



Daily Climate News and Analysis

## State Department Signs off on Controversial Tar Sands Pipeline

by Stacy Morford - Aug 20th, 2009



The U.S. State Department approved a controversial pipeline plan that, once built, will carry tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to the United States.

Environmental groups and Native Americans who oppose the Alberta Clipper pipeline plan are already preparing to challenge the project. (http://www.earthjustice.org/news/press/2009/native-green-clipper-pipeline-permit.html).

"The State Department has rubber-stamped a pipeline that will carry tar sands oil through the air, water and global warming pollution, particularly near refineries that will process this dirty oil," said Earthjustice attorney Sarah Burt.

"The project's environmental review fails to show how construction of the Alberta Clipper pipeline will impact the environment. We will go to court to make sure that all the impacts of this pipeline are considered."

Extracting oil from the tar sands is an [energy-intensive process](#) (http://blog/20090317/tar-sands-deadly-process) that destroys the boreal forest, releases three times the greenhouse gas emissions of conventional crude oil, and uses 20 barrels of water for every barrel of oil produced, leaving sprawling, toxic tailings ponds that can last for centuries.

The oil also contains [11 times more sulfur and nickel](#) (http://www.environmentalintegrity.org/pubs/Tar%20Sands%202008.pdf), six times more nitrogen and five times more lead than conventional oil, toxins that pollute the water and air when the oil is refined.

But supporters point out that there's a lot of oil in the Canadian tar sands, more than 170 billion barrels of reserves held by a friendly neighbor.

President Obama left the final decision on the Alberta Clipper pipeline project to Secretary of State Clinton, who has been targeted this summer by demonstrators opposed to the pipeline. ForestEthics has [urged Obama to end U.S. support for the tar sands](#) (http://www.forestethics.org/article.php?id=2276), and [staged a protest](#) (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwJsMasnGrw) outside Clinton's office with Clinton saving the world from a monster, and a group from [ForestEthics](#) (http://blog/20090626/pipelines-are-forever-why-we-delivered-worlds-worst-news) delivered a sample of tar sand sludge to Clinton's office.

Their pleas ultimately had little impact.

"After considerable review and evaluation today, the department issued a presidential permit for a Limited Partnership for the Alberta Clipper pipeline," Department spokesman Philip Crow said this afternoon.

"This will advance a number of strategic interests of the United States, including expanding energy, also increasing trade with a stable and reliable ally such as Canada, a positive economic signal during a difficult economic period."

"At the same time, we will continue to work internationally and with Canada to address the climate change problem – climate change challenge as we lead up to the international meeting in Copenhagen later this year."



The pipeline will run from Canada, across northern Minnesota, through the Chippewa National Forest, to Superior, Wis., a Great Lakes port and terminus for other U.S. pipelines bound for Chicago and elsewhere.

The groups planning legal action — Earthjustice, Indigenous Environmental Network, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and Sierra Club — say the permit contradicts Obama's promise to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to cut the nation's reliance on fossil fuels in a clean energy future.

"Importing dirty tar sands oil is not in our national interest. It threatens our rural community independence," said Sierra Club Executive Director Carl Pope. "At a time when concern is growing over the national security threat posed by global warming, it doesn't make sense to open our gates to more dirty oil on earth."

"This pipeline will lock America into a dirty energy infrastructure for years to come. This is the State Department should be protecting us from."

When Obama visited Canada in February, environmentalists had hoped for a bold statement on tar sands. Instead, Obama and Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced only a vague plan for energy cooperation and agreed to work together on low-carbon technology.

In addition to the expected lawsuit, opponents are appealing to the U.S. Forest Service to stop the pipeline through the Chippewa National Forest, and members of the Leach Lake Band are working on a referendum to overturn the Leech Lake tribal council's agreement to allow the pipeline on tribal land.

In Canada, meanwhile, the [Beaver Lake Cree Nation](http://www.ravenrust.com/projects/beaverlakecree/) (<http://www.ravenrust.com/projects/beaverlakecree/>) is leading a fight with the federal government and major oil producers in a fight for its rights under an 1876 treaty to hunt, fish and gather on land that is being stripped away for tar sands production.

Canada is currently the United States' [leading petroleum exporter](http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/data_publications/company_level_imports/current/import.html) ([http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil\\_gas/petroleum/data\\_publications/company\\_level\\_imports/current/import.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/data_publications/company_level_imports/current/import.html)), sending more oil by volume as the U.S. receives from Saudi Arabia.

### See also:

[Pipelines are Forever: Why We Delivered the World's Dirtiest Oil to Secretary Clinton \(/blog/20090316/we-delivered-worlds-dirtiest-oil-secretary-clinton\)](#)

[Dirty Canadian Oil vs. America's Green Economy \(/blog/20090316/dirty-canadian-oil-vs-america-s-green-economy\)](#)

[Canada's Mountaintop Mining: The Tar Sands \(/blog/20090318/canadas-mountaintop-mining-tar-sands\)](#)

[In the Tar Patch, Bitumen Comes Before Fish \(/blog/20090319/tar-patch-bitumen-comes-fish\)](#)

[CCS Can't Make the Tar Sands Clean \(/blog/20090320/ccs-cant-make-tar-sands-clean\)](#)

[Dirty Oil Video: Canada's Tar Sands Explained \(/blog/20090216/dirty-oil-video-canadas-tar-sands-explained\)](#)

[Video: Oil Patch Canadians Wary of Obama's 'Anti-Hydrocarbon' Policy \(/blog/20090217/video-oil-hydrocarbon-policy\)](/blog/20090217/video-oil-hydrocarbon-policy)

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