

Opinion Editorial
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Permian Highway Pipeline – Stop Work, Move It, and Respect the Texas Hill Country
From Patrick Cox, Ph.D.

The construction of the Permian Highway Pipeline (PHP) by the Kinder Morgan Corporation is a perilous and unprecedented threat to the Texas Hill Country. From the beginning of this project, Kinder Morgan demonstrated a thorough lack of concern and understanding of the ecological sensitivities, the hydrological uniqueness, and the sensitive nature of our region.

And they have also underestimated the people who live here and care so deeply for this area.

The Trinity Edwards Springs Protection Association (TESPA) and the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association (WVWA) have joined forces to hold Kinder Morgan accountable for violations to our land, our people, and the drinking water we rely on.

On June 22, TESPAs filed a federal suit against Kinder Morgan following the discharge of more than 36,000 gallons of drilling fluid that contaminated area wells near the Blanco River bore site. The drilling fluid was made from a product that contained class 1A carcinogens.

Kinder Morgan has publicly stated, more than once, their project is “constructed in accordance with strict regulatory and environmental standards and industry best practices.”

To the contrary, we believe their decisions and actions on this project have jeopardized the health and well-being of everyone in the Texas Hill Country.

TESPA’s legal action cites violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act that protects “underground sources of drinking water”. The lawsuit is taken on behalf of the homeowners whose sole source of drinking water became undrinkable and on behalf of every citizen and property owner in the region.

The PHP drilling fluid discharged into our aquifer reveals much about the audacious scheme and miscalculations for a pipeline through this region. However, the litany of mistakes made by Kinder Morgan during planning and construction is ongoing.

Recent spring storms resulted in serious runoff and pollution of pristine Hill Country streams near the PHP pipeline construction sites due to insufficient barriers and protections.

Subsequently, a PHP contractor attempted an unsafe river crossing, got stuck, and lost a canister

containing radioactive material into the Pedernales River for several days before it was recovered 13 miles downstream.

Groundwater, drinking water and surface waters – all have suffered from the potential of contamination by this unwelcome, dangerous pipeline intrusion.

What we have witnessed is a worst-case scenario for the people of the Blanco River Valley and Hill Country landowners in the path and near proximity of Kinder Morgan's Permian Highway Pipeline. No company has the right to destroy our aquifers, springs, habitats and threaten our drinking water.

Our message to Kinder Morgan is still this: STOP work on the PHP, FIX the mess you made, PAY for damages, and MOVE this pipeline out of the ultra-sensitive karst region of the Texas Hill Country.

The pristine Texas Hill Country is an integral part of my family's life, as it is for thousands of others who live and visit here. We understand the unique karst aquifers and the fragile environment we inhabit. We know how to care for it, and we are willing to fight for it.

*Patrick Cox, Ph.D., board member and executive director of TESPAs, has spent nearly five decades living in and loving the Texas Hill Country from his home in Wimberley.
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