

At Least Seven Water Protectors Arrested While Protesting the Construction of Oil Pipeline in Minnesota, USA

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At least seven Water Protectors were arrested on Monday afternoon (19 July) while protesting the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline in Wadena County (a county in Minnesota, in the USA).

One of the women arrested was Winona LaDuke, Indigenous leader and founder of environmental group Honor the Earth, who has been standing against the construction of the pipeline for eight years. The seven women all face trespassing charges; with arraignments started on Tuesday morning [20 July].

Honor the Earth says that the “charge of the colonial world is in conflict with the Anishinaabeg,” citing a 2019 White Earth Nation tribal law which requires the White Earth Nation to stand up for and protect the rights of wild rice and other sacred food. [The Anishinaabeg are a group of culturally related indigenous peoples present in what is now Canada and the United States.]

Three water protectors also locked down one of Enbridge’s drills on Tuesday morning [20 July], halting drilling under the Shell River.

The multi-billion dollar ‘replacement’ pipeline carves a path in between three reservations in central and northern Minnesota. Environmental and tribal groups say the line would worsen climate change and risk oil spills in areas where Native Americans harvest wild rice, hunt, fish, gather medicinal plants, and claim treaty rights.

Enbridge, the Canadian energy company behind the project, says the original pipeline from the 1960s is deteriorating, and the new line made from stronger steel will better protect the environment. Environmental groups however have disputed this, pointing out that completely new routes have been added in the construction of this pipeline.

The controversial pipeline has faced legal challenges and protests for years. Last week, tribal and environmental groups asked the Minnesota Supreme Court to overturn a lower court decision affirming the approvals granted by independent regulators that allowed construction to begin last December.

Minnesota’s Department of Natural Resources has also allowed Enbridge to increase pumping from 540 million gallons from local lakes and rivers to 5 billion gallons [close to 19 billion litres] of water, despite the widespread drought in the region.

To date, nearly 600 people have been arrested for protesting the pipeline. [La Duke was released from jail on 22 July 2021.]

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