

Episode 82: Activists spring to fight Line 3

In this episode, we talk to Winona LaDuke, executive director of Honor the Earth, and University student and MN350 intern Karly Beaumont about their efforts to stop the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline.

Ava Kian and Yoko Vue

INTRO MUSIC

AVA KIAN: Hello everyone, I'm Ava Kian.

YOKO VUE: I'm Yoko Vue. And you're listening to "In the Know," a podcast by the Minnesota Daily.

NAT SOUND: "DEFUND LINE 3" CHANTS

VUE: On the chilly morning of Friday, March 5, roughly 50 people rallied outside of the McNamara Alumni Center in efforts to push the University of Minnesota to oppose the construction of the Line 3 pipeline. Three student groups, UMN Students for Climate Justice, Uprooted & Rising Minneapolis and Power in Unity UMN, called on the university to disclose their financial investments and divest from fossil fuels.

STUDENT ORGANIZER: It means a lot to have this great of a turnout and we really want to get the attention of the regents so please make sure that you sign those petitions.

VUE: At the start of the rally, student organizers taped together black tubes in the shape of a pipeline. They then snaked that pipeline around one edge of McNamara and used charcoal paint to symbolize an oil spill. This rally was held on the anniversary week of the largest inland oil spill in the United States, which took place in Minnesota on March 3 of 1991.

STUDENT ORGANIZER: Minnesota comes from the Dakota name for this region. Mni Sota Makoce, the land where the water reflects the sky. The Dakota, and numerous other Indigenous peoples whose cultural, spiritual and economic practices are intrinsically woven to this landscape, hold this land sacred. We recognize them as original stewards of this plant and all the relatives who had thriving and vibrant communities prior to disruption by settlers.

NAT SOUND: "WE WILL FIGHT" CHANTS



VUE: Line 3 was constructed by a Canadian multinational company, Enbridge, in the 1960s. The pipeline transports tar sand oil from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada through North Dakota and Minnesota to its endpoint of Superior, Wisconsin. That pipeline had several spills, including one in 1979, 1991 and 2002. The company decided it was time for a new pipeline in 2013. Ever since then, there has been a battle between Enbridge, Minnesota environmental regulations, and Indigenous communities that oppose the pipeline. In 2016, the Public Utilities Commission called for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Line 3. In 2019, the Minnesota Court of Appeals found that statement inadequate and the Department of Commerce revised the statement. On May 1, 2020, the Commission approved the final EIS and construction began in December of 2020.

NAT SOUND: "STOP LINE 3" CHANTS

VUE: This opposition to oil pipeline construction is not new. Indigenous people have been fighting the construction of pipelines, like the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone Pipeline, for years. Activists oppose the pipeline because of the disruption of Anishinaabe land treaty rights, the environmental impacts of oil spills, and the health risks and effects on Indigenous communities among other concerns. One notable figure in the movement to stop Line 3 is Winona LaDuke of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe and Executive Director of Honor the Earth. She says much of her activism stems from her upbringing.

WINONA LADUKE: Well I just do my best, you know. I was raised by a good family. My parents said, stand up for what's right. My parents opposed the Vietnam War. So, you know, I was born of good cloth. My grandmother was a union organizer, and my father was an Indian organizer. So, you know, we're good. I just knew that we were supposed to do the right thing. And, you know, we all gotta drink the water. I don't know what issues everybody's working on, but at some point, we're all the same cause we all got to drink the water.

KIAN: LaDuke is one of the founders of Honor the Earth, an organization that emphasizes the right to water. LaDuke and other activists say that even the threat of a pipeline oil spill is too much of a risk to water quality. Line 3 is set to run through over 800 wetlands and 200 streams and lakes, which concerns activists because this pipeline will transfer tar sands oil, an oil that is more difficult to clean up than others.

LaDuke has been fighting various pipelines for quite some time. She was previously on the Environmental Justice Advisory group to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, known as MPCA. When MPCA granted Enbridge a key water permit for Line 3, she, along with 11 others resigned in a letter stating that they "cannot continue to legitimize and provide cover for the MPCA's war on Black and brown people." Just recently, Winona was arrested for what she called "trespassing on her own land," with six charges against her.

LADUKE: New pipelines aren't safe. Just look at the Keystone XL that broke within a year, spilled 400,000 gallons. And, no pipe is the safest pipe and good jobs are better than dirty jobs.

