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Another Voice: National Fuel should abandon pipeline project

Diana Strablow
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Diana Strablow (far right), a member of the Sierra Club Niagara Group, is joined by filmmaker Josh Fox; Lynda Schneckloth of Sierra Club; Kim Lemieux of Pendleton Action Team; and a Fox assistant at Starpoint High School in 2016. Strablow is a leading opponent of National Fuel's proposed Northern Access Pipeline.

Buffalo News file photo

Diana Strablow

National Fuel persists in their desire to build the Northern Access Pipeline Project against the will of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, landowners, water protectors and communities.

On April 7, 2017, NYSDEC denied the Water Quality Certification for the Northern Access Pipeline, citing significant damage the 97-mile pipeline would cause as it crossed 192 Western New York streams. This permit denial should have put an end to the project. Instead, National Fuel has insisted they can ignore New York's protection under the Clean Water Act. They are determined to lay pipeline through our region's trout streams without NYSDEC's approval.

In a recently settled court case, National Fuel claimed that NYSDEC's denial was 36 days late and therefore, invalid. National Fuel argued this case despite their signature on an agreement for the time extension. Disappointingly, the U.S. Second Circuit Court ruled in National Fuel's favor, yet also concluded that the company had deceived NYSDEC. NYSDEC states that they will continue to vigorously defend against this project.

In July 2020, National Fuel was charged with violating environmental law by polluting a waterway in Washington County, Pa. According to the Pennsylvania attorney general, a drilling fluid leak was discovered during a pipeline replacement project in June 2015, but it was ignored. The attorney general indicates that employees of National Fuel's subcontractor were directed to hide the leaks from the project's daily reports, which led to the contamination of surface and ground water.

Yet, we are told by National Fuel, that they should be allowed to ignore NYSDEC's regulations. We should trust them with plans to trench through our precious life-sustaining waterways.

How many court cases does it take to build a pipeline?

Since 2017, National Fuel has won in court against landowners. To fight against eminent domain seizures to lay high-pressure gas pipeline through their property, often clearing trees along the way, these landowners had to pay their own legal fees.

National Fuel has battled in court against the Town of Pendleton over zoning laws. The town sought to protect residents in a densely residential area from the health impacts of a 22,000 HP compressor station designed to send the gas across the Niagara River to Canada.

New York's new climate law will phase out fossil fuels and transition our state to clean, renewable energy. It is time for National Fuel to withdraw plans for the Northern Access Pipeline.

It is time to become part of the solution for a clean, renewable energy future.

Diana Strablow is vice chair of the Sierra Club Niagara Group.
