

Pipeline company asks judge to suspend order halting project

By The Associated Press

The company building a crude oil pipeline through environmentally sensitive wetlands in Louisiana's swampy Cajun Country asked a federal judge Monday to suspend her own order temporarily halting construction.

Bayou Bridge Pipeline LLC asked U.S. District Judge Shelly Dick for a ruling on that request by Tuesday so that it can pursue an appeal "if necessary."

On Friday, Dick halted construction through the fragile Atchafalaya Basin, ruling in a lawsuit filed by environmentalists. The company said the construction halt could cost it close to \$1 million per day -- \$1.6 million daily if the order is deemed to apply to the entire length of the pipeline in Louisiana.

Construction began in January, the same month that The Sierra Club and other environmental groups sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, saying the Corps violated environmental laws by granting a permit for the pipeline.

The lawsuit claims the Corps didn't adequately consider the project's oil spill risks. In a recent hearing, Dick heard testimony that the project is tearing down centuries-old trees, destroying animal habitats and jeopardizing fishermen's livelihoods.

Company attorneys said the Corps' permit requires Bayou Bridge Pipeline to restore the basin's "pre-existing wetland contours and conditions" once the project is done. The Corps says it completed two environmental assessments for the project before issuing the permit.

The company said the pipeline "serves the public interest in terms of energy development, jobs, tax revenue, and so forth," and that Dick's Friday order is leading to huge, unnecessary costs.

Enviros sue Corps to block Bayou Bridge pipeline permit

Pipeline carrying crude oil across Atchafalaya Basin to St. James Parish is to be completed by end of March

Dick didn't issue written reasons for granting a temporary halt to construction, saying she would do so later. It was unclear whether she would comply with Bayou Bridge's request for a quick reconsideration.

The company has already filed a formal notice that it plans to take the case to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans if Dick's ruling stands.

The Bayou Bridge pipeline is the last link in a pipeline network connecting the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota with Louisiana refineries and export terminals. The south Louisiana pipeline is designed to have a maximum capacity of 480,000 barrels, or roughly 20 million gallons, of crude a day.

The Atchafalaya River basin is the nation's largest river swamp and includes roughly 880,000 acres (356,000 hectares) of forested wetlands, according to the groups' lawsuit.