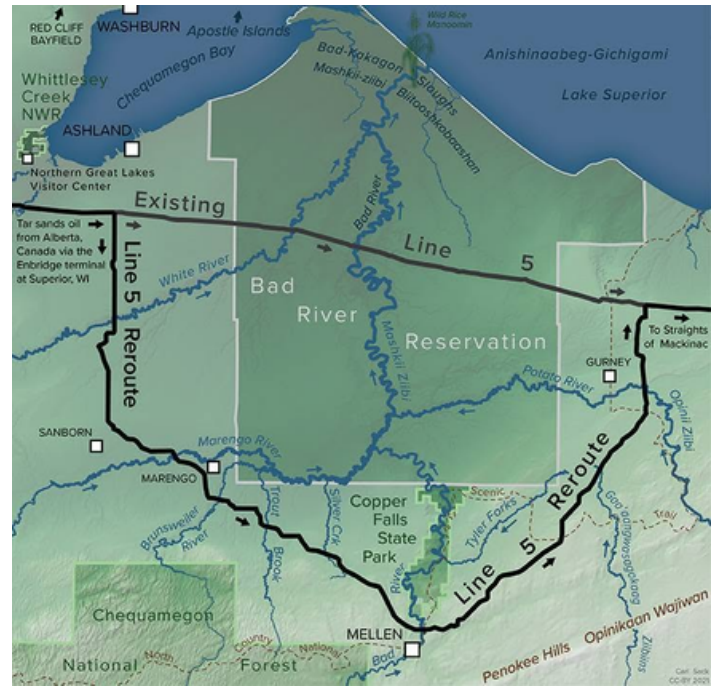
Line 5 is currently trespassing on the Bad River Band's sovereign land and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer has also ordered Line 5 shut down. Instead of complying, Enbridge is putting corporate profits above our safety by pursuing patchwork options to extend the pipeline's life, putting millions of people and ecosystems at risk. The Great Lakes contain 84% of North America's surface freshwater, and we all need water to live.

Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far

August 2026

Line 5 in Wisconsin

Line 5 currently runs through the Bad River Reservation, and when easements to operate expired, members of the Bad River Band pushed back, passing a resolution to remove Line 5 from the reservation and Bad River watershed. However, Enbridge responded by proposing a 41-mile reroute of Line 5 that skirts the Reservation and crosses all major waterbodies that flow into the reservation, while cutting through Ashland, Bayfield and Iron Counties. The proposed reroute threatens critical watersheds and has been broadly opposed by the Bad River Band, environmental groups and many members of the public. This report focuses on the impacts of this reroute.



Map created by Carl Sack

In February of this year, Enbridge began clearing the right of way for the Line 5 reroute as the legal case challenging their state permits for the projects continues. Despite the serious concerns raised by the Bad River Band and environmental groups, Enbridge is proceeding with construction and preparing for the intensive, risky work they've proposed.

In May, a Wisconsin circuit court ordered Enbridge to halt pipeline construction at certain locations while it reviews the lawsuit challenging state regulatory approvals. The partial grant of a stay is based on the court's finding that Enbridge's eligibility for permits at those locations "may be on tenuous legal footing." The court case has proceeded throughout the summer – and so has Enbridge's construction at permitted sites. The impact of their work and presence has been far-reaching, and this report aims to tie together individual experiences to show a broad picture of the negative impact this multi-billion dollar company is making.

Line 5 in Michigan

In Michigan Line 5 currently runs through the heart of the Great Lakes – and lies exposed at the bottom of the Straits of Mackinac. Over time erosion has led to the pipeline's exposure, and in 2021 Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer revoked Enbridge's easement to operate because of the danger of a spill. For years Enbridge has been pursuing a so-called solution, a tunnel underneath the Straits of Mackinac that they would run Line 5 through. The tunnel project is extremely high risk and should not be entertained, but Enbridge has continued to pursue it. While permitting processes continue, recently the Michigan Supreme Court vacated a state permit for the tunnel in a major win for all those working to protect the Great Lakes and tribal rights.

Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far

Setting the context:

A warning from our Neighbors

In 2021, Enbridge completed construction on the Line 3 replacement project – effectively constructing a new pipeline in Minnesota, despite strong opposition. Waadookaaded Amikwag, a group of community members who documented the impacts of Line 3 construction, shared that “Enbridge and their contractors caused extensive and permanent ecological damage by disrupting groundwater and wetlands all along the route,” and that in addition to the threat of an oil spill after a pipeline is operating, “many don’t realize that the pipeline construction process itself can be disruptive to ground and surface water and can degrade key ecosystems.”

