



# The facts about Line 5

## How we can protect the Great Lakes from an oil spill

We are united by our love of the Great Lakes — the largest, most valuable fresh surface water system in the world. The lakes provide drinking water for millions of people in the United States and Canada, drive our economy, and define our way of life. But the Great Lakes are being threatened by Enbridge’s aging, vulnerable Line 5 pipeline, which sits in the open waters of the Straits of Mackinac.

### Outdated, decaying and vulnerable.

Flow Water Advocates is a founding member of the Oil & Water Don’t Mix campaign, a diverse coalition formed to prevent a catastrophic oil spill from Line 5 in the Great Lakes. Line 5 is owned and operated by Enbridge, the same Canadian corporation responsible for the 2010 spill of more than 1.2 million gallons of heavy tar sands oil into the Kalamazoo River watershed near Marshall, Michigan. That spill remains one of the worst inland oil spills in U.S. history. It

took four years and over \$1.2 billion to clean it up to the limited extent possible. Every day, Line 5 carries nearly 23 million gallons of crude oil and natural gas liquids (NGLs) from the oil sands fields in western Canada to refineries in Ontario and Quebec, using the Straits of Mackinac as a high-risk shortcut. Built in 1953 and designed to last 50 years, Line 5 is now over 70 years old and operates in fierce currents on the bottom lands of the Straits — which are held by the state in public trust. Ship anchors and other objects have repeatedly dented and gouged Line 5, and its protective coating has been damaged in numerous spots.

### The path of Line 5.

**645 mi**

Line 5 runs for 645 miles across Michigan & Wisconsin.

**23 million**

gallons of oil and natural gas liquids are pumped through Line 5 every day.

**90%**

of North America’s fresh surface water is found in the Great Lakes Basin.

Enbridge Line 5 is a 645-mile pipeline that originates in Superior, WI, crosses Michigan’s Upper and Lower Peninsulas, including the open waters of the Straits of Mackinac, and terminates in Sarnia, Ontario. Line 5 is part of Enbridge’s vast North American pipeline network connecting Alberta, Canada, to the Great Lakes & Atlantic regions.



**Download the  
Line 5 Action  
Tool Kit!**





Line 5 crosses hundreds of rivers, streams, and wetlands. Outside the Straits, Line 5 has failed at least 34 times since 1968, spilling more than 1.1 million gallons of oil in Michigan and Wisconsin. An oil spill in the Straits could pollute vast reaches of open water and 720 miles of shoreline along Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, according to the University of Michigan.

## A track record of failure

Scientists at Michigan Technological University have characterized the Deepwater Horizon and Exxon Valdez disasters as “useful analogies for [the] ecological impacts” of a Line 5 rupture in the Straits.

## The economic impact

A Line 5 oil spill in the Straits of Mackinac could strike a \$7.68 billion blow to Michigan’s economy, communities, and natural resources, and have an additional \$57.6 billion impact to the region’s commercial shipping and steel production, according to studies commissioned by Flow and conducted by Michigan State University experts.

**RIGHT:** The more than 70-year-old pipeline runs beneath the Mackinac Straits. It transports 23 million gallons of natural gas liquids and crude oil every day.

**Photo Credit:** Oil and Water Don't Mix



## The risky tunnel proposal

Enbridge proposes to bore and blast a 21-foot diameter tunnel under the Straits of Mackinac to house a new Line 5 pipeline, whose fossil fuel contents, when burned, would release climate pollution each year equivalent to nearly seven

new coal-fired power plants. Engineering and geologic experts warn that the proposed tunnel is a dangerous and untested design, particularly for NGLs, which pose a catastrophic explosion risk. Moreover, Enbridge’s own depreciation study filed with FERC in 2021 shows that Line 5 will be a stranded asset by 2040.



