

Tar Sands, Keystone XL, and Maine

What are tar sands?

“Tar sands” are a mixture of clay, crude oil, and sand that is mined from underground deposits, diluted, and shipped to refineries where it is processed into a useable form of oil. But it’s not “regular” conventional oil – it is more corrosive, toxic, and much harder to clean up when pipelines rupture, as they recently have in Michigan and Montana. As a result of tar sands development, an entire region in Alberta, Canada is now an environmental catastrophe zone. Unchecked extraction there has destroyed vast stretches of boreal forest and created toxic “ponds” so big they can be seen from space. To top it off, tar sands are also terrible for the climate, with significantly higher emissions of global warming pollution than conventional oil.



The Syncrude “Aurora” Oil Sands Mine, Canada. (Photo: Peter Essick)

Imagine if the entire Knox County, Maine was an open pit mine. That’s the reality in Alberta today—and future unchecked tar sands exploration may harm a chunk of boreal forest as large as Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont combined.

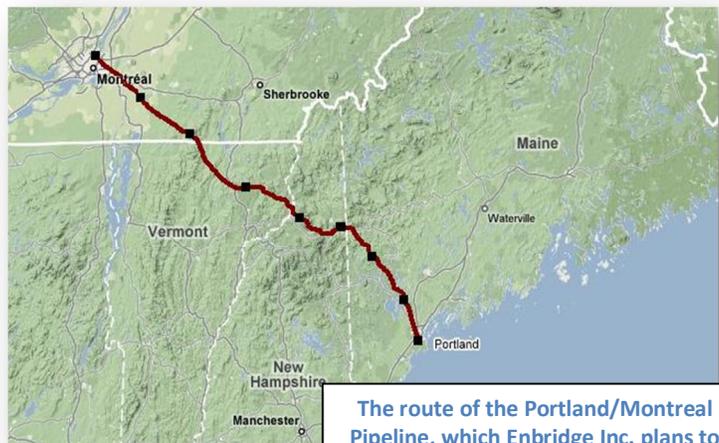
What is Keystone XL?

Keystone XL is a proposed tar sands pipeline that (if built) would run 1,700 miles from Canada to the Texas Gulf coast, cutting across the Great Plains and the vital Ogallala aquifer,

as well as major waterways and some of the most productive farmland in the country. The U.S. State Department denied the permit for Keystone XL because of concerns over public health and environmental impacts, but Big Oil’s allies in Congress keep trying to force the project through in order to pad corporate profits. Big Oil is doing whatever it takes to move the project forward, including breaking up the project to more easily obtain permits. We know this is the wrong project at the wrong time, which is why **more than 6,400 Mainers signed a petition this year to stop Keystone in its tracks.**

Why it matters to Maine

Mainers may soon find themselves facing a similar plan to pump tar sands oil from Canada across the state. **Enbridge Inc., one of the world’s biggest oil pipeline companies, is exploring a plan to send tar sands oil from Alberta to Portland, Maine in an existing older conventional oil pipeline.** The route passes by Sebago Lake. Enbridge is trying to keep the project under wraps to avoid scrutiny, and for good reason: **The company has a long history of spills – hundreds in the last decade, including one in Michigan’s Kalamazoo River in 2010 that released more than 840,000 gallons of sludge, causing health problems for area residents and widespread damage to the ecosystem.** Cleanup crews are still trying to remove oil from the Kalamazoo spill.



The route of the Portland/Montreal Pipeline, which Enbridge Inc. plans to use to send oil from Canada to the Maine coast. (Map: Taxman214)

If *Enbridge* is successful in completing the Portland project, Maine would be threatened with the same risks posed by all tar sands pipelines: oil spills, contamination of our water supply by benzene and other toxics, not to mention being an accomplice to the wildlife and climate catastrophe that's happening in Canada.



Above left: cleanup crews work to contain Enbridge's massive Kalamazoo River spill. Above right: US Fish & Wildlife staff clean a bird coated with tar sands sludge in the same incident. (Photos: Mic Stolz/USFWS)

Congress is Playing Games

In January 2012, President Obama listened to millions of people across the country and denied a permit for the Keystone XL pipeline. But Big Oil does not lose gracefully, and they have the deep pockets necessary to keep the pressure on. Now their allies in Congress are trying to push this project through.

Congress is playing politics by proposing to fast-track the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, when the safety our nation's communities, farmland, and water are at stake. Keystone XL will set the precedent for how tar sands pipelines are regulated. Like farmers in Nebraska, Mainers would not want legislators from other states trying to short circuit the environmental and safety reviews now required by federal and state law, and Congress doesn't have the expertise or capability to handle complex reviews for environmental health and safety.

Senators Snowe and Collins are the **only** two remaining Republican senators who have so far not endorsed this irresponsible proposal to short-circuit these important environmental and safety reviews. But they are under a tremendous amount of political pressure from Big Oil, and we need to make sure they stand strong for Maine and other states threatened by tar sands. If they side with Big Oil, they would tip the balance in the Senate and allow the Keystone XL pipeline to be built. **Tell Senators Snowe and Collins that Congress is not a permitting agency and they should reject this dirty scheme!**

Take Action ▶

You can help prevent the next tar sands disaster by urging our senators to reject any attempts to approve the Keystone XL pipeline. Here's how to get in touch:

- Sen. Olympia Snowe: (202) 224-5344 (Washington, DC office) or (207) 874-0883 (Portland office)
- Sen. Susan Collins: (202) 224-2523 (Washington, DC office) or (207) 780-3575 (Portland office)
- Send them an email from our website, at www.nrcm.org



For more information or to receive email updates on these issues, please contact
Emmie Theberge, NRCM Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator:
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