KIAN: In 2008, another pipeline company, TC Energy, planned to expand the already existing Keystone pipeline, which ran from Alberta, Canada, to various places in the United States. After over 12 years of proposal changes and severe opposition, President Biden signed an executive order to stop its construction in January. Many activists are now looking at the federal government to do something similar for Line 3.

LADUKE: First of all I'm concerned about the devastation of our land. You're watching something tear apart, your forest, right in front of you, all your sacred sites.

KIAN: The proposed route crosses over 40 wild rice watersheds. To activists, this means that potential oil spills may harm the sacred wild rice habitat.

LADUKE: So, that's pretty big trauma. I don't know how much the health policies gonna be or the mental health counseling out of Line 3, probably quite a bit. I hope the governor's ready.

KIAN: The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission in May of 2020 approved the pipeline, convinced that it was safe and would provide a boost to the state's economy.

Enbridge executives insist the pipeline is safe. They say the pipeline construction will bring a \$2 million boost to the Minnesota economy, add jobs and increase property tax revenue in the counties the line runs through. The President and Chief Executive Officer of Enbridge, Al Monaco, has a net worth of \$18 million. To LaDuke, this signifies the inequities between the pipeline owners and Indigenous people.

LADUKE: I tried for seven years to make the system work. Didn't miss a hearing. Intervened at every turn, testified when asked, two minutes, five minutes, three minutes. And the system doesn't work. Turns out that Enbridge can buy the Public Utilities Commission and apparently a good deal of the state with the idea that they've got a safe pipeline now.

I'd like the system to work. I didn't want to get arrested either. I didn't want to get charged. It looks like Governor Walz doesn't think that the civil rights of Minnesotans are as important as the economic rights of a Canadian multinational to make a couple more billion.

KIAN: She believed the state of Minnesota is more interested in gaining money from the pipeline project, rather than protecting civil rights. LaDuke said that around 200 to 300 activists, or water protectors, protested at the site of pipeline construction in the winter season. Local police have geared up in response, purchasing riot gear and tear gas – though no tear gas has been used on protesters. According to the Intercept, the sheriff's office of Beltrami County sent Enbridge an invoice for the equipment. It is unclear if Enbridge has reimbursed the department.

LaDuke said that the front lines of the Line 3 protests are much more peaceful than what took place during the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline, though the police presence is still considerable. During the Dakota Access Pipeline protests in North Dakota, pipeline owners and law enforcement used rubber bullets, water cannons and tear gas against protesters.

LADUKE: Still pretty brutal looking at cops, it's minus 20, and you're looking at a line of cops with no idea, except for that, they're going to violate your constitutional rights.

KIAN: I guess I'm wondering what you think needs to happen to stop this construction. Who makes these calls, and who is in charge at the end of the day?

LADUKE: Well, the Army Corps of Engineers should revoke the water crossing permits. There was no federal environmental impact statement done on this pipeline. They just use the flawed EIS of the state of Minnesota, you know, no spill analysis. The spill hits Lake Superior, like that didn't matter. No climate change analysis or impact, no cultural analysis. Ojibwes just didn't count in that one. So the EIS was a shoddy one. Shameful for the state of Minnesota to issue one. And the Minnesota pollution control agency, they issued a whole bunch of permits after they had the contested case hearings and you got to testify for two minutes by phone if you could get in. The whole system was a sham, the whole system was a sham. So we're hoping that somebody will stop it. Probably the feds [are] our best hope.

KIAN: She says the mistake is Governor Walz's. And what she's asking for is a just transition, a climate justice term that seeks to phase out industries that harm workers, community health, the climate, and ultimately seeks to provide a transition to a harmonious relationship with the Earth.

LADUKE: The fact is that Governor Walz, you've made a mistake. You made a mistake and now let's just undo it. You shouldn't have listened to those guys. You should go for jobs and a just transition. Cause we're going to be fighting over rocks and pipes for the rest of my life. That's what's going to happen unless we make a better decision, and I think now will be the time to go for a just transition.

KIAN: I asked her what the ideal alternative to a pipeline would be.

