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In response to Minnesota decision, Columbia County residents call for eminent domain protections

RIO—Today, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) voted to approve the Certificate of Need for Enbridge’s proposed Line 3 tar sands pipeline, greenlighting more oil to flow into Superior, driving the need for another tar sands pipeline through Wisconsin. This will likely mean that Enbridge will start seeking permits in Wisconsin and getting easements and permission from the landowners and tribes for the new pipeline.

“When we bought our property 20 years ago we knew an oil company had an 80-foot easement. But now we are hearing that the Canadian company that owns the easement may want more of our land to put in more of their pipes,” said Kevin Stoddard, landowner in Columbia County and Steering Committee member of Columbia County Wisconsin Safe Energy Alliance.

The Line 66 Pipeline threatens landowners in Columbia County who currently live with four pipelines and could now see a fifth pipeline. In order for Enbridge to add a pipeline, they would need to acquire additional land through easements or by taking land through eminent domain.¹ For some, this land taking could also result in their homes being taken and destroyed for the pipeline. With this new, looming threat, Columbia County landowners are calling on the state Legislature to protect them from the threat of eminent domain.

“We don’t want them to take any more of our land. When we learned that Enbridge, a \$44 billion dollar foreign oil company had been given the right of eminent domain, so they can take our land whether we want them to or not we knew something was wrong. What about landowner rights for Wisconsin citizens?” Stoddard concluded.

Line 66 is the most immediate threat to residents’ property rights, but resident worry about numerous other projects beyond pipelines. “This goes beyond the eminent domain abuse we will see by Enbridge,” explained Mary Jo Wentz, Falls River resident. “The threat of eminent domain gives Enbridge a considerable unfair advantage over landowners when negotiating lease agreements, as we have seen with the Fox-Conn development. It leaves the door open for other “business entities” to use the same tactic against owners who seek to protect their homesteads from hostile takeover. Who stands up for the little guy anymore?” she finished.

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Wisconsin Safe Energy (WiSE) Alliance is a coalition of community members, leaders, and organizations concerned about the safety, land, and environmental threats posed by proposals to expand tar sands throughout Wisconsin, especially along Enbridge’s Line 61 corridor. Columbia County WiSE is the local affiliate of the statewide organization.

¹ The Legislature expanded eminent domain to make Enbridge eligible in a last minute budget amendment in 2015