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. In April 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously blocked Enbridge's attempt to move the case to federal court.

Enbridge's lawsuit: *Enbridge v. Whitmer* was filed in November 2020 arguing that Michigan's governor did not have the power to shut down Line 5. The district court agreed, and Michigan has appealed that decision to the Sixth Circuit.

Image source: CBC News

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 Public Service Commission (MPSC):** In July 2026, the Michigan Supreme Court overturned the MPSC's 2023 approval in response to challenges brought by four Tribes including the Bay Mills Indian Community and green groups. The agency must conduct a new review.
- **Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE):** Enbridge agreed to re-do a critical permit granted in 2021 and challenged by the Bay Mills Indian Community. EGLE gave approvals for the project in July 2026.
- **US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE):** In response to President Trump's "National Energy Emergency" Executive Order, the agency short-circuited its review of the tunnel's impacts, prompting seven Michigan Tribes to withdraw as cooperating agencies in 2025. USACE released its final Environmental Impact Statement and approved the permit in August 2026.

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.

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 more than 20 years past its engineered lifespan, risking infrastructure failure due to corrosion, pressure, and use. It has spilled 2.3 million gallons of oil and natural gas liquids over 37 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 2023, after rapid riverbank erosion brought the pipeline within 11 feet of the Bad River current, Judge Conley ruled that Line 5 constitutes a public nuisance. The Court ordered Enbridge to shut down the pipeline within the Band's sovereign lands within three years and to pay the Band $5.1 million, a fraction of the $1.1 billion profit unlawfully accrued. Both parties appealed to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals.

In July of 2026, the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that Line 5 is trespassing and must be removed from the reservation of the Bad River Band. However, the panel said that the District Court was "too aggressive" in giving Enbridge three years to vacate and remanded the case to the lower court to create a new remedy.

THE RE-ROUTE PROJECT

Enbridge has begun 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 was approved by:

- **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)**: Despite opposition from the public and from the EPA, the DNR permitted the project in November 2024. The Band and environmental groups are challenging the DNR's permits in two separate lawsuits.

- **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.

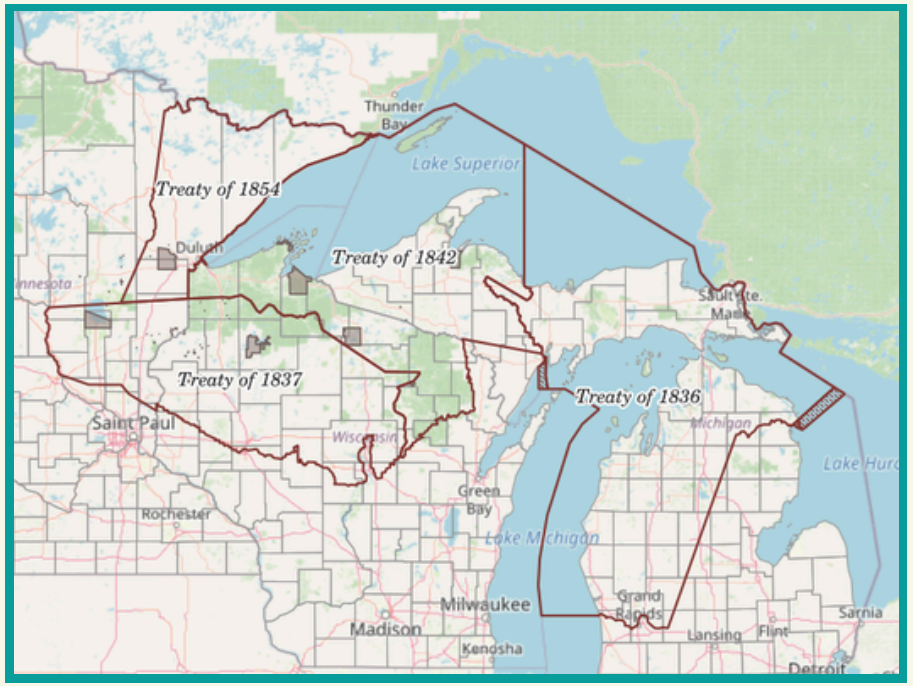

Image source: Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission

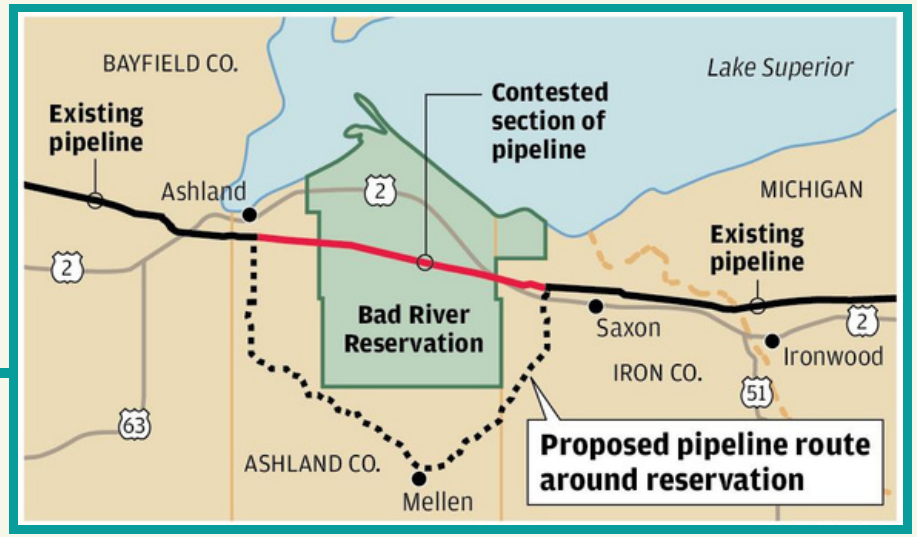

Image source: Wisconsin State Journal