**Source: Popular Mechanics**

**The Dakota Pipeline Controversy Explained**

A complicated situation mixing environmental and cultural concerns.

Jan 24, 2017

By now, you've probably encountered the conflict between the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and the energy company Energy Transfer Partners (ETP). Maybe you've seen the ubiquitous #NoDAPL hashtag, noted the celebrity arrests, or even panicked as you thought half your Facebook friends had suddenly booked tickets to North Dakota.

The fight is a complex one, and has morphed into a conflict resembling both the protests over the Keystone pipeline and the nationwide pushback against the brutality seen in Ferguson, Charlotte, and elsewhere. On one side, you have the Standing Rock Sioux, who live on a reservation in North and South Dakota. On the other side, Houston-based ETP, which is proposing an underground pipeline that comes close to reservation. The conflict speaks to the general distrust of oil pipelines as well as the centuries-old tension between Native tribes and the U.S. government.

HOW WE GOT HERE

In June 2014, natural gas and propane company Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) announced it had the commitments needed to move forward with the Dakota Access Pipeline, an underground pipe from a geological formation called the Bakken Formation to Pakota, Illinois.

With the success of horizontal drilling and fracking in Bakken came the plan for a 1,134-mile pipeline that would carry approximately 500,000 barrels of crude oil through four states to reach its destination.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW

In 2016, two major fights over the Dakota Access Pipeline erupted. The first is over safety, with a particular concern for water contamination. Oil contamination of water is a nightmare with the potential danger to public health. "Ground water contamination by crude oil is a widespread problem," a report by the USGS said back in 1997. Since then incidents like Deepwater Horizon and oil getting into the Yellowstone River haven't helped public perception.

ETP promises to monitor the proposed underground pipeline "24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year." The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has deemed the pipeline safe in a environmental assessment, saying in its evaluation that ETP has "developed response and action plans, and will include several monitoring systems, shut-off valves, and other safety features to minimize the risk of spills and reduce...any potential damages."

It turns out, however, that Corps released this assessment over the concerns of officials from the EPA, which directly challenged the idea that monitoring systems would be sufficient for maintenance. These systems, according to the EPA, wouldn't give enough notice to effectively prevent contamination in the event of a serious problem.

Meanwhile, there is the political resistance. The Sacred Stone Camp, also known as Iŋyaŋ Wakháŋagapi Othí, formed in April as a center of Native American resistance to the pipeline. Sioux opposition is based in the water safety issues raised by the EPA and by the fact that the pipeline runs within half a mile of the reservation. An early plan for the Dakota Access Pipeline considered running it through North Dakota's capital, Bismark, as an alternative until it was rejected as a potential threat to Bismarck's water supply. You can see why the Standing Rock Sioux wouldn't want it by them, either.