During Line 3 construction, Enbridge punctured aquifers along the route and caused frac-outs, which happen when drilling fluid is released, containing mud and chemicals. They altered wetlands, changed the water table, affected water temperatures and more. All of these damages have significant and lasting harm, with some impacts still being felt today.



Photo Credit: Ron Turney



On October 17, 2022, the State of Minnesota found that Enbridge "violated a series of regulations and requirements including discharging construction stormwater into wetlands and inadvertently releasing drilling mud into surface waters at 12 locations between June 8, 2021, and August 5, 2021."

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison announced that Enbridge was facing criminal charges for these actions. Ellison said Enbridge “admitted that it understood or should have understood that the aquifer breach resulted from its construction activity” and that it delayed notifying state agencies about the breach as required.



Destruction and Intimidation

While the legal challenges to Enbridge's permits to build the reroute are ongoing, Enbridge has been allowed to move forward with construction. The Bad River Band and environmental groups challenged the permits Enbridge received to build the reroute. In the legal filing asking for a pause on construction, the environmental groups explained:

“*The Reroute would cause significant adverse impacts to wetlands and waterways. Petitioners-Interested Persons' members live, work, own property, and recreate in the immediate area of the Reroute, and in areas within the same watershed as the Reroute. Doc. 57, 5-9. As established below, construction would impair the functioning of these wetlands and waterways and public rights therein. Those impairments would have impacts reverberating throughout the watershed, thereby harming the interests of Petitioners-Interested Persons' members in preserving and enjoying these highly functional waters. Further, many of these impairments would be permanent, because Enbridge's proposed monitoring for impacts and plans to restore affected areas after construction are fatally flawed.*”

Over the last few months, Enbridge's behavior has raised concerns about the threats Line 5 opponents have warned of for years. Community members are documenting what's going on at the [Watch Line 5 website](#), where you can find all of the information they're compiling, complete with locations, images, videos and notes. Read on for a compilation of the trends monitors have seen thus far.

Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far



Signage and intimidation

Across the reroute Enbridge has posted thorough signage about their work sites, including about the Felony Trespass Law. A prominent and common sign reads in part, **“NO TRESPASSING, OCCUPANT ENBRIDGE, VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED.”**

Passed and signed into law by Governor Evers in 2019, Wisconsin’s Felony Trespass Law makes it a felony to trespass or damage property on land “owned, operated, or leased” by energy companies, including pipelines. Industry groups like the American Petroleum Institute and Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce supported this bill, while the Bad River Band, landowners with pipelines, and organizations like the ACLU opposed the bill.

In April, the Bad River Band raised concerns about the chilling effect of this law when arguing for a stay of construction in front of Judge Anderson. Ojibwe tribes in the region reserved the right to hunt, fish and gather – the usual rights of occupancy – on the land ceded in the 1842 Treaty with the U.S. Government, and the Felony Trespass Law acts as a deterrent for those rights, infringing on them.

STORIES FROM THE COMMUNITY

Volunteers have been monitoring Enbridge’s efforts in the region. These monitors discovered spills, frac-outs, and other violations. The monitors' work has been essential to protecting the area's resources. However, many monitors have reported threats and intimidation as they were simply taking pictures or watching what was happening. Here are a few testimonials from the Watch Line 5 website:

