

U.S. Fish and Wildlife to Suspend Permit for Sewage Pipeline through INWR

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The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has announced that it will suspend a permit that would allow drilling in the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge for construction of a wastewater pipeline slated to carry six million gallons per day of treated sewage and industrial wastewater. The pipeline, which received the right of way permit in 2021 but has never been built, would discharge into Oak Orchard Creek and Lake Ontario.

In a May 15, 2023 letter to the Tonawanda Seneca Nation Council of Chiefs, Holly Gaboriault, Acting Regional Chief for the National Wildlife Refuge System, committed USFWS to preparing a Supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA), including a new public comment process, and pledged that “[w]hile the Service is re-evaluating [the] permit in the EA, the current right of way permit will be suspended for pipeline construction through the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge until a new decision is made.”

Although federal law requires public notice and consultation with Indian Nations on such permits, USFWS never notified the Nation of the permit application and failed to publicize a public comment period in early 2020. The proposed pipeline would carry treated sewage and industrial wastewater from a planned industrial development promoted by the Genesee County Economic Development Center (GCEDC), known as the Science and Advanced Technology Manufacturing Park (STAMP). The Nation opposes heavy industry at STAMP, which lies adjacent to and upstream from the Nation’s pristine Big Woods and federally-recognized reservation Territory. On May 11, nearly 200 people attended a public hearing to voice opposition to a separate application by the developers for a permit to destroy 665 acres of threatened and endangered species habitat.

“The Tonawanda Seneca Nation commends USFWS for its determination that environmental impacts of the proposed sewage pipeline must be reviewed and that the 2021 permit should be suspended during this review period,” said Linda Logan, Tonawanda Seneca Nation citizen and Bear Clan Mother. “As the original inhabitants of this area, the Nation is especially concerned about the damage the pipeline and associated industrial facilities would do to the wetlands, the waters, the plants, the animals and the environment on and around the Nation and our ancestral territory.”