## Achieving energy security and meeting climate goals

1. **According to Enbridge’s own experts and others, we can meet the energy needs of the Great Lakes region and remove the threat to our waters** by making smart adjustments to the existing North American pipeline system — including by using excess capacity in pipelines that don’t go through the Great Lakes.
2. **Enbridge’s own experts testified that Michigan gas prices would increase only half a penny if Line 5 is shut down**, well within normal market fluctuations. In October 2023, PLG Consulting released an important report showing that energy markets will adapt, without price spikes or shortages. And in July 2025, PLG released a report showing how a Line 5 closure would boost U.S. domestic energy production. Download both reports at <https://flowwateradvocates.org/toolkit>.
3. **To achieve net-zero emissions by 2050**, the International Energy Agency’s road map report concludes that no new investments in fossil fuel infrastructure can occur. This takes Enbridge’s proposals to build a Great Lakes tunnel off the table.

## Line 5 in the courts

**TOP:** Michigan AG Dana Nessel gathers with advocates ahead of oral arguments in Cincinnati, Ohio on March 21, 2024.  
**Photo credit:** Bill Latka.

**BOTTOM:** Whitney Gravelle, President of the Bay Mills Indian Community, walks along the shores of Lake Michigan.  
**Photo Credit:** Sarah Rice for Earthjustice

To protect the Great Lakes and our public trust rights to use them, Governor Gretchen Whitmer ordered Enbridge to shut down Line 5 by May 2021. The State of Michigan and Attorney General Dana Nessel remain committed to this legal course while Enbridge defies the shutdown order, and Line 5 is exposed to exceptionally strong currents, lakebed scouring, anchor and cable strikes, and corrosion. Michigan continues to fight for its sovereign right to protect the public waters of the Great Lakes.

Following years of litigation, the Sixth Circuit returned the Attorney General’s 2019 Nessel v. Enbridge case to state court because Enbridge missed a statutory deadline to transfer the case to federal court; however, the U.S. Supreme Court is now (as of February 2026) reviewing that decision. Meanwhile, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan issued a ruling in Enbridge v. Whitmer, preventing the State of Michigan from enforcing Gov. Whitmer’s revocation and termination of the Line 5 easement through the Mackinac Straits. Gov. Whitmer is appealing that decision to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. .

Litigation also continues in Wisconsin, where the Bad River Band successfully fought to



remove Line 5 from its tribal lands. It is now contesting the proposed re-route project, which would encircle its territory on three sides and threaten its watershed.





The Line 5 pipeline, situated in one of the busiest shipping lanes in the Great Lakes, has sustained repeated damage. Freighter ship anchors, cables, and other objects have caused dents and gouges, and the pipeline’s protective coating has been compromised in numerous locations.

**RIGHT:** An Enbridge Energy “Warning: Petroleum Pipeline” at the site of the Line 5 oil pipeline site at the Straits of Mackinac between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.  
**Photo Credit:** Tony Webber



## Line 5 tunnel permit process

To build its proposed tunnel under the Straits of Mackinac, Enbridge must secure federal permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and state permits from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). As of February 2026, Enbridge has not been granted the required permits.

In its Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released in February 2026, the Army Corps finds that the Line 5 tunnel project would result in both short- and long-term detrimental impacts, including permanent wetland and wildlife habitat losses; potential release of drilling fluids to ground and surface waters; up to six years of construction noise, lights, traffic, and vibrations; limits to recreational activities; destruction of archeological resources; and housing values and tourism.

## What you can do to help shut down Line 5



**Download the Line 5 Action Tool Kit!**

- 1. Line 5 Citizen Action Toolkit**  
Visit [FlowWaterAdvocates.org/Toolkit](https://FlowWaterAdvocates.org/Toolkit) to contact your representatives, sign up to volunteer, and find other ways you can act.
- 2. Get the facts**  
Visit [FlowWaterAdvocates.org/Line5](https://FlowWaterAdvocates.org/Line5) for articles, reports, videos, and webinars, and share them with your friends, family, and networks.

- 3. Show up and stand up**  
Show up and stand up. Keep an eye out for upcoming public hearings and other opportunities to make your voice heard! The website [OilAndWaterDontMix.org](https://OilAndWaterDontMix.org) is a great place to stay updated.

- 4. Support Flow Water Advocates**  
Visit [FlowWaterAdvocates.org/Donate](https://FlowWaterAdvocates.org/Donate) to help us continue making the case to shut down Line 5

**The Great Lakes belong to all of us, and they are ours to defend!**