

Clean Wisconsin, Earthjustice, Midwest Environmental Advocates: Judge upholds Wisconsin DNR's permit for Line 5 oil pipeline

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Madison, WI – An administrative law judge today [upheld a key permit](#) granted last year by Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for Canadian company Enbridge to build 41 miles of new oil pipeline through the watershed of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in northern Wisconsin.

Clean Wisconsin Attorney Evan Feinauer said: “Despite this ruling, the evidence presented during the hearing remains undeniable: Enbridge’s Line 5 reroute poses significant long-term risks to wetlands, waterways, and treaty-protected resources in northern Wisconsin. Experts testified that the DNR underestimated ecological impacts, relied on an inadequate monitoring plan, and overlooked Enbridge’s troubling history of environmental violations. This decision does not erase those facts. Clean Wisconsin will continue to fight for strong water protections and accountability from companies whose projects endanger Wisconsin’s environment.”

Earthjustice Senior Associate Attorney John Petoskey said: “Today’s decision ignores strong evidence that the DNR broke the law when it approved the Line 5 reroute. Enbridge’s project threatens permanent damage to the Band’s treaty-protected water, plants, and medicines, all for the enrichment of a foreign oil pipeline company. The Band will continue to fight to protect their interests and halt construction.”

Midwest Environmental Advocates Senior Staff Attorney Rob Lee

said: “While today’s decision is a disappointing setback, it does not diminish our resolve or end our responsibility to protect Wisconsin’s waters from the irreversible harm this project threatens to cause. The record in this case is clear, and our work is far from over. Based on the significant legal issues presented and the strength of the record, we believe there is a strong basis for appellate review, and we are considering all appropriate next steps.”

Elizabeth Ward, Chapter Director of Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter

said: “It has been an honor to work with our partners—including Tribal leaders, community advocates, and environmental groups—to prevent new construction on Enbridge’s Line 5 pipeline. While we are disappointed in today’s decision, we remain committed to ensuring that Wisconsin’s wetlands and waterways are protected and Enbridge is never again allowed to show the kind of disregard for environmental regulations they did during Line 3 construction in Minnesota. Ultimately, this doesn’t change the fact that Line 5 must be shut down to protect the Great Lakes and our climate.”

Debra Cronmiller, Executive Director of League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, said:

“The League of Women Voters is committed to protecting ecologically sensitive terrain, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, advancing renewable energy, and supporting Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights. We took a stand against Enbridge’s pipeline project because it was inconsistent with those values. Despite today’s setback, we resolve to continue fighting for a healthy, just, and sustainable future for all Wisconsin communities.”

Emily Park, Co-Executive Director of 350 Wisconsin, said: “350 Wisconsin is proud to stand with those who challenged the permits for this dangerous and destructive product. Every effort to oppose the construction of new pipeline infrastructure builds power in the broader movement to end our reliance on dirty fossil fuels. Instead of facilitating more carbon emissions, we should be investing in renewable energy, sustainable transportation, and technologies that will help us transition to a clean energy future.”

Enbridge aims to reroute a section of its Line 5 pipeline that currently trespasses on the Bad River Band’s reservation before its court-ordered shutdown in June of 2026. The Bad River Band, represented by Earthjustice, joined Clean Wisconsin and Midwest Environmental Advocates on behalf of Sierra Club, 350 Wisconsin, and the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin in a contested case challenge, arguing that the DNR violated state environmental laws when it approved the permit.

During a six-week contested case hearing last fall, attorneys and expert witnesses presented evidence showing that the DNR permitted the project without fully understanding the risks. The project would entail blasting, horizontal drilling, or trenching through at least 186 waterways and 101 acres of high-quality wetlands that drain into Lake Superior. In separate litigation, the Band is [challenging the US Army Corps' permit for the project](#) in federal court.