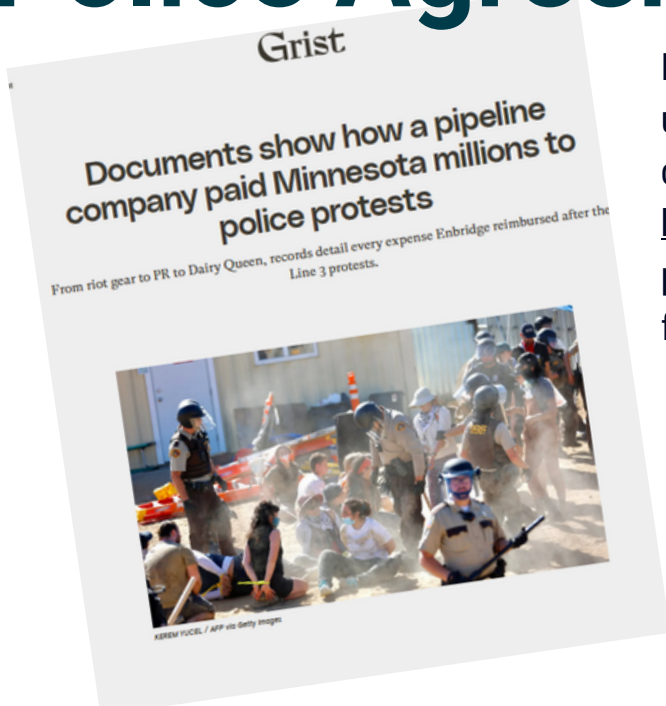
“Purple CIPS Security that’s been following us for miles, parks, and approaches us. He advises is [sic] to ‘move along.’ He says the area is busy but there’s not another soul in site... Told us he was notified from the other side of the route that he was to follow us. ‘They,’ provided him with our license plate number. Security guy says, ‘it’s not stalking.’”

“We picked up a purple CIPS security trail around the Michel’s Yard. Followed for several miles till he eventually approached us.”

“Support Line 5 sign posted without landowners [sic] knowledge or permission at end of driveway. Trespassing and posting of sign reported to the Ashland Co Sheriff’s Dept by landowner.”



Police Agreements



During construction of Line 3 in Minnesota Enbridge set up a similar agreement to fund law enforcement with devastating consequences. The article [“Documents show how a pipeline company paid Minnesota millions to police protests”](#) outlines many of these and here are a few key points:

- Hundreds of protesters protecting the water were arrested (many charges were eventually dropped)
- Police submitted hundreds of receipts and invoices totaling \$8.6 million.
- Some reimbursements were directly tied to violence against women by pipeline workers

In April, the Wisconsin Counties Association and Enbridge announced that they negotiated an agreement “on behalf of” Ashland, Iron, and Bayfield counties to reimburse costs related to “public safety services” during the construction of the Line 5 reroute. Given what happened in Minnesota, this raised serious concerns. Iron County gladly signed the agreement. Ashland County Board members voted to approve the agreement, some in tears saying they wished they didn’t have to support the agreement, but felt they had to. Bayfield County did not sign Enbridge’s agreement, but did create a new procedure for private-police reimbursements.

Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far



Tree clearing across the route

Throughout the span of the reroute Enbridge has cleared trees from the right of way, leaving them strewn across the ground as they moved to do this quickly and remove the trees later. These devastating images can be seen all along the route. As the [Bad River Band noted in comments](#) to the Department of Natural Resources, tree clearing, in addition to wetland conversion, blasting, and soil disturbance “all have long term, if not permanent, impacts,” and “old growth trees such as northern white cedar and black ash may not regrow in our lifetimes—if at all.”

Community monitoring also shows a beaver pond near the Tyler Forks river crossing, with lodges visible, raising concerns about impacts to local wildlife, which has regularly come up as an issue over the years.



Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far



*Photo of Enbridge's largest oil spill in Wisconsin.
Almost 70,000 gallons of oil contaminated a farm field.*

Photo Credit: Bee Kakac

Spills and Permit Violations

Unfortunately, concerns about Enbridge's mistakes and the impacts of construction have started to become reality. As referenced earlier, Enbridge has a poor track record. Line 5 has spilled over one million gallons of oil, and the company's history tells us how they tend to operate:

- In 2010, Enbridge spilled over 1 million gallons of tar sands crude oil into Talmadge Creek and the Kalamazoo River, making it one of the largest inland spills in U.S. history. It took Enbridge over 17 hours before the pipeline was permanently shut down.
- Enbridge's Line 3 pipeline construction caused permanent ecological damage, including aquifer punctures and dozens of toxic drilling fluid releases in Minnesota. Waadookaand Amikwag, a group of community members who documented the impacts of Line 3 construction, shared that "Enbridge and their contractors caused extensive and permanent ecological damage by disrupting groundwater and wetlands all along the route," and that in addition to the threat of an oil spill after a pipeline is operating, "many don't realize that the pipeline construction process itself can be disruptive to ground and surface water and can degrade key ecosystems."
- Line 5 has already spilled over one million gallons of oil and is being operated well beyond its intended lifespan.
- In 2024, days before the Line 5 reroute permits were granted, Enbridge's pipeline ruptured and spilled over 70,000 gallons of oil in Jefferson County, the largest spill in Wisconsin's history. Initially, Enbridge claimed it was just 2 gallons.
- In July, Enbridge agreed to pay \$275,000 for failing to report a spill in Jefferson County for over a year.

