

US sees no major harm from Keystone XL pipeline

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A large excavator loads a truck with oil sands at the Shell Albian mine near the town of Fort McMurray in Alberta. The US said it expected "no significant impact" from a proposed pipeline that would bring oil from Canada's tar sands to the US Gulf Coast.

The proposed Keystone XL pipeline that would bring oil from Canada's tar sands to the US Gulf Coast would have "no significant impact" on the environment, the United States said Friday.

In a long-awaited environmental impact statement on the massive project, which has prompted protests from environmental groups, the State Department said the [pipeline](#) would be safer than most current transport systems.

"There would be no significant impact to most resources along the

proposed pipeline corridor," Assistant Secretary of State Kerri-Ann Jones told reporters upon the release of the report.

Jones said the report, which is one step in the regulatory process, does not indicate approval or denial of the massive pipeline. US officials are due to make a final decision later this year after further review and hearings.

"This is not a lean in any way toward one particular decision or another," said Jones, the assistant secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

The report said that with extra precautions planned, the pipeline "would have a degree of safety greater than any typically constructed domestic oil pipeline system under current regulations."

It also said that scrapping the pipeline would have its own environmental costs, because refineries in the United States would need to transport oil by other means, such as trucks, railroads, barges and marine tankers.

The report did cite some potential problems in the event of a spill in "environmentally sensitive areas," including wetlands, rivers and other water resources, as well as areas with a high concentration of plants and wildlife.

As to a possible alternate route for the pipeline, the report said it "did not find any of the major alternatives to be preferable."

A number of environmental groups have protested the pipeline because of the oil's origin in the oil sands of Alberta, Canada, where high-energy extraction produces a large volume of [greenhouse gasses](#).

They have called on US President Barack Obama to deny a permit for

the \$13 billion project, due to stretch across 1,700 miles (2,700 kilometers).

Environmentalists were quick to denounce the report, and dozens of people have been arrested in the latest protest outside the White House.

Susan Casey-Lefkowitz of the Natural Resources Defense Council said, "It is utterly beyond me how the administration can claim the pipeline will have 'no significant impacts' if they haven't bothered to do in-depth studies around the issues of contention."

Erich Pica, president of Friends of the Earth, said the pipeline decision poses a key test for President Barack Obama.

"If he sides with greedy oil companies instead of people and the climate, he will essentially be urging a huge part of his base to sit out the election. With this supposedly final review of the pipeline's environmental impacts, the State Department has let him down by once again trying to sweep the serious dangers posed under the rug," she said in a statement.

Pipeline operator TransCanada meanwhile said the report backs earlier studies and is part of an "exhaustive and detailed review" of the project.

The review "reaffirms the findings of the two previous environmental impact statements that the Keystone XL pipeline will have no significant impact on the environment," said Russ Girling, TransCanada's president and chief executive officer.

"Today's final [environmental impact](#) statement continues to demonstrate the focus on safety and the environment that has gone into the development of this critical North American pipeline."

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