



Photo of ranch land in northern Nebraska. TransCanada Keystone XL tar sands pipeline is supposed to pass through this piece of property.

Canadians, Stay Strong Against TransCanada's Energy East Pipeline

by Ben Gotschall

I am first and foremost a rancher. I am now also an anti-pipeline activist.

I was 10-years-old when I started my own herd of cattle on my family's ranch in Nebraska. I learned early, from our 75-year history of ranching, about the value of hard work. I learned the value of our land and water which sustains our herd and our family.

You may wonder, how does a rancher become an activist?

I was at a State Department hearing in 2010 when I first saw the names of my friends, family and neighbours on

TransCanada's proposed Keystone XL pipeline map for Nebraska.

The pipeline was proposed to pass right through the Sandhills, a unique and fragile ecosystem that overlies the Ogallala, a critically important aquifer, at a vulnerable shallow recharge zone. None of my neighbours were activists. We felt alone in our opposition to the pipeline. TransCanada told us separately we were the only ones not signing easements and taking the money they offered. But that was not so.

When I started speaking out, I found my voice. I found there were Nebraskans all

across the state who felt the same way. Since then, along with other landowners and citizens in Nebraska and other states, we have fought the pipeline.

And now, I know we have friends in Canada waging a very similar fight against the same company.

I've just finished a week of visiting communities in New Brunswick along the Energy East pipeline. The conversations I've had with landowners, First Nation members and concerned residents very much remind me of the conversations we had when we were first reckoning with the risks posed by Keystone XL.



Ben Gotschall speaks out against the Keystone XL pipeline on behalf of Bold Nebraska. He says ordinary people can stand up to Big Oil companies.

We have heard pipeline proponents peddle the same myths.

Like the promises of jobs. These jobs will be mostly short-term. In fact, they are over-advertised to lure people to support the project. They pre-empt the real discussion about how to build a long-term sustainable energy future that keeps young people in smaller communities and helps the economy grow.

We have also been told that Keystone XL would reduce dangerous oil-by-rail traffic.

Pipeline and oil-by-rail industries are largely self-regulated and neither is held to high enough safety standards. Nor are they showing responsibility to communities by being forthright about the chemicals that are passing through waterways either by rail or by pipe.

Industry is after as much capacity – pipeline or rail – as they can get to feed the booms happening in the tar sands and U.S. fracked oil. Approval of either pipeline will add to the risks of communities facing oil- by-rail traffic.

And there are viable alternatives. In fact, Nebraskans built a New Energy Barn featuring solar panels in the Keystone XL path that generates clean energy for Nebraska's public power grid.

Energy East, just like Keystone XL, is an export pipeline. We are all being asked to bear the risks of a pipeline spill so that foreign corporations can profit.

At 1.1 million barrels per day, Energy East would carry around 300,000 more barrels than Keystone XL would have, making a massive pipeline rupture very possible.

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I met with organic farmers in New Brunswick who have been approached multiple times by TransCanada to have their land surveyed for the pipeline and who are worried about their land and water sources. Landowners are feeling powerless and isolated, just like we did, at first.

This can be overcome.

We have a case before the Nebraska Supreme Court pitting three Nebraska landowners fighting to protect their land from eminent domain and the pipeline, against an irresponsible Nebraskan law attempting to fast-track the pipeline route approval process. The law has already been ruled unconstitutional by a lower district court. TransCanada currently has no legal route through Nebraska.

We've joined farmers, ranchers and tribal communities from along the pipeline route to form the Cowboy Indian Alliance. This past September we rode our horses into Washington, D.C., and set up camp near the White House to tell President Obama to reject the pipeline.

Which he did.

I am proud to stand beside Canadian friends in this most important fight. We, the people of North America and the world, must work together against money and power to protect our homes, our communities and our planet.

Ben Gotschall is a dairy cattle rancher and Energy Director with Bold Nebraska. In April he joined the Council of Canadians on a tour of some of the communities in the Prairies that would be impacted by the Energy East pipeline if it is built.