

Nebraska Should Block Keystone XL Pipeline After Leak

Hunter B. Martin

Nov. 27, 2017

Conflicts over the Keystone XL pipeline have been going on for years and during that time Nebraska has been a thorn in the side of TransCanada, the foreign owned company behind the project.

It's been said that concerns have doubled after the leak of the Keystone XL pipeline, during which TransCanada estimates over 200 thousand gallons have poured out near a small town in South Dakota. The most recent leak has damaged an area that aerial photos have shown appears to be a flat, open, grassy land used for cattle grazing.



Nebraska's economy runs on cattle. A leak from the Keystone XL pipeline could devastate Nebraska's number one industry. As a born and bred Nebraskan, I understand the value of our state's natural resources. That is why I am dedicated to protecting Nebraska from the Keystone XL pipeline.

The pipeline presents irreparable damage not only to Nebraska’s grazing land, but also to the unique Sandhills and the Ogallala Aquifer. Nebraska’s Sandhills are the only place in the world where grass has grown over sandy soil. The land is too delicate for construction of an intrusive project, especially not a leaky pipeline. TransCanada created an alternative route, but it was not moved far enough to protect another one of Nebraska’s unique natural resources.

TransCanada’s proposed pipeline would also lie directly on top of the Ogallala Aquifer. When the pipeline inevitably leaks, it will cause irreparable damage to an irreplaceable natural resource. The Ogallala Aquifer is the single most important source of water in Nebraska, providing agricultural irrigation and water for livestock. Contamination of Nebraska’s ground water would devastate our economy for generations.

TransCanada rejected changing the route to a path that would not lie over the Ogallala Aquifer because alternative routes would increase the number of miles of the pipeline, which would increase the overall cost of the pipeline. Furthermore, when TransCanada create the alternative route it failed acknowledge that all of the environmental research on the project was done for the former route.



Map: New Keystone XL Route



A depth-to-water map of Nebraska, showing the newly-proposed Keystone XL route (yellow) and the original route (orange). The Sandhills region is shown in green. Lighter areas have a high water table (depth to water 0 to 50 feet) and are more vulnerable to the impacts of an oil spill. Darker areas have a depth to water greater than 50 feet.

Credit: Catherine Mann for InsideClimate News, based on a map created by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Conservation and Survey Division.

TransCanada believes it can buy support for a pipeline that is hazardous to the future of Nebraska, but time and time again Nebraskans have shown resilience. Farmers, ranchers, landowners and environmentalists alike have proven that Nebraska does not want to be home to the Keystone XL pipeline.

Proponents of the Keystone XL pipeline argue that the project will lower fuel prices, increase jobs and would not pose any serious environmental risks. However, former governor of Nebraska Dave Heineman wrote to President Obama urging him to reject the pipeline. President Obama eventually did reject the TransCanada project due to environmental concerns after impact analysis was conducted on the pipeline. Unfortunately, the Trump administration reversed the decision and approved the project in March 2017.

There is still hope. Despite the Nebraska Public Service Commission's 3-2 vote in favor of approving the Keystone XL pipeline on Monday, several groups are committed to appealing the decision.

TransCanada's Keystone pipeline has leaked numerous times since it was first constructed, less than seven years ago. With yet another damaging leak and the approval of the project, Nebraskans must protect our state by joining together to stand against the Keystone XL pipeline.