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23 October, 2015

Keystone XL Pipeline

The Keystone Pipeline is a proposed segment of pipeline that would run from Alberta Canada all the way to the Gulf Coast via through Texas where it would be processed. The pipeline would transport 800,000 barrels of crude sand oil each day, and would cost approximately 7 billion dollars to construct. The construction of the pipeline would produce, according to the New York Times, 42,000 temporary jobs over the two years it would take to finish its construction, and 35 permanent jobs.

It is important to note that the Keystone Pipeline is simply part four of a four part plan. the first two phases (Keystone Pipeline and the Keystone-Cushing extension, respectfully) have been completed and in use since mid 2011. Phase III, the gulf Coast extension, was completed and opened in 2014. The first three phases by themselves manage to transport synthetic crude oil down from Alberta to Texas. The Keystone XL pipeline would simply cut the time it took to transport the oil down to Texas, as well as increase the quantity transported daily.

Upon its proposal, the proposed pipeline received criticism due to environmental concerns. The major issue was that the initial route would pass through Nebraska's Sand Hills, a National Natural Landmark that sits atop the Ogallala Aquifer. Not only would a leak possibly damage the Sand Hills, but it could have also pollute the Aquifer, which provides water to millions of Americans throughout the Midwest. The Department of State decided to push back a

decision on the pipeline until a new route that wouldn't pass through the Sand Hills could be found.

Due to these concerns, TransCanada, the corporation constructing the Keystone pipelines, sought new routes for Keystone XL. In 2013, more than a year later, a new route was proposed. It would avoid the Sand Hills, but it would still cross over the Northern High Plains Aquifer System, including the Ogallala Aquifer.

Other environmental concerns include the increase of greenhouse gas emissions due to the pipeline's construction. The process of developing the crude sand oil that would be transported via the Keystone XL pipeline yields 17% more greenhouse gases than regular oil. Another concern was that the oil companies would expand into Alberta's oilsands. Therefore, while it may not have presented environmental risks in the near future, in the long run, it could have still been damaging.

Despite these concerns, many believed that the pipeline would be neither the beginning of the end of the environment, nor the saving grace of the economy. President Obama had previously stated that the Keystone pipeline holds "an overinflated role" in current politics.

Earlier this month, the President rejected the request to build Keystone XL. Pleasing many environmentalists, the decision to deny the proposal finally came after seven years of debate. In those seven years the pipeline had become more of a symbol of the environmental debate itself, rather than a critical topic. Ultimately, it was principles that kept the President from signing the bill. According to President Obama, allowing that bill to pass would have "undercut (America's) global leadership [concerning climate change]".

The rejection was a stepping stone for the President, who finds himself in his final year of office. His decision sent the message that he is willing to put his foot down when it comes to

difficult environmental decisions. His new power plant regulations under the Environmental Protection Agency and the upcoming UN summit meeting about climate change in December are also opportunities for President Obama to further enhance his environmental legacy.

While the negative impact that many environmentalists believed the project would have on climate change may not have been as extreme as initially thought, the positive effects it would have on the economy and on the U.S.'s dependence on oil were vastly exaggerated as well. Obama's decision to not pass the bill retained the nation's stand against climate change and global warming. Also to be taken into consideration is the fact that although the Keystone XL pipeline wasn't an environmental bane, it did hold legitimate long-term environmental issues.

Despite its recent rejection by President Obama, the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline will still remain a hot topic, especially with a presidential election around the corner. It could very well be that the next president is in favor of the proposed pipeline, regardless of the current administration's agenda. If this is the case, then unfortunately we may see the XL pipeline become more than just a plan after all. This would effectively reverse the green message that the Obama administration has been trying to send these two past terms and especially over this past year.

The Keystone XL pipeline's story is a symbol of the Obama administration's battle against climate change. There is a moral to this story. "If your principles are morally sound, stay true to them." This is what President Obama did when he rejected the Keystone XL proposal. He stayed true to his principles. The happily ever after, however, remains to be seen. For now, the message has been sent.

