

Dear President Obama,

As scientists from a variety of backgrounds we are committed and invested in the generation and exchange of knowledge for the common good. Along with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, we are concerned that recent environmental and cultural assessments conducted ahead of the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) are inadequate, unlawful, and that this pipeline would destroy culturally important areas and threaten local ecosystems.

To date, concerns have been raised with regard to the legal processes undertaken to approve the construction of pipeline segments in North Dakota. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has filed a lawsuit against the United States Army Corps of Engineers, claiming that environmental and cultural assessments taken to date ignore the important ecological, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts this project would have on the Tribe and region. The Tribe are concerned that potential spills from the pipeline—which would pass under the Missouri River (at Lake Oahe) half a mile upstream of the their reservation boundary—would impact the drinking water of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and thousands of others downstream who rely on the river for drinking water and irrigation

We know that fresh water is non-renewable, vital to all terrestrial life, and thus one of the most precious and important resources on the planet. The Missouri River provides irrigation and drinking water to communities downstream of Lake Oahe, and supports crucial habitat to diverse wildlife. Oil spills directly kill wildlife, destroy habitat, and can have long-lasting effects on ecosystems. In the last year, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks had to close sections of the Yellowstone River because 1,500 barrels of oil leaked into the river in 2015, prohibiting recreational activity and negatively impacting wildlife populations. Indeed, the damage that an oil spill could potentially cause cannot be underestimated, and it truly is a question of ‘when’, and not ‘if’.

Climate change is the greatest environmental issue of our time. Yet, the DAPL project is just one of many current haphazard approaches to continued natural resource extraction, which overlook the broader consequences of further oil development. Further, we as scientists are concerned about the potential local and regional impacts from the DAPL, which is symptomatic of the United States’ continued dependence on fossil fuels in the face of predicted broad-scale social and ecological impacts from global climate change. Indeed, construction of the DAPL is in direct conflict with the United States’ commitment to reducing the risk of climate change. We are concerned that further extractive practices, such as those supported by the DAPL, do not comply with commitments made under the United Nation’s Paris Agreement (2015) to cut fossil fuel emissions by 2030.

We support halting any construction of the DAPL until revised environmental and cultural assessments are carried out as requested by Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in Case 1:16-cv-01534, and considering recent Paris Agreement commitments, call for the United States Federal Government to consider how this and any other such proposed national energy strategies tradeoff with public health, environmental justice, and biodiversity conservation. We also affirm Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s, and all indigenous peoples’ treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, and the protection of their lands, waters, cultural and sacred sites.

With concern,

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