LADUKE: We all could have written the plan. Quit moving stuff around so much. Get some electric cars. After all, the rest of the world is going electric. Cars and trains, move stuff less, get some hemp batteries so you ain't using lithium batteries on those cars....Get some microgrids, get some renewable energy like the eight fire solar panels that make up here on White Earth to reduce your heating bills. Turns out cold as heck, but solar's better, about 25 to 30% better if it's cold and, get some organic agriculture, grow a lot of hemp to sequester your carbon, got some great plans for the state of Minnesota, all ready to roll... In fact, we just had our farming conference, so we're ready to grow more food. And in fact, we're installing more solar. So we're doing it. I think that a lot of people could learn from the tribes. Leech Lake, putting up solar and Red Lake, just put up, uh, I don't know, 300 kilowatts, and they're looking at 13 megawatts. Invest in the tribes. We have vision.

LADUKE: Why be the last tar sands pipeline in the world when you could be a leader in the just transition, Minnesota? That's the team I'm on, the home team.

KIAN: The protests extend beyond northern Minnesota, where the pipeline construction is taking place. On March 5, second-year student and intern at MN350, Karly Beaumont rallied for the University to take a stand against Line 3.

NAT SOUND: "WHOSE SCHOOL? OUR SCHOOL!" CHANT

KARLY BEAUMONT: Two simple demands. Number one, we want Joan Gabel and the Board of Regents to stand in solidarity with the Stop Line 3 movement. Second, we want the University of Minnesota and the Board of Regents, and Joan Gabel to disclose exactly how much money they have invested into fossil fuels, then divest from that infrastructure and reinvest that money into community-controlled funding.

I think we focus more on the Board of Regents because they have a little bit more power in what occurs than Joan Gabel does. They make a lot more decision-making than I feel like a lot of people expect. I think people expect it's just the president, but it's really the Board of Regents that do a lot of that.

NAT SOUND: "POWER OF THE PEOPLE" CHANT

KIAN: The calls for accountability at the rally echoed those of Indigenous activists around the nation who have historically opposed the construction of pipelines.

BEAUMONT: We need to be talking about tar sands, Line 3, Indigenous people have been fighting this pipeline for over seven years, and it's finally getting more media attention, and we can call on to fight it, and we can call on our Board of Regents to take action and really stand in solidarity.

KIAN: The conversation around pipelines is happening across country lines, and the reach has expanded thanks to the new comfort in online platforms like Zoom. After the in-person rally, a student group at Macalester hosted a virtual rally attended by students across the United States and Canada.

BEAUMONT: The University of Southern California just last month announced that they were divesting. And so getting to learn from those leaders, especially cause I'm a second year, there's still so much to learn about organizing work. It's just been really inspiring. I feel like, and there's just so much traction and movement right now. And I just feel like we have a real shot at getting this done.

STUDENT ORGANIZER: We are investing a billion-dollar endowment into fossil fuels, and we are not divesting or disclosing what our investments even are. So we are just as unpleasant as everyone else in the Walz administration is. It is time that we take a stand against the Enbridge pipeline and actually get rid of our dependency on fossil fuels.

NAT SOUND: RALLY CLAPS

KIAN: Karly went up north that weekend with about twenty others, to participate in a front-line water protectors event in the Minnesota town of Palisade.

BEAUMONT: A lot of what we do is based off of what did we learn from them... And so just making sure that we follow in the footsteps of what is okay with the folks that are on the front lines, especially because this fight is not new. It's been going on for the past seven years. It's been headed by people like Winona LaDuke and the Anishinaabe.

KIAN: She says the movement's energy is picking up, especially considering President Biden's call to stop further construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.

BEAUMONT: He is the single most important person to target right now because he has the power. So back in January, one of the first things you probably know is that he stopped Keystone XL from further being constructed. And so I feel like the energy around him is huge. I feel like there's many petitions going around. There's enough calls being made. And so it's just a matter of getting enough attention, getting enough pressure to be like, alright we know you have the power, it's the Section 404 powers, and you just need to revoke those and end them. And that will be the end of Line 3, just like Keystone XL.

KIAN: Construction is already underway on Line 3. Of the pipeline area in Minnesota, more than 40% is built. Still, activists and water protectors have held their ground throughout this winter, and are expecting more protesters come spring.

OUTRO MUSIC

MEGAN PALMER: In other U News: Richard Pitino will no longer be the head coach of the men's basketball team; four new regents have been elected to serve on the Board of Regents; and the University is planning to resume in-person classes in the fall. We'll see you next week.