

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sault Tribe Chairperson Payment Says oil spill demonstrates unacceptable risk to Pure Michigan waters

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. — Today, Aaron Payment PhD, chairperson of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, called upon Governor Snyder to immediately revoke the easement that allows Enbridge to pump a million gallons of crude oil per hour through the Straits of Mackinac. “The Governor is gambling that a leak won’t happen and he is derelict in his duty to ensure preparedness for an imminent disaster that will destroy our Pure Michigan tourism and Great Lakes ecology,” he said.

Referring to the current and ongoing attempt to control oil leaking from electricity transmission cables in the Straits, Payment said, “This is a demonstration of what can and will go wrong when aged pipelines break. This spill involved light mineral oil, and only a few hundred gallons. However, it has taken the response team days to even understand where the breaks are, and no one yet knows how to get the remaining oil out of there before it, too, leaks into the water. It’s proof that the state and federal agencies can’t cope with even a small spill in the Straits during winter weather conditions, let alone the release of millions of gallons of crude into our sacred waters from a pipeline breach.”

The US Coast Guard and other agencies are working with American Transmission Company (ATC) to remove oil from the disabled cables, a process that is running into snags due to the elderly cables’ condition and unknowns about the cables’ structure and where exactly the breaches occurred. Many agencies are cooperating in a Unified Command, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which are on the lookout for oiled birds who might have dived through oil in their attempts to feed. Payment said while the tribe appreciates this coordinated effort after the fact, it is hardly strategic and entirely a man made disaster.

According to ATC, there is a maximum of over 4,000 gallons of dielectric mineraloil — in six cables and their reservoir of cooling oil — that dive under the Straits at Point LeBarbe, to emerge again and link to aboveground transmission lines south of the Straits. Three of the six cables have been damaged, and two of those have leaked as much as 600 gallons of oil since last Monday afternoon.

The risk associated with Line 5 is monumentally greater. Payment said, “The Enbridge pipelines contain a million gallons at any one time, and move a million

gallons per hour. In addition to their 5 mile Straits crossing, the pipes run for 90 miles along the US 2 corridor, only a mile from Lake Michigan. A breach of those lines would be a disaster of unparalleled proportions. Those pipes are 65 years old this year. It's time to retire them, before the unthinkable happens."

The Sault Tribe, the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, the United Tribes of Michigan, the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes and the National Congress of American Indians have all passed resolutions calling for the decommissioning of Line 5 and unsafe pipeline that threaten our traditional territories. Governor Snyder's administration is expected to hand down a disposition for the pipeline by the end of this year.

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