

Dear President Gabel,

On November 12th, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency granted key water crossing permits to the new Line 3 pipeline project, moving it one step closer to becoming a reality in the state of Minnesota¹. The project will create significant burdens on the environment, as the existing Line 3 pipeline project contributes 80.5 million tons of CO₂, and the new Line 3 project will emit 273.5 million tons of CO₂². This burden will be disproportionately felt by Minnesota's communities of color, and especially threatens Indigenous livelihoods in northern Minnesota.

Enbridge Energy, a Canadian energy company responsible for the largest inland oil spill in the US, has proposed to expand their Line 3 pipeline. Constructed in the 1960s, the pipeline was able to run 760,000 barrels of oil from Canada to the Minnesota-Wisconsin border. However, because of corrosion, the pipeline only runs at half capacity now. Enbridge hopes to discontinue the old pipeline and construct the new Line 3 along a new route with double the capacity. This new path would directly violate the treaty territory of the Anishinaabe people, cross numerous wild rice lakes, and the Mississippi River *twice*³. Our campus prides itself on its location on the Mississippi River, and cannot stand idly by as a project threatens the river's water quality and livelihood. Expanding the pipeline will set Minnesota back on its climate action plans, continue its dependency on fossil fuels, and threaten countless futures. Not only are oil spills inevitable, but Line 3 also carries tar sands crude—one of the most dirty, carbon-intensive, land intensive, and difficult to clean up forms of oil⁴. This pipeline is a climate catastrophe waiting to happen.

Additionally, on November 16th, twelve of the seventeen members of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's environmental justice group wrote a joint letter of resignation in response to the recent approval of permits, citing, among other issues, well founded concerns that the pipeline will exact a devastating toll on Indigenous communities⁵. Line 3 would contribute more to climate change than Minnesota's entire economy, where Minnesota's Department of Commerce found our local market does not need Line 3 oil and strongly urged against the approval of the project⁶. At a time when Minnesota has committed to the U.S. Climate Alliance, a group of states promising to uphold the tenets of the Paris Agreement⁷, approval of this pipeline goes against the key principle that aggressive climate action is not only necessary, but possible.

As the largest public educational institution in the state, the University of Minnesota is greatly influential in Minnesota's economic and scientific future. Environmental concerns are one of the core themes of the University's liberal education requirements, and it has taken great strides in adopting environmental justice curriculum into this theme, including courses touching on the pipeline as a topic, varying in courses and programs

¹ <https://www.brainerddispatch.com/news/government-and-politics/6760531-Minnesota-agencies-grant-permits-to-Enbridge-Line-3>

² <https://www.stopline3.org/#intro>

³ <https://www.stopline3.org/#intro>

⁴ <https://www.ienearth.org/tar-sands-facts/>

⁵ <https://www.grandforksherald.com/news/government-and-politics/6765837-Minnesota-environmental-advisors-resign-over-Line-3-approval>

⁶ <https://www.stopline3.org/#intro>, <https://www.nationofchange.org/2020/11/17/minnesota-permits-for-line-3-pipeline-approved-indigenous-and-climate-leaders-are-left-outraged/>

⁷ <http://www.usclimatealliance.org/about-us>

across colleges, as well as community-engaged learning courses that connect students with organizations working on opposing this project. The University of Minnesota also prides itself on its environmental stewardship and intends to become carbon neutral by 2050, but an oil pipeline with the carbon emissions of 50 new coal-fired plants⁸ would be a detriment to much of that progress. Even more so, numerous students and faculty members have demonstrated their opposition to this pipeline or testified against it, to which it has thus become a University contested issue, and one that many of us are seeking to address.

The University of Minnesota is also a land grant, or “land grab⁹,” institution, of which its very existence is predicated on the forced removal of the Dakota and Ojibwe people from their land. The University administration recognizes this fact in its land acknowledgements,¹⁰ but does not go much farther beyond this to repair the harms that have been inflicted upon these communities. The pipeline’s corridor will directly violate treaty lands and other important sites for Minnesota’s Indigenous communities; as the current stewards of this land, it is imperative that the University, alongside the state, take responsibility for the land, air, and water it now occupies, and of which Line 3 gravely threatens.

Governor Walz himself has not taken a firm stance on this issue, and despite his claims to prioritize the environment, his inaction on urging against this pipeline demonstrates a lack of bold leadership in progressive climate action that will protect not only our generation, but future generations to come. The University of Minnesota does not need to make the same mistakes as the Governor, and can instead be the bold leader in prioritizing climate strategies that this state truly needs.

It is imperative that the University take a stance on this issue, as it is past time to speak out on this project, and time is running out. Therefore, we ask that President Gabel take a public stance on behalf of the University against the construction of Line 3, and to acknowledge the dangers it poses to the health and wellbeing not only of our communities and institution, but of the environment as well. This project represents the culmination of reasons why the University must make progressive strides towards more environmental accountability, not only for itself, but the state of Minnesota, and to recognize the role it plays in protecting the environment for future generations. This issue also highlights the necessity of transitioning towards more renewable energy in our state, of which the University can also be leaders in for the coming years to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. As the undergraduate student government at the University of Minnesota, we are urging the University of Minnesota to pressure the state legislature and Governor’s office to deny Enbridge Energy this project’s fulfillment, a stay of construction during the pandemic, to honor treaty rights, and to thus demonstrate solidarity with the many people in our community working to prevent this pipeline’s construction.

Respectfully,
The Minnesota Student Association
American Indian Student Cultural Center

⁸ <https://mn350.org/giant-step-backward/>

⁹ <https://popularresistance.org/land-grab-universities/>

¹⁰ <https://ias.umn.edu/about/ias-land-acknowledgement>

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UMN Climate Strike
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