Enbridge's track record carries forward to the present day, too.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources tracks spill incidents and issues Notices of Noncompliance when Enbridge doesn't follow the requirements in their permit. And as you can see in the table on the next page, there have been numerous violations and spill concerns.

The DNR's open spills incident reports provide only cursory information, though in the cases below it's been confirmed that the spills were related to reroute construction. With Enbridge's tendency to admit later that spills and impacts are greater than their initial reports, only time will tell what the full impacts of these are.

Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far

Spills and Frac Outs

Date	Location	Details
Jul 16, 2026	Gurney, WI	10 gallons of drilling fluid was spilled into a forested wetland during horizontal directional drilling
Jul 16, 2026	Gurney, WI	The spill released 250 gallons of drilling fluid (bentonite and water). 35-60 gallons drained into Vaughn Creek.
Jul 10, 2026	Mellen, WI	10 gallons of diesel spilled
Jul 9, 2026	Mellen, WI	15 gallons of diesel spilled
Jun 27, 2026	Vaughn Creek	Frac-out. While using a horizontal directional drill, fluid surfaced from underground. The spill released 1500-1900 gallons of bentonite clay in forested wetland. 8 gallons entered Vaughn Creek.

Permit Violations

Date	Location	Details
Jun 3, 2026	Silver Creek	Unpermitted land was disturbed and work was started putting required erosion controls in place, and didn't properly fix the
May 21, 2026	Billy Creek	Construction without proper protective materials
May 20, 2026	Vogues Road	A portable toilet was placed on the edge of a wetland
Mar 30, 2026	Peter's Yard	A site inspection on 3/30 showed that a silt fence was not entrenched and backfilled properly.



Flooding and Frac Outs

The Bad River, so central to the work to shut down Line 5 and protect the river, watershed, and region, was shown to have flooding at the site where Enbridge is using Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) to cross it. HDD is a method of installing a pipe without digging a trench – which may sound good until you hear about the negative consequences. As we saw with [Line 3 in Minnesota](#), thanks to the work of dedicated community scientists, Enbridge's use of HDD to cross water bodies resulted in “frac-outs”, which is the release of drilling fluids containing water, clay, salts and other chemical compounds, sometimes withheld as a “trade secret.” With Line 3, Enbridge reported frac-outs at a staggering 67% of their HDD crossings.

Importantly, this fear has come true. In June there was a frac out at Vaughn Creek, an HDD site on the east end of the reroute. This frac out was widely reported on, but local folks still have unanswered questions about how it will impact their water. On June 23rd a Bad River tribal elder witnessed a pool of brown slurry at the Vaughn Creek HDD site. Four days later, Enbridge reported a frac out at that location to the DNR. It is estimated by the DNR that up to 1,900 gallons of drilling fluid and bentonite clay flooded the impacted wetland. A few weeks later on July 13th, there was another spill, releasing an additional 250 gallons of drilling fluid. The drilling slurry that companies use is proprietary, but [reports have shown](#) that in other projects that Michels worked on, unapproved additives were also used. Neighbors are scared, wondering what impacts will be to their wells, how to protect their families, if water is safe to mix for baby formula and more. Much testing is prohibitively expensive, leaving communities with uncertainty.

Flooding has also been a major concern in the area, especially in light of the devastating 2016 flood that washed out roads and left many without access to basic necessities like water, electricity and emergency services. Climate change has exacerbated flooding in the region and continued investment in fossil fuel companies like Enbridge will only continue to worsen the issue.

Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far

Impacts on Wildlife

Colleen Matula, resident in Iron County, wrote an op-ed in the Wisconsin State Journal about the impact of construction on the beaver pond and trumpeter swan near her.

Some excerpts from [her op-ed](#) include:

I have spent more than three decades observing the seasons change from a tree stand by my pond in northern Wisconsin. I've raised a daughter here who learned to ski on its ice and sketch the birds that nest in spring.

Now I'm watching as the scenery alters right before my eyes. The trumpeter swans -- so deliberately brought back from total extinction in our state -- didn't nest here this year. The beavers, whose record of living in this pond go back to the 1800s, are quiet.

