



United in Protest

The fight against an oil pipeline inspired new activism among indigenous nations.

A signpost at Ocell Sakowin, one of the Standing Rock camps, showed distances to tribes around the world. "We're building foundations for things that are going to come," says Krystal Two Bulls (above), a Northern Cheyenne and Oglala Lakota.



South Coast NY
1872

SAPMI
ARCTIC 1912

SUNNYSIDE
FORT MURRAY

SUNNYSIDE
NY

1872

EAGLE BUTTE

1872

1872

When the demonstrations against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) kicked into high gear this past August, Lewis Grassrope, of the Lower Brule Sioux, joined the Standing Rock movement and put up a tepee on the North Dakota plain near Cannon Ball. “There was nothing but tall grass and wide-open green,” Grassrope said. “And spiders galore—I’d pray with them and make them my protectors.”

Every day during the summer, processions of people in traditional dress came to the camps around Cannon Ball, pledging to support a movement that had turned into something bigger than a pipeline protest. It had become an international call to protect indigenous people’s rights and their land.

The season’s first blizzard came and went on the heels of a tentative victory: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied Dakota Access’s permit to drill under Lake Oahe. The camp cleared out, dropping almost overnight from some 10,000 people to about a thousand.

Then came January 20. Within days of his inauguration, President Donald Trump signed executive actions to advance approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline as well as the Keystone XL pipeline, part of a system that would carry oil from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. By early February the Army had granted an easement to run the pipeline under the Missouri, at Lake Oahe.

But Grassrope, like many other protesters, vows to fight on in the campaign for native lands and tribal solidarity. At press time the Standing Rock Sioux had announced a gathering in Washington, D.C., in March.

As activists continue to raise awareness and the fight moves to the courts, Grassrope sees in last year’s rising at Standing Rock the beginning of a committed community of believers mobilized to resist the expansion of America’s fossil fuel economy.

“Standing Rock reached across the world, and everyone saw the power of what took place here,” Grassrope said. “Now, for most of us who have been in this camp, we must get back to our own reservations to take what we’ve learned back to them, because the fight is going to come to each nation. Each of the 500 nations that came here, the fight is going to come to them.” □



The \$3.8 billion Dakota Access Pipeline would add nearly 1,200 miles to the United States’ oil-distribution network. It could eventually carry about half of American-produced Bakken crude oil to market.

NGM MAPS
SOURCES: USGS; NORTH DAKOTA PIPELINE AUTHORITY; ENERGY TRANSFER PARTNERS

Standing Rock pediatrician Sara Jumping Eagle, with daughter Azilya Iron Eyes (left) and son, Zaniyan Iron Eyes, says we are experimenting on our children with the unknown effects of crude-oil pipeline spills and radioactive fracking waste and associated chemicals that can pollute our water supplies.



Top row from left: At camp a painting shows a black snake – a symbol of the pipeline – dismembered by a “water protector.” Indigenous people “have the same struggle everywhere,” says Eirik Larsen, a Sami from Norway. Two Bulls raises her fist at a protest in Bismarck.



Bottom row from left: “We’re uniting nations here,” says Susana Sandoval, a Purépecha from Chicago. Demonstrator Lewis Grassrope kneels before his tepee. George Pletnikoff, Jr., an Unangaġ from Alaska, says protesters face similar fights back home: “I want something like Standing Rock. We can become antibodies to the sickness of greed.”



