

Controversial pipeline wins state approval

Proposed Bayou Bridge project requires other permits

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The controversial Bayou Bridge oil pipeline has won approval from Louisiana regulators, though more will need to lend their support before the project can break ground.

The state Department of Natural Resources on Wednesday granted a coastal use permit, a decision instantly decried by several environmental groups.

The pipeline is envisioned to carry crude oil between Lake Charles and St. James Parish.

Proponents have said Bayou Bridge would be far safer than carting oil via trucks, trains and boats, and an industry-funded LSU study estimates it would generate \$829 million in economic activity, mostly during construction.

Conservationists have opposed the pipeline, saying it would damage south Louisiana wetlands and put wildlife and residents at risk of oil-contaminated water.

The proposed pipeline is 163 miles long, but the Department of Natural Resources has jurisdiction over the last 17 miles, the only stretch to dip into Louisiana's large coastal zone. Department spokesman Patrick Courreges said regulators wanted to ensure there would be no net loss of wetlands. So if oil executives build on swamp lands in one area, they'll have to conserve an equal amount elsewhere.

The exact location of the mitigation land was not clear Wednesday, but the department determined "the applicant has provided sufficient justification for the activities under consideration in this (coastal use permit)," according to a notification.

Scott Eustis, of the Gulf Restoration Network, criticized the state's limited focus. His group called on the department to require the pipeline company to dig deeper under Bayou Lafourche to safeguard the water supply against any leaks.

"We don't understand how (the Department of Natural Resources) can't consider - isn't considering - the safety of the drinking water for 300,000 people in Louisiana," he said. "We're wondering how the (Department of Natural Resources) can approve a permit without considering the St. James community," Eustis said. "We don't understand how their need for public safety was not considered."

Though Bayou Bridge has the Department of Natural Resources' blessing, it still needs the state Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to sign off on the design before construction can start. DEQ is still going through hours of testimony and some 20,000 public comments submitted since a public hearing in January, said spokesman Greg Langley. Upon review, the department will determine whether to award a water quality certificate.

The Corps will perform the final check to determine whether the pipeline would affect federal projects like levees, as well as large

navigable waterways or wetlands hydrology, said public affairs officer Ricky Boyett.

Darryl Malek-Wiley, a senior organizing representative for the Sierra Club, said he is "not impressed" by the Department of Natural Resources' decision.

The state is "very laissezfaire toward protecting the environment," he said, and the local Corps office "has a history of rubber stamping permits."

The Sierra Club is considering all its options, including taking the matter to court, but the organization still has to review the various regulatory documents, he said.

A number of officers with Energy Transfer, the company seeking to build the pipeline, did not return calls and emails seeking comment. When they presented the project to the Department of Natural Resources in February, they emphasized the economic impact and the relative safety of the pipeline design, saying equipment would feature remote-controlled valves and be tested by first running water through at 125 percent of the operating capacity for eight hours.