

[Solidarity Rally with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe](#)

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Cathy Becker

This was a rally in support of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota, which is protesting the approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline to cross the Missouri River immediately next to the reservation. The Standing Rock Sioux believe this pipeline puts the water their tribe relies on at risk. The rally was held outside the Ohio Union as part of a nationwide week of events supporting the Standing Rock Sioux. About 100 people attended.

The Army Corps of Engineers approved the Dakota Access Pipeline through a fast-track process called Nationwide Permit 12, which does not require a full environmental and archaeological assessment of the site. The pipeline is only seven feet shorter than the Keystone pipeline which President Obama vetoed last year, and would carry Bakken shale crude from North Dakota, which is very similar to Canadian tar sands, through Iowa, to hook up with a pipeline in Illinois that travels to the Gulf coast in Louisiana for refining and possible export.

The Dakota Access Pipeline construction site in North Dakota has been the site of large protests. The Standing Rock Sioux set up a camp several months ago to occupy the area on their reservation close to where the pipeline would be crossing the Missouri River. When the Army Corps of Engineers approved the pipeline, word spread across social media. Other indigenous tribal groups began sending members to join the camp; over 200 tribes have now planted flags along the entrance road into the camp.

In addition, environmental activist leaders began talking about the pipeline. Shailene Woodley, a star of the new movie "Snowden," traveled to the site and broadcast photos and videos through her social media for several weeks. Bernie Sanders called on President Obama to stop the pipeline. Green Party candidate Jill Stein visited the site to participate in civil disobedience. Hundreds and then thousands of activists from across the country began to arrive, including several people I know. The camp is said to number between 6,000 and 13,000 people.

As the pipeline fight began to gain national prominence, reporting took place that found three other federal agencies including the EPA had recommended against fast-tracking the approval process, and that written easements for the pipeline to go under the Missouri River had never actually been issued. We also learned that originally the pipeline was to cross the Missouri River just north of Bismarck, but was moved south to the spot near the Standing Rock Sioux due to concerns about polluting the water supply for Bismarck.

On August 24, a federal judge in Washington, DC, heard a lawsuit filed by the Standing Rock Sioux seeking an injunction to stop the pipeline. A large rally was held outside the courtroom. On September 2, the Friday before Labor Day weekend, the Standing Rock Sioux filed papers with the court mapping out where they had ancestral burial grounds and archaeological sites outside the reservation but in the area where the pipeline was supposed to go.

The next day, a Saturday on a holiday weekend, tribal members went to pray at the site and found bulldozers destroying it. They crossed the fence to try to stop it and were met by a private security group with dogs. Members of the security team encouraged the dogs to bite protesters, injuring six protesters including a child. Private security also used mace on protesters.

Amy Goodman, journalist with Democracy Now, was on the site and got a great deal of video of these events. Her report from the scene has been viewed millions of times on social media and was picked up by dozens of other news outlets. This event became a flashpoint in the pipeline battle, as ordinary Americans saw security dogs attack people who were trying to protect their ancestral graves and water supply. It was eerily similar to photos of police dogs attacking civil rights marchers in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. Although county sheriff's officers were not present at the scene, they later arrested one of the protesters in the video and held him in jail for two days. They also put out a warrant for Amy Goodman's arrest for trespassing.

People were so outraged that within days several petitions asking President Obama to stop the pipeline reached over 100,000 signatures each, including a White House petition that the president must respond to if it gets 100,000 signatures in 30 days. On September 9, the federal judge ruled against the Standing Rock Sioux's injunction and that the pipeline could proceed. But then within an hour, the Obama administration released a statement from the Departments of Justice and Interior and Army Corps of Engineers revoking the permit to go under the Missouri River until a full environmental and archaeological assessment could be done, and asking the pipeline companies – Energy Transfer Partners and Enbridge – to voluntarily cease construction within 20 miles of the river. The statement also invited the Sioux to consult with government agencies about the process in which native American groups are consulted over pipeline projects and give them input to recommend changes, possibly resulting in a bill to be sent to Congress.

This was a huge win for the Standing Rock Sioux and all the other native and non-native people who had joined in the protest. However, no one is sitting on their laurels. Construction of the pipeline continues in other areas. Just yesterday the Morton County sheriff sent dozens of police officers in riot gear to break up a protest at a construction site 60 miles away. Protesters had attached themselves to equipment and were removed, with 22 arrests including two members of the media, video personnel for a website called Unicorn Riot. The camp at Standing Rock will continue for as long as there is a Dakota Access Pipeline to fight, which is the foreseeable future.

The solidarity rally I attended was organized by the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Cohort at Ohio State. Speakers included several native Americans and a few non-natives. An Ohio State student who is from the area spoke movingly about going back and seeing the camp grow from a few hundred to thousands of people, and about the need to preserve water for her daughter. A professor of native American history spoke about how native people see the pipeline fight as fitting into their history. An older Sioux man led songs and prayers, and taught them to the attendees. The rally ended with everyone in a large circle holding hands.

It turned out I had connections to several people at the rally that I had no idea about. Jen Miller, director of the Ohio Sierra Club, has a daughter with a native American father. Her daughter's grandfather is the man who led the songs and prayers. Reed Kurtz, a graduate student who interviewed me about my trip to Paris, was there taking notes. Several people who I worked with on the Bernie Sanders campaign were there, including one who went to Standing Rock herself.

I have found this entire issue incredibly moving. When I attended events outside the climate conference in Paris, one of the most important things I learned was that indigenous people around the world are on the front lines of the climate fight. That's because like the Standing Rock Sioux, they are so often the people put in the sacrifice zone for fossil fuel development.

Indigenous people are no longer accepting that. Around the world they are resisting fossil fuel infrastructure. For the Standing Rock Sioux, it is a question of preserving their water supply. “Water is life” is said repeatedly. But I think they also understand that science is telling us we have to stop burning fossil fuels. The last thing we need is more fossil fuel infrastructure, especially to transport Bakken crude, some of the dirtiest oil on earth, for export.

I would very much like to visit the Standing Rock camp myself and talk to the people there. I am considering doing this over Fall Break, especially if I could get support from the school to make this trip. The focus of my program is climate and society, and right now this is the front lines of the climate fight in the United States. However, there are pipelines all over the country, and new ones going in every day. Ohio is a hotbed for new pipeline construction due to the fracking here. Pipelines continue to be built even though fracking has stalled. I believe the Keystone and Dakota Access Pipeline fights may inspire pipeline resistance across the country. Some aspect of this issue could make a very productive topic for my master’s research paper.