

Proposed South La. pipeline linked to Dakota pipeline

Claire Taylor / The Advertiser, WWL 12:15 PM, CST December 05, 2016



UPDATED 11 a.m. Dec. 5:

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a public notice Monday announcing a public hearing on water quality permits for the Bayou Bridge Pipeline will be at 6 p.m. Jan. 12 in the Oliver Pollock Room of the Galvez Building, 602 North 5th St. in Baton Rouge.

Native Americans on the snow-covered plains of North Dakota protesting a proposed pipeline they fear will threaten their drinking water may seem far removed from Louisiana.

But the same company that's building the Dakota Access Pipeline wants to build a 162-mile pipeline that would cut through the Atchafalaya Basin and 11 Louisiana parishes, including Lafayette, just south of Youngsville.

Environmental groups, some landowners and concerned citizens are quietly building resistance to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline project, gathering thousands of signatures from as far away as New Zealand and South Africa, forcing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to call for a public hearing where they plan to demand a thorough environmental impact assessment of the project.

Cherri Foytlin, of Rayne, a Native American who spent time with the North Dakota pipeline protesters, believes the Dakota movement may be inspiring people in Louisiana, where the oil and gas industry still reigns, to demand protection for their environment, too.

"Enough is enough," she said. "At what point do we draw the line and say we're not going to be the energy sacrifice area for this nation anymore?"

The details

Dakota Access LLC, a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners, is building the 1,172-mile, 30-inch diameter Dakota Access Pipeline from the Bakken and Three Forks oil production areas of North Dakota, through South Dakota and Iowa, to an oil tank farm in Illinois. From Illinois, the oil would travel to Nederland, Texas, then would be transported via a just-completed pipeline to Lake Charles.

Energy Transfer Partners, the company behind the DAPL, owns Bayou Bridge Pipeline LLC, the company whose name appears on the Louisiana pipeline permit applications. Energy Transfer and Sunoco already built a pipeline from Nederland to Lake Charles. Now they want to extend it from Calcasieu Parish through Jefferson Davis, Acadia, Vermilion, Lafayette, Iberia, St. Martin, Iberville, Ascension and Assumption parishes, ending on the west bank of New Orleans near St. James.

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline would provide a connection between the North Dakota oilfields and Louisiana's refineries and ports.

The 24-inch diameter Bayou Bridge Pipeline would be 162 miles long and cross eight Louisiana watersheds including the Mermentau, Vermilion, Bayou Teche and Atchafalaya watersheds. In the Atchafalaya Basin, 77 acres of wetlands will be permanently affected and 171 acres of wetlands will be temporarily impacted.

In its permit application, Bayou Bridge Pipeline LLC says the project will improve public and environmental safety by shifting the transfer of oil from trucks and trains to pipeline, which is supposed to be safer and more efficient.

The company says the pipeline will "play a role in increasing America's energy independence" by transporting domestically produced crude oil to support the nation's energy demands.

"The pipeline is merely a delivery system, similar to FedEx, to help fill a need that already exists to ship the crude to refiners and market. We do not own the crude in the pipeline," Alexis Daniel, of Granado Communications Group, a public relations firm in Dallas, wrote in an email response to questions posed to Energy Transfer Partners.

Using pipelines will free up rail capacity to transport crops and other commodities, the pipeline permit application states.

Scott Eustis, coastal wetland specialist with the Gulf Restoration Network, disagrees. Building a pipeline, he said, doesn't take a train off the rails or a truck off the roads. It just adds another pipeline and increases the risk.

Since 2010, Foytlin said, there have been more than 3,000 leaks or ruptures of pipelines carrying crude oil or other hazardous liquid in the United States, killing at least 80 people, injuring hundreds more and causing more than \$2 billion in damages.

"That sort of devastation is something we just don't need," she said. "One thing BP taught us is how fragile the wetlands are. How much tax dollars are we spending to allow companies to come in and destroy it?"

Daniel wrote, "Energy Transfer Partners considers the safety and reliability of our pipeline to be of the highest priority. If there should be an incident at any time the pipeline is in operation, we are committed to restoring 100 percent of the affected area at our own expense."

Flooding a concern

Dean Wilson, the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, said he's not opposed to oil and gas exploration. He just wants it done in a way that doesn't destroy natural assets like the Atchafalaya Basin.

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline, he said, will be placed alongside an existing pipeline, widening a right of way that's already out of compliance with its permits.

Basin crawfishermen and environmentalists have complained for years about companies digging in the Basin, piling the dirt on the banks and not replacing it when the project is finished, despite being required to do so in their permits.

The spoil banks cause the Basin to silt and interfere with the natural flow of water, destroying crawfish habitat and causing other ecological impacts, Wilson said.

"The Corps doesn't have a single person enforcing permits (in the Basin) and doesn't even have a boat" to inspect projects, he said.

The Atchafalaya Basin is a treasure, Eustis said, the last of its kind in this country. The Corps of Engineers needs to consider the wetlands impact, the fact that hundreds of acres of Basin wetlands will be destroyed.

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline will have the largest single impact on wetlands in Lafayette and Acadia parishes in the last four years, he said.

But the impact of the new pipeline goes beyond environmental concern, Eustis said. It could restrict drainage in areas that suffered flooding in August by destroying wetlands that absorb storm water and by interfering with the flow of existing water bodies.

Bayou Bridge Pipeline's permit application says the company will minimize impacts on the environment and will return areas to their prior state after construction. Hope Rosinski, who lives on six acres of land in Acadia Parish, knows how hard it is to get a pipeline company to do that.

Rosinski already has five pipelines on her land, which has been in her family for many years. She's still fighting the company that installed the latest pipeline to restore her land, which isn't level anymore. Now Bayou Bridge Pipeline wants to come through her land.

"I look at the damage on my property that I'm watching," she said. "Can you imagine the miles and miles where nobody's watching?"

Acadiana is oil and gas country. Despite decades of diversification, when oil prices drop, local businesses suffer and workers lose their jobs.

Company representatives, in their permit application, claims, "The overall project is a \$670 million investment directly impacting the local, regional and national labor force by creating nearly 1,500 construction jobs."

Those jobs, Eustis argues, are temporary construction jobs. They won't help the state or its residents.

One of things the Gulf Restoration Network wants to know is the real benefits of the project.

"We want them to spell it out. Show us the money. Make the argument," Eustis said.

The Corps of Engineers told opponents they will hold a public hearing on the Bayou Bridge Pipeline project, but a date has not been set. Calls to the Corps of Engineers were not returned.

About the proposed Bayou Bridge Pipeline project

- Approximately 162 miles long
- 24 inches in diameter
- Pump stations would be built in Jefferson Davis and St. Martin parishes
- Would run through Calcasieu, Jefferson Davis, Acadia, Vermilion, Lafayette, Iberia, St. Martin, Iberville, Ascension, Assumption and St. James parishes
- Would touch eight watersheds: Lower Calcasieu, Mermentau, Vermilion, Bayou Teche, Atchafalaya, Lower Grand, West Central Louisiana Coastal, and East Central Louisiana Coastal.
- Designed to carry 280,000 barrels of light or heavy crude oil per day from Clifton Ridge Marine Terminal in Lake Charles to various crude oil terminals near St. James.
- Would result in the permanent loss in the Atchafalaya watershed of 77 acres of wetlands and temporarily impact 171 acres of wetlands.

Source: Joint permit application for work within the Louisiana Coastal Zone, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources Office of Coastal Management and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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