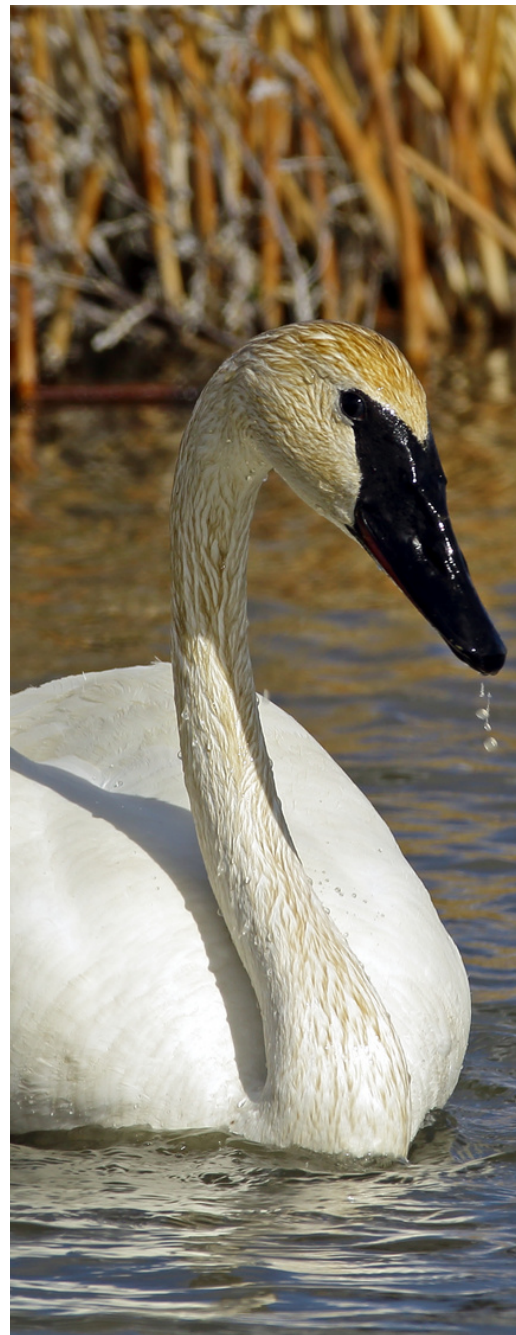
But what I do hear is the mechanical, loud noises of construction from a foreign oil company that, in its effort to reroute an unneeded and dangerous pipeline, has driven away most of the wildlife at the pond.

I worry that regulators approved this project without fully understanding what they're allowing. What I see as an ecologist with 22 years at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and 10 with the Forest Service is a system under siege.

The 2010 oil boom in North Dakota taught us that an economic boost is fleeting, but the ecological damage -- the invasive species, fragmented habitat, damage from herbicide treatment needed to maintain the pipeline, and altered hydrology -- lasts forever. And this is all while living under the threat of a spill. The costs are not worth it.

I've invited politicians and regulators, as well as Enbridge and its contractors to sit with me near my pond. I want them to understand that when you threaten to dewater a pond, you're not just moving water, you're silencing a choir of life. All my calls have been met with patronizing obfuscation and runarounds. Perhaps Enbridge refuses to see the stakes because they do not have to live with the consequences.

No matter what empty promises Enbridge is giving us, I know the boom will be temporary. The residents -- from the people to the swans to the beavers -- will be left with the bust.



What we don't know yet

Many of the impacts of construction won't be known for weeks, months, and even years. Communities in Minnesota are still discovering new impacts from the Line 3 construction. Community members are monitoring potential impacts on tourism, public safety, and criminal justice.



Impacts on Tourism

The tourism economy is vital to the counties where Enbridge is constructing the pipeline. 2025 was the most successful year yet. As a result, tourism in the Bay Area resulted in a \$27 billion economic impact, according to the Department of Tourism.

Enbridge's construction is impacting the places that drive this tourism economy, like Copper Falls State Park and the forests.

While the impact is hard to measure, some vacationers have noticed changes in their visits, from disruptions to intimidation.

