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### Keep Our Water in the Right Hands

The Mackinac Straits: the connection between Lakes Michigan and Huron, and one of the most ecologically sensitive areas in the world (Read, Schwab). Its currents are unpredictable, changing direction every 1.5 days (Anderson). Any kind of major accident happening here would spell disaster for its ecosystem, and the turbulent current means that it would affect the ecosystems of the lakes too.

Take an oil spill for example. Other oil spills in less vulnerable areas were disastrous, so a spill in the Straits would be cataclysmic. Fragile plant species would die, causing fish to die in droves, with the birds who prey on them dying in tandem. Worse, the people of the Lakes would be affected too. Fish deaths would lead to the suffering of fishing towns. Tourism would drop, leaving tourism-dependent communities to sink. And most importantly, the millions that rely on the lakes for their water will be seriously compromised.

These risks on their own make it clear that any potential catastrophe must be prevented now. Despite this, a 68-year-old oil pipeline installed by Canadian company Enbridge continues to operate. Line 5, passing directly beneath the Mackinac Straits, carries approximately 23 million gallons of oil per day (FLoW). In the event of a large-scale spill, even the best-case scenario poses a serious threat to the Lakes and their people.

The pipeline's danger comes not only from the consequences of a spill, but also Line 5's substandard track record. Line 5 has failed "at least 33 times since 1968, spilling at least 1.13

million gallons of oil on land and in wetlands” (FLoW). Specifically, Enbridge contractors severely damaged pipeline supports in 2019 (Oil and Water Don’t Mix). This went unnoticed by Enbridge’s safety protocols until 2020. In other words, Enbridge’s safety protocols are insufficient for adequately maintaining Line 5, and by extension, are not enough to ensure the health of the great lakes.

The current Michigan state government sees this. After inaction from previous governors, Governor Gretchen Whitmer recently ordered Enbridge to remove Line 5, but the oil shows no signs of stopping. Enbridge announced that “[Line 5] will keep operating and will do so until a judge tells it to stop” (Meloni, Kelly). To support this, Enbridge argues that without the existence of Line 5, Michiganders would be left without fuel. However, this has little ground, since “less than 10 percent of the oil [is] used in Michigan” (FLoW). Their attempt at showing some benefit for the people falls flat, especially considering that clean water is more essential in comparison. Enbridge’s insubordination along with their indifference towards the Great Lakes as a water source shows that it is time for greater action to be taken to remove their influence from the Straits.

Enbridge, the only thing preventing a spill from Line 5, is a company with grotesquely inadequate safety measures and a blatant disregard for the safety of the lakes’ ecosystems and people. A failure of Line 5 is all too likely. For the future of the Lakes and its people, the federal government must permanently evict Line 5 from the Straits of Mackinac. If the pipeline continues to operate, the future of the Lakes is in jeopardy.

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