

LINE 5 MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Line 5 is a 645-mile pipeline operated by Canadian oil giant Enbridge. It transports up to 23 million gallons of crude oil and natural gas liquids daily from western to eastern Canada. Although most of the oil is delivered to users in Canada, the pipeline cuts across Wisconsin and Michigan, crossing hundreds of interconnected waters and traversing the treaty-reserved territory of tribal nations including the Bay Mills Indian Community and the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Line 5 directly endangers the Great Lakes, which hold 84 percent of North America's surface freshwater and provide drinking water to more than 40 million people.

MICHIGAN

THE DUAL PIPELINES

A four-mile section of Line 5 diverges into two parallel pipelines as it travels through the Straits of Mackinac in the center of the Great Lakes. In 2020, Michigan's governor ordered a shutdown of these "dual pipelines," citing environmental risks and [legal violations](#). Enbridge continues to violate that order today.

Michigan's lawsuit: *Nessel v. Enbridge* was filed in June 2019 to stop the continued operation of the dual pipelines. The case is [supported by seven Tribes](#) and by [environmental and business groups](#). The US Supreme Court will hear Enbridge's attempt to remove the case from state to federal court on February 24, 2026.

THE TUNNEL PROJECT

In response to safety concerns about the dual pipelines in the Straits of Mackinac, Enbridge has proposed building a risky underground pipeline tunnel. That project needs approval by:

- **Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE):** The Bay Mills Indian Community challenged a key permit granted by EGLE in 2021. Enbridge re-applied for permits in 2025 and the agency is currently reviewing.
- **Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC):** After three years of litigation, and despite omitting Tribal testimony, the MPSC voted to grant the permit with conditions in December 2023. Four Tribes including the Bay Mills Indian Community and environmental groups are [challenging the permit](#) before the Michigan Supreme Court, with a hearing set for March 2026.
- **US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE):** In response to President Trump's "National Energy Emergency" Executive Order, the agency is fast-tracking federal review of the tunnel's impacts. In March 2025, seven Michigan Tribes [withdrew as cooperating agencies](#). USACE released its final Environmental Impact Statement in February 2026, and its Record of Decision is pending.

The Straits of Mackinac are a treaty-protected site of deep spiritual and cultural meaning for Anishinaabe peoples. All twelve of Michigan's federally recognized Tribes have passed resolutions calling to [decommission Line 5](#). In addition, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has called for the US and Canada to shut down Line 5 for three years in a row.



Image source: CBC News

HISTORY

The pipeline was built in 1953, without the consent of Tribal Nations in its path and before bedrock environmental laws existed. Today, Line 5 is operating over 20 years past its engineered lifespan, risking infrastructure failure due to corrosion, pressure, and use. It has spilled 1.1 million gallons of oil over 33 [separate incidents](#).

CLIMATE

Line 5's upstream and downstream greenhouse gas emissions amount to about 87 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually, or nearly 19 million gasoline-powered [passenger vehicles](#).

The continued operation of Line 5 exacerbates climate change at a time when it is crucial to phase out fossil fuels.

ECONOMICS

Experts say that [markets can adapt](#) to a Line 5 shutdown without supply shortages or price spikes. Enbridge's own analysis shows gas prices in Wisconsin and Michigan would only increase by [half a cent per gallon](#).

In comparison, a massive oil spill from Line 5 could cost over a billion dollars to remediate, with close to \$6 billion in added costs levied on communities, including depressed property values and devastated local businesses.

WISCONSIN

THE TRESPASS + PUBLIC NUISANCE LAWSUIT

About 12 miles of the Line 5 pipeline cross the Reservation of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. In 2019, the Band sued Enbridge in federal court to shut down and remove Line 5 from [their Reservation](#). U.S. District Judge Conley ruled in September 2022 that Enbridge has been illegally trespassing and profiting at the Band's expense since the pipeline's easements expired in 2013.

In spring of 2023, rapid riverbank erosion brought the pipeline within 11 feet of the Bad River current, prompting the Band to ask the judge for an emergency shutdown to prevent an oil spill. The court [ruled in June](#) that Line 5 constitutes a public nuisance and ordered Enbridge to shut down the pipeline within the Band's sovereign lands by June 16, 2026.

The court also ordered Enbridge to pay the Band \$5.1 million - a fraction of the \$1.1 billion profit unlawfully accrued - and to adopt a more conservative shutdown and purge plan for its remaining time on the Reservation. Both parties are now appealing the decision in the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals.

