

# Native Americans protest North Dakota pipeline, cite effects on water

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Tech Big Crow, 18, cares for Blue, one of the horses he and others have brought to the protest site, at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers in North Dakota. Photo: William Yardley/Los Angeles Times/TNS

ALONG THE CANNONBALL RIVER, N.D. — Long before Lewis and Clark paddled by during their journey west, Native Americans built homes here where the Cannonball and Missouri rivers meet. Called the Mandan people, they used the thick earth to guard against brutal winters and hard summer heat.

Now, Native Americans are living here again. They sleep in teepees and nylon tents, and ride horses and pickup trucks. They string banners between trees and, when they can get a signal, they post messages with hashtags such as ReZpectOurWater, NoDakotaAccess and NODAPL. For weeks, they have been arriving from the scattered patches of the United States where the government put their ancestors. They are protesting what they say is one indignity too many in a history that has included extermination and exploitation.

They are protesting the Dakota Access oil pipeline. It could carry more than 400,000 barrels of crude oil a day from the Bakken region of western North Dakota across South Dakota and Iowa to connect with an existing pipeline in Illinois.

## **Construction Halted By Protests**

The 1,100-mile pipeline, which is estimated to cost \$3.7 billion, is nearly halfway complete. But construction on a section that would run beneath the Missouri River, just north of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, has been halted under orders from the sheriff of Morton County, Kyle Kirchmeier. He said protesters, nearly 30 of whom have been arrested in recent weeks, were creating safety issues.

Yet the protesters say they are creating something very different. They say they are putting up new resistance against what they say is a seemingly endless number of pipelines and rail lines. These would transport fossil fuels across or near tribal reservations, risking pollution to air, water and land.

"Every time there's a project of this magnitude, so the nation can benefit, there's a cost," said Dave Archambault, the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux, who was among those arrested. "That cost is born by tribal nations."

Archambault and other native leaders have been caught off guard by the support they have received. It began with a handful of natives organizing a prayer camp along the river this spring. The protest has grown so large that it has drawn international environmental groups. Even Hollywood celebrities, including Susan Sarandon and Shailene Woodley, have decided to join them.

"Inspired by the Standing Rock Sioux's efforts to halt the Dakota Access Pipeline," Leonardo DiCaprio posted on Twitter last week.

## **Legal Efforts**

Lawyers from Earthjustice are representing the Standing Rock Sioux in a legal effort to stop construction of the pipeline. The Standing Rock Sioux are asking a judge to stop construction and reconsider the project's permits. They claim that the Army Corps of Engineers violated the National Historic Preservation Act. The pipeline and its construction would damage ancestral sites of the Standing Rock Sioux and put the tribe's water supply at risk, they say.

On Thursday, nearly three dozen environmental groups wrote to President Barack Obama, who visited the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in 2014, with Michelle Obama. The groups said that the Corps approved the project too quickly, especially given the pipeline's size and the many sensitive areas it would cross.

The Corps of Engineers argued in court in Washington last week that the Standing Rock Sioux and other parties had enough time to express concerns and that the pipeline was properly approved. Energy Transfer Partners, the Texas company building it, says the pipeline will make the U.S. less dependent on foreign oil. The company also said that a pipeline is a safer way of transporting oil than by trains.

Judge James A. Boasberg of United States District Court said that he will rule no later than September 9 on the matter.

## **Resistance Until Judge Makes Decision**

The pipeline has met resistance elsewhere along its route. Farmers in Iowa are concerned about soil damage, and property owners are worried that their land will be taken and used for the pipeline.

At the protest camp, Nantinki Young is a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe from South Dakota and runs the cook shack here. Winona, who did not give her last name, is a Penobscot Native American, who drove 2,100 miles from Maine. Her role is to put together a recycling program for the hundreds of new residents of the protest camp.

And then there is Clyde Bellecourt, who is an Ojibwe from Minnesota and helped form the American Indian Movement. In 1973, he was involved in a standoff between Native Americans and the government in Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the site of an Indian massacre in 1890.

He is 80 now, and he likes what he sees at the protest camp.

"My life is almost over, but there's fresh energy here," he said. "Save the children — that's what this is all about."

Protesters have vowed to stay at least until the judge makes his decision — and potentially much longer. Observers from the human rights group Amnesty International have arrived. An employee of the federal Indian Health Service established a first-aid tent, and vans carpooled people to showers.

Members of the Standing Rock Sioux formed Spirit Resistance Radio to broadcast updates, and an art market opened to sell handmade crafts. There was talk, lighthearted for now, about establishing a school that would teach children at the camp site in native languages. People are practicing their protest tactics to stop construction in case it starts again.

Jasilyn Charger, 20, is among a group of young natives who ran together from North Dakota to Washington to protest the pipeline. She remembers the early days of the protest, when just a handful of people prayed by the river.

"When we started this, people thought we were crazy," she said. "But look at where we are today."