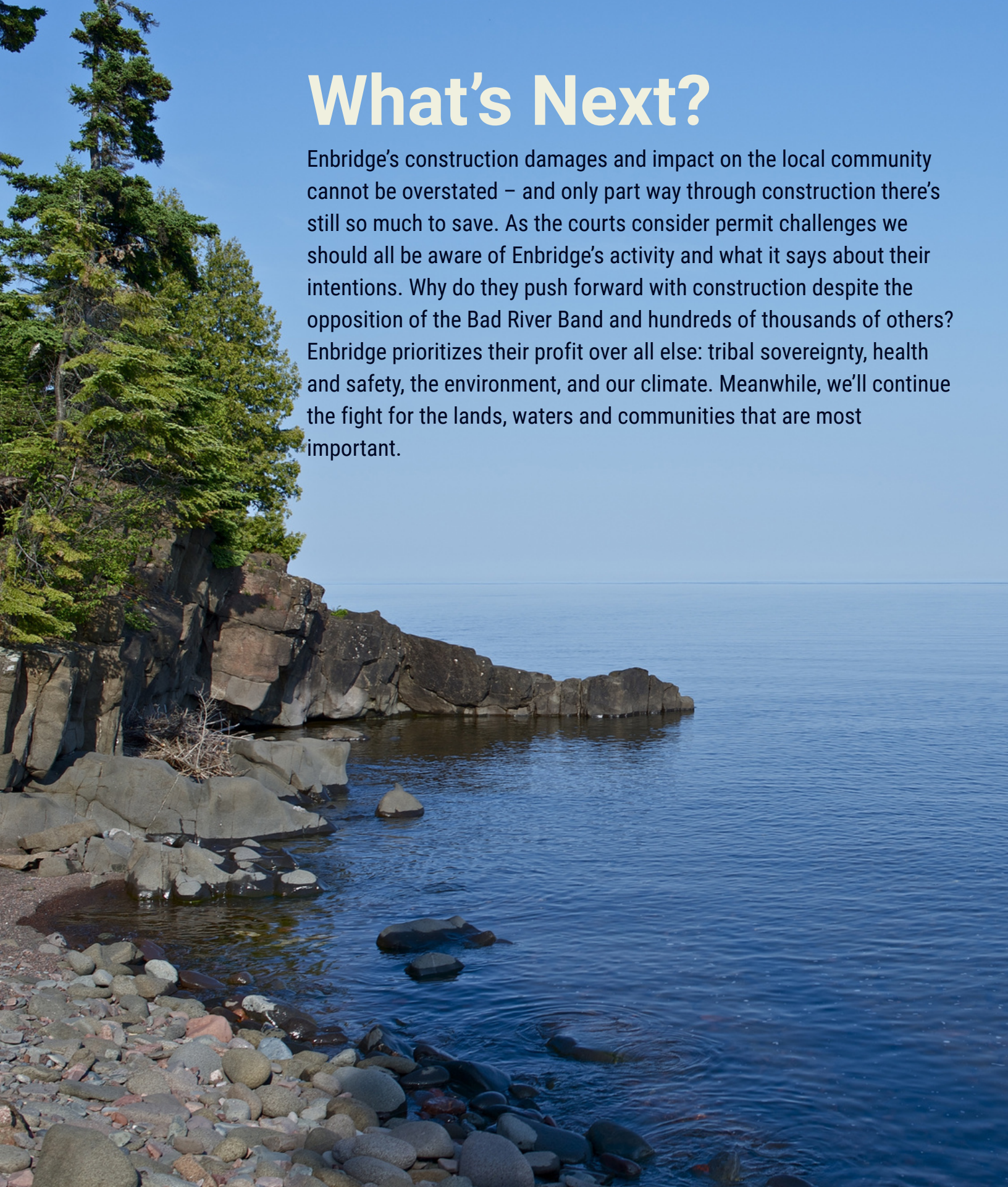
Felony Trespass Bill

Bad River Band members, activists, and monitors have all said that the felony trespass law reduced their willingness to monitor, experience the area, or protest.

While construction is ongoing, it remains to be seen if anyone will be charged with felony trespass and what the long-term impacts will be on the ability of people to exercise their First Amendment rights.



Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far



What's Next?

Enbridge's construction damages and impact on the local community cannot be overstated – and only part way through construction there's still so much to save. As the courts consider permit challenges we should all be aware of Enbridge's activity and what it says about their intentions. Why do they push forward with construction despite the opposition of the Bad River Band and hundreds of thousands of others? Enbridge prioritizes their profit over all else: tribal sovereignty, health and safety, the environment, and our climate. Meanwhile, we'll continue the fight for the lands, waters and communities that are most important.

Destruction and intimidation: Enbridge's Line 5 construction impacts so far

August 2026