THE RE-ROUTE PROJECT

Enbridge wants to re-route Line 5 by building 41 miles of new pipeline around and upstream of the Bad River Band Reservation, crossing the same sensitive watershed and the Band's treaty-protected territory. The re-route project needs approval from:

- **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR):** The agency issued a water quality certification and permitted the project in November 2024, despite opposition [from the public](#) and [from the EPA](#). The Band and environmental groups contested the permit, which was [upheld by an administrative law judge](#) in February 2026.
- **US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE):** Despite [broad public opposition](#), the agency approved the project in Fall of 2025. The Band [filed a lawsuit](#) in December 2025 that seeks to overturn the permit for failing to comply with federal laws, including a requirement to consider impacts to the Band's water quality standards.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Bay Mills Indian Community](#)
[Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)
[Native American Rights Fund \(NARF\)](#)
[Stop Line 5](#)



Line 5 crosses areas where Tribes reserved rights to hunt, fish, and gather in treaties with the United States.

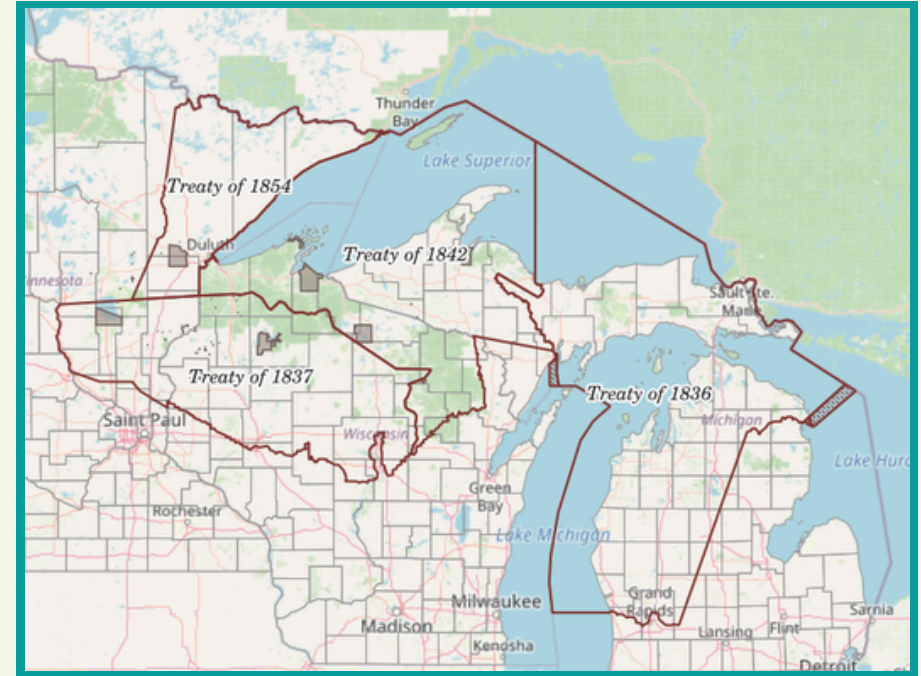


Image source: Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission

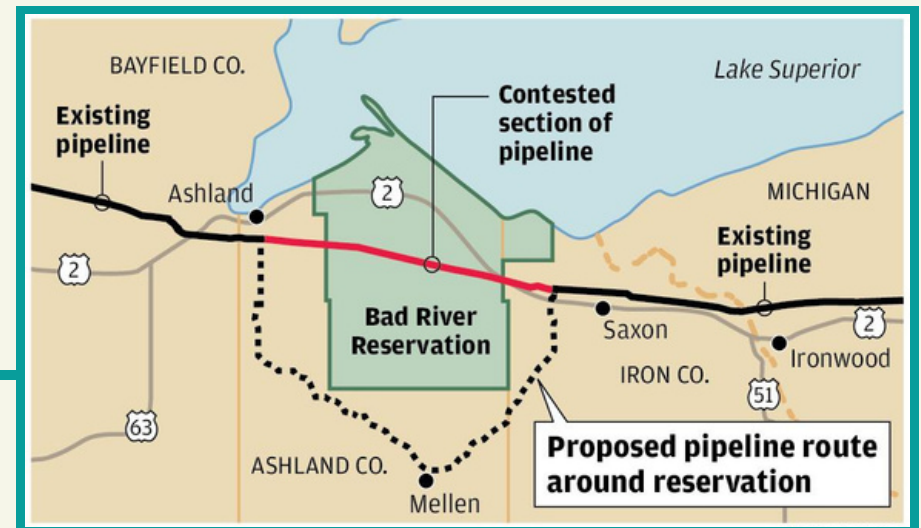


Image source: Wisconsin State Journal